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Testimonios of the Multiracial Latinx/a/o Student Experience

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the School of Education

University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

By

Victoria R. Juárez

May 10, 2021

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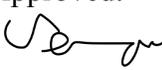
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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

May 10, 2021

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approved by all its members, the thesis
has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:



10 May 2021

Date

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences and identity development of multiracial Latinx/a/o students who attend Jesuit higher education institutions by way of *testimonios*. The research project sought to examine the following research questions: How do multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive their identities in relation to their campus environment? What are the unique ways that multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive themselves in the larger framework of society? How do multiracial Latinx/a/o students negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries? This research project found that multiracial Latinx/a/o understand their positionality as “othered” within a monoracial framework and that they face various barriers to full inclusion in either of their communities. For these students, finding community on their own terms was an important catalyst for self-identification. Additionally, it found that multiracial students require a different understanding of power, privilege, and oppression and that their unique experiences should not be overlooked. This research project sought to understand multiple racial identities in tandem, particularly understanding the nuances of various racial groups together.

Chapter One, Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As the “melting pot” of the United States grows, so too do multiracial, multiethnic, and mixed-heritage identities. Almost 7 million people (2.4% of the population) indicated on the 2000 U.S. census that their ancestry included more than one race (Patton et al., 2016). However, the ways in which race continues to be seen in the US follows a singular race model. On all sorts of documents, from the census to patient forms in a doctor’s office, individuals are forced to check a box signaling what singular race they identify as. The alternatives come in the form of “more than one race,” (though this category does not ask for elaboration) or “other,” a vague term that inadvertently casts one's racial identity aside. Understanding the complexity and diversity of this population is also important. Information gathered from the 2000 census from individuals who indicated that their ancestry included more than one race found that the largest percentage (32.3%) specified they are white and another race (Patton et al., 2016).

Given the increase in a significant portion of the population identifying as multiracial, scholars have developed identity models in the past twenty years to understand the unique experiences of such individuals, particularly college students. Root’s (1996, 2003a, 2003b) ecological model of mixed race identity and Renn’s (2000, 2003, 2004) ecological theory of mixed race identity development have expanded identity development research to include multiracial individuals. Root’s (1995, 1996, 2003a, 2003b) work described five ways in which mixed race individuals negotiate identities as “border crossings,” in addition to identifying external factors that influenced ethnic and racial identity development of mixed race individuals (Patton et al., 2016). Renn’s (2000, 2003, 2004) theory focused on ecological factors that

influence multiracial identity and examined how mixed heritage individuals labeled themselves (Patton et al., 2016). The work of scholars like Ursula M. Brown (2001) and Alissa R. King (2008) has revealed college is a uniquely challenging time for biracial students (Patton et al., 2016). However, existing multiracial identity development models do not adequately capture specific experiences of biracial students.. The problem is that these models do not give specific attributes to different communities, a disservice to those who hold multiple racial identities; this results in generalizations made across a very diverse population. While important to investigate multiracial identity development broadly, it is also important that specific multiracial identities are also studied. Each racial group has its own unique culture and customs; multiracial individuals must navigate multiple cultures and customs. In an effort to better understand the experiences of individuals from varying racial backgrounds, specific multiracial identities need to be given study and understood. As the multiracial population climbs, it is crucial that these identities are not overlooked. This lack of identifying specific identity development experiences within multiracial student populations could lead administrators working with multiracial students to make assumptions about the students they are working with, based on both the monoracial identity models of the students identities, and/or more general multiracial identity development models.

This specific issue can be particularly challenging when working with multiracial Latinx/a/o students, who navigate being multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural within and outside of the Latinx community itself. Multiracial identity is most typically studied in the Black-white framework. Given this, multiracial Latinx/a/o students may also be overlooked and understudied as a part of multiracial communities. The growth of the Hispanic/Latino population

both within the United States and in higher education is also worth noting. According to Pew Research Center, Hispanics (Latinos) are the nation's second-fastest-growing racial or ethnic group (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020). Community members continue to debate where or not Hispanic/Latino is a racial or ethnic group, and the general consensus is that it depends on who you ask. Latinidad is a complex issue; this group encompasses different nationalities, languages, and cultural customs to name a few. This idea of being "Hispanic/Latino" is a socially constructed idea; there is no real way to categorize a huge group of people who loosely belong to the same geographic region that may share a similar language (Spanish). This diversity of Latinidad deserves to be given the same in-depth look as other identities, and those identifying as Latinx/a/o deserve to tell their own stories.

Additionally, the percentage of Hispanic/Latinos who have a bachelor's degree or more education increased from 13% in 2010 to 17% in 2018 (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020). This growth and lack of understanding such a population has serious implications on higher education institutions now and in the future if faculty, staff, and university administration are unable to serve such a diverse population. Without examining the unique experiences of such a population, administrators are at a risk of underserving these students. Examining the specific experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students is critical to providing the best support possible for these students.

Background and Need

Understanding the unique experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students is crucial to expanding the literature and research on multiracial and Latinx/a/o students, and most importantly serving this population well in higher education. With growing populations of both

multiracial and Latinx/a/o students, research has expanded to delve into specific experiences of both of these groups. Two National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 1996 and 2016 show evidence of this growth. In 1995-6, national enrollment of Hispanic/Latino undergraduates was at 10.3%; in 2015-6 it grew to 19.8% (American Council on Education, 2020). Similarly, data reflects that national enrollment of students identifying as “more than one race” was only 0.6% 1995-6; in 2015-6 that same population had grown to 3.3% (American Council on Education, 2020). However, this study proposes looking at a population group in which these two identifiers overlap.

Borderlands theory has been used in previous studies to understand the experiences of multiracial students (Chang, 2013) and first generation Latina students (Espino, 2020). Research on multiracial populations focuses primarily on the overall effects of racism on multiracial students of color (Miville et al., 2005) and on the broader effects of race mixing, intermarriage, and classification of mixed race peoples (Telles & Sue, 2009). Likewise, studies of Latinx/a/o populations focus on ethnicity-related stressors of being Latinx/a/o (Ojeda et al., 2012) and negotiating ethnic boundaries within specific Latinx/a/o communities, such as being Mexican American (Jiménez, 2004). These studies focus on the voices of their participants. In a concerted effort to co-create new knowledge within the multiracial Latinx/a/o community, *testimonios* are most helpful in illuminating the stories of those often left out of the conversation. This study affirms the intersection of multiracial individuals who also identify as part of the Latinx/a/o community. The work conducted seeks to expand the boundaries of multiracial development research in addition to studies conducted about the different experiences of the Latinx/a/o community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis project is to conduct narrative research, specifically capturing *testimonios* in the form of interviews in order to understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o college students at Jesuit higher education institutions and the ways in which they negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural borderlands. This study will be conducted among multiracial Latinx/a/o students at the University of San Francisco. Students identified at least one parent with Latinx/a/o heritage.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the unique ways that multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive themselves in the larger framework of society?
- How do multiracial Latinx/a/o students negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries?
- How do multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive their identities in relation to their campus environment?

Theoretical Framework

Borderlands theory and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) will be used as theoretical frameworks for this thesis. Developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands theory describes the experiences of *mestizas* (Spanish-Indigenous women) living within the US/Mexico border area; however, this study applies this theory more widely. This study expands upon this theory to examine the experiences of individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities. Building off of this foundation, LatCrit focuses on the unique experiences and multiple tensions of the Latinx/a/o community within the dominant single narrative paradigm of the legal field. Similarly

to Borderlands theory, LatCrit can be examined outside of the legal field to understand the complexities of Latinidad within a white supremacist, single narrative framework. Borderlands theory and LatCrit will be used in this thesis because together they inform investigation into the lived experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students on college campuses and in the broader frameworks of society.

One of the foundational authors who has contributed to Borderlands theory is Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa (1987) uses the physical illustration of the US/Mexico border and transfers this image into a metaphor for the ways in which individuals who hold multiple, potentially conflicting identities are forced to choose between their identities and straddle different sides of their internal borders. Her work focuses on removing such arbitrary boundaries and encouraging acceptance of all of one's identities. Hernández-Truyol (1997) expands this work and applies it to the broader Latinx/a/o community and the multiple tensions that exist when trying to navigate a single narrative paradigm, that of monoraciality. Given the complexity in understanding the Latinx/a/o community because of differences in race, nationality, citizenship, age, language, and other identifiers, LatCrit seeks to understand the specific needs and voices of the Latinx/a/o community through a critical race lens. LatCrit encompasses a more holistic look at the Latinx/a/o population, rather than honing in on the *mestiza* experience at the US-Mexico border like Borderlands theory. LatCrit allows researchers to investigate critical race theory in a specific way, accounting for the unique experiences of Latinxs/as/os. LatCrit goes against the dominant narratives of race and gender as applied to Latinxs/as/os in the US and instead seeks to create *nuevas teorías* (new theories), created by and for Latinxs/as/os. Taken together, these authors provide a framework for understanding why it is important to conduct narrative research in the

form of interviews/*testimonios* in order to understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o college students at Jesuit higher education institutions and the ways in which they negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural borders.

Significance of the Study

This thesis may be of interest to students, administrators, student affairs professionals, and researchers in the field of student identity development. It may hold significance for students, particularly those involved in the research, because it is an opportunity for an underrepresented and understudied group to have their experiences and identities validated in scholarship. Using Borderlands theory, this study seeks to continue to expand the knowledge of how individuals make sense of their identities within cultural structures, acknowledging multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals juggle isolation from both of their racial groups in some way. It also calls into consideration the intersections of power, privilege, and oppression that they may simultaneously hold. Most importantly, this work seeks to uphold the resilience and joy that this particular community experiences; it is an opportunity to allow authentic voices to take control of their own narrative and not fall victim to the deficit framework of dominant race theory.

Testimonios offer a way for underheard voices to have autonomy and share their voices in an honest and open way; this is why this methodology was chosen for this research project. This research may interest administrators because the work sheds light on a population of students that they can pay special attention to and assist in ways that may not be pertinent to other groups. It may also hold significance for student affairs professionals who can use the research to build programs and engagement opportunities for this specific population of students. It may also assist in changing internal structures and development opportunities for this population of

students. Finally, this field project may be important to researchers in the field of student identity development because it expands the work done in the field to date and will set the stage for future researchers to continue to expand their knowledge and own work. With its focus on intersectionality, power, privilege, and oppression, this study will continue to make the voices of the often ignored more visible in academia.

Definition of Terms

There are a number of terms used to understand identity in this thesis. They are listed here:

Atravesado(s) used by Anzaldúa (1987) to describe an individual who crosses over, passes over, or goes through the confines of normal, more specifically in terms of race/ethnic identity (p. 25).

I use this term in reference to Anzaldúa and other authors' work.

Chicana/x/o is a term used to describe individuals of Mexican descent living in the United States.¹

Latina/x/o is a term used to describe individuals with racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds from Latin America.²

Mestiza used by Anzaldúa (1987) to describe a multiracial Mexican woman of Spanish and Indigenous descent. I use this term in reference in Anzaldúa's work.

Mixed heritage is a term to describe individuals who are either multiracial and/or multiethnic.

The term heritage is used to take emphasis off of the socially constructed idea of race and allow for a broader conversation into mixed heritage backgrounds that includes language, culture, religion, and other dimensions of background..

¹ The "x" replaces -a/-o at the end of Chicana/o as a gender neutral alternative.

² The "x" replaces -a/-o at the end of Latina/o as a gender neutral alternative.

Multiracial identity is used to describe individuals who identify themselves as belonging to more than one racial group.

Chapter Two, Review of the Literature

This literature review explores Borderlands theory and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and shows how it provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of multiracial identity development of individuals, particularly college students. The foundation of Borderlands theory holds that individuals can hold multiple identities and do not have to pick one over the other; this is particularly true in the cases of race, ethnicity, and/or heritage. Instead of learning how to navigate one side of a border over the other, Borderlands theory provides foundations for individuals to navigate their multiple identities simultaneously. LatCrit is an expansion of this theoretical work, illuminating the ways in which the Latinx/a/o community navigates boundaries like race, language, geography, and culture, creating new theoretical meaning from their own lived experiences versus relying on those that uplift a single dominant narrative. Using Borderlands theory in tandem with LatCrit allows for understanding of identity development of multiracial Latinx/a/o students. To examine the value of Borderlands theory in understanding multiracial/Latinx/a/o student identity, this chapter reviews three bodies of scholarship. The first set of literature examines multiracial identity which requires navigating racial/ethnic/cultural borders. The second set of studies looks at the complexities of Latinx/a/o identity. The third set of literature focuses on mixed heritage identity development of college students through a Borderlands theoretical framework. Borderlands theory and LatCrit can be used to frame this body of scholarship.

Theoretical Framework: Borderlands Theory & Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

Borderlands theory and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) are theoretical lenses that center Latinx/a/o voices and can be used to understand multiracial/ethnic identity development.

This section includes a brief history of Borderlands theory and LatCrit, which includes the foundational work of Anzaldúa (1987), that examines the unique experiences of *Chicanxs/as/os* within the context of the physical and emotional borders between the United States and Mexico and the scholarship of Hernández-Truyol (1997), which focuses on the tensions between the multidimensionality of Latinx/a/o identity and the dominant legal paradigms that take a single-attribute analysis to identity. This foundational thought is important because in it Anzaldúa (1987) illustrates the foundations of multiracial identity development. While this theory is never explicitly named in her work, it's clear from her progression of examining both sides of the border, e.g. having mixed Indigenous and white heritage, towards advocating pluralities and full acceptance of people with emphasis on their multiple identities. This narrative is related to the work of Hernández-Truyol (1997) who articulates in more depth the way in which the blending of Borderlands theory and LatCrit can be used to deconstruct existing theories that do not honor the multidimensionality of Latinxs/as/os in scholarship, particularly in the law.

Latinidad is a complicated concept. It represents a political and social construction of race, primarily to capture the community of individuals living in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Carribean. This group is generally grouped together by language; Spanish is a primary language in these regions of the world. But what can be difficult to unpack about Latinidad is that it covers a vast array of races, geography/places, languages, and other cultural customs. Latinxs/as/os are an incredibly diverse group of people with many dimensions and intersections. Borderlands theory and LatCrit are both useful in unpacking the singular narrative

that is often broadcasted when discussing Latinx/a/o identity, and instead seek to take a more nuanced and multidimensional approach to such an identity.

The seminal work that articulates Borderlands theory comes from Anzaldúa's (1987) anthology *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. This scholarship is critical in examining the lived experiences of *Chicanxs/as/os*, primarily *mestizas*, living in the United States. The border acts as both literal - US/Mexico border - and metaphorical - the internal border that *Chicanxs/as/os* live every day as the product of Spanish and Indigenous mixing. Anzaldúa (1987) goes as far as to say that this border has created a new country, one closed to dominant narratives but home to those who often cannot find where they fit in such dominance. The need for this theory arose from a gap in the literature that did not address the experiences of *mestizas* who face a triple threat of oppression; being an Indian in Mexican culture, being Mexican from an Anglo point of view, and being a woman in the world of patriarchal dominance. Anzaldúa (1987) explains that *mestizas* face such a threat because of lack of safety within both Mexican and white cultures, and fear that men of all races will hunt them. This theory is useful in addressing the limitations of critical race theory, which does not provide a focused look at the ways in which Latinxs/as/os are affected as a multiracial ethnic group, and feminist theory, which can exclude women of color and third world feminisms. This theory challenges dualistic thinking in the individual and instead urges the creation of a collective consciousness through which *mestizas* can dictate and honor their multiple identities without needing to conform to a singular identity. Anzaldúa (1987) argues that being locked within a singular identity does not allow *mestizas* to engage in society fully; it does not allow them ownership of their power to dictate their own lives. Instead of conforming to a single identity, *mestizas* work to

bring consciousness to multiple identities, thus eroding the binaries of gender, race, and class. Anzaldúa (1987) describe a new type of consciousness *mestizas* can create which allow them “to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (p. 102). In other words, *mestizas* can transcend the narrative that their identities exist in opposition to dominant structures (racism and patriarchy) to create a new consciousness that honors their identities. Anzaldúa’s (1987) original scholarship is important because it expands critical race theory and feminist scholarship into a new third world in which multiculturalism and multiethnicity can flourish, where duality is rejected, and multiple identities are celebrated.

Building on this foundation, Hernández-Truyol (1997) proposes the creation of *nueva teorías* “that understand, penetrate, and elucidate the content and meaning of our multidimensional identities and develop, expand, and transform the construct in such a way that translates, incorporates, and realizes Latin[x]/as/os’ worldviews” (p. 884). She adds that “the promise of a LatCrit theoretical model lies in its ability to debunk the ineffectual dominant model, as applied specifically to the Latin[x]/a/o condition” (p. 884). The ineffectual dominant model refers to the monolithic theories used to describe Latinxs/as/os created outside of the community. What LatCrit instead does is create *nuevas teorías* derived from within the Latinx/a/o community. While centering the Latinx/a/o experience, LatCrit is specifically built on tenets of interdependence, intersectionality, and indivisibility. Latinxs/as/os are an interdependent intersection of races, genders, nationalities, languages, and customs. Although numerous differences are present within the community, it is in and of itself indivisible. This community continues to meld and grow, but remains intact. Using such a worldview, Hernández-Truyol

(1997) centers the conversation about border crossing and interdependence on the Latinx/a/o experience. This builds on the work of Anzaldúa (1987), taking the foundations of navigating multiple worlds, such as “*casa y familia* to *calle y trabajo*, from *español* to *ingles* to *espanglish*” (Hernández-Truyol, 1997, p. 883). LatCrit takes this a step further by contextualizing the unique multidimensionality and plurality of Latinxs/as/os while emphasizing the difficulties of existing within the typically single-attribute approach of the legal system. This addition to the field of LatCrit is important because it continues the work of expanding critical race theory to contextualize the unique experiences and voices of the broader Latinx/a/o community. Emphasizing interdependence and multiplicity is crucial to expanding understanding of multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural identity development.

In summary, Borderlands theory and LatCrit work in tandem to describe the unique experiences that Latinxs/as/os face in the context of ethnic identity development, particularly the complexity that comes from defining their identities within the broader Latinx framework, which covers numerous races, nationalities, dialects, and customs. The foundational work of Anzaldúa (1987) examines the unique experiences of *Chicanxs/as/os* within the context of the physical and emotional borders between the United States and Mexico, while the scholarship of Hernández-Truyol (1997) expands upon this work to describe the tensions between the multidimensionality of Latinx/a/o identity and the dominant legal paradigms that take a single-attribute analysis to identity. The following section features foundational research that illustrates multiracial identity development, drawing from a comprehensive literature review and research about how multiracial identity development is unique to other racial identity development models.

Multiracial identity development requires navigating racial/ethnic/cultural borders

In order to situate this research, multiracial identity development must be first understood. This research section highlights development of a new consciousness/identity through the deconstruction of racial borders, offers a comprehensive overview of multiraciality, and concludes with research that highlights how multiracial identity development is distinct from other racial identity development models. The framing of this section emphasizes how Borderlands theory provides a framework for understanding the complexities of analyzing multiracial identity development.

Research investigating Borderlands theory articulates a need for new consciousness of racial/ethnic/cultural identity. Evidence of this can be found in Anzaldúa (1987) who claims that a new consciousness beyond counterstances between dominance and oppression are needed to transgress the social constructions that multiracial individuals find themselves in. What this means is that the ways in which individuals view issues of dominance and oppression (racism, sexism, genderism, homophobia) should move away from seeing them as locked in firm opposition with one another but instead analyze them in a more holistic manner, taking into consideration the nuances and middle ground between two opposing ideas. “A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle” but one that in the best interest of progress is necessary (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 102). This quote emphasizes her belief that the way forward means releasing individual thinking in terms of binary concepts, and taking into consideration the fuller picture of such ideas. In rupturing the socially constructed nature of race, ethnicity, and culture, new consciousness emerges that allows the individual a tolerance for contradiction and cultural ambiguity; Anzaldúa (1987) refers to

this as a plural personality. She goes so far as to say that the future depends on the breaking down of such paradigms, without which we will not be able to evolve. What is key is that the individual herself is able to create this new consciousness; it does not, as have historical social constructions, come from external forces. Although Anzaldúa (1987) does not directly reference multiracial identity development in her work, it's clear that her belief in rupturing socially constructed paradigms, including race, speak to such work. Her framework of boundary/border crossing is also clearly stated in the following research, which also offers a more specific look into the complications of multiracial identity.

Telles and Sue (2009) demonstrate the complications of “race mixture” through a comprehensive literature review that includes the related yet distinct ideas of intermarriage, miscegenation, multiracial identity, multiracial social movements, and race-mixture ideologies. Telles and Sue (2009) call to attention the contemporary research being done on multiracial individuals to see what “path” they take in their identity development; “the paths range from willingly or unwillingly accepting placement in their socially assigned category, seeking a particular status without contesting the boundaries themselves, individually skirting the boundaries, or collectively redefining them” (p. 130). The collective redefinition of racial boundaries is what Anzaldúa (1987) discussed in her research as well.

It is important to note that Telles and Sue (2009) acknowledge the terms in their research are premised on the idea that distinct races exist, which ultimately leads to the idea that some racial boundary crossing occurs when they mix. However, the authors stress a social constructivist approach to the phenomenon of racial mixture with a focus on boundary crossing, similar to Anzaldúa (1987). This assumes that race is a social construct, there is no biological

basis for it, and it is through such a construct that society organizes itself. While race is socially constructed and an arbitrary categorization of people, the effects of behavior on racism and race mixing are very real. A social constructivist approach situates human development within society and knowledge construction through interaction with others. Therefore, the experience of multiracial individuals is complex. Because society organizes itself based on strict racial lines, multiracial individuals must confront these boundaries. Multiracial individuals might "seek to maintain, shift, blur, sidestep, subvert, erode, eliminate, or merely accept such boundaries" (Telles & Sue, 2009, p. 131). Again, we see Anzaldua's (1987) call to deconstruct racial boundaries in favor of a more multifaceted view of race here. Through their comprehensive literature review, Telles and Sue (2009) highlight a crucial piece of Borderlands theory by directly speaking to the racial boundaries that multiracial people face. This literature review provides a firm foundation for beginning to understand the complexities of multiracial development. The following study by Miville et al. (2005) focuses on how multiracial identity development remains distinct from other racial identity development frameworks.

Research illustrates multiracial identity development is similar but distinct from existing racial identity development frameworks. Evidence of this can be found in Miville et al. (2005) who explored the extent to which present biracial and multiracial identity development models paralleled the racial identity development experiences of the participants in their research. Miville et al. (2005) demonstrate the uniqueness of the conceptualization of multiracial identity even though race is socially constructed. These scholars pose the idea of multiracial identity development models driven by developmental markers such as age-related changes, varying influence of social context in monoracial and multiracial identity, and the critical differences in

adopting one of these identities over the other. Instead of focusing on essentialist models, these expand the previous approaches by focusing on developmental markers instead.

Miville et al. (2005) discovered that similarities with existing models did exist, including encounters with racism, reference group orientation, the “chameleon” experience, and critical periods of identity development. However, what was different about this study was the discovery that participants simultaneously adopted multiple labels or categories to describe their racial identity. Participants both identified as a monoracial person, typically the background of the parent of color, and as multiracial. In adopting both a monoracial and multiracial identity, research participants were able to connect with others from their cultural group outwardly (monoracial) but privately identify and claim a multiracial identity. This differs from other racial identity models where an individual claims a monoracial identity OR a multiracial one; this study is distinct in its findings that individuals can adopt both. The authors noted that this inward identifier was often kept private because of the lack of support and visibility that individuals from multiracial communities are given. Continued lack of support and visibility for multiracial individuals and communities furthers the argument for the necessity of this research project.

Similar to Anzaldúa’s (1987) argument that the only way to move forward out of a monoracial hierarchy is to adopt a pluralistic approach to race, Miville et al. (2005) argue that social deconstruction of racial categories can signal tolerance and even positive feelings towards the adoption of a multiracial identity. When individuals are given the opportunity to embrace being and looking different, it is likely that they will develop a healthier self-identity, in this case, a healthy multiracial identity. When taken together, the research in this section stresses a social

constructivist approach to multiracial identity with a focus on the racial boundary crossing multiracial individuals and groups experience due to monoracial hierarchies that exist.

To conclude, this research demonstrates that multiracial identity requires navigating racial/ethnic/cultural borders. This includes research that illustrates development of a new consciousness/identity through the deconstruction of racial borders, offers a foundational overview of multiraciality, and concludes with research that highlights how multiracial identity development is distinct from other racial identity development models. Taken together, this research stresses a social constructivist approach to race and ultimate erosion of the monoracial framework, with a focus on boundary crossing. When analyzed thematically, this body of research supports the idea that Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of analyzing multiracial identity development. It also supports the need for this research study by way of illuminating the voices of individuals who feel isolated and/or left out of the conversation. What is missing, however, is the assessment of unique multiracial identities, rather than grouping them as a monolithic experience. The next section will focus on another critical aspect of this research project, which is unpacking the complexities of Latinx/a/o identity.

Understanding the complexities of Latinx/a/o identity in the United States

Borderlands theory and LatCrit can work in tandem to understand the complexity of Latinx/a/o identity in the United States. This includes research that articulates the struggles of Latinx/a/o integration into the dominant culture of the United States, research that illustrates the navigation of ethnic boundaries that multiethnic Mexican Americans must manage, and research that addresses a gap in the literature examining the influence of ethnicity-related stressors such as stereotype confirmation concern and own-group conformity pressure on Latinx/a/o college

students. Together, this research allows for understanding of the complex interplay between Latinx/a/o identity and monoracial racial boundaries.

Research articulates the struggles that Latinxs/as/os face navigating the dominant white supremacist culture of the United States. Evidence of this can be found in Anzaldúa's (1987) work which reflects language as an example of the challenges of assimilation. She particularly focuses on how various dialects of English and Spanish create linguistic terrorism, the idea that language dictates who/what group is in a position of power. Language can be used to dictate acculturation, something Latinxs/as/os not only struggle to do in the United States, but pay the economic toll of if they cannot. Anzaldúa (1987) demonstrates how *los atravesados* navigate the borderlands of the United States and Mexico through the manipulation of language. In attempting to navigate such a border, *atravesados* created a new language, *Chicano* Spanish, in an attempt to reclaim some agency and act as a conduit between worlds. *Chicano* Spanish is a language born out of the need for *Chicanxs/as/os* to identify themselves as a separate group outside of standard English and standard Mexican Spanish.

In Anzaldúa's (1987) scholarship, language is tied to ethnic identity; agency of one leads to agency of both. She claims that ethnic identity parallels linguistic identity; we are our language. Language acts as discrimination against those who do not conform to the English speaking dominators, the currency of illegitimacy. The stressors related to compromising language are equivalent to emotional terrorism; for this reason, *Chicanxs/as/os* created their own distinct language to mitigate the challenges of conforming to either standard Mexican Spanish or standard English. She cites her own struggles with asserting the ways in which she prefers to dictate her speech. "Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having

always to translate...as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 81). The accommodation and assimilation into white centered norms is a boundary Latinxs/as/os face in the United States. This focus on language is also a key part of LatCrit, as researched by Hernández-Truyol (1997). She speaks to the navigation of language that Latinxs/as/os embark on depending on the context they are placed in; whether they are with family, in a professional setting, or in a public casual place. She too stresses the necessity of adopting a construct that “embraces the significance of language to the narrative, rather than impose ineffectual and silencing of monolingualism and homoculturalism” (Hernández-Truyol, 1997, p. 890). What this research clearly outlines are the ethnic and cultural boundaries established by white supremacy in the United States and the standards of Latinidad upheld through language can lead to the creation of an entirely new language. The creation of this language is born out of lack of full participation in either group. It is critical to understand that the Latinx/a/o experience is built upon navigating such boundaries and potentially creating new spaces. The following research also articulates the cultural navigations that must be made, in this instance by multiethnic Mexican Americans.

Anzaldúa (1987) asserts that *Chicanxs/as/os* in particular hold a dual identity that neither identifies with Anglo-American cultural values nor does it totally align with Mexican cultural values. “I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 85). Furthering this conflict, Jiménez (2004) demonstrates that multiethnic Mexican Americans face challenges adopting an identity because of the complexity and ambiguity of being multiethnic, Mexican, and American.

Multiethnic Mexican Americans are the offspring of intermarriages between one white-non-Hispanic parent and one Mexican parent. Jiménez (2004) cites that multiethnic Mexican Americans not only choose identities by checking boxes on a job or school application, but also in interactive settings. He also argues that while the content and boundaries of a particular ethnic narrative are contested and negotiated, the Mexican experience in the United States is defined by the following: conquest, immigration, poverty, discrimination, protest, and struggle. Participants negotiate their identities amongst these lines, balancing preconceived ideas of what it means to be multiethnic Mexican American. The author categorized the responses of participants into four approaches: symbolic approach, Mexican American approach, a multiethnic approach, or variety of approaches. The common thread between these approaches is the continual presence of boundaries that prevent full integration into Mexicanness or whiteness.

Multiethnic Mexican Americans negotiate their identity in everyday situations, highlighting interactions with family as some of the most salient in which own-group conformity exists. “Although the family facilitates greater familiarity with respondents’ Mexican ethnic background, so too does the family make respondents aware of ethnic boundaries” (Jiménez, 2004, p. 84). The author relays how respondents mention being made fun of because they lack typical characteristics of being Mexican, such as dark skin color and the ability to speak Spanish. Similarly, respondents expressed pressure to pick one ethnic group (Mexican) over another. These findings mirror those of Miville et al. (2005) who spoke to the dual choice of identifying as both monoracial and multiracial; in the case of Jiménez’s (2004) research, this lies in having a Mexican-American and multiethnic Mexican-American identity. Jiménez (2004) ultimately concluded that many respondents in this study generally felt as though their responses were a

compromise because no category accurately described their background. The dilemmas felt when checking boxes on official forms are mirrored as individuals make identity decisions in their daily lives. This speaks directly to the basis of Hernández-Truyol's (1997) argument that the purpose of LatCrit is for Latinxs/as/os to create *nuevas teorías* to make categories that feel more pertinent to them. The promise of LatCrit lies in its ability to critique the ineffectual dominant model as applied to Latinxs/as/os in American society. Viewing Jiménez's (2004) work in this way, it's clear that the next step would be to empower multiethnic Mexican American individuals to create their own theories for what feels most meaningful to them and captures the essence of their experiences. There are numerous groups of people within the Latinx/a/o community that continue to navigate such bounds and choices. The following research illuminates such choices in the context of Latinx/a/o college students and the pressures they face in navigating ethnic stereotypes.

A final body of research addresses a gap in the literature examining the influence of ethnicity-related stressors such as stereotype confirmation concern and own-group conformity pressure on Latinx/a/o college students. Ojeda et al. (2012) shows how Latinx/a/o students may experience cultural dilemmas. These dilemmas are centered between conforming to their cultural self and academic self, particularly when they are one of a few members of their family to go to college. The research claims that demographic and ethnicity-related stressors collectively and significantly predict life satisfaction. The authors cite that Latinx/a/o students may feel a pull to stay connected to others in their ethnic group while at the same time trying to fit in with the college environment. The study concluded that Latinx/a/o college students' life satisfaction was negatively associated to pressures from other Latinxs/as/os to behave in ways deemed

appropriate for Latinxs/as/os and from the fear of being perceived as confirming a Latinx/a/o stereotype. Students' perception of pressure from their own group to conform to the norms of Latinx/a/o culture decreased their life satisfaction. As students' fear of alienation from their own group for not being 'Latinx/a/o enough' grew, their well being likely diminished. They might have also been concerned over how students of other ethnic groups on campus perceived them. "Pressures to conform to the expectations of their ethnic peers may exacerbate concerns about exhibiting behaviors that may confirm negative stereotypes about Latin[xs/as/]os" (Ojeda et al., 2012, p. 23). This dilemma of conformity to the Latinx/a/o community versus the dominant white college environment can trigger alienation and isolation. As seen in previous research, we continue to see the racial/cultural/ethnic boundaries that exist for the Latinx/a/o community, although Ojeda et al. (2012) offers a specific look at how these boundaries assert themselves in the lives of college students. Ojeda et al.'s (2012) work is rooted firmly within LatCrit, exhibiting how boundaries exist even within the Latinx/a/o community and how the creation of *nuevas teorías* by individuals within the community are the key to authentic understanding of Latinidad.

In total, this research illustrates the struggles of Latinx/a/o integration into the dominant white supremacist culture of the United States, including the culture of higher education. This includes research that articulates the struggles of Latinx/a/o integration into the dominant culture of the United States, research that illustrates the navigation of ethnic boundaries that multiethnic Mexican Americans must manage, and research that addresses a gap in the literature examining the influence of ethnicity-related stressors such as stereotype confirmation concern and own-group conformity pressure on college students. When analyzed in tandem, this body of

research justifies the claim that Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of analyzing multi racial identity development of college students, and using it in tandem with LatCrit allows for understanding of the even more complex identity development of multiracial students who hold Latinx/a/o identity. However, this research does not address Latinidad outside of the bounds of whiteness. In order to get a full picture of multiracial identity in Latinx/a/o identified individuals and/or students, more investigation into this intersection needs to be done. Related to the complexities of Latinidad is the idea that multiracial identity theory requires navigating racial/ethnic/cultural borders, especially when understanding the identity development of multiracial Latinx/a/o students. When taken together, this research addresses a gap in the literature examining the influence of ethnicity-related stressors such as stereotype confirmation concern and own-group conformity pressure.

Borderlands theory as analysis of mixed heritage identity development of college students

Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing research on mixed heritage identity development of college students. This includes research that illustrates how Borderlands theory provides a third space between cultures and social systems, research that articulates the ways in which ways in which multiracial figured worlds operate within an alternate racial borderland, and research that illustrates how college students draw from Borderlands theory to develop coping strategies for navigating multiple worlds. This body of literature shows how Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of analyzing multiracial identity development of college students.

To begin, scholarship illustrates how Borderlands provides a third space between cultures and social systems. “The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge

each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory...where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). In the process of two cultures or worlds merging, a third is born, one created out of the melding of the two original territories. The fusion of two unique territories or worlds creates an entirely new one, which is the basis for Anzaldúa’s (1987) work. This fusion is intentional, and acts as a space in which different elements from either side of the border are combined and created to form something new. Evidence of this can be found in Cantú and Hurtado’s (2007) summary of Gloria Anzaldúa’s foundational anthology *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Borderlands theory expands upon W.E.B. DuBois’ ideas on double consciousness and brings it to analyzing the experiences of *Chicanas* growing up in Southern Texas. Double consciousness is the internal conflict felt by oppressed and/or colonized people within society. Cantú and Hurtado (2007) pose that the basic concept of the racial borderland is the ability to hold multiple perspectives while “simultaneously maintaining a center that revolves around fighting against concrete forms of oppression,” in this case monoraciality and in particular white supremacy (p. 7). Anzaldúa (1987) uses the physical border between Mexico and the United States as a metaphor for all types of crossings - geopolitical, social, linguistic, and cultural, and argues that living in the borderlands creates a third space between cultures and social systems in which a new type of knowledge is born. Borders are relative. In the instances they are created there is always continuous crossing; one group jumping over to the other side and vice versa. With them travels knowledge, ideology, tradition, and other components of humanity. Border towns then function a bit differently than the rest of the spaces of a territory; they both simultaneously signify separation but also a new type of unity.

Borders create a new type of knowledge that can be extended to multiracial identity. Creating this new type of knowledge is intentional, and comes out of a deliberate process. As people and cultures clash across borders, they create new knowledge, ideologies, and inevitably a new culture. In the same way, multiracial individuals negotiate two different identities and meld them (if they so choose) into a new form of identity, multiraciality. According to Chang (2014), becoming multiracial, a racial *atravesado/a*, involves a complex process of identity production. *Atravesados/as* live outside the lines of social normativity, possessing unapologetic courage and a willingness to speak out even though they are silenced. It is in the borderlands where *los atravesados/as* live, those who do not fit neatly into a box or on either side of the border. Chang (2014) studied college students who used their deviation from monoracial normativity to exercise choice, owning their multiracial identity proudly. The author argues that “students who claim a Multiracial identity cross the boundaries of normative monoracial constructions by identifying with more than one race, locating them in the Multiracial borderland” (Chang, 2014, p. 26). The author draws on Anzaldúa’s idea of *la facultad*, the ways in which individuals embrace the uniqueness of racial/cultural fusion and gain competency. For the participants in Chang’s (2014) study, *la facultad* serves as a survival mechanism, a guiding internal voice that developed as a response to racism, homophobia, sexual violence, and intolerance. Through *la facultad* and the borderlands exist multiracial figured worlds, spaces that multiracial students assert creative autonomy over their identity due to outside forces, in this case monoraciality, that are out of their control (Chang, 2014). This highlights an integral facet of the borderlands; they are a space created out of a need, due to rigid societal norms outside of individuals control.

Similarly, Espino (2020) focused her work on *mestiza* consciousness, the space through which *Chicana* feminists hold power by constructing knowledge. In this space *Chicanas* exist in “a constant state of transition within lived experience where knowledge is produced, meaning-making occurs, and a sense of self is retained” (Espino, 2020, p. 142). Espino (2020) adds to the conversation by examining the ways in which gender specifically plays into the alternate racial borderland. Latina-identified students are often bound within socially constructed stereotypes that reduce them to binaries such as “college-bound or drop-out, good or bad, sexually promiscuous or academically talented” (p. 142). Existing between such binaries is where new knowledge and power are created. Latina-identified students effectively cross borders by coexisting in dominant white culture while also maintaining Latinx/a/o cultural knowledge (Espino, 2020). In this border crossing they effectively navigate predominantly white institutions while maintaining their Latinx/a/o cultural traditions and values. In Espino’s (2020) work, multiracial figured worlds exist within the dominance of white supremacy and patriarchy in Latina-identified’s lives. Espino (2020) demonstrates how *mestiza* consciousness is the “site of resistance against fragmentation that separates body from mind and spirit: centering bodymindspirit” (p. 142). In drawing from *mestiza* consciousness, the author articulates how Latina-identified students can be effective border crossers and co-exist between dominant cultures while maintaining Latinx/a/o cultural knowledge.

In summary, Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing research on mixed heritage identity development of college students. This includes works that illustrate how Borderlands theory provides a third space between cultures and social systems that articulates the ways in which ways in which multiracial figured worlds operate within an alternate racial

borderland, and that illustrates how college students draw from Borderlands theory to develop coping strategies for navigating multiple worlds. Taken together, this body of research shows how Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing the identity development of Latinx/a/o college students. Similarly to the research conducted in the previous section, this research does not include the identities of multiracial individuals. Again, this reiterates the argument that research including the voices of multiracial Latinx/a/o students needs to be included in the conversation.

Summary

This literature review illustrates how Borderlands theory provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of analyzing both multiracial identity development of college students and Latinx/a/o identified students. Using it in tandem with LatCrit allows for deeper understanding of the identity development of multiracial students who hold Latinx/a/o identity. Evidence that supports this claim includes three bodies of literature. The first set of literature examines multiracial identity which requires navigating racial/ethnic/cultural borders. Borderlands theory and LatCrit can be used to frame this body of scholarship. The second set of studies look at the complexities of Latinx/a/o identity, including a discussion of college students' identity development. The third body of literature focuses on Borderlands theory itself which provides a framework for analyzing mixed heritage identity development of college students. This claim and body of evidence addresses how Borderlands theory and LatCrit work in tandem to describe the unique experiences that Latinx/a/os face in the context of ethnic identity development. With my thesis, I propose to understand the unique experience of multiracial

Latinx/a/o students and expand the literature and work on understanding both multiracial students and Latinx/a/o students.

Chapter Three, Methodology

With a growing population of multiracial individuals in the United States, it is crucial that recent scholarship reflect the lived and shared experiences of such unique individuals. It is equally crucial to investigate into the different multiracial groups existing within the broader population of people who identify as multiracial. Depending on one's racial and/or ethnic makeup, an individual may experience the world differently than others of the larger group. The purpose of this research seeks to investigate and begin to understand the lived and shared experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students studying at Jesuit universities within the United States. The research sought to explore the following questions: How do multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive their identities in relation to their campus environment? What are the unique ways that multicultural Latinx/a/o students perceive themselves in the larger framework of society? How do multiracial Latinx/a/o students negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries?

I had initially intended on exploring all three of these research questions within my *testimonios*. However, given the nature of the global pandemic and online education, the participants did not offer substantial information regarding the relationship of their identities to the campus environment. Since this research question was not as salient as anticipated, it was ultimately removed in my findings and discussion.

Methodology Summary and Rationale

The methodology employed by this study of the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o college students at Jesuit higher education institutions and the ways in which they negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural borderlands will be narrative research, namely *testimonios*. *Testimonios*

reflect the voices of narrators who are often relegated to the fringes of society and represent a blending of voices to describe a certain lived experience/s (Cruz, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009). *Testimonios* are well suited for addressing the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o college students at Jesuit higher education institutions and the ways in which they negotiate racial/ethnic/cultural borderlands because it acts as a methodology that can “contribute to the growing scholarship on critical race methodologies which seeks to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge in academia, moving toward educational research guided by racial and social justice for Communities of Color” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 640). It is particularly valuable to analyze multiracial Latinx/a/o voices through such a methodology since *testimonios* emerged from Latin American Studies and have generally been used to document the experiences of oppressed groups (Latinos) and document injustices (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 643). According to Cruz (2012), “*testimonio* asks a reader to position herself as a listener and witness” (p. 461) rather than actively engaging with the narrative that is being told. Oftentimes, communities of color are not given the space to simply speak their truths without rebuttal or critique; in this way testimonialists are given space to dictate their narratives as they see fit. Furthermore, *testimonios* “offer an opportunity to ‘travel,’ positioning a listener or an audience for self-reflection...within this methodology of travel it is important to contextualize *testimonio* in a critical multiculturalism that is concerned with praxis of anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies” (Cruz, 2012, p. 462). The use of *testimonios* intentionally forces the listener/audience to self-reflect on the stories being shared, stories that may not necessarily be broadly published or recognized as legitimate because they come from people who are marginalized. This study seeks

to elevate the stories of people of color and expand the narrative about who has a legitimate voice in research.

This paper specifically draws on the connections that Pérez Huber (2009) makes between *testimonio* as a methodology and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). Pérez Huber (2009) highlights five points of alignment between *testimonio* and LatCrit: revealing injustices caused by oppression, challenging dominant Eurocentric ideologies, validating experiential knowledge, acknowledging the power of human collectivity, and commitment to racial and social justice. One of the most salient connections the author makes is the relationship between *testimonios* and LatCrit in revealing injustices caused by oppression. “*Testimonio* describes the injustices People of Color face as a result of oppression. A LatCrit lens helps expose the structural conditions which cause oppression in Latino/a communities” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 645). The exposure of structural conditions that seek to oppress multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals will be explored in this thesis. The general structure of the study is as follows: introduction (problem, questions), research procedures (narrative, significance of the individuals, data collection, analysis outcomes), reports of stories, individual theorization about previous experiences, narrative segments identified, patterns of meaning identified (events, processes, epiphanies, themes), and a concluding summary.

Research Setting and Participants

Setting

The research setting for this work was a private Jesuit university whose main campus is located in the Bay Area. The university has an approximate enrollment of 10,000 students across both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Participants: Sampling and Population

For this research I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a nonrandom sampling method in which the research selects individuals who are considered representative for meeting certain criteria of the study (Bui, 2009). In the case of this research project, all participants were multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals. Participants were initially restricted to undergraduate students at the institution chosen who fit the criteria of being a multiracial Latinx/a/o student who was willing to participate in the research. Recruitment was done through emails (which included a virtual flyer to pass along to students) to campus administrators and student organizations to try and gather participants. However, I didn't gather enough participants from this population so I opened up the recruitment process wider to graduate students by connecting with administrative staff and asking them to disseminate the virtual flyer to students within their college. I interviewed four participants for this research:

J.R. (they/them) - undergraduate - Jewish & Argentinian

Taylor (she/her) - graduate - Mexican (Latinx) & white

Sophia (she/her) - graduate - Mexican & Filipina

Marisol (she/her) - graduate - Mexican & Black

Research Design

Interviews were used as the research design for this study. According to Creswell (2006), this method is an appropriate choice for recording *testimonios* because it allows the researcher to situate participants' personal experiences, their culture, and their histories in an intimate and enriching way. The process of restorying participants' narratives allows for shared and poignant connections to be made. It also allows for both parties (researcher and participants) to negotiate

the meaning of the stories, allowing for more enriching analysis and allowing the researcher to interweave her story into the narratives of the participants (Crewell, 2006). The questions below were designed to initiate certain conversations in an effort to answer the research questions.

However, I also left a lot of the direction of the conversation up to the participants to understand their authentic stories and to listen to what was most important to them, rather than prescribing themes onto them. Thus, this research design could be classified as a semi-structured interview, in which the researcher asks a series of predetermined but open-ended questions (Given, 2008).

The participants were asked some/all of the following questions:

1. What was your motivation for choosing this institution for your degree?
 - a. What do you like most about your institution? What do you dislike the most?
2. Do you think your institution recognizes the different ways people are diverse on campus?
 - a. How do you think they show that they value diversity?
 - b. Do you feel some groups are more recognized than others?
3. What do you think your institution needs to do better or really fails in demonstrating that it values the diversity of its students?
4. What racial/cultural/ethnic identities do you use to identify yourself?
 - a. How did you come to choose this/these?
 - b. What is the value you see in identifying in these ways?
5. How are you treated at your institution as an ____ student?
 - a. Can you give me a specific example?
6. What are the kinds of decisions you make around your identities?

- a. How do those decisions impact your experience as a student?
7. Are there any particular programs or people that have been particularly valuable in helping you navigate your identity/ies?
 - a. What has been helpful or useful about them?
 8. Were there programs, people, or university practices that challenged or made more difficult your process?
 9. What do you think is important for me to know about your experience as a ____ student at your institution?

Data Collection

The data collection methods for *testimonios* of multiracial Latinx/a/o students studying at a Jesuit university in the Bay Area were conducted through interviews. Participants were given interview consent forms prior to the start of the interviews. The interviews were done digitally via video conferencing. They were roughly 60-minutes long and were recorded with participants' permission. Data collection lasted approximately 6-weeks. Although the interviews were based on a specific initial protocol, the interviews were largely guided by the participants in the sharing of their stories. It was important to me to understand the individual's stories as they told them. Using *testimonios* to understand the lived and learned experiences of the participants allows for richer dialogue that is more free flowing and authentic than more structured interviews.

Data Analysis

The data was organized and prepared by transcribing the *testimonios*. Interviews were recorded on the researcher's computer with participants' consent and used for purposes of transcription. Transcription occurred automatically by the video conferencing program, but notes

were also recorded during the session as well. Participants were asked to review their own transcript in an effort to negotiate the meaning of the spoken narrative. The transcription was kept on the researcher's computer and coded under a pseudonym. After that, the researcher read/reviewed the *testimonios* in order to narrow the field of data to include only the evidence that can be used to address the research questions. I was focused most on the experiences that they shared regarding their identities and relationships with other people. After I gathered that the nature of the virtual environment that students were largely living in did not warrant much analysis, I pared down research to exclude experiences that students shared relating to their campus environment. The researcher coded the data in order to generate themes. I coded each individual interview and focused on codes that captured thematic elements of Latinx/a/o community, biracial identity, and relationships. After coding the data I reviewed it and organized it into themes to be written into the findings. Finally, the researcher reshared the evidence, organized by theme and devoid of any identifying information, with the participants in order to maintain validity of the research and to maintain their equal participation in the work. Researcher and participant(s) worked together to maintain the validity of the coded data and contribute to the storytelling of the *testimonios* which is a critical component of the work.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations including: the sampling procedure and sample size, methods/data collection process, quality of the data collected in the study, and researcher bias/subjectivity. The convenience sample used for this study contains a limitation because not all members of the multiracial Latinx/a/o college student population were given an opportunity to participate in this research. Given the small sample size, the findings and implications of this

study may not be as widely applicable to the population and other populations at other institutions. The limited nature of the participants may influence the results because the results may not be able to be applied as widely to other members of this population or to other populations. The methods and data collection procedures for this study also include limitations. Data was collected through virtual interviews which may have impacted the quality of the interview including, but not limited to, participant energy and technical issues. It may also be an advantage, however, in that it can make scheduling more flexible and allow access to a broader range of participants. The quality of the data collected for this study may include limitations that influence the discussion and results of the research. This includes the fact that participants have been in a virtual setting for part of/all of their time at their institution and thus their experiences may be reflected differently than they would be if they were on campus. I situate myself as a member of the multiracial Latinx/a/o community, which was my motivation by embarking on this research project. Although I do not see my positionality quite as a limitation, I do acknowledge my positionality and the bias that my personal history might have had in doing this work.

Plan for the Protection of Human Subjects

The University of San Francisco (USF) Institutional Review Board has approved this study for the Protection of Human Subjects (#1438). The purpose of this approval is to protect the participants during the research.

Researcher's Background

The researcher identifies as a mixed heritage, biracial woman of Mexican and Italian descent. I situate myself as someone who straddles the borders of privilege and power. My story

is born through the foundations of family history, immigration, borderlands, and new beginnings. As a tribute to my family, I share and name their stories below.

My family is relatively new to this country, depending on how you think about who has ownership to the land and your view of border crossing. My maternal grandfather's parents, Paolo Rifino and Rafaela Pucci, came to the United States from Altamura, Bari, Italy in 1913, passing through Ellis Island and settling in Astoria, Queens, New York where my grandfather, Vincent "Tootse" Patrick Rifino and his siblings were born. My maternal grandmother's parents, Matias Valdivia and Flavia Elias immigrated separately from Jesús María, Jalisco, Mexico in 1932 and El Valle, Guanajuato, Mexico in 1933, respectively, and settled in Los Angeles, California, where my grandmother Angelina Validivia Rifino was born. My great-grandparents never became citizens. My mother, Melissa Rae Rifino-Juarez, was born in Montebello, California, after my grandfather moved to California and met my grandmother.

My paternal grandparents Ramiro Félix Juarez and Hilda Concepcion Robles Juarez immigrated separately from San Antonio de los Félix, Zacatecas, Mexico in 1961 and Ímuris, Nogales, Mexico in 1963, respectively, and settled in Los Angeles, California, where my father, Ramiro Juarez Jr., was born. My grandparents became citizens of the United States in 1993. Both of my parents were first generation students, navigating the constructs of racism and sexism throughout their adolescence and well into their careers.

However, my family is greater than just the names that I know. When I think of my family, I think of my ancestors, Indigenous people who cultivated the earth I inhabit until Spanish conquistadores came to their land and literally created a new people, the people that I descend from. I find it important to situate my story within that of a much larger narrative; one of

war, violence, and strife, but one of resilience, pride, and *fuerza*, too. I've always known I came from two worlds. It's not lost on me that I grew up straddling languages, communities, food, and cultural customs. But I always felt like I had to pick. When I was with my Mexican family I tried my hardest to speak proper Spanish, downplay my life in the suburbs, and just generally try to "be" more Mexican. The reverse happened with the other side of my family. I pretended to not really understand Spanish, I distanced myself from saying my name properly, and generally dismissed any attention to my Mexican heritage. For most of my life I struggled to feel like my identity was understood, that being from two different cultures could somehow fit together. The reality is that they don't fit, but they don't need to. What I've learned both through personal reflection and in the conversations I've had with other biracial people is that we do not exist within the confines of monoraciality, nor should we want to. White supremacist hegemony has us thinking that we need to assimilate to whiteness, that we must distance ourselves from any tension that could remove us from such a privilege. But that's wrong. Being biracial *is* the privilege. I have the unique ability to be a part of two different cultures while simultaneously pushing the boundaries for inclusion in different spaces. I used to see this as a burden, but it's actually a blessing. But I still found myself going back to this idea that many people don't understand biraciality, which is what led me to this project. I wanted to create an original project to allow voices who are often stifled in a world that values monoraciality. These are our stories.

Chapter Four, Findings

The researcher conducted interviews with four biracial Latinx/a/o students at a Jesuit university; three of the students were graduate students and one was an undergraduate student. Students identified at least one parent had Latinx/a/o heritage. Participants were asked open-ended questions related to their identities, their positionality as students, and their own identity development. The interviews were designed so that participants could speak to what was most salient and important to them, and could have an opportunity to speak for their own experiences as multiracial Latinx/a/o students.

Biracial identity was ultimately defined differently by each student. They shared different ways that they felt as though they struggled to define themselves being a part of two different communities and the ways in which they communicated with monoracial and other multiracial people. They spoke about different markers of identity, particularly within the Latinx/a/o community and how not having one of these markers was a barrier to full participation within the Latinx/a/o community. They also discussed the ways in which families supported or hindered their feelings about inclusion in either one of their racial groups, particularly within the Latinx/a/o community. All of the students spoke about finding community in ways that were most meaningful to them. These findings showcase the similarities between students' experiences as well as the uniquely individual development that is occurring in each of their lives, underscoring the importance of understanding multiracial identity development on a more individual level. These findings are part of the broader creation of *nuevo teorías* through which new knowledge is created from within the Latinx/a/o community.

Biracial Identity

The first research question addressed the unique ways in which the students perceived themselves within the larger framework of society. Most specifically, this framework addresses the monoracial hierarchy that establishes social order within the United States. Existing research seeks to understand how students make sense of their identities. The findings below also illuminate how students navigate racial boundaries, which was another key question of this study. Each of the students spoke to the different ways in which they experienced biracial identity. Three of the participants spoke about the tensions that existed between their two distinct racial identities.

Choice Between Communities

Monoracial hierarchy continues to dominate the way in which race is identifiable in the United States. I wanted to know how students perceived themselves within such rigidly defined boundaries. The findings of choice also spoke to boundary navigation of racial groups, another research question proposed in this study. The findings below highlight the struggle of multiracial individuals to identify with both of their cultures/races fully without feeling as though they need to choose or exist in the inbetween. Three of the students spoke directly about the challenges existing within two distinct racial groups. Their answers revealed a common sort of tension that existed between choosing between their two racial identities. I was most curious about if and when there was a certain point in time the participants asserted a biracial identity. The participants identified the complications of biracial identity, predominantly manifested through the idea of choice. They also all illustrate how tension exists within these choices. Tension and choice have the ability to make racial identity more complicated to comprehend for these

individuals. Tension refers to the border that exists between the participants' racial groups.

Choice refers to the action of movement across such a border to either one or both of the racial groups.

One of the students, Marisol, a biracial Mexican and Black woman, said that she had identified as biracial ever since she was a little girl. She said, "my brother and I that have the same parents...when we were little we started calling ourselves Black-xican. And I honestly thought we made it up." She told me about how they "created" a name to describe their racial identities in order to capture her identity in its fullness. She elaborated:

I've always known that I was two separate cultures and two separate races and things and even if I didn't want to I... there's no escaping it because I don't go a week without asking what... like being asked what are you. So, it's like always thrown in my face anyway...

Marisol highlights how her biracial identity has always existed in tension; she felt as though she had to choose between being Black or being Mexican. Additionally she shared that her racial identity has never been something that she could hide or separate from. She also hints that even though she might not have wanted to see her cultures or racial identity as separate, other people made that separation clear for her. She acknowledges that even though her two cultures and races are separate, she "created" a word with her brother to capture her full racial identity.

Taylor, a biracial Mexican and white woman, spoke to the frustration of existing between whiteness and Latinidad. She described a privilege walk that she did in middle school, where privilege was highlighted by taking one step forward depending on the scenario depicted. She elaborated, "I remember being like somewhere in the middle of like my white classmates and my

like Black and Brown classmates and I was like okay like I don't fit here.” She felt frustration at not fitting in between whiteness and her Black and Brown classmates. This frustration led to feelings of exclusion, particularly not fitting in within those two racial categories.

Another participant, Sophia, a biracial Mexican and Filipina woman, described feelings of not feeling like she was not Mexican enough or Filipina enough. She told me about her experiences going to school growing up; in middle school she went to school with a lot of Hispanic/Latinxs/as/os and in high school she went to school with mostly Filipinos. In these instances she described feeling as though she had to act like the predominant group that she was interacting with at the time. Her sadness mirrors the frustration of Taylor; neither felt like they fit in or were enough for one racial group. Her story illustrates how powerful dominant group pressure can be on a biracial individual. This could cause an individual to identify closely with one group and then change their identity based on who they associate with.

Choice of racial identity was a clear theme that ran through the participants stories. Each described instances in which they either had to choose or someone else was making them choose. Taylor elaborated, “I think that there's always been this need to like well, you have to choose, and you have to like, be this clear cut and I think that sometimes it's like no like race and identity are going to be messy right.” Her statement reflects a common theme within each of the participants' stories; race and identity are complicated, and sometimes contradictory. The complication of race and identity is compounded when individuals are a part of multiple racial groups.

Labels and Expectations

Another difficulty that the students described in discussing their biracial identities were the labels and expectations that others put on them. The participants' stories showed how labeling took away their power to create and share their own identities. When they were labeled, parts or all of their racial identities were erased, leaving them feeling uncomfortable. The concept of identity was unique and complex for each individual participant, but the key finding is the self-assertion each individual makes for themselves.

J.R., an Argentinian and Jewish student, expressed that one of the main reasons dealing with biracial identity was so hard was because of all of the labels that monoracial society puts on people with biracial identity. They said:

I honestly think we, whether that's a we as a multicultural people or we, as just the general everyone, would not have to do such deep identity exploration if it wasn't for others, putting labels on us or expectations on us for who we are, which is, I think, a very difficult thing to grapple with.

What they describe here is the pressure that other individuals place on multiracial individuals in terms of how they do or should identify.

Sophia and I had a conversation about the validation of biracial identity, and the ways in which specifically others can/cannot be supportive. Specifically, she spoke to the validation of identity as separate from racial groupings; validation to her meant moving beyond labels. Conversely, she felt as though her identity was a barrier to others seeing her whole self; she described feeling pigeonholed into identifying as a certain way after individuals found out her

racial identities. She said, “I really don't know what my label is because I don't really identify as one or the other, or even like both I just identify as, like me, but I have these values.”

Sophia expressed frustration at not knowing what her label even is because she didn't identify with one racial group over the other. To Sophia, her identity as a biracial American is not what defines her, but rather her values. She expresses feeling pigeonholed into identifying as certain ways because they are her racial background, rather than things she values. There is a sense of reshaping identity and deconstructing racial labels in her reflections. She said, “I don't identify as super American like I'm not like American pride or anything but I'm just multiracial or a biracial American who appreciates you know cultural values that I have but they don't, they don't necessarily only define me.” She also seems to suggest that there is an assumption made about the way someone identifies because of their racial identity, rather than investigating how a person wants to be identified. This could suggest that outward racial identifiers might not capture the actual identity that biracial individuals want to be identified with.

Both Marisol and Taylor shared similar concerns about being labeled as monoracial when in reality they both proudly assert biracial identity. The phenomenon of “labeling” for biracial people seemingly erases the unique identity of the individual as biracial, even going so far as to erase a particular racial identity. Taylor recounted instances where her identity is assumed to be monoracial and how she asserts her identity as a biracial woman. She said, “I think sometimes my identity is just assumed, so I always try to be really intentional when we're doing any sort of like talking about our identity on the first day like I usually try to explain that I'm biracial.” Differently from Sophia, Taylor asserts her identity as inherently tied to race, but shares the same struggles with others assuming her racial identity before she can claim it herself. Despite her self

assertion, she struggles within the monoracial framework that serves to dictate which racial group individuals identify as simply by assumption.

Marisol shared similar frustrations over “people telling me what I am, who I am or telling me that, like I’m not really Black because of this this and this and I’m not really Mexican because this...” These reflections speak to a larger issue, one in which monoracial frameworks continue to dictate racial identities without giving individuals the opportunity to make sense of their identities for themselves.

Code Switching

Code switching based on racial identity was something that the students also shared in their interviews. Code switching can be both/and in terms of negativity and positivity speak to the larger complication of biracial identity and the pain and joy that comes from navigating a monoracial world. The findings show code switching is a way to navigate racial boundaries. It is both a burden and responsibility to have to switch identities as expressed by the students’ stories below.

Marisol addresses the responsibility that comes with being biracial, with the additional burden of having to switch identities within groups like her family as well:

To be a person that has to feel the responsibility of two separate cultures, at the same time and learn how to switch depending on who you're talking to not only within your family but also out in the world and there's people that have to do that, you know switch between the house and the world, but when you're biracial it's like you have to switch between your homes within each other. The home you're living in and the world, if that makes sense. It's like the house I'm in, my grandparents' houses, the extended family, and

then also the world, and it's just a lot to juggle and so it's easy to lose yourself and all of that.

This reflection on code switching shows the often painful situations biracial individuals face when asserting their identity within pre-established boundaries.

Taylor took a bit of a different approach in her reflections on code switching. While acknowledging that code switching at times was difficult and/or painful, she also shared that she saw her biracial identity and ability to code switch as an advantage:

I think like even down to the ability to like code switch right of like yeah, I can see, this as a really negative thing of like oh, I need to um you know pivot to whiteness, but I also think that it allows me to be so many different variations of me and my true self in lots of different spaces.

Taylor's reflections explore a new side of code switching; one that views such a skill as a positive, rather than a burden faced by people of color.

Preconceived Ideas about Latinx/a/o Community / Markers of Identity

Multiracial individuals navigate various racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries as markers of their identity. There is an assimilation and learning of each race/ethnicity/culture that is done for these individuals to the extent that they are a part of different cultural groups. As this study identified Latinidad as the central connector between these individuals, I was curious to know what aspects of Latinidad these individuals saw as important to this respective community. Although the participants never distinctly addressed the following features as preconceived ideas, their reflections offered insight into their thoughts on what it meant to be Latinx/a/o.

Language

According to the students I spoke to, language (Spanish) was a dominant feature of Latinidad. The general trend that each of the students reflected on was other Latinx/a/o community members' perceptions of their ability to (or to not) speak Spanish. The findings reflect language as a cultural boundary that individuals must navigate. It also had enough influence on the participants that it affected their overall identity development when it came to their Latinidad. J.R reflected on an incident that occurred while they were having a conversation with another Latinx/a/o person:

I'm clearly not a native speaker. I was even in an Uber one time and the driver was Peruvian, his directions were in Spanish, and so I spoke to him in Spanish and it was a natural conversation, he asked me about my background. And he yelled at me when he learned that my mom didn't raise me speaking Spanish like he got so mad and was just completely shitting on my parents' parenting style for that. And I know that's a reflection of how a lot of Latin American people feel and I get it like language is so inherently tied to identity but yeah, so I think that was always the biggest barrier to feeling strong and proud of my like Latinx identity and heritage.

J.R.'s reflections on the incident showcase perceived ideas about the Latinx/a/o community as being a space that requires one to know Spanish, as reinforced by the Uber driver's reaction to their parent's choice to not raise them as a Spanish speaker. Their acknowledgement that language is valued by Latinx/a/o folks reinforces the idea that even if it might not be important to them as an individual, it is important to the broader community. If an individual does not speak Spanish, this could pose a barrier to full membership in the Latinx/a/o community.

Taylor's reflections on language were centered around her ability to speak Spanish and how the perceived idea was that Latinxs/as/os spoke Spanish perfectly. She said, "I'm still not enough because I still don't know the language perfectly um and that's a hard thing." She doesn't name that Latinx/a/o individuals do or should speak Spanish perfectly, but her clear disappointment in not speaking the language perfectly points to this assumption. This assumption causes her stress over her Spanish speaking abilities; however real or not it is, it causes her to feel as though she is not good enough to prove herself to the community.

Sophia discussed language as membership to the Latinx/a/o community. She reflected that she did not have a lot of Latinx/a/o friends, probably due to the fact that she did not speak Spanish. She said, "I, for some reason I feel like the fact that I don't speak Spanish could be a factor like why don't hang out with a lot of like Mexican friends." Here the perception is that Latinx/a/o individuals want to be friends or have relationships with other people who speak Spanish. Since Sophia does not, this was inaccessible to her, or so she perceived. Again, whether or not this is factually true, the perception is that language is a barrier to relationships with other Latinx/a/o individuals.

Marisol's perception of her Spanish speaking abilities were directed at me during our interview. She was telling me a different story and said, "and so, I remember going over to my *tia's* house, and I even get scared right now saying that word cuz I don't know if I'm doing it properly..." Marisol's fear of saying a Spanish word incorrectly offered a first hand account into the perceived fear and shame that the other participants recounted in their interviews. These individuals perceived the view of Spanish as a unifier of Latinxs/as/os and as something

fundamental to access into the community reflects the view of dominant frameworks about what it means to be Latinx/a/o.

Indigeneity

Having an Indigenous background was something two of the students perceived to be important to the Latinx/a/o community. Indigeneity can extend across racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries. It also lives within the monoracial framework of race. Lack of or partial indigeneity complicates the narrative of Latinidad for the participants as a perceived importance of the Latinx/a/o community.

J.R. shared their perception about an important tension that exists in the Latinx/a/o community. Latinx individuals do not have one single racial identity. Latinidad itself is not technically a race, and numerous racial groups can identify as Latinx. Their perception was that the Latinx/a/o community views Latinxs/as/os as having Indigenous heritage and if an individual did not, in this case J.R., then they were not really Latinx/a/o.

J.R. reflected on this perception and the ways in which they both benefit from white privilege while simultaneously feeling a separation from being Latinx/a/o because they are not Indigenous. They said, “I don't want to necessarily claim that Indigenous history accidentally by identifying as Latinx or Argentinian like I would never want to assume that.” I wanted to know more about the perspective they thought others had about being Indigenous and Latinx/a/o so I asked them to elaborate. They said:

I don't think it does, but I think people think it does. And I don't know if that distinction makes sense, but like I don't hold that to be true, and I can't hold that to be true, because then, what would I be like, how would I exist in the world.

As an Argentinian who is not Indigenous, J.R. perceived their lack of Indigeneity as something that did not permit them into community. However, they also addressed the complexity of being Latinx/a/o without being Indigenous and their existence in the world.

Taylor spoke to the tension of being Latinx/a/o as both colonized and colonizer. Her ethnic ties are to Mexico, and as researchers have illustrated, Mexican ethnicity was born out of the colonization by Spanish conquistadores of Indigenous women. She said, “Latinos are both colonizers and colonized so it’s always complicated.” This observation complicates the idea of race within the Latinx/a/o community, particularly for those whose ethnic background was born out of colonization. While not all Latinx/a/o individuals are Indigenous, these reflections illuminate the perceptions of individuals of what it means to be Latinx/a/o. Her reflections offer an observation into racial boundaries and what constitutes actually being Latinx/a/o.

Geography/Place

Two students drew connections between Latinidad and geography/place, particularly what it means to be Latinx/a/o in the United States. Geography/place physically establish borders between race/ethnicity/culture. The crossing of such borders, particularly between Mexico and the US, leads to a more complicated idea of who “belongs” where. Borders are set to be unmoving but as history has shown us they move all the time. Border crossing and immigration were fundamental to the conversations I had with Taylor and Sophia. Taylor specifically highlighted the idea of border crossing when she shared how her family was one of the original families who settled in Los Angeles back when it was still Mexico, but “then the border crossed us.” In her experience, the border crossed her family rather than the other way around. Sophia talked about intentional immigration within her family; both of her parents’ families immigrated

to the United States from Mexico and the Philippines when they were children. Perceptions of Latinx/a/o identity come from places of origin and places of destination, as illustrated by Taylor and Sophia's reflections. Taylor spoke to assumptions of her and her family's immigration status in describing some experiences in which she is assumed to be first generation when in reality her family has been in the United States for many generations.

Like if I'm in a group with other Latinas right and I have friends who are you know like I think probably like fourth or fifth generation, you know Latina in the US and it's like that's a really different experience than if your parents...like if you're first gen right, and so I think that the hard thing is that we all get come together but we hold this same experience and it's like...oh I feel guilty because it's like no my parents aren't first...like I'm not first gen, my parents aren't first gen, my parents went to college my sibling has a master's degree, you know.

Taylor shares the guilt she feels about being assumed to be a different generation than she is. She also shared an interesting perspective about being Latina in a country where "the border crossed us," further complicating the narrative of who belongs where, and how place/geography dictates identity. The perception in her reflections is that Latinxs/as/os come from certain places at certain times, and don't deviate from that preconceived idea.

Sophia shared her experiences being an "Americanized" first generation biracial Latina woman. Her parents both immigrated to the United States when they were young, so Sophia and her sisters were the first ones in their families born in the US. Sophia situated being Americanized as speaking English, evidenced by the below exchange we had:

Yeah so, I mean [I don't speak] any other language at home. I barely hear my parents

... like I only hear my dad speak Spanish when he's talking to his coworkers or when he's talking to my grandparents and then my mom, I like ...I barely hear her speak Ilocano.

To Sophia, not knowing any other language besides English is representative of Americanization. This situation of geography/place creates new iterations of identity for individuals, and could fluctuate between individuals in the Latinx/a/o community. These perceptions of the students of what it means to Latinx/a/o frame how they saw themselves in relation to the community. The following section serves to illuminate the barriers that they saw themselves facing regarding full access to that respective community.

Barriers to Inclusion

Due to their multiracial identity, some individuals perceive their respective racial identities to bar them from full inclusion within one or more of their identities. These findings are in line with the research question that sought to answer what racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries that individuals faced. They perceived that their multiple racial identities were barriers to culture, particular Latinx/a/o culture. The students in this research project spoke to exclusion both within the Latinx/a/o community and to their other racial identities as well. However, most of the conversation revolved around the Latinx/a/o community since that was the common unifier across all participants.

Language (Spanish) in Latinx/a/o Community

All of the participants identified language (Spanish) as the strongest barrier they had in relation to Latinx/a/o identity. Language (Spanish) was posed as a way to relate to other members of the Latinx/a/o community and that without it, that relatability is lessened. For these

participants, language was a significant part of their multiracial Latinx/a/o identity development. There seemed to be a lot of shame and sadness surrounding the fact that these individuals could not speak Spanish, thus preventing them from really identifying with their racial/ethnic/cultural heritage. J.R. spoke about how language posed a barrier to them identifying with the Latinx community. They said, “I do peripherally identify with the Latinx identity but, I’ve... it’s something I definitely wrestle with. Because I don’t speak Spanish natively and I...that’s always been a huge barrier...to just identifying with the Latinx community really.” Though they do not mention Latinx/a/o individuals excluding them, J.R.’s reflections illustrate their ability to not speak Spanish as a huge barrier to identifying with the Latinx/a/o community.

Taylor shared similar struggles in identifying as Latina because of her ability to speak Spanish. She said:

I felt that oh well, I’m not really Mexican because I don’t speak Spanish and my name is Amanda. Right, and so I never...I felt like my ethnic identity was tied to a language, and that was a language that no one in my family had so I just didn’t feel like I was right.

Taylor’s comments suggest that language is such a barrier to inclusion that one cannot even classify themselves as Latinx, or in her case Mexican.

Sophia shared that she was regretful of her ability to not speak Spanish, and in fact it posed a barrier to communicating with other family members. She explained:

I like hate it so much because, like all of my cousins obviously they speak Spanish and they like...because apparently my grandpa and my grandma they’re really funny but I can’t... like I don’t know what they’re saying half of the time. So, it really sucks like I wish that I could understand it more and speak it more just to be like a part of the

conversation and maybe like even know more about my culture, so I just feel like it sucks and I missed out and...it's kinda...I feel kind of like regretful that I didn't learn it at a younger age.

Sophia expresses anger and sadness that she is unable to communicate with her grandparents. She also specifically addresses language as a way to understand more about Latinx/a/o culture. For Sophia, not only does language provide a pathway to communicate with others who share it, but it provides an outlet to share cultural customs and knowledge with others as well. Because this pathway is severed, Sophia shows how this has added to her lack of cultural knowledge.

Marisol expresses similar anger and resentment towards being unable to communicate very well in Spanish. She shared:

I definitely feel cheated, and I get a lot of shit...because I don't speak Spanish and when I do try, I'm a white girl so like no matter who we're talking to I'm a white girl, which is really frustrating.

Marisol shared embarrassment that she doesn't know how to speak Spanish, particularly when it is brought to her attention by other community members who can speak the language. She continued to say, "I'm just mad I don't know Spanish because it also costs me money. Uh huh and just relatability to people that you know whose culture, I should be sharing." My guess is the reference to the cost of learning Spanish later in life could refer to resources such as Rosetta Stone or Duolingo that help individuals learn a language; instead of learning it as a child, she now has to pay the literal price for learning.

Cultural Knowledge

Cultural knowledge was a strong indicator of how much an individual felt a part of the Latinx/a/o community. The findings again reiterate the cultural boundaries that individuals in this research project encountered. In particular, this cultural boundary for multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals showed up specifically surrounding Latinidad and cultural knowledge. For some of the participants, their distance from the Latinx/a/o community was shaped by the ways in which their family did or did not share cultural customs. Marisol likened the ability to know one's culture to a birthright. She explained:

I feel like it's a birthright to know your culture wherever you're born right like it's supposed to help build who you become. And I love Black culture, that's the culture that I grew up in and... but like I should have been raised in two cultures, because of my two parents who were raised in two separate cultures.

She reflected on her belief that culture is supposed to help build who a person becomes. Marisol shared that she was raised by her mother, who is Black. Thus she was raised by Black culture for most of her life. She recently reconnected with her Mexican side of the family, but expressed some sadness that she was only raised by one side of her family and didn't get to connect with her Mexican side until later in life. This distance from Latinx/a/o culture was dictated by her family, illuminating that sometimes individuals' connections to their cultures can be dictated by other people.

J.R. also illustrated how their connection to Latinidad slowed down due to familial circumstances, particularly the passing of their *abuela*.

I think, growing up, I was more in tune with my mom's heritage but like situationally it

was just simply different like I...my *abuela* passed away when I was five and so until I was five, I was speaking bilingual like I was raised bilingual until I was five because my *abuela* never learned English. But when she passed away was when we stopped speaking Spanish because we no longer needed to and my dad also never learned Spanish so it was just me and my mom speaking Spanish. And my *abuela*, but then she passed away. So, I think, with her passing a lot of our identity went with her.

J.R shared that their connection to Latinx/a/o identity was largely due to the connections they had with their *abuela*. When that relationship was no longer in their life, the connection to Latinidad faltered. This enforces the idea that community and relationships can both be a conduit and barrier to access in Latinx/a/o communities.

Taylor shared her family's experiences of having their cultural knowledge erased and how she worked to reclaim it. She explained:

My grandpa and my grandma were both renamed by teachers, you know it's like we've seen the whitewashing of our culture and so you know it's even thinking about like my grandpa's name was Juan, my grandma's name was Celia and now they are Fred and Sally you know and they named their four sons Fred and Larry and Mike and they are Mexican men like 100% Mexican men. And so, I just...I didn't grow up speaking Spanish because it was something robbed from us.

The robbing of Latinx/a/o cultural knowledge, including language, from Taylor's family resonated with her and pushed her to seek out closer relationships with other Latinx/a/o communities, including traveling to Latin American countries.

Taylor also shared the pressure to know and understand the diversity of Latinx/a/o communal knowledge. She said, “oh it's just understood right that, like oh, you know what about immigration or you know about a specific cultural celebration, I mean that's just not the reality for all of our Latinx friends.” She explains the pressures that come with understanding every facet of Latinidad, even if she herself didn't share in certain specific cultural customs. The condensing of Latinx/a/o individuals into the same community is a disservice to the broader group. As a biracial Latina and white woman, there is added pressure to understand not only her Latinidad but her white heritage as well. This could cause extra strife to individuals who identify in this way.

Sophia shared her experiences about missing cultural knowledge on both sides of her family, not just within the Latinx/a/o community. She describes the pressure she has felt to share cultural knowledge with other communities, even though she doesn't know it herself. She said, “Yeah, I feel like sometimes you know when asked like oh, what is your identity, what's your culture, I feel like, I have to come up with more things to talk about because I don't know it too much.” She also explains how she feels pressure to come up with things to share because people assume that she has it. In a different conversation, she revealed that she doesn't have as much cultural knowledge as some of her friends from the same communities.

I don't know a lot of like I guess like folktales I don't know what a stories that, like my friends now because I have a lot of Mexican friends, I have a lot of Filipino friends and there's like things that they talk about that I have no idea what they're talking about, but the reason why they both know is because they're both the same culture, so I think that's one thing.

Her observation that her friends might have had more cultural knowledge about their respective communities due to being monoracial is astute.

Building and Creating Community

Each of the students shared how they built and created community in their own ways. The communities that these participants built and created crossed racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries which was significant. It is important to understand that each individual built and created community in a different way, which parallels the uniqueness of their experiences as multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals. There is no one monolithic experience for multiracial individuals, and understanding how they built and created community for themselves is fundamental to understanding their experiences. Community are the individuals who allow us to be our authentic selves, therefore understanding one's community could lead to more fundamental understanding for such individuals. With the choice between multiple racial identities that exists for multiracial individuals, building and creating community becomes more complex for such individuals. For some participants in this research, they built and created community within a single racial group, for others it was a more broad community of support. However, it was evident that all really valued their chosen or otherwise designated community.

J.R. shared that they found community with other Jewish individuals. This community began before their time at their current institution, and in fact grew when they transferred in last year. They shared how they came to build such a community and how they intend on continuing to create it for others:

I think it just really...it was there when I needed it. Especially like at [my previous institution], I was having a very challenging time adjusting there and the Jewish

organization on campus just embraced me and like gave me a second home. And I ran with it like and then I just became more involved and more involved and more involved, it was like I want to create that for the next class of freshmen, whatever the case might be. And so, I think that was a huge part of it was just like they were there for me when I needed it.

Although J.R. found this community before starting at their current institution, they shared that they founded a student organization for LGBTQ students who are religious and/or are interested in religion and spirituality. They explained they created it because:

College is the first time for a lot of queer students to really explore their identity. And, also to like a lot of queer students have a very challenging relationship with faith and so a space really just explore that and promote that.

Although J.R. did not identify other Latinx/a/o individuals as their chosen community, they did build community with the other part of their racial/ethnic/religious identity.

Taylor shared that she built and created community both within the Latinx/a/o community and with other biracial individuals. She shared that she wanted to get to know more about herself and her identity by getting to know other people who shared her cultural background.

I was in college, and I decided to volunteer with like a very predominantly Latinx community and like I worked...and I think my whole goal, and I, you know this wasn't a conscious decision like I'm going to go get to know Latinx people and I'm going to go get to know what that means, like, I think it was just this genuine curiosity of like well you look like me and I just want to get to know more about you.

Taylor explained that it might not have been a conscious choice to associate with more Latinx/a/o people, but was curious about getting to know other people who looked like her. This desire for connection is interesting and shows a choice that the individual is making to associate with one group over another. Taylor also shared how she found community with other biracial individuals, even those who did not share the same racial/ethnic makeup as herself. In describing her relationships with other biracial individuals she said, “I don't think we all knew it, but I think we were just looking for people, maybe, who had similar racial ambiguity.” Her comments about community with Latinxs/as/os are similar to the unintentional community found with biracial individuals.

Sophia explained that she created community with close family and friends. While she doesn't necessarily gravitate towards one cultural group, she seeks people to surround herself with who also value things like diversity and multiculturalism. When asked about instances where her close circle tried to define her in any particular way, she noted that she didn't feel like they did. She described, “I feel like the people I surround myself with are very open to like culture and diversity and don't really judge or make assumptions about people.” It's clear that her valuation of diversity and multiculturalism without labels in her own life extends to those in her inner circle. I was also curious if she wished that she had closer ties to individuals who shared her Mexican and/or Filipina heritage. She said:

Yeah, I mean I wish that I could just have friends of like every culture, because I just I want to keep my life like diverse and like you know fun but... and I just like to know more about other people, and like gets another families and stuff but I don't I don't think I

necessarily wish that I would hang out with more cultures than another culture, but when it comes to like my own, like Hispanic or Mexican, I think so yeah.

Sophia illustrates her desire to build community with more diverse individuals. Despite her desire to have more diverse friends in general, she is searching for more community with individuals who share in her racial/ethnic/cultural identities. Previously she mentioned that Spanish could be a barrier to why she doesn't have more Mexican friends; that separation could have a negative impact on self-identity. However, being surrounded by people who value diversity could support a stronger connection to one's chosen identity and community and show that having shared identity is associated with creating community for some individuals.

Marisol told me that she has built and created community with her cohort in her graduate program and with her family. She described her cohort as a group of "fourteen badass women" who are primarily women of color. It was through her interactions with them and she felt a closer connection to her identity. She said, "I didn't realize how powerful it would be to be around women who are also women of color. So that's been really just amazing to experience, and I do feel safe with them." She also confided that there had been an incident of racial harm and they had been extremely supportive of her healing process and helped her work through the pain she was feeling.

She has also found close relationships with both sides of her family after reuniting with her father's side of the family. She expressed that her bond with both sides of her family reinforced her racial/ethnic/cultural identity. She said:

I feel like this is the first...well not right now, but like within the last few years is the first time that there wasn't a pull between either side, because I know them both. So, before it

was like always this resentment because of my dad. And now that I've experienced my family it's like it doesn't matter what anybody else says now because I have a place that I can call home with them and, with this side and they all love each other, too, so it's just all...there's not really a divide for anymore, and I also just growing up like I said we called ourselves Black-xican, I never really liked the end in the middle, and so I think that was also just my way of trying to tell people that I'm one person.

Marisol expresses that her reunification with both sides of her family led her to to feel a stronger biracial identity regardless of the labels that other people might have put on her. She also calls attention to her identity as "Black-xican" as not wanting to use the word and; unifying her two identities instead of fragmenting them. Her reunification with her father's side of the family strengthened her confidence in her identity as a biracial woman, instead of her identity as a Black woman who was missing out on understanding her Mexican heritage.

Summary

These interviews provide an important perspective from a population that is often left out of the conversation when it comes to racial identity development. Although more research is looking into multiracial identity development, it has yet to really dig into the specific experiences of individual racial populations. These students shared how they viewed their identities within the broader monoracial framework of the United States and how they were able and not able to navigate racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries as biracial Latinx/a/o students. Each of the students contributed to an important conversation about how race is constructed, defined, and who holds the power to decide such definitions. The participants described the challenge of navigating a monoracial world, namely navigating choice between their respective identities,

labels and expectations put on them by others, and the ability to code switch. They also described certain barriers to full membership into their respective communities and the ways in which they had to juggle various forms of cultural knowledge.

They shared the joys and pains of being a biracial individual; the ways in which they have found community with others who share their racial identity and those who do not. In some cases it was important to them that they engage with members of their own racial communities and other times they found community with those who valued diversity and multiculturalism in its fullest form. Each of these individual stories deepens the understanding of biracial individuals and those who exist within and outside of the Latinx/a/o community. They show contradiction, unity, pain, joy, and ultimately a convergence of strength and ownership.

Chapter Five, Discussion, Limitations of Study, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This research was conducted to better understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o college students and the ways in which they navigate a monoracial world and racial/ethnic/cultural barriers. This was done through *testimonios*, a methodology that allows individuals to share their experiences in their authentic voices. Foundational theoretical research exists advocating for the creation of new knowledge and theories from voices within respective communities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hernández-Truyol, 1997). Self-assertion of racial identity is shown to be an important marker of development for college students. However, research has also found that prescribed labels and markers of identity can leave those who do not feel as though they adequately capture their experience to be damaging. Further research in the area of authentic creation of identities needs to be conducted. Research is especially lacking when investigating specific multiracial identities of individuals, particularly in the Latinx/a/o community. Research exists that addresses multiracial identity or Latinx/a/o identity but does not converge across the two.

Therefore, research conducted using *testimonios* was selected to more deeply understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students and how they understand their identities within monoracial frameworks and other racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries. This research was largely guided by the participants and the stories that they shared with me. In order to understand their authentic experiences and contribute to more equitable co-creation of knowledge, they guided me through their identity development journeys. This research also sought to bring these students authentic voices to the forefront of research. Oftentimes, multiracial individuals are left out of the conversation as unique contributions or are instead lumped into one of their racial identity

groups. In bringing the authentic experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students to the forefront, faculty, staff, and administrators could better understand and similarly serve this unique population of students. This research could also serve to expand the understanding of multiracial Latinx/a/o students and the unique intersections that they navigate throughout their lives.

Discussion

Conducting this research using testimonios allowed participants to share their experiences in an authentic way. Research suggests that the creation of authentic research, or *nuevo teorías*, comes from the voices within the community, instead of allowing others to speak for them (Hernández-Truyol, 1997). In sharing their stories, participants redefined what it meant to be a multiracial Latinx/a/o individual. Some proudly discussed their biracial identity, another shied away from one community because of previous harm done, and yet another wanted the world to embrace her for her values rather than her cultural identity. Most importantly, they showcased the diversity of multiracial identity and how they all experienced it differently.

Each of the participants was aware of the ways in which their identities did not align with monoracial frameworks, particularly when it came to full access into the Latinx/a/o community. Three of the students described the choice that they felt they had to make regarding their identities. All three recounted instances where they struggled to accept their biracial identity. This was largely due to prescribed labels that forced them to choose between their two racial identities. Marisol and Taylor spoke to the discomfort of fitting in somewhere in the middle of their two racial identities and how being situated in the middle led to questions about “what” they identified as. Marisol’s “creation” of a new word (Black-xican) to identify herself speaks to Chang’s (2014) research about *la facultad* and how multiracial individuals can assert creative

autonomy over their experiences while existing in the borderland. It also showcases Anzaldúa's (1987) work that advocates for creation of new language when one does not exist to accurately capture one's experiences of culture; in Marisol's case it was only one word that she didn't create, but it shouldn't be overlooked. Similarly, Jiménez's (2004) research about the negotiations and tensions that multiethnic Mexican Americans face is illustrated in Taylor's story about the tension that existed between her Latina identity and her white identity and how she didn't sit quite comfortably in either. Sophia shared how the pressure to choose one group over the other left her vulnerable and unstable in her identity development journey. Ojeda et al. (2012) shows how college students Latinx/a/o college student feel a pull between their ethnic group and assimilating into a predominantly white college environment; though this research does not incorporate experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students, it does illustrate tension between ethnic identity and environment.

All of the participants spoke to prescribed labels and expectations that they felt like they had to live up to as biracial individuals. In Marisol's case, she described how angry she felt when someone told her she wasn't "Black enough" or "Mexican enough." Taylor also described frustration at being mislabeled and to counteract the mislabeling of her identity. Both of these stories parallel Chang's (2004) research on multiracial students and how they navigated cultural boundaries to proudly assert their multiracial identity. In these specific stories and throughout the interviews both Marisol and Taylor asserted their biracial identity in spite of prescribed ideas about them. This was not without strife, as both described difficulty in identifying as "both" at times. But ultimately they emerge as *atravesadas*, possessing unapologetic courage and living outside of the confines of monoracial frameworks. The agency in defining one's biracial identity

can be a powerful claim and can help an individual assert themselves within dominant monoracial frameworks.

Sophia and J.R. spoke more towards the pressure they felt to define themselves largely because of other individuals wanting to place labels on them. They bring up a struggle that previous research illustrates, the idea that labels dictate identity and that individuals must confirm their identity in one of these categories. Individuals could feel pressure to select a pre-established label even if they don't feel as if it really encompasses their experience. Both Anzaldúa (1987) and Hernández-Truyol (1997) argue for the creation of new identities and theories so that individuals can identify in ways that feel most pertinent to them. Within this pressure emerged an uncertainty of how to really identify. This more closely aligns with Jiménez's (2004) work in which individuals negotiate their identities along the lines of preconceived ideas. While this research does not adequately represent the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals the relationship between preconceived racial identity and struggle to exist within such expectations should not be overlooked. The findings of this research study build on Jiménez's (2004) framework for understanding multiethnic Mexican Americans and expanding it to include other racial groups and other ethnicities outside of Mexican within the Latinx/a/o community. These findings suggest that the individuals navigate different expectations based on their other racial identity. More research could be conducted to understand how exactly those other identities are understood when compared to Latinidad.

Code switching, though painful, can evolve into a place that enriches multiple identities and communities and ultimately improves the future of humankind. My findings build on existing literature that sees code switching as a strength and complicate this literature by

attending to the pain it causes as well. This narrative of having to switch “identities” follows Anzaldúa’s theoretical model of border crossing, in addition to other research reflecting the experiences of multiracial individuals. Marisol saw code switching as a painful reality, one that matched the navigation that *mestizas* must do in Anzaldúa’s (1987) work. *Mestiza* women navigate being Indigenous in a Mexican framework, women in a Chicana world, AND women within a white patriarchal society; similarly, multiracial individuals navigate existing outside of the bounds of monoracial identity, code switching within a white supremacist world AND code switching between their two racial identities within familial groups. This confirms that multiracial identity development takes on a different type of complexity than monoracial identity development (Miville et al., 2005). Taylor also spoke about code switching but she viewed it in a more positive way; to her, it was an opportunity to be any version of herself she wanted in different situations. This ability to code switch can act as a bridge between communities. In this way, multiracial individuals should be encouraged to embrace their multiracial identity not as a deficit between communities but rather as a conduit between them. Espino (2020) spoke to such power in her research with Latina college students and the ways in which they can leverage their dual cultural knowledge of Latinidad and whiteness to be bridge builders. She maintained that Latina students could be effective border crossers but maintain their Latinx/a/o cultural knowledge. This is shown in Taylor’s story. It also speaks to Anzaldúa’s (1987) ultimate belief that individuals should embrace their multiple identities instead of fighting against or between them. She says, “the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (p. 102).

All four of the participants spoke about preconceived ideas about what it meant to be Latinx/a/o and simultaneously what barriers prevented them from feeling as though they had full membership within the community. Since that was the common identifier across all of the students, their *testimonios* focused largely on that group. Language (Spanish) was seen as an important indicator that someone was Latinx/a/o and the participants shared how their respective knowledge of Spanish prevented them from building relationships with other Latinx/a/o people. None of the participants reported that they were fluent, but ranged from practically no Spanish knowledge to proficiency. Even the participants who were proficient did not feel as though they spoke Spanish well enough. Language might be the most salient dictator of who is allowed entry into a community, at least within the Latinx/a/o community. This could pose further complications for individuals who have had their languages intentional erased in the name of assimilation. The tie between ethnicity and language should not be overlooked, and needs to be examined more critically.

The strongest barrier that the participants reported was relationship building and lack of cultural knowledge through language. They indicated that they felt as though they could/would have better relationships with Latinx/a/o friends and/or family members if they spoke Spanish. Sophia and Marisol spoke about how they felt as though they had been robbed by not learning Spanish as young girls. There was a lot of regret and pain that was shared when they were recounting stories about not being able to communicate in the ways in which they wanted to. They also made note that it was much harder for them to learn Spanish as an adult, whether it was because they had less time or didn't have the money to invest in a language learning service. These feelings of entitlement to language at a young age mirror comments Marisol made about

culture being a birthright; if language is a fundamental part of culture perhaps it is a birthright to learn one's language as a child. Jiménez's (2004) research mentions language as a barrier to inclusion in some Mexican American families; the stories of the students confirm that this is in fact a barrier to inclusion for Latinx/a/o individuals. However, multiracial identity development research says little about language. This speaks to the necessity of the research project as understanding multiracial identity more specifically and attending to various multiracial identities. Language may be meaningful for Latinx/a/o individuals but less so for other racial groups.

Taylor's experience with language opened up an interesting conversation about assimilation. Her story brings up an interesting point, that whiteness can force an individual or family to erase their history but the Latinx/a/o community may view them as not living up to its own expectations. She shared that she too felt as though language had been robbed from her family; this time, she was speaking about the forced assimilation to whiteness within the United States. In our conversation about loss of family and culture she also spoke to the tension she experienced knowing that the United States stole land from Mexico but then acknowledging the assimilation and ultimate colonization her ancestors contributed to in the United States. Her story shows how some individuals have had their identities robbed from them due to white supremacist frameworks; assimilation is survival in this case.

Her comments about language, geography/place, and assimilation speak to Anzaldúa's (1987) reflections on the assimilation of language and likening it to linguistic terrorism. Language is used to maintain power and is used as a tool to force others to adapt to systems of power. Taylor's family history speaks to such an erasure; she also told me about how her

grandparents ethnic names were changed by teachers in school as a way to assimilate them.

Taylor's story resonated with me because it's clear that while the US has tried to erase key cultural knowledge for her family, she is fighting to get it back. She studied Spanish, traveled, and is now a Spanish teacher; yet she still feels isolated from her community as a Latina biracial woman. This idea of forced assimilation towards whiteness and the simultaneous shame that individuals could feel as not living up to their community's expectations could warrant further research.

J.R.'s reflections on family and cultural knowledge were similar to those of Taylor except they shared how their connections to Latinx/a/o identity were largely severed with the passing of their *abuela*. Their *abuela* was their closest connection to Latinx/a/o culture and with her passing came a separation. J.R.'s experiences lie in tension with research that posits multiracial individuals adopt dual identities; being a multiracial person and identifying as a monoracial person most closely associated with their community of color (Miville et al. 2005). Instead J.R. became more closely associated with their Jewish community, both ethnically and religiously, instead of maintaining strong ties with their Latinx/a/o community. They explained that this assimilation towards their Jewish identity was also impacted by their mother's choice to convert to Judaism. What their story shows is how impactful family and relationships can be in maintaining or erasing ties to cultural customs. The thread that runs through these stories is that these students felt as though they were expected to have cultural knowledge of both/all of their racial identities. This might not be an issue that all multiracial individuals have to contend with, but is found within this sample group.

Research states that mixed heritage individuals have different choices and when it comes to their identity and relationships (Jiménez, 2004). Identity development models are built on a spectrum, largely acclimation to witness to full rejection of whiteness and integration into the racial identity group that is being developed. The same is similar for multiracial identity development models but in this instance it is built on acceptance of one identity group or full acceptance as a multiracial individual.

The findings of this research project show that each of the participants built and created identity development and community at various stages. Some had a full understanding of what it meant to be biracial while another predominantly chose to associate with one identity group. What is most important to note is that each of the participants built and created the communities that were right for them. Two built community within both of their racial groups, one gravitated towards one of their racial identities, and the last chose to surround herself with people who simply valued the same things she did: diversity and multiculturalism. It's not unsurprising to see how and why the participants gravitated towards the communities that they did. J.R. lost their connection to Latinidad at a young age and thus gravitated towards a community that welcomed them when they needed community most. Their experience speaks to the ways in which biracial individuals may gravitate towards one of their racial identities over the other, particularly when they have felt unwelcome in the past. Taylor's family spend generations having their culture taken from them, which illustrates why she would try to find a way back to that community to reclaim her identity. Her choice to associate with more Latinx/a/o individuals and biracial individuals speaks to research that shows how biracial individuals often associate as biracial and find community with one of their communities, most often communities of color. Sophia grew up

“Americanized,” living between two different cultures that she didn’t learn a lot about, but instead found others who valued her in betweenness and who she was as a whole person regardless of her racial backgrounds. This desire for a more diverse and multicultural community speaks to Anzaldúa’s (1987) work of finding community with others who also embrace pluralism and multicultural identity. Marisol spent most of her life being raised by her Black mother but always knew that she came from two racial groups; upon reconnecting with her father’s side, she was able to accept both into her life and thrive in both cultures. Her connection to home and identity is clear and illustrates how family can be a large indicator of how closely an individual feels connected to their racial identity. These choices that the students made are not unfamiliar.

These stories have distinct similarities and profound differences, but what is most important to pull from each of them is that they are all unique. Yes, they validate the tensions that research has shown exist within the Latinx/a/o community; feelings of not being Latinx/a/o enough, language and family as barriers to inclusion in the community, and the push for more representation by biracial people. However, what research does not validate is the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals. Research has yet to evaluate these two “separate” populations as one. What these individuals have done is shown how despite the pain and struggle that comes with feeling as though they can exist within a monoracial framework, they are finding and developing their identities in ways that feel most important to them. This cannot be done if research constrains identity by putting prescribed labels on the groups of people who are contributing to research.

This research sought to spotlight and more deeply understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals. Unpacking the experiences of a variety of Latinx/a/o

individuals using the theoretical model of Latino Critical Race Theory (Hernández-Truyol, 1997) and simultaneously unpacking the experience of navigating multiracial/cultural/ethnic borders using Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 1987) is groundbreaking but it shouldn't be. We should see research expanding to include more multiracial voices and we must honor the experiences of both those that are similar and different alike.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include the sample size of four students and the limitation of only studying one university. Furthermore, another limitation acknowledges the almost endless combinations of racial identities that multiracial Latinx/a/o students might hold. For this reason the experiences of these students are not generalizable even for other students at the institution. Jesuit universities typically welcome social justice and diversity action and thought, which could possibly allow for more active development of racial identity. Additionally, the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overlooked. Students who participated in this research have been largely remote during their tenure. For this reason, additional research should be conducted to more deeply understand how students situate themselves within campus environments. Recommendations for future research would be to increase sample sizes, the number of universities, and investigate how universities contribute to and/or hinder identity development.

Implications of Findings for Practice

This research project sought to understand the ways in which multiracial Latinx/a/o students position themselves within larger monoracial frameworks and investigate how they navigate racial/ethnic/cultural boundaries. One of the most salient findings in this project was

that multiracial students did not feel as though their voices mattered within broader monoracial groups. One of the students shared that she had tried to join a few monoracial cultural clubs but felt isolated because she did not fit in. Thus, it is important that universities create intentional space for multiracial students to be in community with one another. Beyond specific racial group connections, the students in this project found that just understanding what it means to navigate the constraints of race as a biracial individual was impactful. Research also suggests that when students have space to unpack their identities in ways most meaningful to them, they are more likely to feel more confident in their identities (Miville et al., 2005). Student engagement divisions, particularly departments engaged in cultural engagement work should consider establishing a multiracial student group and/or center that is open to all multiracial students. Similarly, monoracial cultural groups could include more opportunities for multiracial students within those groups to share their unique experiences with their groups. Specifically, Latinx/a/o cultural groups should work to be more inclusive of all races/cultures/ethnicities within Latinidad and work to unpack layers of power, privilege, and oppression within those spaces.

As multiracial populations grow, more multiracial students will enroll at universities. However, in order to attract and retain these students, more multiracial faculty and staff need to be hired. Although this study ultimately deviated from focusing on the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o students on a college campus, the role that faculty played in (in)validating the experiences of students was something that was discussed. One of the students spoke to her sadness at never seeing faces that matched hers as she was going through her educational journey. Another spoke to the important role of faculty in validating and respecting the diversity and identity of students. Findings in this study suggest that having more biracial faculty and staff

who can speak to the experiences of biraciality allows students to feel less confined to prescribed labels and literature that do not accurately reflect their identities. Due to the lack of research in this area, however, more students' voices should be illuminated so that better practices can be developed.

Implications of Findings for Research

Although the amount of research that has been conducted using multiracial populations has increased in the past few decades, further research is needed to understand the diversity of the multiracial student experience. It could be beneficial to base the research on one common racial group, such as in this study, or open up the study more widely but with a focus on understanding the similarities and differences between other racial groups. This could help administrators understand how to best support students who identify as multiracial. Research should also be conducted when students, faculty, and staff return to in-person instruction.

Although this study originally sought to understand positionality within a college environment, the remote nature of academia right now did not warrant such a question to be salient. Another area for expanded research would be to see how multiracial international students understand their positionality within the racial framework of the United States. All of the participants in this research spoke to their experiences as US citizens.

Conclusions

Despite the growing population of multiracial individuals, the United States continues to uphold a monoracial framework in which white supremacy dominates all. Even though research has expanded to include more multiracial individuals, particularly college students, we see that multiracial identity continues to exist as a monolith, with individuals from distinct racial

backgrounds lumped together. While this research project did show the commonalities that multiracial individuals feel with others from the same general background, it also illuminated the need for more research to support individual identities. It also illuminated the need for more visibility within the multiracial community. According to theorists like Anzaldúa (1987) the only way forward is to provide more support and visibility to those with pluralistic identities.

This research sought to understand the experiences of multiracial Latinx/a/o individuals who not only navigate racial/ethnic/cultural barriers as multiracial individuals, but as Latinx/a/o individuals as well. Latinidad was born of colonization. Within its history are stories of war, genocide, destruction, and erasure. However, due to the vastness of the community, it encompasses different stories, customs, languages, and identities to name a few. Neither the multiracial community nor the Latinx/a/o experience can be understood as monoliths. This research project shows that individuals who sit at this intersection cannot be understood as monoliths either. While there are generalizations and trends that can be found, ultimately space needs to be made for *choques*, tensions that may exist within and across communities. Just the same, these experiences deserve to be validated.

White supremacist hegemony has us believing that our experiences of multiracial people of color are unimportant, that we must assimilate to whiteness in order to really be accepted. I disagree. I think individuals who hold multiple identities are more equipped than anyone to be bridge builders, border crossers, community creators. They are the key towards a better world.

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Appendix

IRB Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Victoria Juárez, a Masters student in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco. This faculty supervisor for this study is Professor Seenae Chong, a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to listen to the stories and understand the experiences of students at the University of San Francisco who identify as Latinx/a/o in addition to another race/culture/ethnicity.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, the following will happen: participant and researcher will schedule a one-on-one interview conversation on Zoom which will last between 45-60 minutes. The researcher will ask the participant questions related to the research topic. Participants will be invited to review their own interview transcript after the researcher has transcribed and done some initial analysis.

With your permission, I will record and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be recorded, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being recorded but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve one session that lasts 45-60 minutes. The study will

take place over Zoom.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The risks and benefits associated with this study are a loss of your time and the risks associated with regular activities. The benefit of the study is that it may add to the research on the field of education and international/multicultural issues. This information, once collected, might be read by policymakers, educational experts, educators and scholars and could affect the educational practice. If you do not want to participate in the study, you will not be mentioned in any documents of the study, and your decision to not participate will not be told to anyone. You may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty. If you are upset by any of the questions asked, the researcher will refer you to counseling services available publicly or at the university if you are a member of the academic community (student, staff or professor).

BENEFITS:

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include: amplifying the voices of those often left out of academia, creating space for student voices to shape research and share their stories, understanding the unique experiences of this group of students and proposing recommendations for continued generations, learning more about the kinds of support that multiracial Latinx/a/o students need and want.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, real names will be replaced by pseudonyms on all interview and observation transcripts, and all audio files, observation notes, or other documents that contain personal identifiers will be stored in a password-protected computer or hard-drive that we will keep in a locked file cabinet until the research has been completed. Original audio-files will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts in a locked file cabinet. Consent forms and any other identifiable data will be destroyed in 3 years from the date of data collection.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Victoria Juárez at 951.741.8428 or vrjuarez@dons.usfca.edu or the faculty supervisor, Seenae Chong at (408) 421-2085 or srchong@usfca.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE