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# ¿De Dónde Eres?: The Construction of U.S. and Immigrant Culture and Identity in the ESL Adult Education Setting

Chad Perry

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**¿DE DÓNDE ERES?  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF U.S. AND IMMIGRANT CULTURE  
AND IDENTITY IN THE ESL ADULT EDUCATION SETTING**

**by**

**CHAD PERRY**

B.S., Journalism, Kansas State University, 1977  
M.F.A, Creative Writing, Wichita State University, 1982

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Communication**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July, 2015**

## **DEDICATION**

To the students, instructors and staff of the ESL Program who allowed me to play a small part in their efforts to just be.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am so grateful for the encouragement and guidance of my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Iliia Rodríguez. Thank you for your patience and your kindness during this long, steep path.

I also thank my committee members, Dr. Patricia Covarrubias, Dr. Glenda Balas, and Dr. Ricky Lee Allen. They have provided me with valuable input for this study and assisted in my professional development.

My many friends and colleagues have also encouraged me, and they are too numerous to list here. I will make it my goal to thank every one of you individually.

Last and the best, to my wife, Mylea: your love amazes me and humbles me.

## FOREWORD

The seed, and the title, of the present study come from a conversation I had with a student several years ago. At the time, I was teaching composition courses. The majority of the students one encounters in that situation are taking English composition because they have to take the course, not because of a love for writing.

The love of writing was what was special about this particular student. She was bright, articulate, had not developed lazy or bad writing habits, and in fact had intentions of pursuing a bachelor's degree in journalism. A kindred soul.

One day I saw her walking across campus, and I could tell she was upset about something. In the course of our conversation, she told me that she had been talking with some elderly Hispanic women in the community. They had asked her where was she from (*¿De dónde eres?*), and she explained that her parents had migrated from Mexico to California, where she was born.

“Oh,” they said, “then you’re really *not* Hispanic.”

She expressed feelings of sadness, of anger, about her ethnicity being questioned.

I responded with silence as I felt awkward, and I was not sure what to say to her. I finally stammered something about how did that make her feel.

Later I pondered on how that statement made me feel. I grew up in the Midwest where it was not uncommon to hear derogatory comments about some particular minority group by the dominant, White culture. I was not prepared to hear a similar attitude or thread of conversation in the southwestern United States. New Mexico, like California, is a bellwether state when it comes to diversity in racial/ethnic demographic composition. These states reflect what is supposed to happen to the rest of the country: Whites will lose

their numerical status as the largest population, and People of Color will equal or surpass the White race.

Local politicians claim that New Mexico is a land free of racial strife, and that the cultures have learned to live at peace. Yet here was my student confronted with a discriminatory remark from someone who was Hispanic: Because her ancestors were from Mexico, she could not be Hispanic.

Was I so naive to think that racial prejudice can only be practiced by one ethnic group in America? Was this an example of my White privilege and its accompanying ignorance? Was I in fact stereotyping other ethnic groups by thinking that People of Color have risen above racial trappings in the U.S. American culture?

For the next several years, I pursued my Ph.D. in intercultural communication. I found myself reflecting on my student's confrontation, as well as my role as an educator and as a member of the White, dominant culture in the United States of America. I reflected on my own assumptions and prejudices, as well as those I observed in the U.S. American culture. In particular, I focused on exploring how the communicative practices of students and instructors in an English as a Second Language educational setting enact a relation between language learning, construction of social identities, and reproduction of racial ideologies through a process of intercultural communication. That simple question, *¿De dónde eres?*, led me down this path.

**¿DE DÓNDE ERES?  
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**ABSTRACT**

In this study, I investigated how lessons and interactions in an ESL classroom setting construct U.S. and immigrant cultural identities through narratives and counter-narratives, and how these narratives and counter-narratives reproduced and questioned relations of power along the lines of race, class, and gender difference. The theoretical framework for this intercultural study was informed by Co-cultural theory, CRT, LatCrit, language and power, and Whiteness studies. As the findings of the research show, the narratives constructed through language, interaction, and institutionalized practices in the ESL setting reproduced the ideology of the American Dream. The American Dream emerged as the enduring ideological field within which ESL learners and instructors make sense of U.S. and immigrant culture and identities. I argue that the American Dream ideology is the backbone of the dominant narratives of the dominant, White group of the U.S. American culture. The findings also indicate that while students, instructors, and administrator in the study reproduced dominant narratives, they also created counter-narratives or *testimonios* to question or resist the dominant narratives.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

There is a common perception that a classroom is a place free of social, cultural, and political pressures that offers equal opportunity to access education and thus can level the playing field for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Aveling, 2006; Bell, 2002; Jay, 2003). English as a Second Language (ESL) courses for adults are thought to be such an avenue for immigrant adult learners whose native language is not English and who often struggle to integrate into the social fabric of their new country. The ideal ESL classroom is expected to provide the language skills and cultural knowledge that help immigrant learners participate and function productively in U.S. society. But a classroom, and especially an ESL classroom, does not operate in a vacuum. The cultural and political significance of the ESL learning environment is much more profound as the ESL classroom becomes a site where the intersections of language, identity, and power are enacted through intercultural communication to reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies in the United States.

My perspective on intercultural communication research focuses on understanding communicative situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact, which is definitely at the center of this dissertation research. I am particularly interested in Orbe's (1998a) theory of co-cultural communication that "refers to interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members" (p. 3). This dissertation focuses on the experiences of immigrant adult learners and their instructors in an ESL classroom setting in New Mexico. The research is an inquiry on how the lessons and interactions in an ESL classroom construct cultural identities through dominant

narratives and counter-narratives, and how these narratives reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies about race and other social hierarchies in the United States. More specifically, the research explored how narratives of the U.S. dominant culture intersect with narratives and counter-narratives of immigrant students observed in the ESL classroom to reproduce relations of power through ideologies of race, class, and gender constructed through language.

The term dominant narratives refers here to a particular collection of stories about U.S. society, culture, and peoples that reinforce the ideologies that have been invoked primarily by dominant groups to maintain social hierarchies in New Mexico and in the United States. The term counter-narrative or *testimonio* is applied here to the narratives of participants in the research who are from groups marginalized by U.S. mainstream society or by dominant groups in New Mexico. In this research project, this group includes working class immigrants with low levels of English-language proficiency, as well as immigrants with professional backgrounds in their home countries but who are not fluent in English and lack cultural competency in U.S. mainstream society. These *testimonios* enact the life experiences of the participants and their accounts of the reality of living in the United States.

I conducted critical ethnographic research in an educational setting to explore how English-language learning and intercultural communication among teachers and students constitute ideological processes through which power structures are reproduced. In addition to co-cultural theory of intercultural communication (Orbe, 1998a&b), the research is informed by critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described CRT as a movement of scholars and activists who want to

study and change the structure of power that is based on race and racism in the United States. Bell (1992) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) have argued that racism is not imaginary but a social construct, one based around power – power based not only on the basis of skin color and ethnicity but also around class and gender power. In their view, power is not an abstraction but a part of the construction of social reality as the construct of language. In this research I approach power as mediating the construction of social reality through language and communication. Other theoretical influences in this research are Latino/a critical theory (LatCrit) (Stefancic, 1997), studies on language and power (Reid & Ng, 1999), and Whiteness studies (McIntosh, 2004; Marx, 2004). These theoretical frameworks will be explicated in Chapter Two.

The research questions to be explored are the following: What are the dominant narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed in classroom lessons and interactions among ESL learners, instructors, and administrators? What are the counter-narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed by the ESL learners? How do these narratives and counter-narratives reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies about power relations in the United States?

### **Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The present study aims to contribute to scholarly literature in the fields of intercultural communication and education. Firstly, it will complement previous research in communication by expanding co-cultural theory through the incorporation of critical race theory and LatCrit theoretical perspectives in the analysis. Secondly, this study will contribute to scholarly literature in both communication studies and education, as I will address the voices, perceptions, and experiences of ESL adult learners. I have been

conducting research for the past three years on a form of intercultural communication and a population that has received minimal attention in these fields. Although scholarly literature about the ESL student in public schools or in institutions of higher education is abundant (Zhu, 2010; Peterson, 2008; Kasapoglu-Akyol, 2010; Bernhard, Diaz & Allgood, 2005; Corkett & Hatt, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2009; Gainer & Larrotta, 2010; Galguera, 2011; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Ware & Benschoter, 2011), the non-traditional, immigrant, working class ESL learner has been overlooked; they are a forgotten group.

In addition, this research aims to illuminate how the construction of power relations in New Mexico—a state with a minority-majority population—may offer insights for the understanding of the future of racial relations in the United States as national population trends indicate a movement toward a minority-majority population. In effect, some studies have shown that the United States is fast approaching a public education system where the majority of students in the classroom are from homes where English is not the primary language spoken (Bell, 2002, 2003). As the U.S. society grapples with the issue of immigration, the national public dialogue tends to privilege dominant perspectives and narratives of U.S. citizenship and identity. There has been limited room for immigrant themselves to articulate their perspectives on how the country should address the issue. Bridging the gaps between the marginalized immigrant adult learner and the mainstream population of the U.S. can only help strengthen intercultural communication and understanding in this country. Lastly, this ethnographic investigation aims to identify and suggest pedagogical practices that may improve the classroom experience of adult immigrant learners and instructors of ESL.

## **Dominant Narratives, Counter-Narratives, and American Dream Ideology**

This next section defines three central concepts in this research: dominant narratives, counter-narratives, and the American Dream ideology. I will illustrate how narratives constructed in the ESL setting can maintain or challenge the American Dream as the central ideological field that mediates understanding of power and identity in U.S. American culture.

### **Dominant Narratives**

The use of the concepts narrative and counter-narrative is informed by the scholarly work of critical race theorists. These have conceptualized dominant narratives as “majoritarian stories” or “master” narratives. They defined majoritarian stories as the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462). This definition of the dominant narrative is expanded in my study to include gender and social class because of the wider scope of my intercultural research and the assumption that the analysis of marginalized people’s experiences calls for the examination of intersecting forms of oppression (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999). Intersectionality is a useful construct that leads to the examination of the lived experiences of marginalized people who encounter multiple forms of oppression, particularly when race, social class, and gender are involved (Cuádriz & Uttal, 1999, p. 158). McCall (2005) has stated that intersectionality is the study of “relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations” (p. 1771). Incorporating the analysis of various dimensions of identity—such as gender, race, and social class—allows for a more nuanced understanding of how people negotiate and navigate different

social structures created by the dominant groups in society that are invested in ensuring the perpetuation of White privilege and its systems of oppression. I will use the concept dominant narratives in my study to refer to the power of dominant racial, class, and gendered groups to perpetuate narratives (or stories) that oppress marginalized groups while maintaining social hierarchies in U.S. society (Giroux, 1991; Stanley, 2007).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), one of the tenets of CRT is that the ideology of the dominant group is a narrative of colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy regarding the U.S. society. Delgado and Stefancic also referred to this dominant narrative as a “master narrative” (p. 9). The master narrative should not be thought of as a single narrative “but rather multiple, interlocking, mutually supportive narratives” (Stanley, 2007, p. 15). Dominant or master narratives produce a collection of stories that are the basis of a body of knowledge that is upheld by the dominant group through particular language used to interpret this knowledge. Delgado (1989, 1990) and Tate (1997) referred to this collection of stories as “stock stories” that are reiterated to produce this body of knowledge and “construct realities in ways that legitimize power and position” (Tate, 1997, p. 220). Yosso (2006) discussed that the master narratives have been developed from a “stockroom of stereotypes” regarding gender, race, etc., that over time have been upheld as the truth by individuals, groups, and institutions (p. 9). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) argued the dominant narratives not only help construct realities but are the embodiment of a discourse that becomes the “reality of oppression” that is “translated [into] real policies, practices, and law” (p. 420). Aldridge (2006) observed that these master narratives “refer to a dominant and overarching theme or template” that presents a limited perspective of the U.S. culture (p. 681). The dominant

narratives are used by the dominant group to simplify complex social issues and to simplify members of marginalized groups so that they are seen as one-dimensional objects, rather than as human beings with complex identities, experiences, and cultural lives (Aldridge, 2006; Trueba, 2002). Erdmans (1999) noted that public narratives are dominant cultural discourses that are produced through media, and this media discourse will “shape ideas, provide images, and supply meaning to events in everyday social realities” (p. 341).

Dominant narratives are legitimized by creating boundaries that entrench a circle of power (Trow, 1984). These boundaries are particularly necessary during times of crisis that reveal “contradictions and social fractures” in the dominant narratives (Moraru, 1999, p. 251). These cracks in what would seem to be a solid dominant narrative are quite often revealed through the passage of laws that are supposedly color-blind but are in fact examples of institutional reactions to perceived threats posed by racial minorities to the dominant position of White groups in the racial hierarchy. For instance, 43 states passed anti-immigration laws in 2010 and 2011 (Gordon & Raja, 2012). As of 2013, 26 states had passed “stand your ground” laws that allow people to shoot first and claim self-defense. Seven additional states have shoot-first laws that can be used in claims of self-defense in criminal proceedings (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2013).

### **Counter-Narratives**

Another tenet of CRT, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), is that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is a counter-narrative that is an appropriate, legitimate source for the understanding of the racial inequality perpetuated by the dominant group through its master narratives. According to Stanley (2007), the purpose

of counter-narratives is not to prove the existence of racism, classism or sexism; rather “counter narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives” (p. 14). Counter narratives do so by offering alternatives to dominant discourses, by providing multiple and conflicting views of social and/or cultural identities, and by challenging the dominant White, male culture that the dominant group considers normative (Stanley, 2007). Delgado (1989) argued counter-narratives play an important role as they “shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (p. 2414). In fact, counter-narratives can create a transformational resistance that provides people of color a perspective “that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 320).

### **The American Dream**

I argue in this study that the ideology of the American Dream is an important element of the collection of stories of the dominant narratives. Hochschild (1995) claimed the American Dream has been a central ideology of the dominant U.S. American group “for decades if not centuries” (xi). The American Dream is so pervasive that this ideology is produced through mass media and, as Erdmans (1999) stated, shapes ideas and provides meaning and reality for both dominant and marginalized groups. There are four tenets to the American dream, according to Hochschild (1995): 1) Everyone living in the United States may always pursue one’s dreams; 2) It is reasonable to anticipate success of one’s dreams; 3) Success is the result of one’s individual character and abilities that is under one’s personal control; 4) Success is associated with hard work and virtue. Hochschild also noted that the meaning of success can be very individualized and

ranges from absolute, materialistic well-being (the prevalent definition) to relative success based on personal accomplishments and/or achievements (pp. 15-25).

Hochschild argued that these tenets are quite flawed when the historical record is taken into account. She labeled the factual claim of the first tenet as “largely false” (p. 26). She pointed out that women of any race and Men of Color have had a narrow range of potential futures while White men could lay claim to pursuing any dream. Because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status, the second tenet regarding anticipating success becomes tenuous at best for marginalized groups. If the starting points for members of the U.S. society are not on relative equal footing, then how can People of Color believe that everybody can attain success? That leads to the flaw in the third tenet: “Americans who do everything they can and still fail may come to understand that effort and talent alone do not guarantee success” (p. 30). As Hochschild, pointed out, part of the American Dream ideology is that if one claims responsibility for success, then one must accept responsibility for failure. But if U.S. Americans have stories about winners, why should they listen to stories about losers? The flaw in the fourth tenet is reinforced by the flaw in the third tenet. The view of hard work as a virtue is a key element of the fourth tenet. Following the logic of this ideology, if one is a loser, then it is because one is not virtuous enough, or as Hochschild put it, “failure implies sin” (p. 30).

The first tenet of the American Dream ideology is anchored firmly in the belief of the White dominant group in the United States regarding meritocracy. Anyone can pursue one’s dream because the United States has an equal playing field. Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2003) addressed this as “color-blind racism” that drives an ideology based on “story

lines” practiced by the White, dominant group. “I define story lines as the socially shared tales that are fable-like and incorporate a common scheme and wording. Racial story-lines are fable-like because ... they are often based on impersonal, generic arguments with little narrative content – they are the ideological ‘of course’ racial narratives” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 76).

The majority of the individuals who participated in this study are Mexicans and Mexican Americans. These groups, like others, have shared in the ideology that by assimilating certain values associated with U.S. European American culture, they, too, can live the American Dream. But the dominant narratives do not reveal to marginalized groups that some opportunities are kept for or only available to those with the right race, social class, and gender. They conceal the historicity of the American Dream, which has been more elusive for those who are not descendants of European Americans and has kept certain social identities on the margins of the U.S. dominant culture.

Individuals from marginalized groups who do break through barriers created by the dominant culture become examples that perpetuate the notion of meritocracy in the American Dream: it is possible for anyone who works hard to live the dream. But living the dream also requires adopting European American, White, middle class values, and becoming a proxy for Whiteness (Chávez, 1991; Rodríguez, 1982; Martinez, 2006). Consequently, marginalized individuals who do not attain the American Dream are examples of individuals who failed because they did not develop the U.S. American work ethic, clung to family and cultural values considered foreign, did not master the English language, or did not take advantage of a U.S. educational system that, according to the dominant narratives, is equitable and fair (Yosso, 2006). Yet such messaging does not

take into account what Espino (2008) described as cultural capital: the unacknowledged cultural knowledge transmitted from generation to generation within affluent and middle-class families on how to successfully navigate the educational systems. Therefore, the American Dream is an ideology that allows dominant groups to justify their position of privilege as members of the dominant culture (Espino, 2008).

However, recent research suggests that a majority of Latinos living in the United States believe that cultural capital skews the possibilities of attaining the American Dream. This perspective presents a counter-narrative to the American Dream ideology. A 2013 survey of Hispanics (Jones, Cox & Navarro-Rivera) in the United States indicated that “strong majorities of Hispanics believe that the U.S. economic system unfairly favors the wealthy (72%) and that hard work and determination do not guarantee success for most people today (60%)” (p. 2). Furthermore, Carrasco and Kokoyachuk (2013) with ThinkNow Research conducted a study entitled “U.S. Hispanic Cultural Values in 2013.” This study indicated that the majority of Latinos living in the United States uphold values that do not reflect the values found in the American Dream ideology. These values provide evidence of a counter-narrative. For instance, family unity and being surrounded by friends and family were ranked first and third among a list of the top ten Hispanic cultural values. These values are ones that are often sacrificed in the American Dream. Carrasco and Kokoyachuk also noted that Mexicans and Central American Latinos ranked being surrounded by family and friends higher than any other Latino cohort in the study. I note this because the majority of the participants in my study are Mexican or Mexican-American. In the discussion of findings, I will address the values expressed by

the participants in my study and compare the values they expressed to those in Carrasco and Kokoyachuk study.

### **Relevant Background: The ESL Classroom in the Current Political Climate**

The ESL classes that were observed for the study were held at a community center and a school in a rural setting outside a metropolitan area in New Mexico. The following statistics about the center help place the ESL program in context. According to the program's annual report for 2010-2011, the Center served 1,141 students in Adult Basic Education (ABE) or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Of that total, 187 adult students were enrolled in ESL courses. Of the 187 ESL students enrolled in the program, 177 of them are listed as Hispanic/Latino. The majority of these ESL students are working class people who recently migrated from Mexico, Central America, or South America. They are raising families, and their children are ESL students in public schools. These non-traditional ESL students are also anxious to learn English because they want to be able to help their school-aged children with their homework, and many of these parents lack the confidence in their English skills to be able to do this.

The cost per student for the entire year was \$459.56, and the cost per contact hour was \$7.76. These figures are based on State and Federal dollars spent divided by the number of students with 12 or more contact hours during the year, and by the total contact hours in the program, respectively. When these ABE figures are compared to funding for other educational programs, one sees a large gap in funding levels. For instance, the cost per student at community colleges is nearly \$3,000 per student annually. Public school funding in the State of New Mexico is approximately \$7,000 per student annually.

The funding for the Center's ESL program (and similar ESL programs throughout the state) is so low compared to other New Mexico educational programs that students are not allowed to take textbooks home for study. When the students write answers to exercises in the textbooks, they are required to write in pencil and then erase their answers before returning the books at the end of the class. In fact, in the eighteen years that she worked in adult basic education in New Mexico, the Program Manager for the ESL program in 2012 had seen funding decreases rather than funding increases for adult learners. It required program administrators to be inventive and to learn how to cut costs with measures like limiting the purchase training materials. The lack of materials for reviewing lessons outside of the classroom is just one example of an obstacle that ESL students have to overcome in order to develop proficient English skills.

It is not surprising that a lack of funding exists at this program or throughout the United States since ESL programs are associated with immigrants. Immigration is a politically contentious issue in this country, and the sentiment among the dominant group is that immigrants are not welcome. In recent years, various states have enacted stringent immigration laws to try to further control illegal immigration. Laws have been passed in Alabama, Arizona, Utah, Indiana, South Carolina, and Georgia. More than 30 states have considered passing immigration laws, but most of them tabled these bills when legislators discovered the cost of enforcing such laws (American Immigration Council, 2012). Among these, Arizona passed what is considered the toughest bill on illegal immigration in 2010, one that can result in racial profiling of people who are considered suspicious of being in undocumented immigrants based only on skin color and other physical features (Archibald, 2010). Another law, HB 2281, passed in the Arizona legislature went into

effect on Jan. 1, 2011, and bans ethnic studies on the presumption that these classes promote the overthrow of the United States government. It also outlaws classes that advocate ethnic solidarity and/or are designed specifically for a particular ethnic group (Medrano, 2011). The Tucson Public School District, for example, gutted its Mexican-American studies program because the district faced up to \$15 million in lost funding. An administrative law judge ruled that the Tucson program was teaching Latino history and culture “in a biased, political, and emotionally charged manner” (Smith, 2011). That curriculum was deemed in violation of the new law.

In New Mexico, Gov. Susana Martinez was elected to her first term as governor in 2010 in part due to her views on immigration control and her campaign promise to revoke a state law that allows immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses, no matter what their legal status is. The governor, of Mexican-American descent herself, has now attempted in six different legislations to get the law repealed. A judge blocked the governor’s attempt to verify the residency of those who have these licenses, but not after the governor’s initiative had cost taxpayers at least \$49,000 (Boyd, 2011).

In the public debates that have surrounded all of these legislative efforts, the rhetoric of anti-immigrant groups is often racially charged and fueled by myths that uphold a White, hegemonic perspective that criminalizes non-White immigrants, particularly those who come from Mexico. For instance, according to the American Immigration Council (AIC)—a pro-immigrant, non-profit group—many states have considered passing tough immigration laws because of a deeply distorted report issued by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR)—a non-profit organization that seeks to reform policy to reduce immigration. The AIC noted that the FAIR report “relies

upon empirically baseless assumptions to inflate its estimate of the costs unauthorized immigrants impose on federal, state, and local governments” (American Immigration Council, 2012, p. 8). The AIC seeks to debunk two of the most racially charged ideas: 1) that unauthorized immigrants are abusing the welfare system and 2) that unauthorized immigrants are connected with violent crime. The AIC also seeks to debunk the idea that tough local laws will make communities safer: “If anything, harsh state immigration laws make communities less safe because immigrants – legal and unauthorized – will be fearful of reporting crimes to the police” (p. 9).

In this political climate, programs that provide services to immigrants—whether legal or undocumented—are often targets of criticism or causes to be defended by the various social sectors mobilized by the immigration issue. In this context, the ESL classroom is a setting where instructors and immigrant students negotiate tensions and create safe spaces for intercultural dialogue. The current study will explore this problem by focusing on how language learning becomes a process of intercultural communication through which cultural difference, identity construction, and power relations are experienced by adult ESL learners. In exploring this topic, I will give attention to how the particular dynamics of the New Mexican context may affect the learning environment and racial climate faced by ESL students. This context and how it affects the present study is explored in the next section.

### **The New Mexican Context: Race, Language, and Power**

The current study of the ESL classroom is enriched by the understanding of how centuries of intercultural interaction and racial stratification have shaped perceptions about race and power in New Mexico. In this section, I discuss this historical legacy for it

is a factor that influences the perceptions and experiences of New Mexican ESL instructors and immigrant learners.

Racial conflict is a complex subject in New Mexico that is usually avoided in everyday conversations. Part of the dominant group rhetoric in New Mexico is that since there are numerous racial groups living in New Mexico, racism is not an issue. But in a report released by the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, that “is a popular misconception” (New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, 2014, p. 15). To better understand these relations and the denial of racism in the state, I will present some historical background on the development of race identity in New Mexico and conclude with a discussion of racial stratification that is reflected in race identity in New Mexico today. I will argue that the history of race in New Mexico is firmly embedded in the memories of *nuevomexicanos* and their relation to the White, dominant groups that have shaped the institutional history of New Mexico.

Historian Ramón Eduardo Ruiz (1992) noted that pigmentocracy became important very early in the Spanish conquest of the New World. Lynn (2008) defined pigmentocracy as a social construct that determines wealth and social status determined by skin color. He explored numerous societies throughout the Caribbean and Latin America whose social stratification is based on pigmentocracy, and he pointed out that the light-skinned peoples in these societies have the highest social status (p. 25). Pigmentocracy still functions as a determinant of socio-economic status today in New Mexico and throughout the United States (Lynn, 2008).

According to Ruiz, the European characteristic of being light-skinned became a mark of distinction over having darker skin, or *piel morena*, during the Spanish conquest

of the New World, though the fair-skinned in the New World were less than 20 percent of the population. “Of New Spain’s 6.1 million inhabitants in 1810, just over 1 million were of the ‘White race’ ... Given these statistics, and the value attached to being of Spanish descent, one’s racial classification acquired major importance. Everyone wanted to be White” (p. 119).

Hayes-Bautista (1980) observed that the Spanish colonizers had a history of xenophobia—a practice of discrimination against other cultural groups perceived as foreign or outsider. In Spain, Jews and Arabs—viewed as foreigners—were persecuted and expelled in the fifteenth century. Spanish colonialists carried that attitude to the new world. In New Spain (1521-1821)—the first of four viceroyalties that Spain created to govern the conquered lands north of the Isthmus of Panama—the Spanish imposed a racial order based on *limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood] that placed a small, White minority at the top of a very structured racial order. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, there was an attempt to redraw the racial hierarchy to incorporate mestizo and Indian populations in the nation-building project. But that was soon lost with the U.S. occupation of the Southwest in the mid nineteenth century. At the point of U.S. intervention, the disadvantaged groups were those labeled “Mexicans” and “Indians” by the Anglo conquerors, while the label “Spanish” had lost stigma for who was considered a Spaniard because to be Spanish was to be considered White, European. (p. 354).

Nieto-Phillips, in his book *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s*, presented a very different picture regarding race in New Mexico. His account defies the denial of racism in New Mexico.

Nieto-Phillips posed an argument similar to those by Ruiz and Hayes-Bautista. A *nuevomexicano*, Nieto-Phillips argued that the Spanish-American identity evolved out of a medieval concept about blood purity, or *limpeza de sangre*, as well as a modern longing to enter the United States' White body politic. *Limpieza de sangre* is an ideology that comes from Europe and the Middle Ages. It maintained that one's blood determined one's lineage and was important for establishing ancestry. Blood signified purity and nobility, especially on the Iberian Peninsula. Spanish/Catholic blood was considered superior to Indian, Moorish, or Jewish blood. Recent converts or people with mixed blood were placed in a caste system, or *casta*. Thus untainted blood, *limpieza de sangre*, or purity of blood, became all important as the Spanish empire grew (p. 17-18). But racial mixing in Spain's New World forced the creation of a new system of castes that assigned positions in the social hierarchy based on racial makeup to guarantee the superiority of the White race. "Contaminants" came from Indian or African groups. The ranking of Spaniards became so critical that Spanish descendants born in the New World (*criollos*) did not have as a high a standing as those born on the Iberian Peninsula (*peninsulares*). The desire to identify with Whiteness as a mark of status and power thus engendered the claiming of *hispano roots* among New Mexicans and identifying with having Spanish heritage (p. 23).

That desire to claim Spanish ancestry is still prevalent today and influences relations between White and mixed-race New Mexicans who often identify themselves as *hispanos*—rather than as Latinos or Chicanos or Mexican Americans—and distance themselves from Mexican, Native American or African ancestry—and other Spanish-speaking groups. But as Nieto-Phillips (2008) noted, the current notion of *hispano* has

changed over time. The first revision of its meaning stemmed from parentage. There were three racial archetypes in the Spanish New World – Spanish, Native American, and African. It was possible for the offspring of a Spanish parent and a parent of mixed Spanish and Native American blood to lay claim to being *español* or *española* (p. 26). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mixed-blood labels shifted from issues of parentage to cultural, ethnic, and geopolitical constructs. The next shift – a faux scientific twist to the language of blood – occurred after the U.S. occupation of New Mexico. The system of *castas* was gone but the *limpieza* concept returned with a definition based in part in scientific racism. The revived notion of *limpieza* was a response to Anglo America’s statement that the “mongrel race” of New Mexico was unfit for statehood (p. 46). In the 1800s and into the 1900s, a racial discourse anchored in biology and science, and being of pure Spanish blood evolved with it (p. 47). Nieto-Phillips (2008) noted that Nuevomexicanos wanted more than ever to establish their Whiteness:

In the quest for full inclusion in the nation’s body politic, the challenge for Nuevomexicanos, then, was to establish their Whiteness and, with the rise of Mexican immigration in the early years of the twentieth century, to distance themselves from “Mexicans from Mexico.” Having regularly been characterized as “mixed-blood Mexicans,” this challenge would prove formidable and would move them to boast of their “Spanish” ancestry, dredging up old rhetoric about their “purity of blood” and refashioning their ‘Spanish’ genealogy. (p. 48-49)

The racial and cultural differences of New Mexicans were in fact a factor that prevented the incorporation of the territory as a state of the Union during the period of

1848 to 1912. The debate that began in the halls of Congress and endured for decades questioned whether New Mexico was fit to be a state. The argument against statehood was based on race. Sen. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina encouraged his fellow legislators, in January of 1848, to have some restraint on whether the U.S. should annex large portions of the Mexican territories: “We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free White race” (Nieto-Phillips, 2008, p. 52). Comments such as these reinforced the need to identify with pure Spanish blood and ancestry from Europe among New Mexicans.

According to Nieto-Phillips, another important development in the history of race relations in New Mexico stems from “hispanophilia.” As more and more Anglo Americans moved to the territory of New Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new set of values was introduced based on Protestant, and not Catholic, values. In the 1890s, the propagation of these values was supported by an idea that originated in England about the Spanish conquest of the Americas. It was known as the Black Legend, and it portrayed the Spanish as particularly barbaric in their conquest of the New World. The Black Legend is an example of racism as one European country (England) tries to rationalize its barbaric treatment of Native Americans as less barbaric than another European country (Spain). In 1893, *The Spanish Pioneers* was published and served as a counter-legend to the Black Legend. The author, Charles Fletcher Lummis, presented a 292-page portrayal of the gentle Spanish conquest of the aborigines of America. This revisionist tale painted the conquistadors as humane and progressive. The book became known as the White Legend. The revisionist White Legend became a

dominant narrative that was particularly meaningful for New Mexicans who claimed Spanish lineage.

This is a narrative that is still present today in New Mexico, and is part of the narrative on race relations in the county where the ESL program is located. For example, a series of articles and letters to the editor that appeared in a local paper in the fall of 2005 illustrated the complicated picture of race in present-day New Mexico and echoed the influences of the Black Legend and the White Legend in current narratives on race. The debate that went on for months on the editorial pages of the paper began with an article by Jim Boeck, a local Hispanic historian. His column was part of a monthly series titled *La Historia del Rio Abajo*. The articles in the series were written by members of the County Historical Society and, usually, they did not generate controversy. But Boeck stated in his column that New Mexico “has a dark secret that few people know about today. New Mexicans have practiced various forms of unfair, often brutal human bondage, from chattel slavery to debt peonage, for much of their history” (Boeck, 2005). Boeck’s claims had been documented by other scholars before him. For instance, Castro (2000) referenced this account in his work on the hidden history of slavery in New Mexico. Slavery was a major institution in the New World, and the history of New Mexico is peppered with Indian slave trade, Mestizo forced labor, and debt peonage across three centuries, according to Castro. Castro’s article shreds the White Legend and provides examples of affluent Hispanics developing a robust Indian slave market in the late sixteenth century (p. 129). The Indian slave market was abolished in the 1820s and was replaced by a debt peonage system that meant the majority of peons were left in a permanent state of service (p. 134). Churchill (1997) has noted that the Black Legend

propaganda “is afforded much currency in the mass media” but that Spanish “accounts of their anti-Indian atrocities submitted by their own officials and historians” puts Spain, like the rest of Europe, squarely in the genocide camp of Native Americans in the New World (p. 117).

Yet some historians who responded to Boeck’s article denied the history of genocide and slavery in New Mexico. A historian, who penned his name as “Rubén Sálaz M.,” responded to Boeck’s article and was highly critical of Boeck’s version of the history of slavery in New Mexico. Rubén Sálaz M., short for Rubén Sálaz-Márquez, has written several books about the Southwest. He argued in his response that Boeck was perpetuating the racial bashing of Hispanic cultures and the view that “the standard villain is Spain, its people and its Catholic Church” (Sálaz M., 4a). He also argued that to get the correct version of the history of the Southwest, readers should review Philip W. Powell’s *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World*. The reference to Powell is noteworthy. Powell’s book, first published in 1971, focused on the distortions of the Black Legend and then attempted to argue that the White Legend was indeed factual. In the course of developing his thesis, Powell stated: “We of the United States, presently championing the values of Western civilization, have never achieved a truly sympathetic understanding of a vast part of that civilization – that which speaks in Spanish and Portuguese. Yet the Iberian peoples served as a shield and spear of Christian west against the infidel East for a thousand years” (p. 3). Brenner and Skinner (2010), in their review of the 2008 reprinting of Powell’s book, noted the anti-Islamic tone in Powell: “The author displays a remarkable insensitivity to his own prejudices and distortions, which ultimately reduces his work to

little more than a useless polemic” (p. 1). Brenner and Skinner concluded that there was no need to reprint Powell’s book as it contributed nothing to understanding the history of New Mexico. This example shows how contemporary public dialogue on race identity, slavery, and genocide in New Mexico still mobilizes historical debates on racial relations and stratification.

Furthermore, history of racial relations in New Mexico resonates Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) theorizing on the shifting from a bi-racial to a tri-racial order in the United States. He suggested that “the new order will have two central features: three loosely organized racial strata (White, Honorary White, and the collective Black) and a pigmentocratic logic” (p. 931). He argued that this tri-racial order is developing because the White population is shrinking. The same thing happened in Latin American and Caribbean nations, and to hold onto power the White population there made a light-skinned ethnic group “Honorary Whites.”

Trucio-Haynes (2001) noted some LatCrit scholars seem ready to embrace the Latin American tri-racial concept of race as it appears to be inclusive and has no fixed constructs on race. However, she posited that the Latin American order “embodies the same spectrum of subordinated groups” with a White-over-Black ideology (p. 31). Johnson (1997) has addressed this issue of racial stratification in his discussion of the difficult assimilation of Latinos in the United States because of the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and nationhood in the U.S. (p. 182). Add other issues – such as immigration status, how they arrived in the U.S., social class, language abilities, and culture – and simple assimilation is not practical (p. 204). Because they are often defined as the “other,” Latinos have difficulty in assimilating within the dominant European

American culture and may make claims of Whiteness to gain status by distancing themselves from other Peoples of Color. What some do, as for example Johnson's Mexican-American mother and grandmother did, was claim Spanish ancestry, or what he labeled an assimilationist outlook (p. 186). He noted that the Spanish ancestry myth is not uncommon: "[B]eing classified as Mexican is disfavored in the United States, especially in the Southwest...The phenomenon of Latinos attempting to 'pass' as Spanish, and therefore as White, is a variation of the 'passing' of other minorities as White" (p. 186). He noted that many Anglos perceive Spanish as more European, and therefore more White, than of a Latin-American ancestry.

Bonilla-Silva also noted that he believes a tri-racial order already exists in the Southwest. The centuries-old claim by *Nuevomexicanos* that they are *hispano* continues the dialogue of continuing European ancestry. Bonilla-Silva would argue that in New Mexico Whites and Honorary Whites, the *hispanos*, are creating a tri-racial order by "othering" other racial minorities, including groups who have recently migrated to the United States. There is, indeed, a historical memory of a tri-racial order in New Mexico. Gómez (2005) has discussed how the Spanish colonization of the Southwest created a racial hierarchy that is based on a tri-racial order. There were very complex categories, but the general hierarchy placed Spaniards on the top with Indian/Spanish mestizos in the middle and Indians and Blacks at the bottom. Certain rights and privileges were associated with each of these positions in the hierarchy (p. 15). Likewise, as stated earlier, the reconfiguration of the social order after the U.S. invasion of New Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century led New Mexicans to invoke Spanish ancestry and notions of

blood purity to mark their distance from mixed-blood Mexicans and prove their fitness for U.S. statehood (Nieto-Phillips, 2007, p. 48-49).

These historical developments, as well as the current political climate discussed above, are relevant contexts for the purposes of this dissertation for they are likely to influence the interactions between teachers and students of White, Hispano, Mexican, and other ethnic and racial backgrounds in the ESL classroom. Local history and current debates constitute ideological referents that mediate not only the representation of U.S. culture, values, and norms in the English language curriculum but also relations of power among participants in the New Mexican context.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs this research and elaborates on this relationship between intercultural communication, language learning, and the construction of identity and power relations. The chapter includes a literature review of relevant sources on ESL learning that provide empirical support to some of my key arguments. The third chapter lays out the methodological procedures to be followed for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The fourth chapter includes findings and analysis, and the fifth chapter presents the conclusions.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The present study is an exploration of the construction of culture, racial identity, and power relations through intercultural communication in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom setting. The review of literature includes theoretical and empirical studies from the areas of intercultural communication with emphasis on co-cultural theory; critical race theory (CRT) and Whiteness studies; Latino/a critical theory (LatCrit); language, race, and power; CRT in educational research; and other relevant literature on pedagogy for the ESL student. The theories and studies highlighted in this chapter illuminate relevant research on the connections between communication, culture, and power. At the same time, they serve as the basis to underscore the need to develop a body of knowledge about the communication strategies of adult ESL students—referred in the literature also as English Language Learners (ELL)—and non-traditional students, as well as to critique the perception of the classroom environment as a color-blind, non-ideological site of learning.

#### **Co-Cultural Theory of Communication**

Mark Orbe (1998a) developed co-cultural theory as a critical and interpretivist approach that allows communication scholars to explore communication dynamics connected to power, culture, and language (p. 8-9). Influenced by other critical theories like muted-group theory (S. Ardener, 1975; E Ardener, 1978; Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987), Orbe's theory focuses on how marginalized groups communicate with the dominant, hegemonic, White population in the United States. Orbe criticized communication research for its tendency

to focus on the dominant perspective, and, thus, have an ethnocentric bias. He argued that there was a great need to conduct studies of marginalized groups to explore various dynamics related to power, culture, and communication (p. 3). Orbe has stated: “Specifically, co-cultural theory works to create a framework that promotes a greater understanding of the intricate processes by which co-cultural group members (women, people of color, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, etc.) negotiate attempts by others to render their voices muted within dominant societal structures” (p. 4). The present study will attempt to further build that framework to explore a marginalized group that numbers in the millions in the United States.

Orbe initially used various terms to describe co-cultural communication, ranging from intracultural communication to subordinate, subcultural, non-dominant, or muted group. However, he settled on the concept of “co-culture” in hopes of avoiding “negative or inferior connotations of past descriptions” of marginalized groups (p. 1). His theorizing aimed to acknowledge the great cultural diversity of the United States while making the dominant group aware of how invisible other cultural groups are because of dominant ideologies. The five epistemological assumptions of co-cultural theory include:

1. Societies have hierarchies that provide privileges to certain groups. In the United States, privileged groups are men, European Americans, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, and the middle and upper economic classes.
2. The dominant group members are in positions of power, consciously or unconsciously. Communication maintains and reinforces this dominant position and their experiences.

3. Persons not of the dominant group are impeded by the dominant communication systems.

4. Co-cultural group members include women, people of color, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, people with disabilities, and lower socioeconomic classes. Their social positions keep them marginalized and underrepresented within the dominant system.

5. Co-cultural group members have to develop certain communication behaviors in any public environment in order to have any success within the dominant public structure.

These assumptions provide me with a framework for exploring the communication behaviors of ESL students in the program observed for the present study. The majority of the students are Mexican or Mexican American and are generally of a lower socioeconomic class that is marginalized and underrepresented within the dominant system. All of their instructors are members of the dominant groups in New Mexico. These dynamics help create the potential for applying co-cultural theory to the study.

In co-cultural theory, members of what Orbe and Spellers (2005) called “the underrepresented groups” exist as a “co-culture” in a number of scenarios that range from complete adoption of the dominant perspective (thus, assimilation and acculturation), to aggressive separation (refusal to assimilate or acculturate). Resistance is an important tool for minorities to use in distancing themselves from the dominant group. Co-cultural theory research then attempts to uncover any commonalities among co-cultural, marginalized groups while also acknowledging the diversity among these groups (p. 11-12).

Orbe conducted two studies (2004, 1994) that focused on college students from racial and ethnic minorities. In the 1994 study, Orbe focused on the saliency of race in the United States and argued for a study of race that goes beyond a Black vs. White dialogue (p. 288). He concluded that further research is needed that will avoid making race a Black/White issue but will broaden the discussion into an array that includes age, gender, class, sexual orientation, as well as other issues because “the future of our diverse nation hinges on our understanding of the relationship between culture and communication” (p. 296). His 2004 study focused on African American first generation college students (FGC) and addressed how these students have to negotiate a multiple-identity as they do not feel like they fit in at college or at home. The framework that Orbe relied on was Hecht’s (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). The CTI theory suggests that identity is transactional and messages and values are exchanged within four frames: within individuals, within relationships, within groups, and between relational partner and group members (p.134).

It was not until 2010 that Orbe conducted a study that examined the communication experience of immigrants. Urban and Orbe (2010) did not rely on college students for their interviews, one of the few examples in the literature that does not focus on Students of Color in a college or public school setting. In this study, interviews were conducted with 17 immigrants from 16 countries. They found that even though assimilation has been considered one of the goals of immigrants, according to Urban and Orbe, many immigrants are not interested in forgetting their old identities and just merging into the mainstream U.S. American White culture. Urban and Orbe explored the intersection of the old world and the new world that immigrants negotiate. An important

finding in their research was the participant's sense of a gap in identity between a personal frame and an enacted or public frame. The personal frame refers to an individual's self-concept and how that is perceived or communicated to others. The public or enacted frame, then, becomes "who they need to become to experience a degree of comfort and acceptance" in a public venue (p. 308). For the first time in their lives, these immigrants found themselves being labeled as a minority, not part of the mainstream society as they had been in their homeland. In their attempts to blend in, some immigrants were startled by how their skin color or their accent was perceived by the dominant culture (p. 310-11). The authors concluded that researchers should not assume that for immigrants the identity of "immigrant" is more salient than other identities (profession, age, race, etc.) and that one should not assume that assimilation is a universal goal of immigrants who come to the United States (p. 317).

Another set of relevant studies for the purposes of my research (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Drummond & Orbe, 2010; Urban & Orbe, 2010) have looked at the U.S. dominant worldview of race—the rigid classification of distinct racial categories and multiple ethnic groupings—and how diverse groups of individuals come to understand and adapt to the labels that are associated with that particular worldview. Drummond & Orbe (2010) provided a short history of the U.S. Census and how through history "government-sponsored racial and ethnic labels have permeated in U.S. society," and thus rigid racial categories have become institutionalized (p. 374). The authors noted that labels used for Spanish-speaking cultures tend to be of two types: "*Hispanic* is seen as a more appropriate label for individuals seeking to assimilate to U.S. culture; whereas,

*Latino/a* is typically associated with those concerned with preserving language and culture” (p. 374).

In sum, Orbe’s co-cultural theory is an exploration of how marginalized groups make use of language in negotiating power with the hegemonic group. Since my research involves a marginalized group that more often than not is silent in public discourse (ESL adult learners) and that is attempting to learn English, understand the mainstream U.S. culture, and adapt to living in the United States, co-cultural theory provides a relevant perspective to approach the topic as the dynamics of that learning environment potentially enact the epistemological assumptions of co-cultural theory. Further, the findings of Urban and Orbe (2010) on immigrants as co-cultures serve as a basis for further exploration of ESL learners’ experiences, especially considering that learning a language is about learning values, practices, and systems of meaning—from slang to idiomatic expressions—that constitute a dominant culture. In studying the communication that takes place in the ESL classroom and the perception of ESL students about the U.S. dominant culture, one would be able to explore whether language learning encourages assimilation, acculturation, separation or resistance to dominant values and social structures of power.

This research will also analyze immigrants’ narratives and counter-narratives in order to explore how acquiring English language skills relates to the ESL student’s sense of identity and position within the mainstream racial structure. In this sense, the study will shed light on a dimension that has not been at the center of Orbe’s research on co-cultural theory. Orbe (1998a) has stated that the intent of his theory is to explore how racial minority groups cope with hegemonic culture. Hence his work has emphasized

primarily the relation of marginalized groups to the dominant perspectives and placed hegemonic culture as the focal point. Yet, one may argue that co-cultural theory will benefit from closer attention to how underrepresented groups construct their own narratives or counter-narratives about U.S. culture and their positions of power in society. In addition, in exploring racial identity this research will complement co-cultural theory with critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and Latino/a critical theory to enrich and expand the scope of analysis and interpretation.

Orbe's work (1998a&b), while influential, does not provide a conceptualization of culture. His definition of what constitutes the dominant group and the underrepresented groups are as close as he comes to defining culture, and those definitions are limited to the intersections of power or the lack of power with race, gender, sexuality and class. It is important for my study that a working definition of culture be included. A great resource for that definition comes from Hall (1996), especially in light of the ideology of the American Dream and its connection with what Hall refers to as a "national identity" or a "national culture" (pp. 611-612).

Hall explored how the modern notions of a national culture and identity are the result of persuading regional peoples, localized societies, and/or tribes to form under a "political roof of the nation-state" (p. 612). Hall argued that the pre-modern concept of culture had a sense of place, of smaller groups of people, such as the sense of "tribe." He argued the nation-state is very much an industrialized conception that is on a much larger scale:

The formation of a national culture helped to create standards of universal literacy, generalized a single vernacular language as the dominant medium

of communication throughout the nation, created a homogeneous culture and maintained national cultural institutions, such as a national education system.

In these and other ways, national culture became a key feature of industrialization and an engine of modernity. (p. 612)

The myth of the modern nation-state (and of a national culture) is that a nation is actually an entity that is unified. Hall noted that the majority of modern nations “consist of disparate cultures which were only unified by a lengthy process of violent conquest” (p. 616). He also argued that modern nations are a composition of social classes, as well as gender and ethnic groups, and that a “cultural hegemony” is employed by whatever dominant group conquers or colonizes other ethnic groups (p. 617). Thus, instead of viewing a nation as a unified national culture, it should be perceived “a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions...and ‘unified’ only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power” (p. 617). I argue that the American Dream ideology is a form of cultural hegemony employed by the White, dominant group of the United States in an attempt to define or unify the U.S. American culture under the leadership of the European American dominant group. The American Dream also incorporates a modern concept of nation as it refers to a work ethic derived from the experiences of industrialization as a feature that defines national culture.

Hall (1996) also argued that a myth of the modern nation is the “underlying culture of ‘one people,’ for “modern nations are all cultural hybrids” (p. 617). He then related the hybridity of a nation to the problem of a unified national identity that hinges around race. He noted that the biological notions of race have been deconstructed and

have been replaced by cultural definitions of race that perpetuate the myth of a one people/unified national identity. Thus nationalism and patriotism become a convoluted narrative perpetuated by the dominant group that becomes “cultural racism” and is based on social constructs that “utilize a loose, often unspecified set of differences in physical characteristics – skin color, hair texture, physical and bodily features, etc. – as symbolic markers in order to differentiate one group socially from another” (p. 617). Both in Europe and the United States a national culture is associated with whiteness (p. 618).

The association of U.S. national identity with whiteness and the American Dream ideology are key to how the concept of culture will be used in my study. The “U.S. American culture” that I will reference is rooted in the myth of the modern nation-state that propounds the notion of “one people;” in this case, an industrialized people, bound by the values, traditions, and practices of a dominant, European American, White, male-dominated sectors of society. In this sense, this conception of modern national culture is consonant with Orbe’s epistemological assumptions regarding the interactions between a dominant group and marginalized groups in co-cultural communication.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory has expanded from a narrow subspecialty in academic law to multiple academic fields ranging from education to English, history, and anthropology, to name a few (Harris, 2001, p. xx). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), CRT also found its way into communication studies (p. 63). In their foundational work on CRT, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined the basic tenets of CRT as follows:

1. Racism is ordinary, is institutionalized, and is not the exception. Racism is a common, routine experience of People of Color.

2. Any progression in race relations in the United States must serve the interest of the White elites who are in power. This concept is also referred to as “interest convergence.”
3. Race is a social construct that is engrained into the U.S. American social fabric.
4. The dominant ideology is a narrative of colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy in society. The ideology perpetuates a White Myth.
5. The counter-narrative, the experiential knowledge of People of Color, is the appropriate, legitimate approach to truly understanding racial inequality (p. 6-9).

Harris (2001) provided an explanation of why CRT is fundamental to understanding race relations in the United States, and why Delgado and Stefancic’s 2001 book is fundamental to that understanding of both the theory and the dynamics of race in the United States:

Critical race theory not only dares to treat race as central to the law and policy of the United States, it dares to look beyond the popular belief that getting rid of racism means simply getting rid of ignorance, or encouraging everyone to ‘get along.’ To read this primer is to be sobered by the recognition that racism is part of the structure of legal institutions, but also to be invigorated by the creativity, power, wit, and humanity of the voices speaking about ways to change that structure. As race relations continue to shape our lives in the new century – setting the stage for new tragedies and new hopes – critical race theory has become an indispensable tool for making sense of it all. (p. xx – xxi)

Closson (2010) called Derrick Bell the founder of the theory and noted that CRT developed because Black feminism, Marxism, and critical theory were not paying specific attention to racism as an issue. “Neither CRT nor critical theory is, in reality, a single theory. Like critical theory, CRT is a collection of related premises defining an interpretive framework” (p. 265).

CRT scholars and advocates do not take the same approach as civil rights activists. Civil rights activists tend to believe change in racial relations can occur incrementally, in an almost formulaic progression. CRT scholars question the foundations of liberalism: equality theory, legal reasoning, and Enlightenment rationalism. These foundations of liberalism are the essence of meritocracy practiced by members of the dominant group in the United States. Many liberals advocate for being color-blind, gender-blind and class-blind, and thus a rationalism that CRT scholars argue is not based in reality. Most importantly, though, CRT scholars challenge that constitutional law is somehow neutral (p. 3), which is another component of the Enlightenment rationalism. Derrick Bell (1992) argued in another foundational book for CRT that “racism is a permanent component of American life” and that “the goal of racial equality is, while comforting to many Whites, more illusory than real for Blacks” (p. 13). Bell argued that acknowledging the permanence of racism in the United States does not mean CRT activists are pessimistic. He explained the conditions of race in the United States are not a matter of choosing between an ideology of race as permanent or of a dream of attaining a society free of racism. Bell advocated for pragmatism; instead of continuing to pursue civil rights strategies that he believed are futile to pursue because they are too idealistic,

CRT scholars must pursue a new course of action that creates real, pragmatic change (p. 199).

### **Whiteness Studies**

The concept of Whiteness and the discussion of Whiteness as property, White privilege, and the language of Whiteness as power have become areas of theorization and research for CRT. These areas will be explicated in the following sections of this chapter.

#### **Whiteness as Property**

Harris (1993) made a compelling argument for Whiteness as property in what is now considered a foundational piece in CRT. She traced how the formation of Whiteness as a racial identity became a form of property, of something that could be owned or possessed. Reviewing various legal cases, Harris revealed how the domination of Black and Native Americans became racially-formed issues of property rights for the White race in the United States. Whiteness has a long legal history in the United States of possessing value, and Whites alone have the right to possess their racial identity as property (p. 1721). There is also a history of “othering” in legal cases, which means that before the abolition of slavery, White people who owned slaves could legally think of their slaves as currency, or as a substitution for hard currency, rather than as human beings (p. 1720).

She argued that Whiteness as property is still being upheld today with the attacks that have been made on affirmative action by the courts. The courts now acknowledge that Blacks and other racial minorities were oppressed by slavery and segregation, but it is now considered unfair to burden the current White generation with any responsibilities

for these past grievances. In other words, U.S. society – or at least the U.S. legal system – is colorblind and “the protection of the property interest in Whiteness is achieved by embracing the norm of colorblindness” (p. 1768). Harris concluded that it is only through upholding affirmative action that the United States can finally dismantle Whiteness as property:

Whiteness as property has carried and produced a heavy legacy. It is a ghost that has haunted the political and legal domains in which claims for justice have been inadequately addressed for far too long [...] In protecting the property interest in Whiteness, property is assumed to be no more than the right to prohibit infringement on settled expectations, ignoring countervailing equitable claims that are predicated on a right to inclusion. It is long past time to put the property interest in Whiteness to rest. Affirmative action can assist in that task. Affirmative action, if properly conceived and implemented, is not only consistent with norms of equality, but it is essential to shedding the legacy of oppression. (p. 1791)

That heavy legacy of Whiteness as property continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and pushes forward the ideology of the American dream. I argue in the present study that this legacy allows the dominant groups to keep privilege intact and keep perpetuating the tenets of the American Dream ideology.

### **White Privilege**

In the scholarship on White privilege, Peggy McIntosh’s essay “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies,” is a foundational piece. The author confronted her own privilege and assumptions about other races based on her White ethnicity. “As a White

person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage” (McIntosh, 1997, p. 291). She described this privilege as an “invisible package of unearned assets” of which she is to remain oblivious (p. 291). By comparing the invisible package of advantages males have in society to the advantages she has as a White person, McIntosh proceeded to dissect these advantages. She included a list of 54 special circumstances and conditions she has experienced since birth. Numerous items on the list hinged on the fact that she is White. In another shorter and influential piece by McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” the author reiterated a warning about the term “privilege.” She stated that the word is inappropriate as privilege suggests one has earned something, has been rewarded. “The word ‘privilege’ carries the connotation of being something everyone must want [...] Such privilege simply *confers dominance*, gives permission to control, because of one’s race or sex” (2004, p. 191).

Tatum (1997, 1994, 1992), an African American professor who has taught in predominantly White settings, noted there is a complete lack of self-awareness among Whites with European backgrounds. Tatum focused her work on tracing a process White people could use to dismantle individualized racism and to recognize and resist institutional racism, the Helm’s model of white racial identity (1994, p. 463). The end goal of the Helm’s model is to shift emphasis from individual racism to recognize and resist institutional racism. There are six stages to the model:

- Contact: there is a lack of awareness about one’s race and the importance of being part of a racial group. For Whites with a European background, individuals just

think of themselves as “normal.” Coupled with this is the internalization of stereotypes about people of color, and complete lack of awareness of this social process (p. 464).

- Disintegration Stage: This stage for Whites involves the tearing down, the disintegration, of the social norms. This stage involves cognitive dissonance and discomfort. One reaction is to completely deny that any information adverse to their White narrative is valid. Tatum said that those who stay engaged lead to feelings of guilt and wanting to become an activist. Tatum also stated: “Heightening student awareness about racism without also providing some hope for social change is a prescription for despair” (p. 464-465).

- Reintegration Stage: At this stage, because of alienation from friends and family, an individual may decide to put the blame for racism on minorities, thus relieving oneself of feelings of guilt. This is a critical stage that requires discussion and awareness so that individuals do not get trapped (p. 467).

- Pseudo-Independent Stage: The individual may feel the need to distance oneself from one’s own race and seek relationships only with minorities. This requires being able to accept one’s own racial cultural heritage and to integrate in one’s daily routine, and do so without feeling inferior or superior. This stage can mark the beginning of a “positive definition of Whiteness” (p. 467-468).

- Immersion/Emersion: In this phase, the individual seeks role models of White people who exemplify antiracist activists. Helms states the individual is seeking answers to such questions as “‘Who am I racially?’ and ‘Who do I want to be?’ and ‘Who are you really?’” (p. 468-469).

- Autonomy Stage: The last stage is an accumulation of the first five. The individual's positive perception of Whiteness is internalized and quite often involves exploring other "isms" that result in bias and prejudice (sexism, ageism). One does not arrive and become enlightened; it is a struggle and there is often a revisiting of earlier stages (p. 470).

Tatum argued that the sixth stage in Helm's model—the Autonomy Stage—provides the individual with a positive internalization of Whiteness and the ability to start exploring other biases and prejudices. The trouble Tatum found for White people who reach this sixth stage is that finding a positive model of Whiteness is difficult since the prevalent models of Whiteness include the White supremacist, the hegemonic White person who is completely unaware of privilege, and the suffering, guilty White person (Tatum, 1994, p. 471). To address this vacuum, Tatum developed a fourth and positive model – the white ally. Most white allies, though, are historical figures; because of the obscurity, she believed it would be necessary for White people to start support groups and to provide mentoring for White antiracist advocates. (Tatum, 1994, p. 472-473).

The application of CRT and related theories on Whiteness for the study of a predominantly Latino population is of particular relevance to this research on ESL adult learning for it illuminates dominant ideologies of race and different levels of awareness of White privilege in the construction of identity positions in the racial structure. The next section summarizes some key works in the field of Latina/o Critical Theory, which is another important theory for this study.

## **Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit)**

LatCrit is a progeny of CRT that grew out of a need to explore the unique issues of Latino/as. Aoki and Johnson (2008) have noted that LatCrit emerged in the mid-1990s, building on CRT, to push civil rights analysis beyond the Black-White race binary to include other issues regarding nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class (p.4). Part of its political agenda was to foster inclusiveness and building multiracial coalitions with the goal of building genuine social change. This perspective has promoted the examination of some of the challenges that face marginalized people who are not part of the Black-White binary that tends to pre-occupy CRT scholars in their studies of race. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have stated that CRT and LatCrit are both extensions of a broad literature base known as critical theory. LatCrit is not in competition with CRT; instead, LatCrit is seen as a complement or a supplement to CRT (Valdé, 1996; Villalpando, 2003). Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) and Villalpando (2003) posited five themes that form the framework for both CRT and LatCrit: 1) Intersectionality of race and racism with other types of subordination; 2) Challenging dominant ideology (objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, etc.); 3) Committing to social justice; 4) Recognizing experiential knowledge (*testimonios*); 5) Utilizing interdisciplinary methods that put race and racism in both contemporary and historical contexts (p. 312-314).

At the same time, LatCrit scholars have stated that the theory has four interrelated functions that are not necessarily the focus of CRT (Fernández, 2002; Valdés, 1997; Valdés, 2002). Valdés (2002) noted that LatCrit theory tries to fulfill four interrelated functions: 1) producing knowledge; 2) advancing social transformation; 3) expanding

anti-subordination struggles; 4) cultivating coalitions and communities among peoples of color (p. 122). Delgado Bernal (2002) noted that LatCrit differentiates itself from CRT in that LatCrit is interested in coalition building and adds dimensions of language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality to the dialogue on race. In other words, LatCrit looks at the intersectionality of different forms of oppression (p. 108). LatCrit theory focuses more particularly on multidimensional identity issues for Latinos and thus constitutes a relevant body of work for this dissertation.

Therefore, an important difference between LatCrit scholarship and CRT is the dismantling of the binary Black/White paradigm as a central category of analysis in CRT (Cameron, 1997; Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Haney López, 1997; Stefancic, 1997; Chang & Aoki, 1997; Valdés, 1997; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). In effect, one distinction between the two theories stems from their approaches to the traditional discussion of race in the United States. The discussion has historically centered on the dialogue between the Black and White races. This dialogue has been supported by court decisions, the civil rights model, and the European immigration experience.

In the area of the law, an important 1991 Supreme Court decision illustrates these complexities. In the case of *Hernández v. New York*, the court established that a juror can be excluded if he/she is bilingual. Cameron (1997) argued this ruling established English-only precedence, which constitutes discrimination on the basis of national origin. (p. 266). Although the U.S. has a history of multilingualism, the current perspective of the U.S. dominant group places emphasis on an English-only society. This emphasis has become a part of the tenets of the American dream ideology. This is evident in the

teaching materials used in the ESL program studied, which reveal how mastering English is considered a requirement for anyone in pursuit of the American Dream. The *Hernández v. New York* ruling led Cameron to argue that judges tend to see language issues along the lines of the racial dualism discourse. Blacks and Whites speak English; but since Latinas/os are associated with the Spanish language, they are disconnected from the U.S. national imagined community and rendered invisible. According to Cameron, invisibility then leads to legal indeterminacy (p.268-270).

Cameron also noted that the Black/White binary prevalent in the discourse of civil rights has generally excluded the Latino racial experience for two main reasons. The first is that in the White/Black binary, “only skin color matters” and the other distinguishing characteristics of a people (language, culture, religion, etc.) are ignored (p. 273). The second reason is that Latinos were not extensively subjected to chattel slavery by Anglos as were the African slaves and, thus, are marginalized from the history of racial relations in the United States. Cameron also discussed how the immigration model of the U.S. failed most Latinas/os. First, because that model is based on the historical experience of European immigrants, but Latinas/os are descendants of people who came to the new world at least 200 years before Anglos arrived in the Southwest. A second failure of the immigration model is the concept of English-only, since the U.S. has a rich history of multilingualism.

However, the Black-White binary remains salient in LatCrit theory, in part because the Supreme Court made it so. Haney López (1997) focused on the *Hernández v. Texas* case where Pete Hernández was found guilty of murder by an all-White jury in 1951. His lawyers appealed the ruling arguing that Mexican-American jurors were

excluded from the jury pool; they argued on the grounds of the Fourteenth Amendment that guarantees equal protection under the law. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals concluded the Fourteenth Amendment only prohibits racial discrimination against Blacks and Whites, and Mexican Americans were not covered by the amendment (p. 58-59). On May 3, 1954, a unanimous decision by the Supreme Court agreed with the Texas court's opinion. Haney López has thus argued that in order for LatCrit theory to be relevant, it must embrace ethnicity, national origin, and culture, but that it cannot neglect "the language of race" (p. 126).

Aoki and Johnson (2008) have posited that LatCrit is currently at a crossroads. They have argued that for all the work, the objectives of the theory are unfocused: "A review of LatCrit's sprawling body of work reveals that the unifying themes and common threads are difficult to identify with specificity" (p. 7). Recent LatCrit work, for example by Pérez Huber (2010), has provided an example of more conceptual specificity in scholarship. She argued that LatCrit analysis has helped researchers develop a conceptual framework of "racist nativism" (p.77-78). She defined racist nativism as "the assigning of value to real or imagined differences in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is perceived to be White, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the native's right to dominance" (p. 81). In the current political environment of the United States, racist nativism is operationalized in the common perception that Latinas/os are undocumented Mexican immigrants regardless of legal status or citizenship (p. 81). She also discussed internalized racist nativism and defined it as:

[T]he conscious or unconscious acceptance of racist nativist hierarchy, where perceived White superiority ascribes Whites as native to the United States. Based on real or imagined differences, People and Immigrants of Color are ascribed as non-native, justifying exclusionary racist nativist practices and White dominance. It is the internalization of White dominance, and thus, White supremacy that can potentially result in negative self, racial group and immigrant group perceptions. (p. 91)

Chang and Aoki (1997) have explored “nativistic racism” in their discussion of the othering of Mexican immigrants. They focused on how borders, which they called a social construct that is as prevalent as the social construct of race, help define marginalized groups. Issues around the border with Mexico perpetuate the ideology of nativistic racism and help keep Mexican immigrants in the other category (p. 1397). They also noted how European immigrants, though White, were subjected to nativism in the early part of the twentieth century. This approach to racism, they argued, enables ethnic and racial identity politics.

LatCrit and CRT scholars have tackled other issues specific to the Latina/o experience and have contributed to this field of studies. Of particular relevance to this research are the many studies that have applied the lens of CRT to pedagogy and race. The following section presents an overview of theoretical and empirical studies in this area that are relevant to my study.

### **Language, Race, and Power**

Another area of study that is relevant for this research on ESL learning is the study of language and power. Although power dynamics play a role in intercultural and

intergroup encounters, according to Gudykunst et al. (2005), the issue of power is not incorporated in very many of the theories of intercultural communication. We have to look outside of the discipline of communication to find any substantive work on the connection between language and power.

Reid and Ng (1999) noted that even in their discipline, social psychology, the study of language and power in intergroup settings is lacking, but what work has been done “is highly applicable to real-world circumstances” (p. 120). The problem in studying language as an instrument of power is that “[w]hen we examine language in a social context, it becomes clear that power is not always given; on the contrary, it is the basis for argument, is created, re-created, subverted, and hidden using language” (p. 120). Because power in language can be subverted, it is easy for the dominant group to subvert and keep power. Reid and Ng drew four conclusions about power in language:

1. “Language reflects power” (p. 122). Dominant groups tend to use high-power language that is assertive while minorities use low-power language. They defined powerless language “as the frequent use of hedges (e.g., *sort of*, *maybe*), intensifiers (e.g., *so*), tag questions (e.g., *that was nice, wasn't it?*), and hesitations” (p. 122). Users of high-power language do not employ these forms.

2. “Language creates power” (p. 124). With the aid of high-power language, one can gain control over not only the direction of a conversation but its outcome (p. 121).

3. “Language depoliticizes power” (p. 127). The depoliticization of power is how a dominant group can gain power and cover up the aggressiveness of this power “through the strategic use of social categorizations, or stereotypes” (p. 121). Thus, embedded in the belief system of the dominant group is language that seems neutral but is really not. An

example would be a member of the dominant group saying such things as “Why don’t you get a job?” to a homeless person, or saying “I admire people who can pull themselves up by their bootstraps” to a person of color, or to anybody, for that matter.

4. “Language routinizes power” (p. 131). When a country is colonized, the dominant race imposes its language on the colonized race. In current times of globalization, one sees the importance of the dominant language (English) being imposed on other cultures. If it is not the language, it could be the symbols of a particular cultural life-style, like eating French fried potatoes from McDonald’s restaurants is now commonplace on every continent of the world.

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) have focused specifically on the language and rhetoric of Whiteness as a system of reproduction of power relations. They argued that the strategic rhetoric of Whiteness is an “uncharted territory that has remained invisible as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain” (p. 291). Thus, the place from where the center of power (Whiteness) is “exercised is often a hidden place” (p. 291). Nakayama and Krizek conducted ethnographic research and concluded that being White generally meant living without a sense of history and roots, and becoming “culturally invisible” (p. 292). Referring to his personal experience, Krizek stated: “When I started realizing that other people were able to articulate and appreciate aspects of their cultural heritage, I began to feel uncomfortable about being transparent” (p. 292). The authors concluded that “in U.S. culture, Whiteness has assumed the position of an uninterrogated space. In sum, we do not know what ‘Whiteness’ means” (p. 293). Nakayama and Krizek concluded that part of being the dominant group is having a sense of the ordinary, of the every day. “The everydayness of Whiteness makes it a difficult

territory to map” (p. 296). In their survey of college students, Nakayama and Krizek identified six strategies that Whites use strategically in the discourse of Whiteness:

1. White means power. They considered this strategy to be tied to Whiteness “in a rather crude, naked manner” (p. 296). Respondents simply defined White as being the majority of U.S. Americans, and White Americans were in charge.

2. White by default. “People engaging in this discourse see White as meaning that they lacked any other racial or ethnic features; hence, they must be White by default” (p. 299). This discourse has a negative connotation as White is seen as a non-color. The implication of this non-color rhetoric is that “White means not having any other ‘blood lines’ to make it impure” (p. 299).

3. White is a “scientific definition” (p. 300). In this discourse, White becomes naturalized, and the usual line of rhetoric is that White means being classified “scientifically and not judgmentally” because it is what “color I am” (p. 300). Nakayama and Krizek argued that the scientific rhetoric makes Whiteness invisible again. “The invocation of science serves to privilege reason, objectivity, and masculinity, concepts that have long been viewed in the Western tradition as stable, and therefore more trustworthy, poles in the dialectic relationships that exist as reason/emotion, objectivity/subjectivity, masculinity/femininity” (p. 300).

4. Whiteness is confused with nationality. Whiteness “is bounded by national borders and recenters Whiteness” (p. 300). This type of rhetorical move suggests that “Whiteness means ‘that I’m of American descent,’ or ‘White’ means ‘White American’” (p. 300). Of course, the authors pointed out that not all White people are U.S. Americans, nor are all U.S. Americans are White.

5. Whites who refused to be “labeled.” The rhetoric here is that “we’re all Americans.” As one respondent put it, “My ethnic heritage doesn’t matter to me because that doesn’t say who I am” (p. 301). In this rhetorical stance, according to Nakayama and Krizek, White is not seen as a label, “but the other discursive markers are labels” (p. 301). Again, White privilege allows one to be White without being included with the other races.

6. White is related to European ancestry. A few of the respondents equated being White with having ancestors from Europe. In spite of recognizing this heritage, the respondents did not recognize the power relations (that Racial Contract) “embedded in that history” (p. 302).

### **CRT in Educational Research**

Critical race theory in education has become a driving force on how to view and change the paradigm and the structures of education (Powers, 2007). Through the lens of CRT, numerous education scholars have pointed to the big elephant in the classroom: Race and inequality. Powers (2007) has argued that because in the United States race links social identity and social structures, it is important to consider that the unequal ways in which people are “treated in institutional settings is the product of deeply rooted racialized (and gendered and classed) social practices that shape how they view themselves and the world around them and how they act in the world” (p. 155).

In the 1990s, CRT moved from the legal scholars’ journals to the educators’ journals with the works of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005), among others. Closson (2010) noted that CRT in the educational literature is referred to as both a theoretical and/or interpretive framework

and as a movement (p. 264). Taylor (1998), for example, defined CRT: “As a form of oppositional scholarship, CRT challenges the experience of Whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of People of Color” (p. 122).

Therefore, as developed in educational research, CRT scholars have thus relied on the experiential knowledge of marginalized people. A tenet of CRT in legal circles is the study of counter-narratives (Levit, 1999). Closson (2010) has stated that the original intent of counter-narrative in legal scholarship was to “restructure” that scholarship. The point of the counter-story is to reveal how colorblindness and neutrality distort how much the marginalized are still disadvantaged (p. 268). In educational research, the study of counter-narratives took one of three forms: positionality of the authors, fictional or composited characters, or as a collection of students’ and faculty’s stories (p.267).

CRT theorizing on racism and liberalism also informs empirical research on education across topics and approaches. Endemic racism is Closson’s term for Bell’s notion of the permanence of racism in CRT scholarship. Closson discussed Bell’s concept of the permanence of racism as a practice embedded in every aspect of our modern world, from psychological, to economical, to societal, to cultural. Bell, she noted, focused on the intersectionality of gender and class, and emphasized that racism goes beyond any Black-White binary. Other scholars have also explored intersectionalities that address language, sexuality, generations, etc. (Solórzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005). The critique of liberalism, addressed by Bell in legal scholarship, is also advanced in educational research. As Bell (1992) stated, “The worship of equality rules as having absolute power benefits to Whites by preserving a benevolent but fictional self-image,

and such worship benefits Blacks by preserving hope” (p. 101). Closson (2010) has noted that liberalism has become “deified” in education. She stated that several authors who critique liberalism in higher education have described this dominant perspective as delusional in its “color-blind, race-neutral, and meritocratic notion of their field or their HEI’s (higher education institution’s) procedures” (p. 271). For instance, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued the multicultural approach in education is equivalent to liberalism in legal circles. This “multicultural paradigm” ensures the status quo and gives the marginalized a false hope (p. 270).

CRT has also become a relevant methodological approach that incorporates approaches ranging from ethnography to textual analysis of hidden curriculum, rhetorical criticism of White privilege, or the collection and study of counter-narratives. In this section, I will address topics and approaches found in empirical research in CRT and education, given their relevance to my dissertation research. The studies will be grouped by areas of focus within the CRT approach: teacher training; inequalities in education and educational theory; critical race pedagogy; White privilege and Eurocentrism; dominant narratives and counter-narratives; and CRT and adult education.

### **Teacher Training**

Providing culturally sensitive training for pre-service teachers through a CRT lens was the subject of studies by Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002) and Pennington (2007). Smith-Maddox and Solórzano employed CRT, Freire’s theory and methods, and case study research to create a course that allowed teacher candidates to unlearn stereotypes while understanding what a diverse student population is (p. 66). Pennington

utilized autoethnography as a teaching method to work with pre-service teachers in an elementary school setting.

Recent paradigms in teacher education, according to Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002), have focused on the skills necessary to teach a diverse population. One paradigm, social reconstructionism, relies on the teachers' abilities to see how their actions affect social and political implications in the greater society (p. 66). The difficulty in implementing alternative paradigms is how uncomfortable teacher candidates are in addressing race and social class issues, and that many tend to fall into the colorblind school of thought (p. 67). Referring to the five tenets of CRT, Smith-Maddox and Solórzano argued that CRT in education represents a paradigmatic shift in the discussion of racism in education (p. 68). They then suggested the CRT lens needs a methodology to implement an alternative pedagogy. They explored Freire's problem-posing methodology that starts with the premise that all education is political, which means schools are not neutral. His methodology has three steps: identify the problem, analyze the causes of said problem, and find solutions (p. 69). Students needed to actively engage in the problem-posing method, and they are encouraged to challenge teachers (p. 70). In their conclusion, Smith-Maddox and Solórzano stressed the potential of the critical approach since it forced the student-teachers to review their own ideological lenses that could blind them to the cultural and educational experiences of peoples of color. The framework can allow the teachers to unlearn stereotypes and analyze what it means to teach a diverse population (p. 80).

In Pennington's study, she and the other White pre-service teachers confronted their attitudes about being saviors for at-risk children of color. All of them were teaching

in an elementary school where students of color were the majority. In the curriculum examined, Whiteness was addressed only indirectly, diversity and multiculturalism were indirectly discussed as well, and teachers lacked any training on how to analyze their own racial constructs (p. 95). She observed that she and the pre-service teachers “operated from a position of power as White teachers” (p. 96). Through autoethnography, Pennington and the pre-service teachers started discussing their attitudes and beliefs. The reflection led them to realize they wanted to help but not from a place of power. They wanted to help in the “right way.” That led them to what Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) referred to as a transformation that moves Whites to “activism alongside People of Color” (p. 107).

In her work, Pennington decided to cross the silent boundaries, to not worry about being socially correct, and to bring up her own race. She mentioned how McIntosh (1988) realized she had been taught that others were at a disadvantage but her White privilege put her at an advantage (p. 108). Pennington concluded there must be a “space to talk” of race and power (p. 109). “Bringing PSTs into schools of color and leaving them to silently ‘understand’ is not preparing them to be skillful teachers” (p. 110). She cited several scholars (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Feldman, 2003) who call teachers to break “the silence of Whiteness in education” (p. 110). “I end asking not *if* we should be there, but *how* we should be there – the purpose behind PST education” (p. 112).

The American Council on Education challenged universities at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to better prepare education majors to be more culturally competent. According to McIntyre (2003), American students are growing more diverse, and

educational institutions are failing to prepare teachers for the changing face of the student population. Burnout is so serious that 40-50% of new teachers quit within their first five years. But McIntyre pointed out that better teacher preparation programs will not remedy the deep social problems of poverty, crime, racism, unemployment, etc. that pervades the neighborhoods where these children live (p. 28). The author argued there are three essential issues that must be addressed to better prepare American teachers. The first is to school teachers on urban issues; the second, make White education majors aware of their biases and assumptions; the third, co-create spaces with their students that reflect the students' "lived experiences" (28). McIntyre proposed developing the lived experience through participatory action research (PAR); the author noted PAR would reframe the typical education major's perspective and what they view about teaching, learning and research (p. 28).

The topic of the ethnicity of the teacher has received international attention in the research of British scholar Housee (2008), who explored the ethnicity of the teacher and how that affects students and their responses when discussing racism. She concluded that if only teachers from racial minority groups are addressing race in the university classroom, then the issue becomes "ghettoized."

### **Inequality in Education and Education Theory**

Researchers like Tate (1997), Chapman (2008), Solórzano and Yosso (2002), and Lipman (2003) have focused on the importance of CRT in addressing inequality in education and in education theory. Tate (1997) offered a historical perspective on how current thinking in education is influenced by a paradigm that views ethnic and racial minorities as biologically and genetically inferior to Whites (p. 198-199). The inferiority

paradigm has influenced political, scientific, and religious theories, and its fluid and dynamic characterizations support “an ever-changing hegemonic discourse” (p. 199). Tate believed the best way to deconstruct this paradigm is through the frame of CRT.

Chapman (2008) revealed how teachers in a public school system actually lowered standards for honors classes once desegregation was court-ordered. She interviewed teachers in an English department at an urban district high school close to ten years after the reforms were implemented (p. 50). She applied a CRT lens in her study and particularly focused on interest convergence. The English department changed its curriculum to incorporate the works of people of color in an attempt to engage students of color. The teachers were also introduced to diverse pedagogical practices as well (p. 46). In some cases, assignments from the textbook were used non-sequentially and supplemented with works by people of color. The approach confused students, and the curriculum was disjointed (p. 51). The big shortcoming of the reform was the lack of critical understanding of the significance of works by these authors, and therefore the Eurocentric approach was not really challenged. Some students of color complained that the books by authors of color were depressing and that they did not need to read several books. “We get it,” was the typical response (p. 54). But in fact, students started coupling depressing themes with authors from racial minority groups, and the teachers failed to reflect how many Eurocentric works also have a depressing theme. In so doing, these teachers re-centered the curriculum back to a protected Eurocentric curriculum, thus serving the interest-convergence of Whites (p. 55).

In her study, Lipman (2003) addressed the racist assumptions and effects of standardized testing, a key component of No Child Left Behind policy. Her study

analyzed four schools in the Chicago Public School system, of which three provide services to primarily Latino and African American populations. The new measures for accountability, implemented through standardized testing, were part of a 1995 school reform law passed by Chicago. The result of the measures is that thousands of African American and Latino youth being retained or transitioned to remedial programs and/or schools designed for learning a trade (p. 332). Chicago Public Schools also launched the first two military high schools in the U.S., and these public schools are serving as a model for future educational tracts for the rest of the country, according to Lipman (p. 332).

### **Critical Race Pedagogy**

Some of the scholars who have addressed the need for cultural sensitivity introduced the concept of critical race pedagogy. For example, critical race pedagogy (CRP)—based on CRT—was used by Blum and Piedra (2010) in one study to help pre-service or licensed teachers become aware of their prejudices and stereotypes in hopes that they will develop sensitivity to marginalized students by hearing their counter-narratives. Likewise, Olivos and Quintana de Valladolid (2005) proposed a critical pedagogy to examine the assumptions within social institutions, including educational institutions. In another study, Marx (2004) made use of CRT and Critical White Studies in her exploration of English-only speaking pre-service teachers who tutored ELL high school students of Mexican origin. And Wagner (2005) addressed resistance in teaching anti-racism. In this section, I review these studies in further detail.

In their study, Blum and de la Piedra (2010) developed a service learning program for pre-service teachers that required them to work with immigrant Mexican families in

an urban Texas setting and Hmong families in an urban California setting. In both settings, the pre-service teachers collected counter-stories from their respective groups. The Hmong stories were gathered at a school while tutoring recent Hmong immigrants in English as a Second Language classes. The Mexican immigrant stories were collected at a career workshop for families of Mexican origin at a university. Both authors also used Critical Race Pedagogy, based on CRT, in their teacher education classrooms. Blum and de la Piedra concluded that they were able to make their students aware of their prejudices and stereotyping. CRP questions the dominant ideology of colorblindness and the myth of meritocracy. Quite often “othering” accompanies the dominant ideology – marginalized groups can only have limited success in the United States, and it is because of their background. “Othering,” they argued, “is maintained and perpetuated by cultural deficit majoritarian storytellers who advocate cultural assimilation” (p. 9). The authors maintained that these majoritarian storytellers believe it is necessary for the non-English speaking “other” to lose his or her native tongue, loosen family connections, and adopt the individualistic, hegemonic American ideal in order to become successful.

Along these lines, Olivos and Quintana de Valladolid (2005) have also stated that a critical pedagogy lens enables educators to break with the view that problems in society or in education are deficiencies within an individual or a group, or for that matter that an individual or group is somehow “disadvantaged.” These educators avoid the pitfall of blaming students or parents for any underachievement. Instead, the blame is shifted onto the “complex and dialectical circumstances that exist within the broader society...the U.S. capitalist system that gives origin to these inequities, ultimately allowing them to exist and reproduce” (p. 285). They argued anti-Latino sentiments are driven by fear of

losing social control, and this became quite evident through discourse analysis of terms like “achievement gap” (p. 286). The “achievement gap” is defined in their work as the disparity that is studied and recorded when comparing the academic performance of students from racial minority groups to White students in both academic and social settings (p. 286). Usually for Latinos the gap is measured in terms of dropout rate and performance level on standardized tests (in English, of course). These authors argued the achievement gap should be referred to as the “achievement trap” because the gap obfuscates the multiple problems and inequities in the country’s public schools. In fact, the gap is “a concoction of the dominant culture used to justify the subordinate position of Latinos” (p. 286). They point out the indicators that reveal that the gap is actually a “trap”: 40 percent of Latinos who drop out have poor English skills; 44 percent of Latino dropouts are born outside the U.S.; and the most poorly performing Latinos live in poverty (p. 287).

Olivos and Quinta de Valladolid (2005) also challenged critics of bilingual education and questioned how ELL courses are taught. They argued that a standardized test is a narrow instrument for measuring how far a student has come in mastering English skills. The test itself is flawed because it is designed by members of the dominant group, and it fosters the assimilation of Latinos into the dominant culture. Thus, native language instruction is not used in public schools. They concluded that a myth about educational systems in the United States is perpetuated by these programs: that institutions of learning are the great equalizers where the oppressed can excel through individual talent and hard work. But this myth does nothing to address enduring social inequalities. The authors viewed institutions of education as places of both oppression

and empowerment and suggested that to make any type of change educators must: 1) use a critical lens to question educational systems, 2) extend work past schools and into communities, and 3) be sensitive to the poverty the students confront.

Another study influenced by critical race pedagogy was Marx's (2004) research at a large university in the Southwest, where she was teaching a teacher education course on second language acquisition. The education majors reflected the demographics of the university, which mirrored national demographics for being predominantly White and female. Nine students from the course volunteered for the study. Collecting narratives was an essential component of the methodology, which involved in-depth interviews, observations, and reviews of journals kept by the participants in the study. All the volunteers were tutoring children from ethnic and racial minority groups (p. 34). The first indication that the participants were influenced by racism was their assertions that Whiteness was a non-ethnic identity, or was "normal" (p. 35). At the same time, all of the volunteers viewed people of color as having disadvantages because of their culture; they were perceived as "inhibited" or having deficits when it came to intelligence, self-esteem, culture, family, language, etc. (p. 35-36). In addition to these racial assumptions about minorities, participants also had the typical perspective that reduces racism to overt racism; they did not see themselves as racists but could recall memories of family members overtly making racist statements, or a person of color making a racist statement.

Lastly, Wagner (2005) addressed student resistance to anti-racism trainings in the college setting. Wagner viewed teaching anti-racism in a university setting as a political project because it challenged the dominant Eurocentric perspective that frames education as objective and apolitical. Antiracism challenges the university setting and the dominant

perspective, especially the historical White-male privileged perspective. Antiracism also deconstructs the dominant discourse of detachment and universality (p. 261). The author noted that educators need to expect anger and resistance when addressing racism in the classroom because teachers who try to avoid conflict may feed into the dominant discourse that denies racism and celebrates colorblindness (p. 263).

### **White Privilege and Eurocentrism**

Other scholars have focused their research on the effects of White privilege and the invisibility of Whiteness and Eurocentrism in education (Rendón, 2009). Morgan (2006), for instance, took a personal approach to educational issues when she confronted her own White privilege while taking a graduate course on CRT. She noted that Whiteness is difficult to analyze in the United States because it is “part of the fabric of everyday life [...] “For a White person, thinking about Whiteness is something like thinking about breathing” (17). Morgan noticed that in the discussion of Whiteness in her class, she needed to listen because White people could take over the discussion of CRT, and racism would become dominant (p. 17). She started noticing racism in writings, emails, television, housing, politics, and education, and how White privilege dominated everything. “I found myself reading a novel and noticing for the first time that the author always told us if the character was a Person of Color but never described a character as White, just assuming the reader would think the character was White unless told differently” (p. 18). Morgan concluded that by confronting her White privilege, through a CRT lens, she is more useful, stronger, and capable as an adult educator (p. 18).

Applebaum (2008) discovered a common theme among White students who saw themselves as marginalized because of the myth that the White population is now a

minority population in the United States while Students of Color are in the majority and are privileged. She argued for using social justice pedagogy in an attempt at making White students look at their privilege and discourse that denies racial issues in this country. Applebaum also discussed using social justice pedagogy as a form of empowerment that can lead to collaborative work in the diverse classroom. She utilized this pedagogy in a college classroom to help White students understand their privilege and to dismantle their perspective of reverse discrimination, or what she referred to as White talk. If used correctly, Applebaum argued, social justice pedagogy provides an environment where Students of Color can present their perspective and White students can actually listen and understand these experiences. In order for social justice pedagogy to work, a mediated analysis of experience is important for the privileged and the marginalized (p. 411). Applebaum also stated there is no methodology for educators to use in filtering when White talk is being used to dominate the experiences of the marginalized, nor when to realize that a White student is using White talk to distance and deny the experience of the marginalized. As she put it, “not you but I am oppressed by your ‘political correctness’” (p. 412). The end result and objective of social justice pedagogy is thus to encourage critical thinking, to question what we cannot imagine, and to provide new possibilities (p. 412).

A related approach can be found in Aveling (2006) and Levine-Rasky (2000), who emphasized a critical approach to Whiteness. Aveling focused on critically deconstructing Whiteness among college students and developing a pedagogy that helps White students push through their resistance so they become self-reflexive (p. 262). Aveling suggested that the act of othering would need to be deconstructed for White

students. In another study, Levine-Rasky discussed the paradigm of othering that is practiced by educators. Educators are quite willing to develop programs for “their needs,” and those needs are remedial in nature and thus segregated because of special education or behavioral issues (p. 272). Levine-Rasky stated that the problem with critical Whiteness study is the way it is introduced as the focus is on White privilege, and thus participants will rationalize, develop double binds, etc. The author suggested that the approach in the study of Whiteness should not be about the *who* Whiteness refers to but about the *how* Whiteness is entrenched in society. In the first instance, Whiteness becomes something observable, quantifiable, and defined to a specific group. “Instead, Whiteness should be regarded as a constructed category that involves contradictory relations to the process of racialisation” (p. 274).

Others have approached multicultural education as problematic for this pedagogy actually helps maintain the status quo of White privilege, particularly through the use of othering (“Let’s celebrate *their* holiday.”). Bell (2002, 2003) addressed the problem of ethnicity that is at the core of White privilege in the American public classroom. Future teachers who are now enrolled in education programs are 90% female and White, but the classroom they will be teaching in consists of Students of Color. How do you get these future teachers to understand their privilege and colorblindness? Bell (2002) addressed the issue of preparing White teachers for a diverse classroom in public schools. Bell’s study is based on in-depth interviews of educators and human services personnel. She found a narrative that was common among the White educators and personnel interviewed, and she also found it is a common narrative in other studies. In this narrative, there is an unspoken belief that there is some merit, some superiority, to being

White, of being the White knight who helps the marginalized Student of Color. In order to be the savior, one must be colorblind. What underlies these “White fictions about race” is a sense of discomfort about being aware of race, along with embedded racist beliefs. “Unless Whites can expose and examine their feelings and beliefs openly, they will continue to feel confused, will not understand the internalized racist beliefs and assumptions they keep pushing under, and will be unlikely to work effectively with Students of Color” (p. 240).

A Canadian study by Solomon et. al. (2005) also reflected the same strategy employed by teachers. In this case, pre-service Canadian teachers were interviewed. The authors discovered the subjects interviewed did not look at their own identity and were able to rationalize their beliefs by talking about the actions of other White teachers. Thus people in power, which include educators, have devised a discourse that keeps White privilege in place while creating a discourse that is both emotionally and academically debilitating to Students of Color by perpetuating meritocracy and the denial of White privilege (p. 147).

Patton et al. (2007) addressed how White privilege and Eurocentricism are kept intact through Whiteness as real property on college campuses. They noted that White property is upheld on campuses when speech patterns, behaviors, dress, etc., that conform to White norms are rewarded (p. 46). In addition, Whites also are the norm or are “given agency” in numbers: the vast majority of faculty and administrators are White and that implies status and power (p. 46-47). They argued the maintenance of educational inequities, based on race, perpetuates the status quo. Students of Color have difficulties enrolling in college because of inequities between rich and poor classes. Because of the

race factor in education, Patton et al. insisted educators and administrators in higher education need to understand these inequities: “For example, racism could be said to be at the core of a curriculum that focuses exclusively on White, Western viewpoints that render Students of Color invisible in what is learned and discussed in class” (p. 44).

When Duncan (2005) reviewed an urban elementary school curriculum, he noted that it utilized dated curricular materials even though updated materials were available. In his research, he focused on the roles of narrative and ethnography to explicate the allochronic discourses that inform public education. He used Fabian’s (2002) concept of allochronic discourses, which refer to denial of coevalness. Duncan noted that “When asked for his definition of ‘equal,’ Thurgood Marshall once answered ‘equal means getting the same thing, at the same time and in the same place.’ Here, Marshall established coevalness, or ‘the sharing of the present time’” (p. 93). This was illustrated by the historical example of *Brown v Board of Education* and the notion of separate but equal, when nothing was equal – there was no coevalness, no sharing of the present time (p. 93). Duncan also noted that Fabian explained that allochronic discourse is a “denial of coevalness” that is “effected primarily through language” (p. 93). Thus, the power of language helps reinforce the dominant structure through a narrative where there is the denial of truly sharing the present time. He then proposed using CRT as a method to analyze the lack of coevalness in public schools:

Given its emphasis on placing the stories the People of Colour tell of their experiences at the center of analysis, critical race theory (CRT) is an especially useful tool for examining how sociotemporal notions of race inform the naturalization of oppression and the normalization of racial inequality in public

schools and society. These discursive processes are some of the more explicit and formal expressions of power that we typically associate with oppression and inequality [...] and the narratives of People of Colour often bring them into relief with a clarity that is seldom communicated through dominant technologies [...] (p. 94)

Duncan proposed that a “critical race ethnography” be employed to “inform the way race functions as a stratifying force in school and society” (p. 94) Duncan argued that an ontological blackness was created as White, Western civilization became a world force, and that a preservation of material property rights in the U.S. is extended to include skin color, resulting in economic, social, and political inequalities (p. 95). Duncan concluded that a Eurocentric approach to teaching is kept intact.

White privilege and Eurocentric attitudes can be reproduced by teachers, as well. Vaught and Catagno (2008) conducted an ethnographic examination of teacher attitudes on racism and White privilege in two urban school districts. The teachers who were interviewed had attended an in-service training on race and bias. On White privilege, Vaught and Castagno found denial or a lack of awareness. One group resisted the concept or argued that it was something practiced by individuals. For the other group, there was no awareness at all. In fact, one teacher in that region believed it could not exist at her school because the majority of the student population was of color. Though the teachers were introduced to White privilege in their training, the teachers morphed the concept so that it fit their “pre-existing racial framework” (p. 101). As CRT scholars have pointed out, racism is a pathology not of the individual but a collection of individuals who construct a systemic structural problem. The teachers “were not just individually but

simultaneously creating meaning themselves” (p. 102). Vaught and Castagno surmised that White property was not recognized as a collective in interviews. Some teachers indicated the training would help individual (read: White) teachers understand their culture. The authors pointed out Students of Color were not seen as individuals but as part of a collective, that some othering was taking place (p. 103-104). White teacher responses ranged from “I’m not a racist, so the training won’t help me,” to “Students of Color have been subjected to racism their entire lives by individuals.” The authors concluded such rhetoric represented “a new ritual of White property: to ostensibly name itself as a means of asserting indirect authority and control over meaning-making” (p. 106).

In another study, Jay (2003) suggested White privilege is embedded in multicultural curriculum and argued for revisiting “the role of hidden curriculum in education” through a CRT lens (p. 3). Even as the United States becomes more diverse, the mainstream curriculum of schools and colleges “remains organized around concepts, events, and paradigms that reflect the experiences of Anglo Saxon Protestant men” (p. 3). Multicultural education is the norm for those who advocate for a diverse curriculum, or a “pluralist education” from Pre-K to college. The idea is to transform schools. Jay argued multicultural education will fall short because of a hidden curriculum that embraces hegemony. Jay built his argument on the basis of other CRT scholarship that has maintained that multicultural education is being used to uphold White privilege. Jay cited Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who argued that the current multicultural paradigm is parallel in its use to civil rights law as both are “subverted to benefit Whites” because they are mired in liberal ideologies (p. 5). Thus “multicultural” education has become a

code for the word “race” and multicultural education becomes a venue for teaching the student of color without advancing any transformation of hegemonic structures of White privilege (p. 6). Therefore, to keep both the Student and Teacher of Color happy, and the ruling class in place, multicultural education becomes a negotiated paradigm that ensures marginalized groups will comply with the status quo. Jay noted this bargaining fits perfectly with what Gramsci argued: Hegemony is not just domination by the ruling class but is also the winning of consent of subordinated groups. A typical avenue for winning this consent is to universalize the dominant group’s interests as the interests of all of society.

To address White privilege and racism, Duncan (2002) developed a pedagogy based on CRT for social science classes at a Midwestern university. First, he observed that White students and colleagues alike tended to downplay the role of racism, arguing class and gender are more important factors in social oppression. He also noted that White students in his courses tended to develop a “false empathy” for People of Color, and argued that the danger of this false empathy is that it maintains unequal power relations between White people and marginalized groups. This false empathy can lead to an abstract and detached behavior that “characterizes liberal ideology” (p. 90).

Duncan asked students to reflect on common beliefs regarding the definition of race. Many students regarded race as based on physical attributes while others referred to ideological constructs. One black female student gave a definition that goes to the heart of the problem: “a concept created to categorize people for purposes of power distribution through social institutions and interactions” (p. 95). Duncan noted the Black

student's definition was in line with political scientist Marable (1994). Duncan added that both of their definitions “defy the idea that race exists ‘mainly in the head’” (p. 96).

Students in Duncan's course were also asked to write an autobiographical account of how they “became” Black, Brown, White, etc. He noted White narratives tended to refer to conditions from childhood, or how a parent filtered their perspective. Black students made use of concrete language that revealed their biases, of having a bicultural or racialized concept. Duncan exposed his students to CRT concepts through various films, photos, and other items. He motivated some of them to rethink racial issues, and the students were able to apply a “race ethnography” to their work.

Duncan also introduced the concept of “racialized time”—defined as the “relationships between time and material conditions, such as resources and interactions between people that adversely affect oppressed groups” (p. 101). Students identified how these policies were upheld through curriculum, pedagogy, and policies that were school-based, district-based, and state-based (p. 101). Duncan concluded that his approach to make his students aware of Whiteness, privilege, and racism led to an understanding of false empathy, popular misconceptions about what is racism, and how “detached qualities” regarding racism can be linked to liberalism (p. 102).

### **Dominant Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

The study of hegemonic narratives and counter-narratives constructed by People of Color has been another area of CRT theorization that has influenced research in education. For instance, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) questioned whether educational research is truly objective or if indeed it does not uphold “deficit, racialized notions about People of Color” (p. 23). They proposed the need for a critical race methodology that

relies on the experiences and knowledge of People of Color. It is the classic argument for relying on the counter-narrative, or counter-story, which is not found in the hegemonic perspective but is quite often argued for by CRT proponents. The authors argued for reframing research based on this counter-narrative to create “theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (p. 23).

Bell (2003) also argued for relying on the tenets of CRT to bring the counter-narratives of People of Color into focus. Bell has attempted to answer the question of the role of stories in culture. Bell and other CRT scholars have argued stories are cultural and ideological, and not just stories individuals tell. Stories depend upon social position. For example, Whites convey stories that show American history and U.S. society as progressive. This positions Whites as good and fair, and that society is not perfect but is progressing. People of Color see this same history as cyclical, where a phase of progress is followed by a time of regression. The dominant discourse of Whites is a public transcript that ensures their position as the dominant group. Needless to say this perspective is quite positive. Bell concluded the counter-narrative reveals the existence and history of racism that is slow to change. Whites have an opposite, hegemonic perspective based on a color-blind ideology that permits an ignorance of racism (p. 22-23).

Bell and other scholars have addressed the importance of counter-narrative, or the counter-story, in developing a curriculum that is not based on the hegemonic, White perspective. For example, Su (2007) applied the tenets of CRT to a five-case study of organizations involved in educational reform in South Bronx neighborhoods. In each

case, the organization ran into the wall of a hegemonic version of U.S. American culture and education. Su referred to the hegemonic story as “the silent codes.” Su concluded CRT challenges the conventional by “cracking silent codes.” Those codes are cracked by allowing stories from outside and inside the classroom (p. 545). These stories are the counter-narrative to the established, hegemonic narrative. “From a CRT perspective, meaningful bridging spaces can help communities of color to transform race consciousness into political practice, and work towards more radical school reform” (p. 546).

In his study, Michael-Luna (2008) explored how early elementary Mexican-origin bilingual students’ racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities are constructed and negotiated in the context of a literacy event on Martin Luther King, Jr. From the lesson plan, a narrative of how Martin Luther King, Jr. faced racism as a child, the author concluded the text wanted the Mexican American immigrant children to define themselves racially, but they only had a binary choice of Black or White. Relying on CRT tenets, Michael-Luna analyzed how the story upheld racism as a historical construct. Whiteness as property was also upheld narratively as a White woman informs the two boys in the story they cannot play together because Martin is Black. The author argued that since the students are to create an association with the powerless character in the story, they are denied the ability to view themselves as having power. Interest convergence is also served as the text proposes the power struggle in the story is historical and binary. The story also upholds the idea that racism is only practiced by individuals, and thus society is colorblind (p. 288). The author concluded that instead of trying to change “children’s home ways of

knowing” that education needs “to move . . . toward the possible ways of changing school and dominant discourse to include multiple ways of knowing” (p. 291).

In another study on narratives, Williams (2004) wrote about using the concept of counter-narrative in college classrooms. The researcher identified two narratives driving what students think or say about racism. One is distinctive to the United States: the myth of the individual overcoming social obstacles. Just with the proper attitude and fortitude, the individual can overcome even racism. The other pervasive narrative, Williams noted, is also seen in other countries—the perspective of White students in only thinking about race when discussing other people. Whiteness is invisible, not a race (p. 165). So the dominant culture, and its ideology in the United States, departmentalizes the discussion on race. Williams pointed out that racism becomes pigeonholed with such events as Black History Month. That month is always February, and it is always for a month. Stories are told, usually of historical figures such as MLK. The stories are always about the individual overcoming the great odds, and “othering” takes place, avoiding the “systemic and cultural constructs of race” (p. 165). Williams noted that in literacy education, it is easy to dovetail into the dominant narrative and make it most visible by talking of the “Other.” Another trap is to fall into the use of code words, or “terms used as markers for race, such as ‘basic writer’” (p. 165). Another term that becomes a marker: the “ESL student.” So to counteract the dominant narrative, Williams discussed Delgado’s (2000) use of counter storytelling. Williams noted marginalized peoples have relied on their narratives to provide another version of society. The counter-narrative can also aid literacy teachers by finding stories, poems and essays not of the dominant cultural venue. A dialogue can be started revealing both conflict and connection across

cultures. Williams acknowledges that counter storytelling will not solve racial issues but that it can possibly dispel the myth of individuality in racism and help the dominant and marginalized focus on the systemic, real problems of racism: “In this way we can all begin to seek the truth in the tale” (p. 168).

Similarly, Yosso (2002) examined racism in the curriculum to emphasize the importance of counter-narratives. The author defined curriculum as an institutional structure that limits and specifies the kinds of knowledge to be disseminated, and as a process that reproduces a class system among students. The dominant discourse around curriculum reinforces the rhetoric that students receive specific types of knowledge based on what classes they are assigned (p. 93). The author argues that traditional curricular processes fail to prepare Students of Color for higher education. For example, Chicanos/as are tracked for vocational programs, or are placed in ESL programs that block eligibility for college and delay Chicanos/as access to college by routing them through remedial coursework (p. 93). To begin dismantling these institutionalized processes, Yosso proposed developing a Critical Race Curriculum based on CRT. The implications of a CRC are the acknowledgment of the political agenda of traditional curriculum that is stacked to give Whites an advantage. But it also means including the counter-narrative, of not limiting to a singular curriculum, and to look at how race, gender, sexuality, class, culture, immigration, and language intersect in the real U.S. American experience (p. 102).

According to Closson (2010), CRT is currently evolving and the question becomes: Can CRT add to the discussion of racism in education? She stated that starting from a perspective that “racism is normative,” CRT scholarship can then address the

supposed race-neutral laws, policies, social structures, and dominant historical narratives that still leave People of Color marginalized (p. 277). For Closson, an area where CRT scholars really need to develop is providing solutions instead of just discussing the problem or of just providing a critical perspective.

### **CRT and Adult Education**

Closson (2010) is one of the few education scholars who addressed CRT and adult education. She defined adult education as higher education or continuing education, but her definition does not include basic adult education, ESL, or GED curricula. In fact, I have yet to encounter any scholar or read in any article any mention of adult education that focuses on basic education/ESL/GED programs. Closson (2010) did provide an overview of publications on education and race that spanned from the 1930s to 2010. She argued that although CRT is an appropriate perspective for the analysis of adult education, she was dismayed by the lack of literature that applied CRT as a theoretical framework. She found a 30-year span, from 1950-1980, where race and racism in education received minimal attention. The irony of that span is this represents the era of the civil rights movement and the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Closson concluded that “few articles on CRT emanate from adult education or center on adult experiences” (p. 266). In her literature review, Closson noted that only 21 studies were peer-reviewed and acknowledged CRT as a viable framework. Of those 21, 16 articles focused on higher education settings and issues, and only 2 addressed the field of adult education. One of those two studies (Peterson, 1999) focused on creating a culturally relevant dialogue for African American educators; the other study (Rocco & Gallagher, 2004) focused on how to make adult education educators aware of discrimination.

## **Other Relevant Research**

Outside the scope of CRT in education, relevant research on education for ESL/ELL has addressed mainstreaming, bilingual education, curricular issues, the design of learning materials that will result in a culturally relevant pedagogy, and the approach taken to teach a class. Among scholars, some argue for a pedagogy that provides sensitivity training for teachers (Palmer, 1998), while others advocate developing a culturally relevant pedagogy that benefits the students (Rendón, 2009). I will summarize findings from these studies, even though very little in the literature addresses the non-traditional ESL/ELL student.

Several scholars, including Mantero and McVicker (2006), have addressed a systemic issue affecting ELL pedagogy in public school systems: the majority of ELL students are being taught in mainstream classrooms. The general consensus was that mainstreaming ELL students was ineffective but that reality dictated this was how most of these students would be schooled. Several scholars proposed providing intensive training for pre-service teachers in order to provide any chance of success for the ELL student in a mainstream environment (Bernhard, Diaz & Allgood, 2005; Corket & Hatt, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2009; Gainer & Larrotta, 2010; Galguera, 2011; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Ware & Benschoter, 2011).

Cadiero-Kaplan and Rodríguez (2008) advocated the preparation of certified bilingual educators in order to create a good environment for the ELL student. They noted, as did some of the others, that the No Child Left Behind Act was the driving force behind the current mainstream approach to education where assessment by tests administered in English only was the sole benchmark for measuring educational progress.

Mitchell (2005) argued that bilingual education died on the day the NCLB was signed into law. Mitchell referred to 2002 as a “banner year for linguistic imperialism” as the Bilingual Education Act was transformed by Congress into the English Language Acquisition (ELA) Act as a component of the No Child Left Behind Act (p. 254).

One study (Yoon, 2007) focused on the importance of teachers utilizing a culturally relevant pedagogy in a mainstream classroom that would require instructors to not only become culturally sensitive and employ appropriate teaching methods but to also serve as “cultural bridges” between ESL students and mainstream students (p. 224). The culturally relevant approach is the opposite of an assimilationist approach. Yoon noted “culturally relevant teaching emphasizes the attempt to meet students’ needs by having them sustain their own cultural values while living in a mainstream culture” (p. 224).

Another set of studies addressed using social media or technology to enhance the learning experiences for ELL students. One was an international study of Chinese students attending Jilin University in the People’s Republic of China (Genzola, 2010). Participants were encouraged to weblog and practice their English independently, and it provided them with a great degree of autonomy that they really liked. Spanish-speaking students in a high school science class used a classroom response system (CRS), otherwise known as “clickers,” in a science teaching module on electricity (Langman & Fies, 2010). The authors concluded the clickers provided a positive shift in the classroom for discourse; however, the students relied heavily on images for understanding as their linguistic resources to express concepts of science in English were still difficult.

Another study of middle school students showed similar results. A qualitative study of 20 ELL middle school students focused on an in-school and after-school

program that utilized multimedia. PowerPoint presentations and digital films were to be produced. Laptops were checked out to the ELL students; however, the laptops were rarely used for anything except to check email, browse the Internet, or download and listen to music. Only with peer and teacher interaction did presentations or films get developed (Ware, 2008). The author also noted that with the films, the students relied heavily on storyboards rather than script writing, which meant their verbal written skills were not being developed.

Finally, Wu and Coady (2010) conducted a qualitative study of four middle school ELL students who were using a software program designed specifically for ELL students. The four participants in the study were able to identify with the fictional immigrants portrayed in the lessons of the software program. However, the experiences the fictional characters have in the lesson's narratives were at complete odds from the students' experiences. That contrast posed a "conflict of identity" for the subjects of the study (156). Wu and Coady concluded the verdict is still out on whether educational software and computer technologies will genuinely benefit language learning and literacy development, and that this particular software used in the study requires awareness by the ELL teacher to make the lessons culturally relevant to the students.

Overall, this literature on the ESL/ELL student illuminates relevant dimensions of the ESL/ELL experience. However, omitting discussion of how teacher insensitivity and lack of cultural relevance in curriculum is connected to White privilege and White dominance is a limitation for the purpose of this dissertation research. In addition, lack of attention to the particular experiences of adult, working-class ESL students also limits the applicability of the studies.

Lastly, this research will highlight the importance of silence in nonverbal communication across cultural groups. Three studies have reviewed the negative and positive aspects of silence in the academic classroom for students of color (Covarrubias & Windchief, 2009; Covarrubias, 2008; Covarrubias, 2007). All three studies focused on how Native American students in predominantly White universities were subjected to both positive and negative forms of silence in the college classroom. I am particularly interested in how participants in my study may make use of what Covarrubias (2007) described as “generative and consumptive silences as radically cultural communication” (p. 268). She proposed that these two types of silence are not “rigid lexical juxtapositions” but that they are considered as “contrasting communication categories that exist in tension in any given society” (p. 268). Consumptive silence has a negative outcome where the absence of verbal communication results in unproductive outcomes. “In consumptive silence, the self can be seen as unempowered as when silence is imposed for purposes of oppression” (p. 268). Thus, generative silence is a productive form of nonverbal communication. “In generative silence interactants are seen to engage in a fertile communication activity wherein people affirm the self and each other personally, interpersonally, culturally, and even metaphysically” (p. 268). I will also be attentive to any types of silence that stem from what Covarrubias (2008) referred to as “racialized communication in everyday classroom activities.” In her article, she noted that Native American students were subjected to White privilege via racial comments that were made in the classroom and were not addressed by the professor. She introduced the concept of “masked silence sequences” that occur in “race-laden situations...Specifically,

a configuration emerges consisting of repeated pairings of two forms of communication – a discriminatory statement + dismissive silence” (p. 242).

My study is informed by the insights offered by this literature inside and outside the scope of CRT because these studies help illuminate problems and experiences similar to those lived by the non-traditional ESL student.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This dissertation research focused on adult, immigrant learners and their instructors in an English as a Second Language classroom setting to explore how their experiences, narratives, and counter-narratives enact a relation between language learning and construction of identities and ideologies through the process of intercultural communication. The study examined how the communication of cultural values and norms reproduces particular racial and other social hierarchies. The site for the study was a community center and a school located in a rural setting outside a metropolitan area in New Mexico. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

#### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the dominant narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed in classroom lessons and interactions among ESL learners, instructors, and administrators?

RQ2: What are the counter-narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed by the ESL learners?

RQ3: How do these narratives and counter-narratives reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies about power relations in the United States?

For the purpose of the study, ESL learners are adult immigrants in the United States who are non-traditional students and whose native language is not English. The definition of the non-traditional status followed the criteria set by the National Center for Education Statistics. As stated, non-traditional students are the ones who meet one or

more of these conditions: do not have a high school diploma, are single parents, have children or other dependents, are considered financially independent, work full-time (35 or more hours per week), attend school part-time, and/or delay enrolling into college after finishing high school ([nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/analysis/2002a-sa01.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/analysis/2002a-sa01.asp)).

Instructors and administrators of the program are classroom teachers and administrative staff who, in the particular setting studied, are likely to be White or New Mexican Hispano/a. As Solórzano and Deglado Bernal (2001) have stressed, Latinas/os have multidimensional identities where intersectionalities of race, class, linguistics, immigration, culture, identity, phenotype, sexuality, and any other type of difference shape their perceptions and experiences. These intersecting differences are likely to emerge in the interactions in the ESL classroom and among students, instructors, and administrators. My approach also takes into account Orbe's description of ESL students as co-cultural group members whose social positions keep them marginalized and underrepresented within the dominant educational system.

The dominant/master narratives produce a collection of stories that are the basis for a body of knowledge that is upheld by the dominant group through language that is used to interpret this knowledge (Stanley, 2007). These dominant narratives are expected to reproduce—explicitly and implicitly—the values and experiences of the dominant, White society in the United States. Therefore, notions of Whiteness—as proposed by McIntosh (1997), Tatum (1992), Nakayama & Krizek (1995), Orbe (1998a&b), and Reid & Ng (1999)—are expected to be mediating the narratives about U.S. culture and identity, albeit implicitly and sometimes invisibly to an uncritical observer. Lipman (2003), Tate (1997), and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have addressed in their research the

hegemonic perspective that upholds the dominant narratives in a classroom setting. In this study, I will be analyzing these narratives in the multiple ways in which they may be conveyed, such as instructors' perspectives, student reactions, textbook content, lesson plans, assessment, readings, class materials and activities, etc.

At the same time, in line with one of the tenets of CRT and LatCrit regarding the importance of the experiential knowledge of People of Color, I will examine the counter-narratives of ESL learners as an appropriate methodological step. Counter-narratives are defined here as the experiential knowledge of People of Color that is an appropriate, legitimate approach to truly understanding the racial and other intersecting forms of inequality perpetuated by the master narratives. In this study, accounts of the ESL learners, their "testimonios," were explored because they enact the participants' life stories and lived experience of the U.S. American culture, not as a member of the dominant group but as a member of a marginalized group.

The concepts of narrative and counter-narrative originate from legal scholarship. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined research on storytelling and narrative as "Scholarship that focuses on the theory or practice of unearthing and replacing underlying rhetorical structures of the current social order, insofar as these are unfair to disenfranchised groups" (p. 150). The authors also refer to *counter-narrative* as "counterstorytelling." That term is defined as "Writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (p. 144).

The present study builds on the premise that intersecting understandings of language, national identity, race, and power in the narratives and counter-narratives of participants have ideological effects. Ideology is defined here as a "set of strongly held

beliefs or values, especially dealing with governance of society” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 148). A particular focus of this study is the reproduction or contestation of racial ideologies in the United States. Whiteness and colorblindness are two dominant racial ideologies, as discussed in the previous chapter, which have influenced public discourse and educational practices in the post-civil rights period. In this study, I will examine how the interactions and narratives co-constructed in the ESL setting reproduce or challenge dominant racial and other intersecting ideologies.

I designed an ethnographic approach to understand and critique how ESL language learning and intercultural communication in a classroom setting can become ideological processes through which power structures are reproduced and transformed. The tenets, ethics, and methodological procedures of critical ethnography (Madison, 2012) will guide data collection and analysis in this research.

The methods of collecting data included observation, individual interviews (with students, instructors, and administrators), focus groups, and document analysis. The following sections provide explication of the conceptual methodology and research procedures for data collection and analysis.

### **Relevance of Qualitative Inquiry and Critical Ethnography**

The nature of the study I conducted required the examination of nuance in communication and the contextualization and interpretation of explicit and implicit meanings that will surface from the accounts and interactions of the subjects. Krizek (2003) has observed that what characterizes a communication study is the goal of “understanding human experience, person by person,” and in order to understand the human experience the scholar has to value narrative, the stories that people repeat about

their experiences and their lives (p. 142). The counter-narrative that is so often silent is all important in my inquiry. Clair (2003) has argued: “Communication and language are never neutral. Communication can be oppressive and act as a means of silencing different groups of people” (p. 15). Understanding the stories of people, interpreting language that is steeped in nuanced meanings, and awareness that communication can silence groups of people, are analytical tasks that call for qualitative inquiry.

The study thus followed a qualitative approach through ethnographic methods. Quantitative methodology is limiting in this regard, as the context of the lived experiences of subjects is excluded in the process of quantifying numbers. “In fact, quantitative methodologies intentionally control for complexity, or the messiness of lived experience” (Waite, p. 17). Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) have noted that the natural setting, the researcher as participant, and the subject-centered communication process are keys to qualitative research in general. The qualitative approach to research also allows for theorization that is grounded, one that “emerges inductively from the data – that is, ‘from the ground up’” (p. 10). They also argued the qualitative approach to research is pragmatic: “We focus on how people communicate in their own natural environments, when they are guided by their own personal objectives and how they give meaning to their communication, especially when they are using communication for those pragmatic objectives that determine and control day-to-day existence” (p. 11).

Qualitative research also allows for positionality or reflexivity. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) noted that to have thick description (Geertz, 1973), the fieldnotes should “reflect a more personal account of the course of the inquiry” (p. 122). These notes include the researcher’s “feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (p. 122).

Prejudice will be an important aspect of my inquiry, as I am conducting an intercultural study that involves the dominant, hegemonic group providing instruction to a marginalized group. Since I am a member of the White, dominant culture of the United States, it is important that I acknowledge this and reflect on how my own privilege can influence my observations and the participants' interactions with me. Milner IV (2007) noted that "in education research, the adoption and practice of color-blind and culture-blind research epistemologies and approaches can potentially lead to the dangers of exploitation and misrepresentation of individuals and communities of color" (p. 392). To guide the researcher through the color-blind pitfalls, Milner IV provided a framework for the researcher's racial and cultural positionality. This framework involves researching the self (posing racially and culturally grounded questions to oneself); researching oneself in relation to others (reflecting on oneself and questioning oneself in relation to the participants); engaging in reflection and representation (thinking through what is happening with the participants); and shifting from oneself to the cultural system. Milner IV emphasized that on the fourth element of the frame, "researchers contextualize and ground their personal or individualistic, new and expanded consciousness to take into consideration historic, political, social, economic, racial, and cultural realities on a broader scale" (p. 397).

This consideration of historic, political, social, economic, racial, and cultural influences on the broader scale is a key component of Critical Race Theory methodology, as well. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) noted CRT has been "academically institutionalized" through critical studies in law and education, but that now "CRT resonates strongly among communication scholars" (p. 63). This resonance occurs, according to Lindlof and

Taylor, because the analysis of data focuses on discourse and images that transform what can be seemingly innocuous cultural relations to relations based on power devised and maintained through racism (p. 63). In addition, CRT analysis can go beyond the typical stereotype and delve into subtle or complex activities, texts, or symbolic codes that reinforce oppression based solely on racism and prejudice. What I tried to uncover in my inquiry is the racially complex narrative of the hegemonic, White world, and the racialized complex counter-narrative of the marginalized groups involved in this practice of ESL instruction.

The topic at hand required an examination that relied on observation, description, and analysis of participants' narratives to elucidate meaning-making activities, and ethnographic methods are best suited for the goals of this project. Ethnography was most applicable to my approach because I observed ESL/ELL students and their instructors in their classroom environment; in other words, I conducted fieldwork that described "situation-specific conventions of conduct" (Frey et al, 1992, p. 250). I also followed up these site observations with interviews of students and instructors; interviews provided the participants the opportunity to give their perspectives and interpretations of what they thought was occurring (Frey et al, p. 248).

According to Lambert et al. (2011), it is "easier to state what ethnographers do than to come up with a definition" (p. 17). A literal translation comes from its two roots: graph, which can refer to a picture or a description, and ethno, or people. The general agreement is the researcher gathers data through first-hand observation, as well as by interviewing participants. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) described the ethnographic process as "a holistic description of cultural membership" (p. 16).

A key element of ethnography is the participation of the researcher, or what is referred to as “participant observation.” Singer (2009) wrote that ethnographers “acknowledge not only the presence of the researcher but also the subjectivity of what is seen, recorded, and communicated” (p. 192). Other qualities, Singer stated, include explicit interpretation, active participation in the research process, and reflexivity on the process and on what one knows (p. 192).

Lambert et al (2011) noted that ethnography is a process that is field-oriented and has at its core cultural interpretations (p. 17). There are six trademark features of ethnography that make this a very applicable methodology: 1) The data I am collecting will be in the real-world, or natural, setting of the classroom; in other words, I am going where they are studying and learning. 2) The data I will collect will be within the context of their natural setting for learning. 3) The observation will require a sense of trust, and thus an ethical situation will be established as the participants will know they are being observed. 4) The data collection will consist of multiple modes as I will make use of observations, interviews, documents and other artifacts in my inquiry. 5) The perspective will include both emic (interviews and input of the participants) and etic (my participant observations) to create what Geertz (1973) called a “thick description.” 6) The sampling will involve key participants giving insight into the phenomena being studied, and thus will be a small number of cases (as compared, say, to the typical quantitative study that can be in the hundreds) (p. 20-23).

More specifically, this inquiry into the ideological character of ESL learning followed the conceptual and methodological framework of critical ethnography. Thomas (2003) described critical ethnography as a way of “applying a subversive world view to

more conventional narratives of cultural inquiry.” He added that critical ethnography does not oppose other conventions of the social sciences, but that it “offers a more reflective style of thinking about the relationship between knowledge, society, and freedom from unnecessary domination” (p. 45).

Madison (2012) argued that it is important to understand the critical in critical ethnography, a distinct genre of ethnographic methodology. The critical ethnographer, according to Madison, begins with an “ethical responsibility” to address injustices “within a particular lived domain” (p.5). She states that the critical ethnographer feels a sense of duty, of compassion for the suffering of living beings:

[T]he researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. (p. 5)

### **Research Design**

What follows is a description of the design of the present study, as well as what types of data were collected, and what protocols were followed for collection and analysis of data.

#### **Description of Sites and Participants**

Two classroom sites were used for the present study because they provided a good cross section of the types of ESL students who attended ESL classes provided by the program. One site was a classroom located on the campus. The other site was located at a community center in the area. That center is approximately 10 miles from the

campus. Observing these classes provided rich data on comparing how the instructor worked with different class formats, dynamics, and demographics. The description below was based on my direct knowledge and observation of the sites and students as a staff tutor.

The campus classroom was located in the learning center on the campus. Several non-traditional ESL students attended classes at this site, and they ranged in skill level from beginning to advanced. The majority of these students were from Mexico. This class was held twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the evening hours; each session lasted approximately 2.5 hours and class started at 6:00 p.m. The majority of the students in the evening class were female, but there were a few male students who attended on an infrequent basis. Male students attended evening classes more than day classes, as many male ESL students worked during the day. The bulk of the female students were married with children, and they had low-paying jobs or were housewives. All three levels of ESL learners interacted in this classroom. The instructor provided some general instruction for all three levels, and then split the group into clusters so that all the beginners worked together, the intermediate students worked together, and the advanced students worked together. The instructor provided each group with specialized lessons designed for their level of comprehension. The majority of the students who attended the evening class were either intermediate or advanced students; only 2 or 3 students who attended could be considered beginners, and they did not participate in the focus groups.

The community center site classroom was a large meeting room located within the center. The majority of the students were from Mexico, and Spanish was their primary

language. Classes for the community center site were also held twice a week for approximately 2.5 hours per session, usually Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9:00 a.m. The majority of the students were women who were married and were mothers of young children. They had low-paying jobs that required working during evening hours or they were housewives. A few were grandmothers. Men's enrollment was infrequent; if a male did attend any of the classes, he was usually retired. In this hall setting, each level was segregated and there was no general classroom instruction. There were no walls provided between the levels of instruction; the class levels were separated by some large, portable dry eraser boards that also served as partitions. The intermediate students sat around tables in a U shape toward the west side of the room. The advanced students sat around tables in a U shape located on the east side of the room. Between these two classes was the area for the beginning class. The beginning class usually numbered in single digits (4-6 students) while the intermediate and advanced classes ranged in number from 4 to 14 students per class. There were three instructors at the community center, one for each class level. The instructor for the intermediate class at the center was also the instructor for the evening class at the campus. The community surrounding the center was an area populated generally by people who had recently arrived from other countries. It is an area that would be considered poor or working-poor class.

Participants in the study were students enrolled in ESL courses, the instructors for these courses, and the administrator of the program. After receiving approval to conduct the study from the University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board, I proceeded to recruit the participants for my study. They were recruited at the ESL classrooms. The method used was interpersonal communication. I made a short presentation about my

research. They were asked in person to participate in focus group discussions, provided with a consent form, and then contacted about scheduling the focus group. The methods used for identifying the participants were the class rosters kept by the program and the instructors. The students interviewed were in intermediate and advanced sections of the ESL program. Their comprehension of English had progressed to the point that they could usually converse in English.

Administrative and instructional staff was recruited via interpersonal communication. The instructors were the instructors of record for the ESL classes. All participants were informed that the interviewing process was strictly voluntary and that they could exclude themselves from the process at any time. Very few ESL students decided not to participate in the focus groups, and all of the instructors and the administrator participated in the interview process. In total, five instructors and one administrator participated. A total of 25 students participated in the research. The majority (88 percent) of the ESL participants consisted of immigrants from Mexico. Two students were from Spain and one was from Burundi, Africa. The two students from Spain and the student from Burundi provided me with the opportunity to interview people with recent travel and migratory experiences in national contexts outside of North America. Only two of the participants were male. The first focus group had two couples in it; there were no couples in any of the other focus groups. One of the couples in the focus group had become U.S. citizens. The other participants had not become citizens, though three others indicated they wanted to pursue citizenship.

## **Observation**

I conducted preliminary observation and data collection in the intermediate and advanced ESL classes from August 2011 to August 2012. I talked to classroom teachers and administrators and obtained permission to access the sites. We discussed how I should be introduced to the students and agreed that I would explain to the students that I was there to observe the classes as a part of my doctoral research. It was also agreed that I would be assisting the instructors with a computer-based instruction project. The project produced a portable computer lab that was to provide both the intermediate and advanced students with additional training in English skills via an online computer program that all of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in New Mexico had access to for additional instruction. I became the tutor for students who volunteered to participate in the online instruction. Several students in the advanced and intermediate classes started the program at the campus as beginners; that provided me with the opportunity to ask these students informally about their experiences at the various levels of the program.

Three classes were observed during this initial stage. One was the evening class, observed for six months, once a week for 2.5 hours, for a total of 60 hours of observation. This observation took place during the summer and fall semesters of 2011. The second class was an intermediate class at the community center observed for 12 months, once a week for 1.25 hours, for a total of 60 hours of observation. Observation was conducted over the summer and fall semesters of 2011 and the spring semester of 2012. The third class was an advanced class at the community center, observed for 12 months, once a week for 1.25 hours, for a total of 60 hours of observation. Observation was conducted over the summer and fall semesters of 2011 and the spring semester of 2012.

The focus of data collection and observation during this period was on 1) the content of lectures and materials used by instructors to develop a lesson, 2) interactions between instructor and students, 3) interactions among students, and 4) the reactions of students to the types of learning materials and exercises used in the classroom. Learning materials included handouts, posters, audiovisual and digital texts, or any other document used to complement lectures. Exercises ranged from reading aloud, to playing roles in written scenes, to presenting information to other members of the class, to interacting with a computer program.

Additional observation of classroom settings took place during spring and summer 2013 for approximately 40 hours. The focus during observation was on 1) the content of lectures and materials used by instructors to develop a lesson, 2) interactions between instructor and students, 3) interactions among students, and 4) the reactions students have with the types of learning materials and exercises used in the classroom. Exercises ranged from reading aloud, to playing roles in written scenes, to presenting information to other members of the class, to interacting with a computer program. Field notes written included both descriptive and reflective notes. I was interested in reflecting upon questions like these: What messages about U.S. cultural values and national identity are communicated? Do the lessons take a multicultural, inclusive, and comparative approach? Are lessons developed from a white-dominant, hegemonic perspective? How do the students interact and react via the type of language used? In other words, did the students utilize powerless language? Did the instructors engage in a high-powered language (Reid & Ng, 1999)? Was cultural stereotyping embedded in the language used

by the instructors and/or the ESL students? Were there patterns or usage of high-powered language in textbooks, materials, and lesson plans?

### **Sampling Protocol**

Stacks (2011) noted that in-depth interviews or focus group interviews are conducted when subjects have been identified that can provide insight on a topic. Sampling criteria becomes essential to determining whom to select for the interviewing process, and needs to include such things as demographics and experiences that are linked directly to the study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Experiences and demographics helped determine selection of participants. Those interviewed in individual or group sessions provided “rich detail” about the experience and what they really thought about the program (Stacks, 2011, p. 174). Sampling was relatively easy in my study because it was narrowed to participants in the program and their instructors. Their experiences were essential to the present study. Their demographics were also important because of the analysis of dominant group and marginalized group perspectives.

### **Interviews**

What helped me tremendously in developing my interview protocol was a series of preliminary interviews and conversations I conducted with a student (I will call him Roberto) who was originally from Mexico and had immigrated to the United States when Ronald Reagan was president of the United States. Roberto benefitted from the immigration amnesty program supported by Reagan. Roberto came into the United States by crossing the Rio Grande. After being in the United States for a few years, he was caught and sent back to Mexico. Roberto re-entered the United States again without the proper immigration papers, but was part of the immigration amnesty program. Roberto

attended ESL programs in both Texas and New Mexico. From his description of these programs, I was given the impression that every program he participated in was grossly underfunded. After studying English for more than ten years, he became proficient enough in English to pursue a GED. At the time of our conversations, he was a pre-engineering college student. His input from the variety of questions I asked him helped me tremendously in the interview protocol that was used in the focus groups. I then presented the interview protocol to my dissertation advisor, and we made slight revisions on the questions based on her feedback.

Individual interviews with the administrator and five instructors was one of the methods for gathering data. The rationale for interviewing instructors and the administrator of the program was to explore their perspectives and experiences and later compare them with the perspectives and experiences of ESL students. English was the predominant language used in conducting the interviews, which allowed for detection of any idiosyncrasies of U.S. English utilized by the ESL subjects. The one-on-one interviews with instructors and the administrator averaged 1.5 hours

### **Focus Groups**

I conducted four focus groups with six participants in each group. I utilized focus group interviews for the students as group interaction tends to spur conversations among participants, which provided a source of data and another chance to observe interactions between the subjects being studied. The small group interviews averaged 90 minutes. English was the predominant language used in conducting the interviews, which allowed for detection of any idiosyncrasies of U.S. English utilized by the ESL students.

## **Interview Protocols**

Since I placed emphasis on narratives and counter-narratives in my study, it was important that I asked open-ended questions that allowed the subjects to open up and tell their stories in ways that were relevant to them (Riessman, 2008). This required me to create possibilities in the interview process where I had to share control of the direction of the sessions with the subjects (Riessman, 2008). I was guided by Briggs (1986), who advised that interviews be conducted face-to-face, rely on open-ended questions rather than surveys, and include a set pattern of questions. I also tried to adhere to the perspective that I was a “co-participant in the construction of the discourse” (Briggs, 1986, p. 25) during both individual and group interviews. I was also sensitive to the fact that in conducting the focus groups I did so as a member of the dominant group who was attempting to enter into a community of people who are marginalized, that my research could have a “communicative hegemony” (Briggs, 1986, p. 121). What benefits my research is that, as Jones, Torres and Arminio (2014) put it, I am trying to situate the study in the theoretical perspective of CRT and LatCrit, which are theories developed by Scholars of Color rather than scholars of the dominant group.

## **Document Analysis**

Documents available for analysis included visual, print, and digital sources. Examples of documents analyzed are textbooks, tests, and homework assignments conducted to assess student progress, posters (some are generated by the students), workbooks and handouts used for lesson plans, essays or other forms of writing by the students, films or other media used in the classroom, materials from instructor training and workshops, and a computer program made available to the students for practicing

their English skills. There were also a few recent news media pieces that can be analyzed, including a recent television news piece and a few newspaper articles about the program.

### **Data Analysis: Thematic and Narrative Analysis**

Field notes and data collected from observations, interviews, and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using a critical ethnographic framework. As for a unit of analysis, the focus was on various forms of communication (verbal utterances, printed statements, audio and visual images, non-verbal communication) that referred to the process of teaching and/or learning English, the values, behaviors, and identities associated with U.S. culture, and power relations among groups. More specifically, I focused on thematic and narrative analysis of data. As Riessman (2008) pointed out, thematic analysis provides an approach to looking at what is said rather than focusing on how or to whom or for what purpose (p. 54). Riessman also noted that thematic analysis works well for the analysis of stories of resistance (or counter-narratives) and included such exemplars in her book, *Narrative Methods for the Human Science*.

Cortazzi (2001) has stated that narrative is “one of the fundamental ways in which humans organize their understanding of the world” (p. 384). Narrative, according to Cortazzi, provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore the interpretations of the subjects’ perspective on events or on their own lives. Cortazzi referred to this as “concern with the meaning of experience, voice, human qualities on . . . dimensions, and research as a story” (p. 385). Bogdan & Biklen (2007) offered a similar view to Cortazzi’s in their observation that informants frame their lives through narrative, so it is important to have narrative codes “describe the structure of talk itself” (p. 178). Cortazzi (2001) added that the narrative analysis should include coding for topics, content, style, context and the

delivery or the telling of the tale that would include the “tellers’ understandings of the meanings of key events in their lives, communities or cultural contexts” (p. 384).

Through careful analysis, with line by line coding, I identified themes and narrative threads in the data. Madison (2012) emphasized that coding is the time of making sense of the mass of information from the field; “so it is expected that you will pick and choose, select and sort, and blend and combine what is useful for you” (p. 43). I applied Cortazzi’s coding scheme for topics, content, style, context, and delivery. Silence was also explored, along with teaching methods, pedagogy, and the classroom environment.

In field notes from observation, I coded for what is said by instructors and students in the classroom as it related to the meaning of learning English and their understanding of U.S. American culture and identity; their sense of their own identity, and perceptions of others racial, ethnic, or gender identities. These themes were analyzed in terms how they enacted narratives of the dominant group and counter-narratives of the marginalized group. To incorporate the CRT and LatCrit perspective, I coded for narration that showed the intersectionality of identity with issues of race or gender or other factors that are commonly utilized by the dominant group to marginalize other groups. Another analytical category that I coded for is group identity. I explored whether these ESL students learn to be members of a marginalized group or do they assimilate and think of themselves as members of mainstream U.S. society. For the instructors, I explored if they have an awareness of being part of the dominant group in U.S. culture. Coding of documents like handouts and workbooks utilized by the instructors in the ESL program were important because these documents were rich for textual (print and visual) analysis. Many of the lesson plans incorporated illustrations and text to develop a lesson

plan and/or develop a narrative. Many of the narratives are constructed through description of routine activities, i.e., asking for directions, buying items at a store, a phone conversation, talking to a doctor about an ailment, etc. I analyzed how the images are used to portray what is a U.S. American citizen as well as how the images portray people who are not U.S. American citizens, and the values, norms, and social relations emphasized in these texts.

My final methodological step was to interpret the participants' discourses in light of the insights of co-cultural theory, critical race theory, and LatCrit theory. I identified dominant narratives and counter-narratives that enacted unequal positionings and reinforcement or negotiation of hegemonic ideologies in the contemporary educational setting of ESL immigrant, adult learners. In the next chapter, I present the analysis of data in detail.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis

This research explored how lessons and interactions in an ESL classroom setting construct cultural identities through narratives and counter-narratives, and how these narratives and counter-narratives reproduce and questioned relations of power along the lines of race, class, gender, and other cultural differences. The analysis of data presented here also shows how these narratives uphold the American Dream as a central ideological field within which ESL learners and instructors make sense of U.S. and immigrant culture and identities. The discussion is based on the analysis of data generated by focus groups and individual interviews, as well as field notes from my observations and one-on-one interactions with students, instructors, and the program administrator. The dominant narrative, or master story, in the New Mexican context studied was identified in the perspectives encoded in ESL funding mechanisms, curriculum design, and instructional materials; in the accounts of U.S. White and Hispanic individuals in charge of curriculum, instruction, and administration of the ESL program; and in the accounts of ESL students. The counter-narratives analyzed here are primarily the *testimonios* of ESL learners who are working-class immigrants and immigrants with professional backgrounds in their home countries who possess low levels of English-language fluency and limited cultural competency in U.S. mainstream society. Generally, the ESL classes observed in this study were representative of a typical ESL class in the United States because such classes follow certain criteria and national standards for learning assessment that standardize the pedagogical approach taken in these courses. In this sense, the exploration of local ESL classroom experiences through the lens of

intercultural communication also attempts to shed light on communication practices that can make ESL pedagogy more culturally relevant to immigrant students across locations.

The analysis of data suggests that the construction of U.S. and immigrant cultural identities and the perceptions of power relations shared in the ESL classroom operate through a dominant narrative that encompasses four intersecting narratives. The dominant narrative links English language learning to: 1) the successful incorporation of immigrants into the U.S. workforce, 2) immigrants' assimilation of particular understandings of the U.S. work ethic and of consumer behavior as cultural values for positive integration within U.S. American society, 3) notions of individual success and upward mobility in the colorblind, meritocratic system of the United States, and 4) the othering of ESL learner's cultures and identities that are perceived as deviations from the "American" norm. These narratives are institutionalized in ESL program design and mission statements or teaching materials, and echoed in the accounts of instructors, administrators, and ESL learners. The first narrative, for instance, surfaces in curricular materials and in the accounts of instructors and students who assert the notion that speaking English proficiently will ensure success in the U.S. workplace and strengthen the U.S. economy by serving the needs of U.S. businesses. Of course, incorporating into the U.S. workforce is supposed to assure the opening of a path to the American Dream. The second narrative features a particular construction of the "American work ethic" that upholds the belief that the U.S. workforce has the strongest work ethic of any country in the world, characterized by punctuality, discipline, hard work, and high productivity. This is the work ethic immigrants need to learn in order to achieve upward mobility and virtue. Along with hard work, the cultural value of consumerism is associated with

integration and participation in the U.S. dominant culture. The third intersecting narrative is the view that language learning allows immigrants to access and succeed in a U.S. meritocracy that is monolingual and monocultural, as well as class-, gender-, and color-blind. But the access to U.S. meritocracy requires individual responsibility and cultural assimilation, for immigrants have to earn their spot in the U.S. society. The fourth is constructed primarily in the instructors' accounts of their experiences and interactions with ESL learners and other U.S. students from working class, non-White backgrounds whose attitudes and behaviors in the classroom defy the expectations of their White and Hispanic New Mexican instructors. Immigrants are expected to adopt values and attitudes suggested in these narratives, for the U.S. is not a place where marginalized peoples can receive a handout. Rather, in the dominant narrative the United States is presented as a fair society that provides a "hand up" to all individuals, that is, a pathway to obtain success to those individuals who work hard and are willing to assimilate values and behaviors associated with the dominant construction of U.S. national identity. These narratives also feature explicit references or implicit assumptions that construct immigrants and other racial minorities in the United States as others and places them in a position of subordination in the social hierarchy.

The findings also indicate that while students, instructors, and administrator in the study reproduced these dominant narratives, they also created counter-narratives or *testimonios* to question or resist the dominant narratives. The *testimonios* convey how subjects attempt to overcome or negotiate cultural barriers as they struggle to survive and adapt to life in the United States. The main counter-narratives that emerged in ESL learners accounts were: 1) the view of English language learning as a requirement for

advancement in the global rather than the U.S. national workplace; 2) the view of English speaking as a means to cope with discrimination in the dominant culture, 3) the questioning of the dominant values of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and respect for immigrants' hard work in U.S. culture, and 4) the gendering of the women immigrant experience as a structural barrier to the American Dream.

I will argue here that these intersecting themes and narratives, and their counter-narratives, have an ideological underpinning to the American Dream. For ESL learners that are aiming to build not only language skills but also cultural competence in U.S. society, the American Dream persists as the ideological frame against which their intercultural experiences are articulated. The American Dream is indeed one of the most pervasive and enduring master narrative in U.S. American society. It is one that promoted the view that any individual, documented or undocumented, living in the United States has the opportunity to attain wealth, prosperity, and individual freedom by breaking through social class barriers (Cuádriz, 1997; Hochschild, 1995). The dream is achievable through hard work and determination. But it also demands becoming "American" by adopting and displaying certain values and behaviors associated with "American" national identity, and sacrificing public expressions of one's native languages, nationality, customs, and traditions.

The discussion of findings will be presented in the following sections of this chapter. The first section will review how policies for funding, institutional standards, ESL mission statements, and instructional materials reinforce dominant narratives. The second section addresses how the typical structure of lesson delivery and the instructors' perspectives reinforce the dominant narratives. The last section focuses on how students

reproduce dominant narratives and also challenge them through *testimonios* that reveal the fissures and blind spots in the dominant narrative.

### **Dominant Narrative in ESL Funding Politics, Mission, Standards, and Curriculum**

I will start the analysis of findings with a discussion of how structural factors like politics and structure of funding ESL programs, stated mission, national standards of ESL instruction, textbooks, and other teaching materials enact and operationalize particular dominant narratives.

### **Rhetoric and Politics of Funding ESL Programs**

Since dominant narratives, as outlined above, espouse the importance of speaking English proficiently, developing a strong U.S. work ethic, and upholding a meritocratic society, the politics of ESL funding become important in understanding how members of the dominant group can claim to advocate for these ideals, and thus perpetuate the ideology of the American Dream, even when levels of funding put in question their true commitment to realizing the ideals of a society that offers equal opportunity to pursue the American Dream.

A common claim among politicians is that ESL programs are funded at a level that provides opportunities for immigrants who are really willing to make the sacrifices needed to join the U.S. American society. Government funding of ESL provides a “hand up, not a hand out” to immigrants willing to work hard to pursue the American Dream. New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez discussed the American Dream in her famous speech before the Republican National Convention on August 29, 2012. She said her parents believed in the American Dream and taught her that success “is built on the foundation of courage, hard-work and individual responsibility.” Martinez went on to say

that “success is the American Dream. And that success is not something to be ashamed of, or to demonize.” She reiterated the dominant narratives regarding the work ethic and virtue of individual responsibility that is the essence of the American Dream ideology. In that same speech, she also has made reference to that popular political phrase, giving a “hand up.” Questioning welfare assistance, which is the antithesis of the American Dream work ethic, Martinez said in her speech: “Is it the way of life or a hand up?”

Popik (2010) has noted that the phrases “hand out” and “hand up” have been in the U.S. American body politic for decades. Cited in print since at least 1937, the history of the phrase dates to the Great Depression when many people, referred to as hobos, lived entirely on handouts. Its original reference did not have a negative connotation. But Popik noted that the phrase now has a negative meaning and “is a common remark among proponents of workfare or other welfare-to-work systems,” and that “handouts to panhandlers are more often frowned upon by those who believe the behavior encourages homelessness.” In discourses about immigrants, emphasis on hand ups rather than handouts is part of the hegemonic perspective embedded in American Dream ideology that categorizes anyone needing any type of government help as lazy or worthless, of not having a strong work ethic, of lacking character and virtue.

But it is not just conservative politicians in the United States who adhere to this dominant perspective. In his weekly address to the nation, broadcast on June 8, 2013, President Barak Obama focused on the issue of immigration reform. With some optimism, Pres. Obama discussed how Congress was finally going to tackle immigration reform. This would be good for the United States, he said, because we are “a nation of immigrants [...] It’s kept our workforce vibrant and dynamic. It’s kept our businesses on

the cutting edge. And it's helped build the greatest economic engine the world has ever known."

In this quote, the association of immigrants with a "vibrant workforce" that benefits U.S. business is explicit. Further, the tenets of the American Dream work ethic come through loud and clear. Immigrants who are hard workers have helped make the U.S. economy the "greatest economic engine." In his rhetoric about immigration reform, other themes of the dominant narrative—English proficiency and persevering through obstacles--are encoded:

This bill would provide a pathway to earned citizenship for the 11 million individuals who are in this country illegally – a pathway that includes passing a background check, learning English, paying taxes and a penalty, and then going to the back of the line behind everyone who's playing by the rules and trying to come here legally.

The hand-up-not-hand-out phrase is encoded here in the message that immigrants need to learn English and get in the back of "the line." Interestingly, the image and metaphor of the immigration waiting "line" has rich racial connotations. Matt Cameron, a leading immigration lawyer and creator of the blog *thereisnoline.com*, has argued that the "line" that is an important part of the dominant narratives about White, European-American immigration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

(Today) There is no line. It's pretty simple. When most Americans think of immigration, we're thinking of Ellis Island. We're thinking of a model that's been outdated for almost 100 years now...One in three Americans can trace their lineage to a line in which people were asked a couple dozen questions, screened

for admissibility and allowed into the United States. And that system hasn't existed for over 100 years. There is no general purpose line in which anyone can just take a number and become a United States resident and then citizen. And I just believe it's deeply misleading and it's really just more unhelpful than anything else to continue to use this expression. (Martin, 2013)

Essential to maintaining the racial hierarchy for the dominant group is to continue believing in dominant narratives about a meritocratic system that allows immigrants who “play by the rules” of the immigration policy, wait their turn on “the line,” work hard, and learn English to become part of the U.S. American fabric. But having to stand at the back of a line after one has worked hard to become English proficient goes against one of the intersecting narratives of the dominant narrative: that learning English is connected with individual success and upward mobility. Having to stand at the back of the line also creates a disjuncture with two of the American Dream tenets. If one has worked hard and become proficient in English, then there is good reason to believe this individual can anticipate success because success is associated with hard work and virtue. Learning a language is hard work. Having to stand at the back of line after mastering English is not an example of upward mobility. But this apparent contradiction is likely to be glossed over.

To dismantle the dominant narratives would mean to dismantle the American Dream ideology and White privilege. Both Governor Martinez and President Obama, members of racial minority groups, had the opportunity to show leadership on questioning the dominant narrative but instead reassert it and uphold the American Dream ideology. Ifedi (2010) would argue that this is an example of racialized discourse

where individuals from minority groups support dominant narratives and participate in the “new racism” that erases the structural barriers and differentiated experience of non-white groups. It could also be argued that both of them, Obama and Martinez, become exemplars of the American Dream. Their prominence and success story—Martinez the first Hispanic female governor and Obama the first black president—while representative of the exception rather than the norm, become testament to the notion of meritocracy perpetuated by the White dominant culture of the United States.

Martinez’s views reflect a perspective that Carrasco and Kokoyachuk (2013) noted in their 2013 survey of Hispanic values. Two values that were included in the survey are values reflected in the American Dream ideology – 1) having control of my time and 2) control over my destiny. Their survey indicated that those Latinos who are highly acculturated found these two values to be very important compared to Latinos who are not highly acculturated. Another value associated with Latino values, generosity, was considered much less important among acculturated Latinos in the study (p. 11). Carr (2013), a managing partner with ThinkNow Research, wrote in a blog about the 2013 Hispanic Values study that these acculturated values should not be a surprise. Upon the values of controlling one’s time and one’s destiny, Carr said:

The more we thought about this category, the more it appeared to us that as Hispanics (and particularly the men) start to live [or surrender to] the American Dream – working hard, making more money, providing for their families, climbing the ladder of success, etc.) – the more their lives (their time and their destiny) become less their own...and because of that, become more important to them (not unlike the rest of Americans who work to climb the ladder of success).

Carr also questioned if becoming less generous with becoming highly acculturated means “the more mainstream American I become and the more money I make, the less I care about helping others.” Since Martinez is highly acculturated and a strong believer in controlling one’s destiny and the American Dream, it stands to reason that her approach to generosity would be less likely to be associated with giving openly and freely but with the notion of opportunity or “hand up.”

Funding, then, of ESL programs becomes part of the enactment of the dominant narrative, as it allows politicians to claim that they are in favor of educational programs that provide a hand up, not a hand out, to immigrants. However, the funding model of ESL illustrates how the operationalization of this ideology perpetuates racial codings, social inequality, and racial hierarchies.

In ESL administration, Latinos are marked and tracked like no other group. The ESL intake application forms used in the program observed have an ethnicity requirement that is mandated by the U.S. federal government. The intake form requires students to declare that they are either “Hispanic/Latino” or “Not Hispanic/Latino” in the ethnicity column. This requirement allows for government tracking of Latino ESL learners as a separate ethnic group receiving benefits from the U.S. government. In an adjacent race column, they are asked to identify their racial identity and can “Check all that apply.” The categories include American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander or White. Two instructors, Hazel and Florence, said the form confuses all of their ESL students. The majority of the students consider themselves Hispanic/Latino, but they do not identify with any racial category. One

instructor said she told students to “check anything because it is required to make the government happy.” (See Appendix A for an example of the student application.)

Beyond registration, the day-to-day reality of ESL program administration speaks about the unequal access to resources and low priority given to adult and ESL education. Krystal is the manager of the adult education department and the ESL program. Her life story exemplifies the kind of success story that upholds the dominant narrative. At the same time, her accounts of the challenges she faced administering the program can be read as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of politicians. She is a White New Mexican woman who started working as a tutor in the ESL program in 1994, after completing her GED through the same program in which she enrolled as a student in 1991. Tutoring led her to completing her bachelor’s degree in secondary education. Eventually, she was hired as the program manager, a position she had held for several years.

Krystal has seen many challenges related to budgets over the years, since the program is habitually underfunded. She offered the following example:

For a particular type of funding, instructional materials, we’ve never gotten more than \$21 per year per student. Of course 19 years ago, \$21 was good. We had an abundance of books. For about three years, we only got about \$10 per student. Just this last year, we got an increase: about \$11 per student. The instructional materials money comes from a special fund. That applies to the public schools as well. The fund depends on how much the state gets each year from mostly mineral rights. That always fluctuates. But it has remained low. We get one-fourth as much as the public school students get.

When I asked an instructor, Hazel, if she had ever spent her own money for copies or other teaching materials, she said: “Oh hell yes.” She said she would have her lesson plans together in time and before the copy budget was depleted in order to have her copies made at the office. Otherwise, Hazel would spend her own money at a copy center. But there was a bigger issue for her:

The same materials that were at the program when I started eight or nine years ago are still there. I don’t mean just the same text, I mean the selfsame workbooks that were sitting in the closet. They have been erased and written in hundreds of times.

Krystal also explained that the intricacies of federal funding. The program receives federal and state funding. The state has to match 90 percent of the federal allocation in order to receive federal funding and the situation has been difficult:

So we started to drop below that last year ... The state tried to do some creative things, and tried to say ‘no, we really are giving the 90%.’ But it was around that time that they walked a bunch of people out at the State Department because of fraudulent audits. So...

Krystal finds herself in a situation that does not have a good solution, and the funding becomes a loop that only spirals down. Headcount (or number of students enrolled in the program) is needed for 80 percent of the funding, but with the decrease in funding, the headcount was reduced in order to accommodate the students. Less headcount, less money...

Hazel blamed the situation on the sluggishness of the state economy and on the Republican governor (the first female Hispanic governor in the United States, Susana

Martinez) “who doesn’t support adult education” and has made it difficult to support ESL programs. Another complication that Hazel explained is the influence of a quasi-governmental agency, the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy (NMCL), which receives funding from the State Legislature. It has been supporting 15-20 programs throughout New Mexico, and some of the programs are connected with colleges. The coalition was started during a previous Republican administration (Garey Carruthers), and its funding has been a line item in the state library budget for several years. According to Hazel,

The upshot of the whole thing was that the legislature -- well, it wasn’t the legislature; it was the governor -- did not want to ‘double-fund.’ So if we’re already funding high school, why do we have to fund ABE (Adult Basic Education) so people can get GEDs? And if we’re already funding ABE, to work with ESL and GED people, then why do we have to fund this extra agency? So what happened about a year ago was that NMCL said they will not fund any of the ABE programs for anything.

Talking about the politics of funding ESL, she said: “(The program was) effectively gutted, and a lot of the programs are running scared because they’re afraid they’re going to lose funding if they talk to any of those ‘nasty’ ABE people.” She also said that ESL programs are a small but important part of the adult basic education programs because the ESL programs include the majority of the volunteers and “it’s easier to find ESL students than it is to find adults who will say ‘Oh, I can’t read. I need to work on that.’”

One particularly revealing example of institutionalized othering and racism is seen in the management of space and the expectations of ESL learners in the program observed. The ESL program makes use of a community center for conducting the ESL

classes. In order to use the facility, a preschool program has to be offered. Originally the county government planned to fully staff the center. An office was built for personnel to manage the center but was never staffed. Plans also called for hiring a custodial staff to maintain and clean the facilities. But when the county built a new courthouse, commissioners forgot to budget for custodial staff not only for the new courthouse but for all of the community centers throughout the county. When a county manager wanted to start charging fees (rent) for using the space because the county was going to have to pay someone to maintain the facilities, Krystal provided a counter-proposal:

I told them we are a poor program, and we can't do that. I borrow space all over the place, and it has to be free. It's not in my grant to be able to pay rent to anyone. So what else can we do? So they gave us a key and the code to the alarm system, so we wouldn't have to pay that fee. Then the cost for cleaning, so we clean our own space. That's why we end up cleaning at the center. It's not an ideal situation, but we do it.

The three classes that met at the community center rotated cleaning duties. Once a week, one of the classes stops the class 30 minutes before the usual ending time to clean the bathrooms and mop the floors throughout the facility. Students in the designated class also pick up trash and clean windows and doors. Over the span of a semester, each class misses at least four hours of instruction time because of this arrangement, and they clean a facility that has less than an ideal learning environment, especially for language learning.

Expecting ESL students to clean the facilities reinforces othering that is practiced by the dominant group. The underlying ideological messaging is clear:

- They will be expected to study hard and quietly overcome barriers, even the ones created by the program itself that make it more difficult to study.

- The association of ESL learners with immigrants in low-paying jobs (particularly Mexican workers in service jobs like domestic service, gardening, construction, etc.) makes this practice acceptable and reasserts a particular identity and position in the social hierarchy.

- ESL students will not receive a “hand out,” and this is what a “hand up” looks like for this particular group.

The funding of ESL and ABE programs in New Mexico is an example of how institutionalized racism and classism operate through the construction of hierarchies. Funding for students attending public schools is four times higher than funding for students of ESL programs. And while both the ABE and ESL programs are underfunded, ABE receives more favorable attention because these programs serve citizens of the United States. The ESL programs are populated by people who are from other countries, represent non-white racial groups, and do not speak English proficiently. The politics of funding, then, are an example of institutionalized “othering” and marginalization of immigrants and U.S. working-class adult learners. The irony of the attitude of some in the governor’s office and key legislators in New Mexico is that they expect immigrant populations to learn English, yet make it difficult for programs to obtain even marginal funding. The tenets of the American Dream assert that anyone can pursue her or his dream because everyone has an equal chance of achieving success in the U.S. color-blind meritocracy. This assumption is proven false when one examines the politics of ESL

funding. However, the marginal funding of ESL programs serves an ideological purpose in keeping the myth of the American Dream alive.

### **ESL Mission and Standards**

The dominant narrative is institutionalized in ESL education through the mission and standards set by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), a national organization that establishes what ESL programs nationwide are to teach, and informs the curriculum of the ESL program observed for this study. The standards are codified in the document *CASAS Competencies: Essential Life and Work Skills for Youth and Adults*. These standards must comply with the measures and methods for the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). The NRS is a division of the Adult Education and Literacy Office of Vocational and Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education. The Core Outcome Measures of the NRS focus on employment, of either gaining employment or retaining employment (National Reporting System, 2015).

CASAS organizational website ([casas.org](http://casas.org)) provides further insight on construction of dominant narratives with the ideological undertone of the American Dream. The section titled “The Need: Entry-Level Workers with the Skills to Move Up,” links language learning to the needs of U.S. businesses that lose “more than \$60 billion in productivity each year due to employees’ basic skill deficiencies.” Proficiency in English is associated with work productivity and the acquisition of the necessary skills. In this case, the “basic skills” are those that fill the employers’ need for entry-level and low-skilled labor; in other words, cheap labor. Yet the promise of upward mobility is codified in the text since gaining “basic skills” would allow workers to “move up.”

These associations in the organizational narrative for ESL programs also activate the narrative of an “American work ethic” as an essential tenet of the American Dream: success and mobility results from learning the skills and pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. This desirable behavior is one that demonstrates willingness to start from the bottom, a kind virtue in workers. Focusing on work ethic and teaching this work ethic to ESL students result in the othering of immigrants by implying that immigrants lack such a work ethic. It also reinforces the stereotype that they are lazy and unskilled. Consequently, a goal of the ESL programs is to socialize immigrant workers into the perceived strong and virtuous U.S. work ethic.

However, this type of socialization via ESL curriculum obviates the fact that immigrant workers, regardless of work ethic or desire to “move up,” face significant hostility in the U.S. society. Some of the *testimonios* of ESL learners interviewed for this research construct a counter-narrative to this dominant idea. Peri (2012) has discussed how close to 50 percent of U.S. citizens perceive immigration as a problem and fear immigrants. Peri noted that there is a widely held belief that immigrants come to the United States to seek social benefits rather than to work. The survey also indicated that U.S. citizens are concerned that the jobs immigrants perform are detrimental to the U.S. economy and diminish wages for everyone. Thus, the work immigrants seek and perform is less than virtuous for members of the dominant culture. By de-linking immigrants and their work from notions of a legal, honest, and virtuous work ethic, members of the dominant culture maintain their privileged position as they re-assert themselves as true exemplars of their constructed U.S. work ethic.

## **ESL Curriculum**

Likewise, instructional materials used in the ESL program studied reinforced notions of the U.S. work ethic and a set of particular cultural values as definers of U.S. identity and culture.

The primary texts used are titled *Stand Out: Standards-Based English*. It is a series of books. The first component in the series is *Stand Out Basics*. Five levels follow the Basics Level (designed for someone who knows little if any English), with Level Five being the most advanced (reading at a fifth-grade level). The authors of the series are Staci Johnson and Rob Jenkins, who were instrumental in developing the current CASAS assessment standards. The standards system is used throughout New Mexico and the United States to determine if students are progressing. Multiple-choice assessments are all important to determine whether students are progressing and in order to continue receiving funding. Because Johnson and Jenkins were instrumental in developing the CASAS assessment standards system, the Stand Out series was adopted by the ESL program studied.

The narratives created in these textbooks are consistent with the dominant narratives and tenets of the American Dream ideology discussed above. For example, one set of lessons communicated the importance of working hard and consuming material goods in order to be a full participant in the U.S. culture (Jenkins and Johnson, 2009). A second lesson focused on the importance of developing English proficiency in order to fully participate in U.S. culture. In a particular lesson, the ESL student learns the importance of learning English in order to truly be able to express one's emotions and feelings (TV411 in Print, 1998).

*Immigrant work and the U.S. work ethic.* A focus on work is introduced in the very first unit, *Everyday Life*, of Stand Out Level Two and is reinforced later in the seventh unit. The goal of lesson four of the first unit is to “interpret and write schedules” (p. 10). Readers are introduced to a planner and a calendar with several entries on the planner and the calendar regarding going to work and going to school. Thus, the notion of “everyday life” in the United States presented to ESL learners is reduced to the routines of employment or attending school (in preparation to enter the workplace). Unit seven of the second level Stand Out text is titled *Work, Work, Work* (p. 121). The goals of this unit include: evaluate learning and work skills; identify jobs and job skills; apply for a job; interview for a job; and follow instructions in an office. The opening paragraph introduces an ESL student named Dalva who now lives in Los Angeles and needs a job. The text states that “she had several jobs before she came to the United States, but it is more difficult now because she is learning English.” The text also informs the reader that:

Good work habits are very important in the United States. Employees who come on time, work hard, and cooperate are more successful than other employees.

Good work habits in the classroom are similar to good work habits in the workplace (p. 121).

The implication of this text is that in order to become employable in the United States one must be proficient in English and develop particular work habits that distinguish English-speaking members of the U.S. society from immigrants from the rest of the world. In that same unit, a lesson (number two) helps ESL students identify their job skills and thus types of employment they should seek. Of eight positions listed in this lesson, only one could be considered a position that requires a college education:

computer programmer. The other positions these students are encouraged to consider include carpenter, custodian, construction worker, delivery person, homemaker, mechanic, and office worker. Most of these jobs are considered low-skill, minimum-wage or low-wage positions.

In Unit Six of the Level Four text, *Getting Hired*, there are a few more examples of positions that require higher levels of education, but for the most part the implication is that a person with limited English-language skills must find work in the service sector. In that unit, readers are introduced to Ranjit Ghosh, an immigrant from India. Readers discover that Ranjit received a certificate in computer repair while in India. After moving to the United States, Ranjit secured a job assembling computers. Readers discover that:

Although he loved his job, he needed another job to pay the bills. In addition to assembling computers, he also repairs computers in the evening for another company. Ranjit is busy, but he is doing what he loves. (p. 107)

A clear message is sent that if one has limited English skills, one will have to work two jobs to survive in the United States. Further, that workers who seek a second job will find it, and will still love or find satisfaction in what they do. This message is an example of how an individual can pursue the American Dream. Two of the tenets of this ideology focus on how to achieve success. The third tenet involves one's character, and the fourth tenet focuses on virtue and working hard. Ranjit is an example of what an individual immigrant does in pursuit of the American Dream, as one must have: 1) willingness to conform and accept a labor market where wages are so low that a second job is needed in order to meet the needs and move ahead, 2) the attitudes of ambition, self-motivation,

determination to improve one's economic status, and 3) the virtue to work hard and find satisfaction in hard work despite conditions that impose long hours and low wages.

*Participating in U.S. consumer culture.* Participation in the U.S. consumer culture is another key theme in the Stand Out texts. As represented in the texts, a key part of assimilating into the U.S. American culture is becoming a consumer in the capitalist economy. The second unit in the Level Two book is titled *Let's go shopping!* Readers are introduced to the Hernández family, who moved to Chicago from Mexico in the summer. But as winter arrived in Chicago, readers learn that "Mario and his family wear warm clothes in Chicago in the winter. They don't wear shorts or sandals in the winter" (p. 21). The authors make the assumption that winters in Mexico are never cold, despite the fact that in numerous locations in Mexico the overnight temperatures during the winter months drop into the 40s. But the lesson is stressing the idea that immigrants need to learn to shop for winter clothes. The illustration that accompanies the text shows a Latino family wearing the types of winter coats typically worn in the U.S. Midwest or bought from a Sears catalog. The authors miss an opportunity to depict this family wearing clothing that incorporates a greater variety of designs, colors or patterns more likely to be found in Mexico or among Latinos in the United States. Chicago has a large Latino population, so the depicted Hernández family would not have to completely assimilate but could have retained some of their cultural markers when it comes to fashion. The shopping unit also features how to purchase leisure clothing; but the emphasis in this unit is placed on work clothing. The emphasis on work clothing is another message that asserts the identity of immigrants primarily as members of a workforce that is developing a U.S. American work ethic.

Besides buying clothes, readers of the second level text are introduced to the need to secure housing. Readers of the housing unit (number four) are introduced to how to read a classified ad for apartments and homes for rent, and the steps needed to complete a rental application form. Since students using this book are reading and understanding English at a second-grade level, the authors assume that these students can only get lower-paying jobs and can only pay rent. The authors do not introduce the concept of buying a home until a more advanced book, Level Four. In fact, one of the instructor participants in the study, Jody, was quick to note in her interview regarding the assumptions of the textbook authors regarding housing. Jody commented (sarcastically) that she did not realize a person has to speak English proficiently in order to purchase a home.

Consumerism is promoted even more explicitly, as readers learn, in the second unit titled *Personal Finance*, how to apply for loans and credit cards. Materialistic success is the primary form of success discussed by Hochschild (1995) in her exploration of the American Dream ideology. Encouraging ESL students to consume is an example of cultivating the dominant perspective in teaching the behaviors that lead an individual to gain material wealth and thus succeed in U.S. society. Though the Level Four book is a more advanced book, the same themes thread through that text as in the Level Two book, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1	
Stand Out Level Two Chapters	Stand Out Level Four Chapters
Unit 1 <i>Everyday Life</i> (Where are you from?)	Unit 1 <i>Balancing Your Life</i> (Reaching your goals)
Unit 2 <i>Let's Go Shopping</i> (Shopping for work clothing)	Unit 2 <i>Personal Finance</i> (How to apply for a credit card)
Unit 3 <i>Food and Nutrition</i> (How to plan meals)	Unit 3 <i>Buying a Home</i> (The American Dream)
Unit 4 <i>Housing</i> (Complete a rental application)	Unit 4 <i>Community</i> (interpreting maps and how to volunteer)
Unit 5 <i>Our Community</i> (Give and follow directions)	Unit 5 <i>Health</i> (Complete a health insurance form)
Unit 6 <i>Health</i> (Make a doctor's appointment)	Unit 6 <i>Getting Hired</i> (Job search, resume, job interview)
Unit 7 <i>Work, Work, Work</i> (Job skills, interviewing)	Unit 7 <i>On the Job</i> (Workplace behavior, ethical decisions)
Unit 8 <i>Goals and Lifelong Learning</i> (setting academic and work goals)	Unit 8 <i>Civic Responsibility</i> (Jury summons, driver's license, voting)

*Speaking English as a means to assimilate (European) "American" values.* In addition to the themes of work and consumer culture, instructional materials link English-language competency to a set of values and behaviors associated with mainstream "American" culture despite the fact that, upon closer examination, these values and

behaviors reflect the worldview of U.S. European Americans: assimilation into a monolingual and monocultural society with the nuclear family as the ideal model. Notions like cultural plurality, multicultural conflictivity, bilingual or multilingual culture, and alternative models of family life (like the extended family structure) are suppressed. These narratives negate the experiences and worldviews of other non-White ethnic and racial groups that make up the U.S. national culture.

For instance, in a booklet used frequently by the ESL program examined in this study, the messaging suggests that improving English-language skills will make the adult ESL student not only a better communicator but a better parent. In the 12-page booklet titled *TV 411 in Print*, published by the New York-based Education Development Center, Inc., there are two lessons: one is about reading a map, and the other is about developing better parenting skills. The characters of Hilda Armendariz, her two daughters, and her husband are featured on page 11 of the booklet. Readers discover that the family recently moved to El Paso, Texas, from Mexico. Hilda has a college degree in business administration but has limited English-speaking skills. So Hilda joins a family literacy program (*Even Start*), where she “improved her English more than she thought possible.” That led to a “very good job managing a flower shop” (p. 11).

In addition to securing Hilda’s incorporation into the U.S. labor force (even if overqualified for the job secured), the best part of learning English was the impact it made on her parenting skills:

Hilda loved her job.

But she loved her kids more.

That’s why the classes at Even Start were so important to her. Even though Hilda

is a terrific mom, she got lots of ideas on ways to enrich herself and her children.

‘Even Start wakes up your mind to be better with your children. Children learn from what you do and what you say,’ she claims [...]

Hilda learned to read and write in English not only to bring home a paycheck.

What really mattered to her was the love and happiness she brought into her household. (p. 11)

These types of stories suggest to readers that communicating in English brings not only economic benefit but also enrichment of family life and better parenting skills—even when English-language skills of parents and children are still being developed. Hilda’s determination and ability to develop her English skills beyond what she “thought possible,” reinforces the third tenet of the American Dream. She is a success story because she alone controls abilities and opportunities to advance and improve her life. Since she persevered to master English, Hilda has shown true character and now has the reward of knowing how to express love for her children in the target language.

Furthermore, this idea that communication in English among family members whose mother tongue is not English would create richer and more expressive family life goes to the heart of Rendón’s (2009) discussion regarding “Euro-American privilege and the assumption of Western superiority” (p. 42). It suggests the assimilation of the European-American, monolingual (English speaking) nuclear family as a model, and it negates the values of linguistic and cultural plurality--such as models of extended family living--even in the private sphere of immigrants’ homes. In this particular case, the main character, Hilda, is also assigned a gender position defined by her role as a mother. Motherhood—more than professional advancement--is the main incentive for learning

English and seeking the Dream. And even if she loved her kids in Spanish, loving them in English would make her parenting more successful and enriched.

Another example of Euro-American assimilation and suppression of cultural plurality or conflictive multiculturalism is in lesson plans that focused on Halloween. Just a few months before one of the lead teachers retired, she initiated the Halloween lessons after a discussion in her intermediate day class. Discussions in class made her realize that her students did not know about the origins of Halloween. She started to explain the meaning of Halloween with a comparison of Halloween and the Mexican festival of *día de los muertos*. She made use of a Venn diagram to make comparisons, which at first suggested a fruitful approach to discuss culture and identity differences. But only during the first class of the Halloween lessons (which endured over three weeks) was there any reference made to *día de los muertos*. Instead of taking advantage of the comparison to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding, the focus of all handouts and discussions thereafter was on the U.S. version of Halloween. There were some historical references to the origin of the tradition in a Celtic (and thus a European) festival known as Samhain. But more emphasis was placed on the rituals associated with consumer culture, i.e. buying costumes and consuming large quantities of candy, than in the cultural and historical meanings of this day.

In this case, perhaps if students had been asked to inform instructors about what *día de los muertos* means to them and the significance of having entire families participating in this festival, then a paradigmatic shift could occur where students would want to be more involved. Creating such a learning pattern would shift the ESL program from a model of assimilation to a model that incorporates cultural plurality as a value and

culturally relevant pedagogy. Yoon (2007) has noted the importance of a culturally relevant pedagogy in a mainstream classroom that would require instructors to not only become culturally sensitive and employ appropriate teaching methods but to also serve as “cultural bridges” between ESL students and mainstream students (p. 224). The culturally relevant approach is the opposite of an assimilationist approach. Yoon has argued that “culturally relevant teaching emphasizes the attempt to meet students’ needs by having them sustain their own cultural values while living in a mainstream culture” (p. 224).

A more culturally relevant ESL pedagogy calls for a shifting from the objectivist pedagogical model that Palmer (1998) described as the “dominant model of truth-knowing and truth-telling” to a subjectivist model where the subject, rather than the instructor, becomes the center of attention (pp. 101-103). Palmer explained:

As we try to understand the subject in the community of truth, we enter into Complex patterns of communication – sharing observations and interpretations, correcting and complementing each other, torn by conflict in this moment and joined by consensus in the next. The community of truth, far from being linear and static and hierarchical, is circular, interactive, and dynamic. (p. 103)

In the next section, I will discuss how these areas of curricular emphases are enacted in the classroom by the choices and communicative practices of the instructors.

### **Dominant Narratives and Counter-Narratives among ESL Instructors**

This section provides further insight on the instructors’ communication with and about their students and the kinds of practices and perspectives they bring to the ESL classroom. The goal of the analysis here is to explore how most of the teachers interviewed reinforced the American Dream ideology through dominant narratives about

U.S. culture and identity that, simultaneously, othered ESL learners' cultures and identities. Only one instructor constructed her own counter-narratives to challenge some of the assumptions of the dominant narrative.

### **Reinforcing and Questioning Assimilation of (European) “American” Values**

When asked about selection of instructional materials described in the previous section and how they used them in class, the instructors interviewed both reinforced and challenged the assumptions of the dominant narrative. Some teachers, consciously or unconsciously, reinforced the dominant narratives constructed in the textbooks. For example, Hazel commented that she faced the resistance from Melissa and Florence—two of the veteran part-time instructors—when she recommended the adoption of the Stand Out series. In effect, these two instructors questioned the textbook adoption on the basis of their critique of the assimilationist narrative in the texts. As Melissa put it, “If you want to assimilate students and reinforce working and spending, then this is the series to use.” Florence also had awareness that these learning materials reinforce assimilation and that her students were trying to retain some sense of cultural identity. “I think the publishers want these immigrants to understand what it is to be an American, so they have an idea of what they’ve gotten themselves into,” Florence said. “However, the texts I’ve seen don’t seem to let you know that it’s okay to retain your culture, too.”

Later, Jody, a new lead instructor, phased out the Stand Out texts in her classroom. She started generating her own lesson plans and utilized handouts from various sources the program had in its small and dated archive. Jody also started utilizing a computer and projecting topics in the classroom that interested the students. For instance one topic that was very important to many of the ESL students in this study was

how to conduct a conversation with a teacher during a parent-teacher conference. Jody created dialogue that would simulate a conversation between a teacher and a parent and would project it on a white dry eraser board. These pedagogical issues and curricular choices, as this case shows, can become ideological tugs of war among individual instructors. But competing ideological positions between individual instructors do not seem to reach decisions made at the programmatic level. In this sense, Florence posed a question that goes to the heart of a debate in the program: should the program follow the dominant narratives or should it attempt to address the students' needs? "This is the core question I've been asking for years," Florence said. "What is our (the program's) purpose? What are our goals? Why are we in that classroom?"

### **Othering ESL Students and their Cultures**

Besides selection of instructional materials, instructors' accounts of the dynamics of classroom interactions also revealed how pedagogical issues and methods reproduce a particular social hierarchy and immigrant identity. In their accounts, instructors support the dominant narratives by othering ESL learners' cultures and character. The instructors do so by reinforcing stereotypical views of immigrants and stressing the cultural distance between immigrant students and U.S. Students of Color, on the one hand, and their perception of an "American" norm on the other side.

In the typical pattern of interaction observed in the classroom, students listened to a lecture delivered by the instructor and took notes; then some practice would take place, usually in the form of students pairing up and speaking English to each other, with some writing practice based on the lesson. Very often, students would practice English for a few minutes and then shift back to speaking in Spanish to each other. Students did not

ask questions. In interviews with instructors, I shared my observation that students tend to stay silent and not participate in class unless instructed to do so. I posed the observation as a starting point to elicit instructors' interpretations of cultural dynamics and identities. Instructors would comment to me that they wished they could get more interaction, more conversation with students during class time.

In order to encourage students to speak in English in the classroom, one instructor, Hazel, developed a project that required each student to make a solo presentation in front of the class. Students could discuss their family, work, hobby, or any other topic that they chose to develop. Each presentation was supposed to be approximately ten minutes in length, with time for questions at the end of the presentation. Students would be scheduled throughout the semester, and they would be reminded in advance of the date they were to make their presentations. Approximately a third of the students would actually make their presentations. Usually students would be absent the day they were to speak, and they usually were not asked to make up their presentation on another date. This presentation project was also assigned by another instructor in the advanced class, and it produced similar results in terms of student participation.

Two of the instructors were not aware of any moments of silence in their classrooms. The answers from these two White instructors resonated with research that indicates that it is not uncommon for members of the dominant group to be unaware of cultural nuances in the practices of marginalized groups (Moon et al, 2009; Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002; Pennington, 2007). The other three instructors' (one White

and two New Mexican Hispanic women) interpretations of silence in the classroom provided further insight into the construction of dominant narratives in the ESL setting.

One of the instructors, Jody, said the following as an initial response to the question about silence in the classroom:

For some I think there is a fear, like ‘Oh that’s a lot’ ... I’m always like ‘What are you waiting for? Like, you need to get in groups and start working.’ And you’re right – they do just sit there... Like, well that’s a dumb activity. With the American classes, when the students sort of sit there like ‘Okay I’m supposed to do that but I don’t want to get up.’ It’s because they’re not interested in doing it. So that would be one obvious reading of why they’re doing that.

This response indicates a form of othering ESL students in that, while stressing similarities between ESL and non-ESL students when it comes to apathy in the classroom, ESL students are clearly labeled as not “American.” That label is reserved for non-ESL students, whose behavior is clearly intelligible to the instructor and becomes the sole referent in the teacher’s explanation of ESL students’ silence in the classroom.

Evidently, the cultural distance felt by the instructor led her to use “American” students as the normative group by which to interpret the unintelligible practices of ESL students.

Yet, the same instructor made other references to her “American” classes in ways that further complicate the othering and hierarchization of students on the basis of class and race. She referred to her experience teaching GED courses to U.S. Americans. In this instance, “American” becomes a code word for U.S. Students of Color, a group that also ends up being othered in the narrative. Her discussion centered on a comparison between teaching U.S. Americans and teaching immigrant students. She recalled a conversation in

which a former supervisor stated that immigrant students are easier to work with and achieve higher grades just because they are immigrants. According to her, the same supervisor denied her credit for the challenges of teaching U.S. Students of Color who “had a series of failures in their lives from various other social issues.” The instructor’s perceptions of U.S. Students of Color were indeed marked by the othering of this group in terms of class and racial differences. But this othering operated primarily through code words that point out individual “failures” and flaws in character rather than histories of class, racial, or gender oppression. In another instance, she referred to her choice of specializing in ESL rather than Adult Education for U.S. Americans in these terms:

...but I thought, well, if I get the master’s in adult education I am going to be with the Americans that the other teachers are teaching, and they (the students) didn’t look like a nice group to work with. They (the students) would only show up on the days when they were issued their bus passes. Many were mandated there by the state. I had heard stories you know about the welfare reform and how the rolls were just filled...

When asked whether immigrant students were harder working than “American” students, she said she was not sure. To point out her difficulties with both categories of non-White students, “American” Students of Color and ESL learners, she described her experiences teaching two GED classes to U.S. American students:

When I got my class list, there were 22 students. Within the first week, I had six and now I have three. Six total, whoever showed their faces and only three have made it to the end. Still they have excuses to leave early or come late. Sometimes I only have two. I had one on Monday. Out of a group of 22 people, so that may

be an indication... I taught another GED class at XXX a year or so ago. I really disliked teaching that group. I had students who were very kind of... they would sort of blame me. They would say, 'Why is it like that? What do you mean when I have to multiply I have to do this? That's stupid.' You know they tried to set me up as some sort of authority who was imposing my will on them.

Jody resented being seen as an authoritarian figure, but it was also apparent that she was uncomfortable with racial and class differences, as these passages suggest:

There was one kid with the teardrop tattoos talking about his gang involvement and his family gang involvement being in prison since he was 13, in and out. He says, 'Well I don't know if you high class people can understand blah blah blah.' I've been very aware in working in adult education of my class status. My dad has a PhD. We weren't always upper middle class but probably now we're upper middle class. And just the speech I use. So one thing I kind of like about Spanish and I've always liked is that it's harder to read me. I'm a different person and you can't judge me, but when I get with the American students I feel them judging me...

There was an older gentleman, an African American gentleman, and he would also say, 'Why is it like this? I don't get that?' And I would try and tell them that I had to jump through these same hoops to learn this too and I had to...but, but...I don't know that I did because you know I probably came to school with like the studies with a much larger vocabulary. The students, this summer, I'm teaching 'an' versus 'a.' Well, I didn't have to learn that. *This is an apple* – you know I just

speak the right dialect of English (from home). So with the Americans there is this issue of class status, I think, frequently.

Evidently, while the cultural distance in terms of language and cultural norms may be shorter between the instructor and her U.S. working class Students of Color due to the assumption of a shared “American” identity, racial and class differences soon shatter such assumption. Students of Color, unlike ESL students, are able to “read” the instructor’s class and racial status and to question her privilege. This makes her uncomfortable and feeling “judged” as a person. Jody’s claim echoes a concept practiced by the dominant group termed “reverse discrimination.” Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define reversed discrimination as “discrimination aimed at the majority group” (p. 154). Bonilla-Silva (2001) has argued that Whites use it as a form of defense to uphold their dominant beliefs. “Shielded by colorblindness, whites can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of ‘reverse racism’” (p. 4) when they are the ones criticized or dissected by a member of a racial minority group. It is also important to note that Jody is careful not to discuss race as a possible factor in explaining the conflict with her American students. In this case, she attributed the conflict to “class status,” which, as Bonilla-Silva has explained in her theorizing, allows her to be colorblind.

    In contrast, when trying to explain ESL students’ lack of active engagement in classroom activities, the instructor’s tone shifted to one of empathy and understanding of ESL student *testimonios*:

    It’s gotten better but there have been times, or weeks even, where I feel like everybody is kind of like (the instructor pulled her shoulders down and used her

body to show a person who is depressed). Just kind of sort of feeling defeated, sort of disinterested, unhappy, not a lot of confidence. And I'll hear from the students...this one student who doesn't understand directions very well, she's been doing so much better. Her father passed away. He was really sick and she couldn't visit him because she's undocumented. Or I'll hear two of my family members were kidnapped. Two students told me their family members had been kidnapped.

At this point, closer attention to particular cultural differences was part of the instructor's response. However, empathy does not preclude the othering of these students. In fact, this instructor transitioned back into a dominant narrative as she attributed students' lack of participation with interpersonal conflict among them:

I had heard from one of the students [...] that when I was absent and Florence was teaching both classes at once the students got into a disagreement about a particular grammatical item. They were rude to each other about it. When I came back, nobody told me this, but I noticed that they really wanted to know the answer to a particular question, and they exchanged a lot of looks after I gave them the answer. Some people felt like they were winners and some people felt like they were losers as a result of that particular question being answered. Some of them dislike each other intensely, the ones in my class – I think.

What was interesting about Jody's response was her assumption about ESL students' intelligence. Rather than being curious or inquisitive about the nature of the "grammatical item" that caused debate among students, she refers to rumors about interpersonal conflicts as the main cause of conflict. Instead of considering the conflict an opportunity

to explore students' interest in an intellectual debate about language or ideas, she denies ESL students that dimension of selves. They are othered as less than capable of debating matters beyond their personal differences. This is another example of the traditional pedagogical model that, according to Rendón (2009), assumes the underserved student has deficits that are insurmountable and therefore discussion of complex issues and active debate is not possible among ESL learners, that the instructor must be detached from the students, and that the student's voice is unimportant in the classroom. If a culturally relevant pedagogical approach were to be used, according to Rendón, students' cultures and life experiences could help foster learning and could lead to student development of self-confidence and a voice in the classroom.

When asked about cultural values and norms of the United States that, in her view, were the most important for ESL students to understand, Jody reverted to the dominant narrative about learning the "American" work ethic:

[Chuckles] I don't spend a lot of time thinking about that. It's a huge issue really.

I wonder...you know what's important to me as a teacher...is you come on time. I know that sounds crazy but when I got there those students were not coming, and Melissa and Florence seemed cool with that. That's just the way this is. That pissed me off. We're going to waste our time here?

Therefore, after becoming the head teacher, Jody changed the attendance policy. The program's budget can only accommodate a certain number of students per class on an annual basis. Classes had grown to the point that there were waiting lists. Jody then allowed three unexcused absences before a student was withdrawn from the class and

was replaced by someone on the waiting list. She also insisted that students show up on time and that classes start on time.

I did do that for a while, especially when the classes were more full. I came down much harder in the GED in Spanish because I had like up to 30 students there who wanted to take the class with me. So I whipped them into shape and then I sort of slacked off with it... It's not a big deal. XXX school has rules like this, but I got initially an attitude from Florence and Melissa like 'Oh that's so heartless and these poor students, their poverty and their domestic abuse and this and that. You can't possibly expect them to be here on time.'...What about other people whose lives are also very hard who are on the waiting list? Those people should also be given an opportunity... But punctuality, that is a great American value. I don't know where you're going to get in the way of jobs if you're not punctual. You're not going to be able to hold a job at McDonald's if you're not punctual. You're going to get in trouble with the school if you drop your kids off late or don't come and pick them up on time...

Here, the othering of ESL students and U.S. Students of Color begin to overlap, as the instructor maintained a clear separation between both groups and her own set of values. She positions herself as a White, middle-class woman whose liberal sense of "fairness" and "opportunity" upholds the faith in U.S. meritocracy. Interesting to note here is also her reference to a position in McDonald's as an example of the type of employment ESL students should aspire to; this in line with the dominant narrative in the ESL mission statement. Jody's emphasis on punctuality is also another reference to the work ethic of

the American Dream ideology; she helps perpetuate the myth that U.S. American workers are consistently punctual.

She also acknowledged her identity position when she admitted:

[S]o these values I'm sharing with I suppose are values I hold so deeply as American that I just react instinctively when students break them. It's not exactly a well-considered plan. But I've noticed well when I was in Mexico and I've noticed with Mexicans here there is also quite a bit of racism there.

Two important shifts in the discourse are evident here. When making reference to herself, Jody used the term "American" to identify a particular set of values she holds "instinctively" and that are very different from the values attributed to her "American" Students of Color. I would argue that her usage of the term "American" in this passage revealed her ideal of what it is to be truly an American: hard working, punctual, and colorblind. Thus, a second important shift is the acknowledgment of racism, that is, of the fact that her readings can be interpreted as racist toward Mexican ESL students. Faced with her own transgression of the colorblind ideology, the instructor opted for projecting the racism onto the Mexican ESL students. Racism is thus something that is not exclusive to the White, dominant group in the United States:

So when I've had mixed classes of students, they (Mexicans) like to talk about *los chinitos* (the Chinese in Spanish), which are anyone from Asia, you know. I just broke down in Spanish, and I said: 'listen, we call them Asians. Look, this student is from Cuba. Would she like it if she was called a Mexican? No. She's not Mexican. She's Cuban. So you use either the nationality or ...' And why I thought

that was so important? Because I think, well, you're an oppressed minority. Are you really going to oppress other minorities?

Recounting this exchange allowed Jody to re-gain her identity position as a White American who does not practice nor encourage racism. This allows her to reassert a position of moral and political superiority as an "American" who can "teach" Mexican immigrants about oppression and racism and how not to be racist. Her position upholds a liberal view of the United States as a colorblind meritocracy that is progressive or ahead of other countries in addressing discrimination and racism. When I pointed out that the term "Asian" is similar to "*los chinitos*" in the sense that it lumps together very diverse groups of people, she responded:

Good point, you're right. But we've gone through a whole process by which we've determined that's the appropriate phrase, right? We've probably...50 years ago it was *Chinese*, then it became *oriental*, now it's *Asian*.

Jody's perspective on racism in Mexico and the U.S. enacts the position put forth by conservatives and liberals that racism in the U.S. has ended. Macedo and Gounari (2006), in their book *The Globalization of Racism*, have argued that such notion is based on the dehistoricization of racism. "Through this dehistoricizing, racism is often disarticulated from politics [...] Individuals who embrace a dehistoricization process in their treatment of racism fail to recognize that racism is always historically specific and that it manifests itself differently in terms of geographical, cultural, ideological and material location" (p. 3). Rather than placing racism in their particular historical contexts, some White people use color-blindness as a "means to ignore racism and aggressively assert a meritocratic argument that bolsters unexamined White privilege"

while other White people equate seeing race with racism, and thus “color-blindness is an attempt to not be racist” (Bell, 2003, p. 23). By othering her students, Jody was in fact asserting her ability and privilege to be color-blind. This is evident in her statement that “we,” meaning White “Americans,” had “determined” the “appropriate” or “politically correct” labels to eliminate the racist labels used in the past for Asian Americans. One may argue that this case illustrates how political correctness can be another identity marker that keeps White privilege firmly embedded in dominant perceptions of the U.S. American culture.

When asked how she interpreted moments of silence in the ESL classroom, the third instructor, Veronica, reproduced the othering of ESL learners based on a perception that life predicaments do not allow them to focus and commit fully to their studies. In this instance, she focused in particular on gender relations among immigrant people of color as a form of a cultural barrier to learning that ends up othering ESL women learners as passive, disempowered women due to their cultural backgrounds:

When they leave that classroom, their life goes off in another direction. They’ve got to worry about the kids, the food, and everything else. This is a matriarchal society we’re talking about. The women run the show. The man just brings home the money and that’s it. . . First it’s the husband, then the house, then the kids, but they are right at the bottom of the hierarchy. They do all the cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bill paying, but there’s nothing for them. It’s that hierarchy. And what’s for them, it’s at the bottom of the list. Sometimes in class, they get to talking about shopping, and they’ll say ‘Oh, I haven’t bought shoes in years, and new ones, forget it.’ Because it’s all for the husband and kids. It’s a subservient

life. So I think that's why the silence. 'They (the instructors) want me to do this? Yeah, right.'

Unaware of the contradiction in her use of the word "matriarchal society" and of the ways in which she stereotyped her students' cultures, this instructor presented yet another interesting cultural and racial dynamic affecting interactions in the ESL setting. Veronica is a native New Mexican who emphasized her Spanish heritage when talking about herself. She is part of the tri-racial social structure in New Mexico, as she is a member of the middle-class Hispanic culture that identifies more closely with White, middle-class, mainstream dominant culture than with Mexican immigrant cultures. Her perspective stressed the sense of otherness and cultural distance that separates her from her Mexican immigrant students, while overlooking the fact that that both immigrant and U.S. women share the predicament of living under patriarchal systems of power. This instructor had roots that go back several generations in New Mexico and talked of having ancestors from Spain. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) have discussed this form of identification with European ancestry as one of the strategies of Whiteness. Allen (2001) put it in these terms: "The 500-year history of European imperialism has transformed European 'ethnics' into a visible, global community through the invention of the white race" (p. 477).

When asked if there was discrimination in the local communities toward people who could not speak English or could not speak it fluently, her response ascribed immigrant and U.S. identities in terms that reinforced the dominant narratives:

I'm sure there is. And people who are not competitive feel it more than those who are competitive. What happens is people who are more sensitive, they stay

home, and let family members take care of the business. Then they come to school to try and learn the language. Sometimes they're not consistent with their classroom attendance, and they suffer. Then you see them the following year. They realize if they want to blend in, if they want to survive and grow in the American culture, then they have to learn the language.

Veronica's perspective reasserts the dominant narratives about how individuals who are "competitive" find success in the United States, and the notion that speaking English ensures that individuals will "survive" and "grow" in the "American culture." In her view, ESL adult learners are among those who are not "competitive" enough to "take care of business" and are thus affected more by discrimination. When asked to clarify what she meant by "competitive" immigrants, she said:

I see competitive people willing to take that chance. They're like pioneers; they're very spontaneous. I am surprised at how many families go out on the highway on little vacations to go see loved ones. They're fearless. They say, 'When we get there, we'll see.' They have this can-do attitude... Meaning that they are straightforward. They're not afraid of the word 'no.' They get in there and find a way to make it work. That's what I mean about that pioneer spirit; 'no' is not an option. We are just going to move forward, sometimes rolling, sometimes dragging or running, but we are going to move forward.

That "can-do attitude" as a desirable trait in immigrants reinforces the dominant narrative that portrays the U.S. as a leveled field where those with the right attitude, particularly European Americans in positions of dominance, have succeeded. But instead of the image of a leveled field, the instructor described U.S. meritocracy as a circle:

I believe we are all in a circle, and we move about constantly, learning and adapting. We have to absorb all that's around us, and sometimes we skip a few places and end up higher in the circle. But there's no beginning or end. It's just where you end up in the circle. And that all depends on your capacity for knowledge, and how much you want to get ahead.

Veronica's use of the language is revealing. Reid and Ng (1999) discussed how those in positions of privilege use language to keep power. One approach is to use terms that depoliticize power and sound race neutral by creating social categorizations (pioneers, competitive, sensitive) and stereotypes. Veronica sounds race neutral but is really not. She refers to immigrants who, to her "surprise," mirror the White American "pioneer spirit" as the people who get things done, grab their bootstraps and start pulling ahead as the good immigrants who have the perceived U.S. "American" work ethic. These "pioneers" have that individual character, virtue and the ability to work hard, those elements needed for success in achieving the American Dream (Hochschild, 1995).

In one instance when she did refer to immigration dynamics of different racial groups, her perspective led to the reassertion of the individualist pursuit of success in the American Dream. Referring to the views of politicians in the immigration debate, she made a contrast between the experience of European American immigrants in the past and the dynamics of cultural assimilation in the contemporary U.S. society:

A lot of these politicians and other people are much older. They remember when the Irish, Italians, and others came over. They just learned everything on their own. They had that mentality. But those people are from a different era. It's not that way now. This is a high-tech society that is materialistic, and when there

aren't enough jobs, people will do whatever they have to do to get one. Some will come to school and try to do it the right way, and others will just steal and rob. Then there are those few entrepreneurs who just find a way to make it happen. When I worked in Gallup in the Welfare to Work program, our Indian population only wanted to be entrepreneurs. They didn't want to work for anybody. 'Just let us make our pottery and rugs and jewelry, and we'll make our own money.' And to this day, that's how that works. They have roadside businesses.

Veronica was also convinced that ESL students can become proficient in English within one year, two at the most, if they will truly apply themselves and become completely immersed in speaking nothing but English at home, in public, and in the classroom. Her observations repeat the view that speaking English is the means to acquire "American" values and to achieve the American Dream.

As their perspectives show, Veronica and Jody both have a strong belief in the notion of a work ethic as an essential component of being American, and that without adopting the American Dream tenets of hard work, character, and virtue, immigrants will have difficulty in knowing any kind of success in the United States. From this view, success is the result of one's individual character and abilities that is under one's control. By believing in the American Dream and committing to learning English, an ESL student can transform, assimilate, and understand the U.S. American work ethic.

One of the seasoned instructors, Melissa, did not share this dominant perspective and articulated her views from a differentiated U.S. identity position and counter-narrative as "Chicana": "I actually do have (Spanish) ancestry... I'm only second generation born here, but I consider myself Chicana because of the culture. I was raised

in the Chicana culture: the music, the food, the religion, the beliefs.” In her *testimonio*, she recalled the understanding that the term “Hispanic” was not used until the Reagan Administration, and until that point common terms for a “Spanish” ethnic reference were either Chicano or Latino. She was part of a generation of New Mexicans who in the 1950s was discouraged from speaking Spanish in school. In fact, it was forbidden to speak Spanish; thus, Melissa understands marginalization within the dominant U.S. culture and offers a politicized account:

I cannot tell you the number of times I had to write on the blackboard ‘I will not Speak Spanish in the classroom.’ Over and over and over. So I did lose a lot of it (the Spanish language). I was what you would call maybe passive bilingual, because I understood maybe the main ideas of things, but if they got into more complicated concepts, then I couldn’t follow along.

By the time Melissa went to college, she had lost her ability to speak Spanish. “On a whim I took a Spanish class, and I thought, ‘Aah, I’m home,’” she said. “So I started taking Chicano literature classes, and discovered more about the way my grandparents were, how my parents behaved in the classroom.” She completed a Ph.D. in Spanish with emphasis on Latin American literature.

In contrast to Jody, Melissa said she had noticed that students in her classes can show biases, but their actions did not bother her the way that they bothered Jody. Rather than othering ESL students, she compared their behavior to that of U.S. students learning Spanish. Referring to ESL students who make fun of classmates because of the way they pronounce words in English, she said she had noticed the same type of behavior in her college-level Spanish courses when she was a student:

They would poke each other and say ‘she can’t say blah blah...’ Especially in graduate school; there’s so much competition. [...] So I was a real...talk about being a beginner in Spanish. I don’t think I had read a novel through completely in Spanish yet, so I was always playing catch-up, and they were really mean to each other. Not just to me, but to everybody else.

She said that many of her students “realize that even after a couple of years they are not going to know a whole lot.” But at least “they can understand what the teacher is trying to tell them.”

Melissa had more realistic expectations of ESL students than did Veronica. Studies indicate that it takes several years to become fluent in a language. This is based on the 10,000-hour rule discussed by Ericsson, et. al. (2007) and Eaton (2012). The typical pattern of study of a new subject is 1,000 hours per year, and thus 10 years to reach mastery of a skill, such as a new language. Veronica’s perspective embodies the ideology that two years of studying hard, of developing that U.S. American work ethic, is all that is really needed to master the English language. However sometimes hard work is not enough to achieve success, and studying a language intensely does not mean it can be mastered in a short span of time.

In contrast to the other instructors, Melissa showed more concern about racial situations her immigrant students confront in community settings. Her accounts showed that Melissa had earned the trust of beginning students who told her about their experiences of discrimination:

Even in rural New Mexico, where you hear so much Spanish, some of my students tell me they go through some pretty embarrassing incidents, when

nobody will even try to understand what they need, and just say ‘Oh, you don’t speak English,’ and go on. There’s a lot of racism and prejudice here, which surprised me a lot. [...] One of my students told me about an incident where she took her child to the doctor once, and spoke only limited English. She felt he had a urinary tract infection since he complained of pain on urination. She didn’t know how to say ‘urinate,’ so she pointed to him, and said ‘pee pee infección,’ and they sent her away, saying ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about.’ Anybody would know what you were talking about if you could say it that close. So they (the students) feel very discriminated against.

Melissa’s *testimonio* also indicated that she had lived in New Mexican towns that are predominantly White and racist, but that she had not seen any real difference in other rural areas of New Mexico that have a predominantly Latino/Chicano population. Her observations indicated just how embedded the dominant narratives are throughout New Mexico. Thus, her counter-narrative did offer alternative views in that it presented a politicized and racialized view of unequal power relations among racial groups (White, Chicano) within the U.S. Her narrative thus challenged the colorblind, egalitarian view of the nation under the American Dream ideology. Furthermore, this instructor did not reproduce the othering of immigrant and U.S. Students of Color that was constructed in the accounts of other teachers interviewed.

In the next section, I will address how ESL students reproduced these dominant narratives, as well as how they crafted their counter-narratives or *testimonios*.

## **Dominant Narratives and Counter-Narratives among ESL Learners**

This section presents an analysis of the perspectives offered by students in focus groups to highlight how their understandings of ESL learning and U.S. culture and identity tend to both reproduce the dominant narratives salient in ESL instructional materials and in the instructors' perspectives. Some of their accounts reinforced the narrative that links English language learning to successful incorporation of immigrants into the U.S. workforce, and to notions of hard work, individual success, and upward mobility in the U.S. society. Yet, as the analysis presented below shows, the reproduction of the dominant narrative is at times partial, as ESL learners offered views that complicated and challenged the tenets of the American Dream ideology. In some instances, students did offer *testimonios* that directly challenged the dominant narratives about U.S. meritocracy based on individual effort, equal opportunity, individual freedom, and colorblindness.

### **Learning English and Upward Mobility in the Workplace**

ESL students in focus groups addressed the relation between language learning and career plans. The majority of these students said that one of the motivations — although not the only one nor the primary motivation in most students — was to develop their English-language skills or to advance career objectives. Among them, one young couple from Spain, Adan and Paloma, said they were trying to become proficient in several languages, especially English, because without an understanding of English it would be difficult to have a viable career in Europe. They were planning to travel throughout the world, which included a stay in China, before returning to Spain and pursue their careers. Both of them had college degrees, and they studied English in

college and in high school in Spain. They felt it was necessary to have a command of English in order to have a career that provides any upward mobility. The case of Adan and Paloma may not be typical in ESL in that they were White Europeans who obviously had some racial, class, and cultural capital that many working class Mexican immigrants do not have. Yet, they felt on the margins of the U.S. mainstream society because they had not mastered the English language.

Another couple, originally from Mexico, had moved to New Mexico from California with career goals in mind, as well. The wife, Adalina, had just obtained her GED and was enrolled in college courses. She planned to complete a bachelor's degree and work with young children as a teacher's aide. Her husband, Reynaldo, was developing job skills that would allow him to work in an office setting. He had suffered back injuries while working in construction and needed to change careers due to health issues.

Elisa, also from Mexico, had plans similar to those of Adalina. She was pursuing a GED and then wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree and pursue a career. Elisa has only studied English for a short time and only through the ESL program. With them, an East African woman who spoke six languages, Yasmina, wanted to become more fluent in English. She studied English in her native country, Burundi, before moving to the United States. She had married a man from New Mexico and wanted to pursue a position in elder care work.

All of them agreed that having a command of the English language is important in order to have any type of a career:

Adan: I need English for work. Anywhere, pretty much Europe, we need English for everything. So my English is important part of my life right now.

Paloma: Yeah, for me, it would be pretty much the same, to be able to communicate with everyone where I go in the world, and for working as well. Most of the things now are in English. If you want to work in an international company or something you need to be able to communicate with English.

Yasmina: In my country if you travel and go to Kenya, they speak English. Go to Uganda, go to Tanzania, they speak English. Well they speak British English. So when we try to go into business you must learn English [...] We have a business, and in Kenya the economy is very good. Tanzania also the economy is very good. Uganda. They speak only English.

While partially reinforcing the view that English-language learning is linked to a smooth and positive incorporation into the workforce and upward mobility, the views of these ESL students lacked emphasis on U.S. national culture as a meritocracy or to notions of an “American” work ethic. For some of them, learning English was associated more closely with the dynamics of globalization and political economy of the English language around the world rather than the U.S. national character. As Yasmina stated:

In Uganda and Tanzania they speak only English. Only in Burundi do we speak French. Our economy is not good. It's expensive when you want to learn English in my country (Burundi), to take class. So I go to Kenya to learn because I was there to make business, so I must learn English. But they (Kenyans) speak British, not American (English).

For them, English has become an international language for conducting business. By learning English, these students believe they can change their lives economically because they feel they will be able to have more lucrative careers. For others, learning English was a path to a career serving other immigrants rather than to assimilation into the dominant institutions in the English-speaking population, as in the case of Regina: “For me it is very important because I want to get one career, for example, the assistant to the teacher for the bilingual.”

Although their narratives were not couched in the ideals of pursuing the American Dream, their end goals of achieving upward mobility resonated with the ideology of the American Dream. I would argue that the narrative of mastering English is the pathway to a successful career has now spread globally to signify something broader than the pursuit of an “American” Dream. Also to note is that in the ESL student narratives, a variety of career options was mentioned, not just the entry-level positions emphasized in the ESL mission statements discussed above.

### **Asserting and Questioning the Dominant Narrative about U.S. Cultural Identity**

Focus group participants also made comments that indicated how they both questioned and reproduced some of the beliefs perpetuated in the dominant narrative about U.S. American culture and identity. For instance, Paloma and Adan spurred a discussion of U.S. identity when they questioned the reason why the United States has so many laws and rules regulating people’s lives, all justified on the bases of safety and security.

Paloma: I think here everything has to be very controlled.

Moderator: The rhetoric about America is that it is the country of freedom.

Adan: For us, it's just the country of the opposite.

Paloma: It's part of the culture, to be sure that you are safe. Come on, I'm safe.

You need to do nothing to know that I am safe.

Adan: I'm already safe so...

Their experiences and perspectives as Spaniards provided a counter-narrative to the dominant belief that the United States is the beacon of individual freedom.

But Yasmina had a different perspective about the United States, one that enacted the dominant narrative. Reacting to Paloma and Adan, and comparing the United States with her native country, Burundi, she said:

We don't have these traffic lights (She described traffic cops with whistles in her country). So, stop, stop, stop. Maybe you are late somewhere when you take a taxi. So when you say here they have control, I like it because here we are safe, not like to be doing what they want. Here, they have good economy and how do you say it? Proud. Americans are proud of what they are doing because when you go everywhere, it's good, it's good.

Yasmina's perspective that "Americans" should be proud of what they are doing reflects a pride usually shown by members of the dominant group and others who share the hegemonic view of the United States as an exemplar of democracy and freedom. The same student later made comments regarding her dislike of U.S. African Americans, suggesting that those "proud Americans" she mentioned in the quotation above are in fact White Americans. Referring to U.S. African Americans, she said: "I do not understand them ... Why don't they speak English? And I do not like how they treat me."

The conversation shifted gears from Yasmina's perceptions about U.S. African Americans when Adalina and Reynaldo expressed their positive views about the justice system in the United States in a debate with Adan and Paloma:

Adalina: Well at least this country is trying to be honest because we are talking yesterday after class regarding working with children or working with old people. I mean, in here I am working as a caregiver. They check our background. They have to take our fingerprints and send them to the FBI to make sure I have no criminal record. So it's the same thing to work with children – they pay too much attention to that, but I mean checking the papers and to clear, to make sure everything's good. So I don't know if it's good or not, but I think it's good.

Adan: We were talking yesterday about that. If you've been criminal and you went to the jail, uh, maybe when you go out, you just finish your sentence, you are still having a life.

Adalina: But the record is still there.

Adan: Yeah, but the record, someone puts the record because you were selling drugs or you were doing something bad, but you still have a life. Maybe you go to the jail. What is the reason to go to the jail? The jail it means, for us, maybe you are going to the jail to learn, to don't do it again, but after that you still have more life.

Paloma: How many opportunities you have here, is nothing. Also what is it to be a criminal here?

Adan: Criminal is what? To be a killer?

I then explained to the focus group that criminal background checks are conducted on people who want to work with children to make sure these people have not harmed or molested children. I also explained that the U.S. penal system is punitive in nature since people who are sentenced to prison are there to pay for their crimes. There is no real emphasis on rehabilitation within the penal system. I explained that at one point in U.S. history people in jail could continue their education and try to learn job skills but that rehabilitation was no longer an institutional priority in the U.S. judicial system.

Adan and Paloma: The system is not made properly.

Reynaldo: It's really hard to believe, but some people like to be in jail all the time. They have three meals...they don't have to pay rent.

Adalina: So when they go out, it's hard for them to start a new life out there, so they prefer to...they do something to go back to jail.

At this point, Reynaldo and Adalina's line of reasoning interjects Paloma and Adan's counter-narrative to reproduce, indirectly, some of the tenets of the American Dream ideology. According to this ideology, people who do not work hard lack character and virtue. Criminals are examples of lazy characters and are losers who lack the "American" virtue. Faced with Adan and Adalina's counterarguments, Reynaldo held on to the dominant narrative of hard work as a measure of virtue or rehabilitation:

Adan: You are judging them (convicts and ex-convicts) because you're thinking that they do something wrong, but maybe you don't have to judge anyone. I mean, we don't have to judge the people who come from the jails. Maybe the problem is the system.

Adalina: But it's hard to start a new life out there.

Adan: Yeah, you say, they become institutionalized. That means the system is like this, so how you judging them? You don't have to do that. So maybe you should change something about the system.

Reynaldo: Maybe if they try to use, to do the jail time, while they working and doing something in jail.

In reaction to Adan and Paloma's counter-narratives about U.S. culture, Adalina, Reynaldo, and Yasmina adopted parts of the dominant narratives about hard work linked to ethics and virtues in the U.S. society. It is important to note that Adalina and Reynaldo had developed an advanced proficiency in English and were pursuing educational goals that placed them in frequent interaction with the dominant groups in society. Yasmina, married to a U.S. citizen, was also expected to be in closer cultural proximity to dominant narratives. Their positionalities at the intersection of ethnicity, race, language, citizenship, and class status certainly creates more proximity to the dominant culture.

The characterization of a U.S. American work ethic as a strength is an obsession in the dominant group's narratives. There is an annual survey released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics titled "American Time Use Survey." It breaks down how many daily hours on average that people in the United States work. Categories of reporting include gender and employed vs. self-employed. Besides metering labor, the study reviews leisure hours of anyone 15 years of age or older. Statistics are also kept regarding gender and three races: White, Black and Hispanic (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Laura Stack, a productivity expert, commented about the "strength of the American work ethic" in a column she contributed to the HR Certification Institute website. "Clearly, American workers remain motivated, or we wouldn't be working so much, and we know from other

studies that we really do produce like mad” (2013). Producing “like mad” has become so embedded in the U.S. American culture that it is even applied to the penal system. The dominant narrative that focuses on the work ethic is so much a part of the fabric of the U.S. social culture that it permeates every corner of this cultural cloth, even to the point that those incarcerated are seen as getting a free ride. Even co-cultured members, such as Reynaldo and Adalina, can participate in the perpetuation of the narrative.

In light of co-cultural theory, one may argue that these ESL learners are assimilating the dominant perspective though they are co-cultural group members. Orbe (1998a&b) and Perry (2006) noted that co-cultured group members will do this as a way of coping when interacting with members of the dominant group, and that some co-cultured individuals will actually adopt and believe the dominant narratives. Specifically Orbe argued that there is a co-cultural communicative practice that involves embracing stereotypes where “co-cultural groups undertake a negotiated reading of cultural stereotypes by which they adopt the dominant ideology [and] [...] selectively apply it in specific cases” (p. 66). Hall (1996) referred to this as “cultural hegemony” that is employed by the dominant group in creating the concept of a national state. CRT scholars also discuss how members of marginalized and racialized groups will adopt attitudes and perspectives of the dominant group. Ifedi (2010) discussed a new approach to racialized discourse to rehash the old binary of dominant vs. non-dominant groups. Ifedi proposed the importance of examining “intra-group differences” and “internal racisms” to argue that internal differences exist within racially categorized groups (p. 3).

## **Speaking English as a Means to Cope with (European) “American” Discrimination**

The majority of the students in the research project had studied English for less than two years and only studied English through the ESL program. In this sense, they have been exposed to the dominant narrative as constructed in textbooks and classroom interactions. However, their *testimonios* did not center on the narrative of ESL as a pathway to a job and to the assimilation of a U.S. work ethic and (European) “American” cultural values. Instead, a majority of students said they wanted to acquire English-speaking skills in order to communicate effectively in everyday settings and interactions, especially in encounters with members of the U.S. dominant culture where situations of discrimination, racism, or conflict occur. These students were very aware of how the dominant groups in the United States, both White and Hispanics in New Mexico, use English-language competency as a criterion to project varying degrees of tolerance or hostility toward immigrants, and to judge whether immigrants have the right attitudes and potential to assimilate the “American” culture and achieve the American Dream.

Among most of the students interviewed, learning English in order to obtain U.S. citizenship was not the primary goal. Only one of the students in the intermediate course, Gabriela, was studying English with the primary goals of obtaining citizenship and developing a career. Yet, her *testimonio* makes evident that she was not pursuing assimilation of “American” values but learning English as a way of coping with discrimination against immigrants who are not English proficient. Gabriela had worked for a hotel, and she felt she was discriminated against in her workplace. In her own words: “because I’m not talking English very well in my position, I’m taking another job; but in my mind, I’m taking it for discrimination.” Gabriela said she was forced to take

another position at the hotel because she did not have a good command of the English language. That was one reason why she was studying English. But she had a far more compelling reason. Gabriela had been jailed twice by local police who thought that she was an illegal immigrant. This despite the fact that she and her family had lived legally in New Mexico for a decade. In both arrests, because of her lack of English-speaking skills, the police took her to jail where she was considered for deportation.

During a focus group, Gabriela's *testimonio* about the incidents elicited the supportive reaction of a classmate:

Gabriela: He (the policeman) take me and put me in jail because I could not speak English. He said I was a wetback.

Luisa: He called you a wetback?

Gabriela: Yeah.

Luisa: Ahh! [with a tone of disbelief and disgust]

Moderator: Was that here?

Gabriela: It was here but translate (she meant transferred) to [another county].

And my family doesn't know it's me. Nobody talked to me and I needed to call my family. They (the police) said you have no rights.

Moderator: Does your family live in the other county?

Gabriela: No, here. So the police transfer me to [there]. I am staying one month in jail.

Finally one of the sergeants at the facility loaned Gabriela a cell phone. She called her family, and her husband started visiting her. She was imprisoned for a full month because it took her husband a few weeks to obtain the proper paperwork to get her released. In

order to buy toiletries to clean herself, Gabriela cleaned the jail cells. She said she received just enough money for soap.

That arrest had occurred three years prior to our interview. “And the same police take me another time,” Gabriela continued. “I was taken to jail again.” This time she was imprisoned in the local county jail and not transferred somewhere else:

And immigration put a hold for me because the sergeant or the police says I’m  
mmmm a wetback. And I stayed over there for two weeks. And my family put a  
lawyer...because it’s not true. And I fight in court because I have the papers and  
uh the lawyer says it’s not right.

Gabriela’s *testimonio* was the most dramatic of any of the participants regarding encounters with the dominant group. Her story is an example of a counter-narrative that shreds the dominant narratives about U.S. meritocracy, virtuosity of hard work, and color-blindness. Despite being a hard working woman, her lack of proficiency in English made her the target of local police authorities who wrongly assumed she was an undocumented immigrant and took her to jail not once but twice. Gabriela experienced how unequal power relations affect working-class, Spanish-speaking immigrants in the “land of the free.” Her counter-narrative is also revealing in that her pattern of speech is also an example of Reid and Ng’s (1999) discussion on language and power. They have observed that low-powered language employed by marginalized people includes hesitations and pauses, of lacking any sense of assertiveness. Gabriela was very careful in how she presented her *testimonio* and made use of frequent pauses in presenting her account of what happened to her. In contrast, according to Reid and Ng, members of the

dominant group make use of high-powered language that does not employ forms of hesitation or pauses.

In addition to law enforcement, another institutional setting where students said they experienced discrimination was in hospitals, schools, spaces for recreation, banks, and retail stores. Participants in every focus group discussed the length of time it takes before a translator is provided, whether it is in a public setting or with customer service on the telephone. Area hospitals are supposed to provide translators for patients, but often these translators take hours to arrive. In general, hospitals are understaffed when it comes to translators. As one participant said, after waiting a long time, “I never asked again for someone who could speak Spanish. You just waste your time.”

Students in focus groups also discussed the need to learn English in order to communicate effectively and avoid marginalization in their children’s school system, recreational sites, stores, and other public settings. For example, Selena and Verónica were particularly concerned about interactions with teachers. Another student, Regina, was not only concerned with school settings but also with other settings where his son was active:

Because now I understand better, now when I go in for my children in the day visit, I understand. When I come to the United States, sometime I need to translator. And the person would say, ‘Do you need the translator?’ Yes, I need the translator. And I would need to wait a long time for the translator. It’s very frustrating... For me it is very important for me to learn English because every day I need to speak English. For example, my son: he plays baseball and the people only speak English. Sometimes, it is difficult for me to understand because

they have all their pronunciation, and they have all their vocabulary. For instance I learn the standard English but sometimes the Americans don't speak ... cómo se dice ... um ... because we learn the standard vocabulary in English ... It's the same in Spanish. You study standard Spanish but the vocabulary of the people is not the same.

Members of one of the focus groups expressed how frustrating a public setting can be, and how insensitive English-speaking people can be. Several participants discussed their beliefs that a better command of English would help them blend into public settings:

Daniela: Mostly in the store, and you're going to pay, the uh...No, not the clerk, the people behind you. Oh my gosh ... Or in the bank, if you need assistance with the phone or the internet, or if you need to call the company. You ask for someone who can speak Spanish? No. I hope you can understand me. And you have to wait a long time for a translator.

Regina: Some people will make fun of you (for the Spanish accent)... Sometimes it's better to be calm, to be quiet.

Several other members of that same focus group nodded their heads in agreement with Regina's statement about silence. Regina's reference to remaining calm and quiet when they are vulnerable in a culturally-conflicted situation is an example of consumptive silence. According to Covarrubius (2007), consumptive silence leads to unproductive outcomes. In such cases, marginalized people are being confronted by members of the dominant group and opt to remain silent in order to feel safe. Silence thus becomes a counter-narrative.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) it is not uncommon that victims of racial discrimination will suffer in silence, and “stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences” (p. 43). Regina’s story about using silence as a way of coping is a counter-narrative that is part of a body of knowledge known by People of Color. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argued that stories and narratives told by the victims of racial discrimination can in fact be the “cure for silencing” (p. 43).

The common denominator for many of these students is that they enroll in the ESL program because it helps them improve communication skills in their everyday life. Advancing their career goals and attaining U.S. citizenship, while important to many, does not seem to be the main motivation for most. The students are aware of the dominant narratives but have their own goals in mind, and these do not fit neatly in the dominant perspective of the ESL mission statement. Furthermore, their lack of interest in assimilating values associated with White “American” culture also indicates that they are quietly insisting on keeping their cultural and familial identity.

### **Gendering Immigrant’s Access to the American Dream**

As stated earlier, one of the tenets of the American Dream ideology is that great personal sacrifice must be made but barriers can be overcome in order to live the American Dream. The dominant narratives that reproduce this ideological construction obviate or deny the fact that race, class, and gender stratification operate as structural barriers to achieving the Dream. In this section, I present an example of a counter-narrative to the American Dream based on *testimonios* about gender inequality. The personal stories shared by ESL learners highlighted how women were responding to

patriarchal expectations and family structures that made their experience as individuals different from the experience of a male immigrant pursuing the American Dream.

It is not uncommon for students to stop attending ESL classes for months to years at a time. Usually, a student who interrupts studies and postpones completion of the course is a woman and is raising a family. Luisa is just such an example. Describing her pattern of attendance, she said: “I am in these classes this month... but I am going in the past to here. Three years ago, I went for about six months.” Diana, Jacinta, Gabriela, and Adalina are other examples of students with intermittent attendance over the years. The primary reason for intermittent attendance among women ESL students is family obligations.

Adalina, for instance, stopped taking ESL courses because she had three sons in school. Now that they are all raised, and two are in college, Adalina plans to continue studying English while pursuing her bachelor’s degree as a full-time college student. When explaining her current educational plan and decision to live “her life” now, she said:

Cause my children are old enough. My oldest is 21 years old, and he left to the Air Force. Right now he’s in training in San Antonio, Texas. Soon, probably, he’s going to be in Germany. I feel sad but they have to live their lives ... So I’m doing the thing I didn’t do before because of them. But I don’t regret them because they are so nice, they’re so smart, and I’m proud of them.

Other participants in the study expressed similar sentiments. Various participants said they eventually wanted to pursue working but their main concern was the children.

Verónica said, “I want to communicate better with my children.” Selena, sitting next to

her, nodded and added: “And to talk with the teachers.” Luisa said, “I study English because it’s important to be able to help my daughter in the school.”

A display of notes written by ESL students was posted on a bulletin board at the community center for approximately one year. The notes were written in preparation for a site visit by the community grant committee of the local United Way Chapter. The notes included expressions of gratitude for United Way providing a grant to help pay for the childcare services that are so vital to making the program work. One student wrote, “Thank you for supporting the childcare, because your help is very essential to the progress in our own lives.”

Almost every note posted on the display mentioned the importance of family. What follows are excerpts from several of the ESL students’ notes:

- “I’m studying English and Ged so I can get a good job and give my children better lives.”
- “With a federal job I will have excellent benefits and good wages, then, I will be able to buy a bigger home for my family.”
- “In the future I want to have my own accounting office and have a better life for my family.”
- “I have to come to school and study. I need to speak it correctly. I must do this in order to be a good example for my children.”
- “These goals are to have more money to help my husband, to fix my house and to be a better person, and a good example for my daughters.”
- “The program has helped me in many ways, I have learned English and Math which is very important because it helps me and allows me to help my children as well.”

A common thread among all of these comments is the emphasis on family. Even those pursuing a career want to do so to help their families, not to pursue material gain for the sake of self of individual material gain, which is an idea often emphasized the American Dream ideology. All of the above comments were written by Latina students in the ESL program, and the comments suggest another example of *testimonio*.

Research among Mexican and Mexican-American women has indicated that delaying women's own educational aspirations is not uncommon. Because of a patriarchal family structure and a cultural value placed on cooperation with family and placing children's educational aspirations first, Mexican and Mexican-American women will delay their aspirations (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). According to Espino (2008) and Solórzano & Solórzano (1995), Mexican and Mexican-American families in the United States will adhere to a narrative that keeps women from pursuing educational goals because this interferes with family obligations and duties. A hierarchy in Latino families is part of the "normative cultural values," according to Marcia Carteret (2011). Carteret is the director of Intercultural Communications for the Colorado Children's Healthcare Access Program. She has noted that Latinos tend to be a collectivist culture with *familismo*, or strong family values. Because of the importance of the family, roles are applied, which tend to make for a patriarchal structure that has the oldest male figure as the provider with females expected "to manifest respect and even submission to their husbands" (Carteret, 2011). When immigrant women like Adalina offer their *testimonio*, they highlight the fact that individual hard work in the workplace as the path to attain the American Dream is not a narrative that applies to most women living under a patriarchal system. Their *testimonios* also indicate that they are not interested in pursuing the

American Dream for their own individualistic material gain. Instead they pursue a dream that helps their families.

### **Chapter Summary**

The dominant narratives found in New Mexico are similar to what can be found anywhere in the United States. The core of the dominant narratives is the American Dream ideology that is entrenched, embedded into the mindset of not only the members of the dominant group but members of marginalized groups as well. Essential to being a part of the U.S. American culture is adhering to the “rules” of the American Dream ideology: play by the rules, work hard, learn English, and get to the back of the line. The concept of standing at the back of the line reveals a hierarchy in the dominant narrative and the American Dream ideology and a flaw in the supposed logic of the narrative and ideology. If the U.S. American culture was meritocratic and colorblind, then why would there be a need for a hierarchy? Why does there have to be a line? How is a hierarchy an example of being meritocratic?

What this study also reveals is that the narrative and ideology is not a black-white binary but is one that can be found among other ethnic groups and recent immigrants to the United States. My study also suggests this narrative/ideology is permeating beyond the U.S. American borders and is becoming a global perspective.

What this study also does is provide more evidence that the belief in the meritocracy of the U.S. culture by the dominant group is indeed a myth. The study also reveals that the belief in meritocracy is intertwined with the American Dream ideology, and that this entanglement provides a convenient mode for the dominant group to continue to uphold a flawed dominant narrative. Not only is this dominant narrative

evident when one speaks to members of the dominant group, but it is evident when interviewing People of Color. Even Politicians of Color are driven by the American Dream ideology, and it is evident that these leaders miss an opportunity to start deconstructing the dominant narrative and the dream ideology. This flawed belief in meritocracy also permeates the textbooks, the lessons, the pedagogy of the English as a Second Language curriculum in New Mexico and in the United States. The curriculum studied revealed how strong the current of the American Dream ideology was throughout the coursework and lesson plans of the ESL program.

My study also revealed counter-narratives that show how flawed the dominant belief system is. Various counter-narratives revealed that the U.S. dominant culture is not meritocratic nor colorblind just in how members of the dominant group interact with People of Color. Even the ESL program instructors revealed in their interviews that their perspectives, their belief systems, are entangled with the American Dream ideology. Several instructors emphasized the virtues of the U.S. work ethic and how that should be applied in the ESL classroom. My conversations with them also indicated that the instructors thought of themselves as liberal, progressive. My conversations with them also revealed they fell into the liberal belief system trap that CRT scholars discuss. According to CRT scholars, liberals, and conservatives, in the United States believe that the U.S. American culture is making great progress in civil rights and that the U.S. American culture is colorblind and meritocratic, particularly in the legal and educational environments. Bonilla-Silva (2003) referred to this color-blind notion as an example of the story line upheld by the White dominant U.S. American culture that is fable-like and incorporates a “common scheme and wording” (p. 76). An example of this fable-like

common scheme is the American Dream ideology. The first tenet of the American Dream ideology is that everyone living in the United States may always pursue one's dream. Nothing could be further from the truth, and that will be explored in the conclusion.

The study also provides information about a group that is ignored and yet is essential to really developing any true sense of immigration reform – working class Mexicans and Mexican Americans. In my conclusion, I will discuss potential studies that can address this group. I will also address my research questions, as well as what my study contributes to the fields of communication and education, and what are my study's limitations.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and Implications

In this study, I investigated how lessons and interactions in an ESL classroom setting construct U.S. and immigrant cultural identities through narratives and counter-narratives, and how these narratives and counter-narratives reproduced and questioned relations of power along the lines of race, class, and gender difference. As the findings of the research show, the narratives constructed through language, interaction, and institutionalized practices in the ESL setting reproduced the ideology of the American Dream. The American Dream emerged as the enduring ideological field within which ESL learners and instructors make sense of U.S. and immigrant culture and identities. The findings also indicate that while students, instructors, and administrators in the study reproduced dominant narratives, they also created counter-narratives or *testimonios* to question or resist the dominant narratives. The *testimonios* convey how ESL learners ignored some of the assumptions of the dominant narratives to focus attention of their unique motivations to learn English and particular cultural needs, or attempted to overcome or negotiate cultural barriers like racism and marginalization as they struggled to survive and adapt to life in the United States. By analyzing the dominant narratives and *testimonios* [life experiences] of adult ESL learners, this study filled a gap in the research on ESL education and co-cultural communication. It presented an analysis of the particular experiences of a marginalized group that has been overlooked in communication and education research: adult immigrant learners, of which the majority are working-class and Mexican or Mexican/American.

There were numerous intersections of the dominant narratives with the tenets of the American Dream ideology that were explored in my study. For instance, the first tenet of the American Dream ideology – everyone living in the United States may always pursue one’s dream – intersects with the dominant narrative regarding learning English. English proficiency, according to the dominant narrative, leads to individual success and upward mobility in the colorblind, meritocratic system of the United States.

This tenet suggests that anyone can pursue any dream as long as one can speak English, but the majority of the ESL students in my study want to pursue a dream that is collectivist in nature, and not individualistic. These students want to pursue careers or to learn English so that these pursuits benefit their entire family, not just them. Hochschild (1995) addressed how the emphasis on individualism is one of the flaws of the American Dream:

One problem stems from the radical individualism often associated with the dream (although the ideology entails nothing that prohibits groups from pursuing collective success). Achievers mark their success by moving away from the tenement, ghetto, or holler of their impoverished and impotent youth, thus speeding the breakup of their ethnic community. This is a bittersweet phenomenon. The freedom to move up and out is desirable, or at least desired. But certainly those left behind, probably those who leave, and arguably the nation as a whole lose when groups of people with close cultural and personal ties break those ties in pursuit of or after attaining “the bitch-goddess, success.” (pp. 34-35)

These ESL students plan to pursue their dream of benefitting *familismo*, of not sacrificing their connections with family members, in order to become a part of the U.S. American society. Yet, according to Hochschild (1995), that is not part of the definition of anyone being able to pursue one's dream because that type of dream does not fit the dominant narrative of an individualistic dream.

My study revealed that as students become English proficient, they do adopt dominant perspectives and start to assimilate. For instance Reynaldo stated, "It's really hard to believe, but some people like to be in jail all the time. They have three meals...they don't have to pay rent." His wife Adalina then reinforced that by saying, "So when they go out, it's hard for them to start a new life out there, so they prefer to...they do something to go back to jail." Reynaldo and Adalina's perspectives are very much the perspective of the dominant group.

In the study conducted by ThinkNow Research, the researchers discovered that some Latinos surveyed had started to adopt values (controlling one's time and controlling one's destiny) that aligned more with the dominant group. Carr (2013), wrote "the more it appeared to us that as Hispanics (and particularly the men) start to live [or surrender to] the American Dream...the more their lives (their time and their destiny) become less their own."

Pursuing a family/collectivist dream is not part of the dominant narrative regarding the American Dream, and that means it becomes difficult to fulfill the second tenet: "It is reasonable to anticipate success of one's dreams." Assimilating to particular understandings of the U.S. work ethic and consumer behavior as positive values would result, as Hochschild (1995) argued, in the nation as a whole losing when those cultural

ties are broken to pursue the “bitch goddess” called success. This severing of cultural ties to pursue success also reflects what Hall (1996) termed “cultural hegemony,” a process enacted in the American Dream ideology as no room is left for dreams that are not perpetuated by the dominant group.

### **Overview of the Study**

The findings addressed the study’s three research questions: 1) What are the dominant narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed in classroom lessons and interactions among ESL learners, instructors, and administrators? 2) What are the counter-narratives about U.S. and immigrant cultures and identities constructed by the ESL learners? 3) How do these narratives and counter-narratives reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies about power relations in the United States?

Lessons and interactions in the ESL classroom studied constructed cultural identities through narratives and counter-narratives, and these narratives and counter-narratives reproduced and questioned relations of power along the lines of race, class, gender, and other cultural differences. The findings also showed how these narratives uphold the American Dream as a central ideological field within which ESL learners and instructors make sense of U.S. and immigrant culture and identities. The dominant narrative, or master story, in the New Mexican context studied was identified in the perspectives encoded in ESL funding mechanisms, curriculum design, and instructional materials; in the accounts of U.S. White and Hispanic individuals in charge of curriculum, instruction, and administration of the ESL program; and in the accounts of ESL students.

The analysis of data suggested that the construction of U.S. and immigrant cultural identities and the perceptions of power relations shared in the ESL classroom operate through a dominant narrative that encompasses four intersecting narratives. The dominant narrative links English language learning to: 1) the successful incorporation of immigrants into the U.S. workforce, 2) immigrants' assimilation of particular understandings of the U.S. work ethic and of consumer behavior as cultural values for positive integration within U.S. American society, 3) notions of individual success and upward mobility in the colorblind, meritocratic system of the United States, and 4) the othering of ESL learner's cultures and identities that are perceived as deviations from the "American" norm. These narratives are institutionalized in ESL program design and mission statements or teaching materials, and echoed in the accounts of instructors, administrators, and ESL learners.

The dominant narratives articulated the ideology of the American Dream in the accounts of participants as well as in teaching materials and program design. One of the thematic narratives espoused the notion that speaking English proficiently will ensure success in the U.S. culture and workplace and strengthen the U.S. economy by serving the needs of U.S. businesses. Multilingualism as a national value is thus undermined by this narrative, as well as learning English for other social purposes. Research uncovered that the mission of ESL education is narrowly defined as preparing these working-class students for entry-level work and citizenship by emphasizing English proficiency.

Connected to the first thematic narrative is the construction of a second thematic narrative regarding the "American work ethic." This narrative upholds the dominant narrative that the American work ethic is the strongest work ethic of any country in the

world and that immigrants need to learn this work ethic in order to succeed in the United States. These immigrants have the opportunity to do so with lessons learned in ESL programs, according to this narrative.

The third thematic narrative is an important one in the dominant narratives: The view of the U.S. American society as a meritocracy that is colorblind, gender-blind, and class-blind. If immigrants study and work hard enough, they will persevere in education, in the workforce, and in the U.S. dominant group's perspective of U.S. American society. This ideal of meritocracy extends to the classroom where people of any race, gender, or class can apply themselves and obtain the American Dream. Race, gender and class issues are checked at the classroom door and ESL students are exposed to the purity of the American Dream: Anybody can achieve it because the U.S. dominant culture has created a meritocratic environment.

The counter-narratives analyzed were primarily the *testimonios* of ESL learners who are working-class immigrants and immigrants with professional backgrounds in their home countries who possess low levels of English-language fluency and limited cultural competency in U.S. mainstream society. The *testimonios* conveyed how subjects attempted to overcome or negotiate cultural barriers as they struggle to survive and adapt to life in the United States. The main counter-narratives that emerged in ESL learners accounts were: 1) the view of English language learning as a requirement for advancement in the global rather than the U.S. national workplace; 2) the view of English speaking as a means to cope with discrimination in the dominant culture, 3) the questioning of the dominant values of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and respect for immigrants' hard work in U.S. culture, 4) the gendering of the women immigrant

experience as a structural barrier to the American Dream, and 5) the preference for family/collectivist values over the individualistic/materialistic values of the American Dream.

This research was informed by the theoretical perspectives of Co-cultural theory, CRT, LatCrit, studies of language and power, and Whiteness studies. This critical ethnographic approach to an educational setting offers a critique on how language learning and intercultural communication can constitute ideological processes through which power structures are reproduced. In other words, it demonstrates how the ideology of the White, dominant group is reproduced and reinforced through the funding, design, curriculum, instruction, and learning process in an ESL program. The following sections highlight how my study contributes to research for the scholarly literature in the theoretical perspectives of Co-cultural theory, CRT, LatCrit, language and power and Whiteness studies, as well as contributions to the scholarly literature and research in the fields of intercultural communication and education.

### **Contributions of This Study**

The study contributed to the scholarly literature and research in the fields of intercultural communication and education. It expanded co-cultural theory through the incorporation of critical race theory and LatCrit theoretical perspectives in the analysis of data. This study is among the first of what I hope will be numerous studies to help fill a void in scholarly literature in both communication studies and education regarding the voices, perceptions, and experiences of ESL adult, working-class learners. My research focused on a population that has received minimal attention in these fields. Although scholarly literature about the ESL student in public schools or in institutions of higher

education is abundant, the non-traditional, immigrant, working class ESL learner has been overlooked; they are a forgotten group.

In addition, this research illuminated how the construction of racial and power relations in New Mexico—a state with a minority-majority population—may offer insights for the understanding of the future of racial relations in the United States as national population trends indicate a movement toward a minority-majority population. In effect, some studies have shown that the U.S. is fast approaching a public education system where the majority of students in the classroom are from homes where English is not the primary – let alone the secondary – language that is spoken. This group represents a growing demographic sector with an eagerness to participate in the U.S. polity. Lastly, this ethnographic investigation identified and suggested pedagogical practices that may improve the classroom experience of adult immigrant learners and instructors of ESL programs by making use of a constructionist approach to pedagogy.

### **Co-cultural Theory**

Orbe (1998a) developed co-cultural theory as a critical and interpretivist approach that allows communication scholars to explore communication dynamics connected to power, culture, and language (p. 8-9). Orbe criticized communication research for its tendency to focus on the dominant perspective, and, thus, have an ethnocentric bias. He argued that there was a great need to conduct studies of marginalized groups to explore various dynamics related to power, culture, and communication (p. 3). Orbe has stated: “Specifically, co-cultural theory works to create a framework that promotes a greater understanding of the intricate processes by which co-cultural group members (women,

people of color, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, etc.) negotiate attempts by others to render their voices muted within dominant societal structures” (p. 4).

My research also analyzed immigrants’ narratives and counter-narratives in order to explore how acquiring English language skills relates to the ESL student’s sense of identity and position within the mainstream racial structure. My study attempted to shed light on a dimension that has not been at the center of Orbe’s research on co-cultural theory. Orbe (1998a) has stated that the intent of his theory is to explore how racial minority groups cope with hegemonic culture. Hence his work has emphasized primarily the relation of marginalized groups to the dominant perspectives and placed hegemonic culture as the focal point. My study also included the hegemonic view point, but emphasis was placed on how underrepresented groups construct their own narratives and counter-narratives about U.S. culture and their positions of power in society. I argue that co-cultural theory benefits from closer attention to the marginalized rather than the dominant perspective, particularly through the examination of narrative and counter-narrative.

In exploring racial identity my study complemented Co-cultural theory with Critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and Latino/a critical theory to enrich and expand the scope of analysis and interpretation.

### **CRT, LatCrit**

In their foundational work on CRT, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined the basic tenets of CRT as follows:

1. Racism is ordinary, is institutionalized, and is not the exception. Racism is a common, routine experience of People of Color.

2. Any progression in race relations in the United States must serve the interest of the White elites who are in power. This concept is also referred to as “interest convergence.”
3. Race is a social construct that is engrained into the U.S. American social fabric.
4. The dominant ideology is a narrative of colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy in society. The ideology perpetuates a White Myth.
5. The counter-narrative, the experiential knowledge of People of Color, is the appropriate, legitimate approach to truly understanding racial inequality. (pp. 6-9)

LatCrit is a progeny of CRT that grew out of a need to explore the unique issues of Latino/as. Aoki and Johnson (2008) have noted that LatCrit emerged in the mid-1990s, building on CRT, to push civil rights analysis beyond the Black-White race binary to include other issues regarding nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class (p.4). Part of its political agenda was to foster inclusiveness and building multiracial coalitions with the goal of building genuine social change. This perspective has promoted the examination of some of the challenges that face marginalized people who are not part of the Black-White binary that tends to pre-occupy CRT scholars in their studies of race.

One issue the study explored is re-thinking the black-white binary that LatCrit scholars have discussed and criticized. This study examined racial issues in New Mexico where what Bonilla-Silva (2004) described as a tri-racial order is firmly in place. In New Mexico, the dominant group consists of a loosely-formed coalition of upper, middle-class Whites and upper, middle-class hispanos. New Mexico could very well prove to be a

bellwether state for future racial relations in the United States where members of the traditional White, dominant group form loose coalitions with what Bonilla-Silva described as honorary Whites. Bonilla-Silva believes a tri-racial order already exists in the Southwest. The centuries-old claim by *Nuevomexicanos* that they are *hispano* continues the dialogue of continuing European ancestry. Bonilla-Silva would argue that in New Mexico Whites and Honorary Whites, the *hispanos*, are creating a tri-racial order by “othering” other People of Color, including groups who have recently migrated to the United States. My study revealed that, indeed, perspectives by the dominant group of Whites and *hispanos* do perpetuate “othering” recent immigrants who have settled in New Mexico and do support Bonilla-Silva’s perspective of a tri-racial order.

With a tri-racial perspective, this could contribute to future work, for instance, on Hochschild’s (1995) examination of the American Dream. Her work definitely falls along a black-white racial binary and does not explore the ramifications of the American Dream for any groups besides Whites and African-Americans. There was no mention in any of her work regarding the meaning of the American Dream for Latinos, Asian-Americans, or any other minority group. Hochschild was very concerned with the racial divide, but did not explore how this divide could affect other marginalized groups. Pushing the race dialogue beyond a black-white binary is one of the tenets of LatCrit and Hochschild’s work is an example of how this dialogue is sometimes confined to that binary.

My study found evidence to support the basic tenets of CRT. The structure and funding of the ESL program serves the interests of the White elites and helps perpetuate the White Myth of meritocracy and colorblindness. My study also provided support for pushing racial studies past the black-white binary.

## **Language, Power, and Whiteness**

The study of language and power was also explored in my study. The issue of power is not incorporated in very many of the theories of intercultural communication, and I argue that my study provides evidence that intercultural studies should incorporate the study of language and power. We have to look outside of the discipline of communication to find any substantive work on the connection between language and power. I incorporated work by Reid and Ng (1999) and Nakayama and Krizek (1995). My data uncovered examples of Reid and Ng's conclusions regarding language reflecting power, creating power, depoliticizing power, and routinizing power. My study also supported Nakayama and Krizek's Whiteness strategies. Those strategies include 1) White means power; 2) White by default; 3) White is a "scientific definition"; 4) Whiteness is confused with nationality; 5) Whites will refuse to be "labeled"; and 6) White is related to European ancestry. My study revealed at least two of the strategies: White is American and White is related to European ancestry. These concepts regarding language and power were definitely present in my intercultural study and need to be explored more and incorporated into intercultural communication.

### **Limitations of This Study and Further Research**

Qualitative studies tend to focus on a limited number of participants or cases due to the fact that the nature of qualitative work is to analyze cases in depth, particularly if the research involves complex issues or phenomena. This focused and close reading allows for the collection of rich data. The limitations of this approach are that the researcher cannot make claims that findings are generalizable or that the findings can be extrapolated to larger settings or populations. Critics of qualitative work, including my

study, could argue that the findings presented here are unique to the relatively few participants in the study. This study presents the dynamics observed in a local site with the understanding that such research provides understanding of the local site explored and also establishes a basis for future comparative research. Comparing data gathered at this site with data gathered from various sites in other areas of the United States would enrich this study.

Related to the criticism of qualitative work is the use of narrative and counter-narrative from critical race theory. Critics of narrative as a form of data argue that such data cannot be quantified, that it lacks a rational inquiry, and that narrative cannot be considered reliable since it involves the perspectives of individuals whose stories may be completely fictional or anecdotal. But the critics of qualitative work and CRT miss the point: both of these incorporate experiences of the individual, to challenge what is considered normative, to present a perspective that is overlooked or ignored.

Content analysis of learning materials and textbooks utilized by English as a Second Language classes throughout the United States would be one way to respond to critics of qualitative work and CRT. Content analysis provides a way of quantifying documents, and a study could be conducted that codes for hegemonic language, including the intersections of race, class, and gender in the use of that language. Providing content analysis of various ESL publications would have enriched my study.

This study was also limited by time restrictions. One way to enhance this study is a longitudinal design that would allow to follow ESL learners for several years to investigate the relationship between progress in the learning of English and coping with the U.S. dominant culture. Another area of limitation and idea for further research would

be to follow up focus groups with individual interviews. A criticism of focus groups is that sometimes two or three subjects in a group will dominate the conversation or that the environment can be artificial and influence the type of information that is generated. I was aware of these factors and encouraged all the participants in each group to speak up. The focus groups were also held in the classrooms, an environment that was familiar to the subjects. But the opportunity to then interview members of the groups individually could have possibly provided another set of data for the study.

Conversely, the opportunity to include the instructors in a focus group could have enriched data I gathered from their individual interviews. Time constraints did not make any of these concerns an option.

### **The Implications for Research**

More qualitative research needs to be conducted to analyze the complexities of race and adult education in the ESL environment. On the basis of this research experience, I recommend the following areas to be explored further:

- ESL programs designed for other ethnic working-class immigrants. Studies that observe programs with a different ethnic makeup than the one in my study (primarily Mexican immigrants) would provide more data on how the dominant narratives affect other marginalized groups.
- ESL programs in an urban setting. The rural site for my study resulted in an ethnic makeup that was predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American. Studying a site in an urban setting with an ethnic makeup of various nationalities would provide data rich with the dynamics of these group interactions. Comparing an urban site with a rural site also has potential for further study.

- Long-term studies of ESL students who are focused on their families. My study indicated that many of the students in the program were not that interested in pursuing the American Dream ideology. Perhaps these students are pursuing a dream that is an alternate or counter-ideology to the dominant dream ideology. My study suggests this ideology comes from a collectivist perspective, and perhaps this perspective usually is obliterated by what Hall (1996) labels the “cultural hegemony.” But what if some ESL students are able to keep their collectivist dream alive? Studies have also indicated that becoming proficient in a language requires ten years of study. In this sense, longitudinal studies of ESL students who are more interested in learning English in order to help their children with school or in order to successfully interact with members of the dominant group in social settings could be a fascinating study. Observing immigrant families for several years could provide data outside the scope of my study. How do the children cope with learning a new language compared to their parents? How do the family dynamics change as the children assimilate at school while their parents cope with providing food and shelter while attempting to learn English?

- Long-term studies of ESL students who are focused on college and careers. There were a few participants in my study who fit into this category, and all of them had studied English for several years. Many of them faced obstacles and setbacks because of family or financial issues. What are the dynamics of that environment? Does that pursuit of college affect their children and inspire them to pursue college? Are they able to pursue the American Dream ideology in the same manner as members of the dominant group? Are they able to maintain a collectivist perspective that benefits their families?

- Constructivism as a paradigm in teaching and learning in the ESL classroom.

Constructivism is what Rendón (2009) and others focus on as a learning paradigm for students who are not part of the dominant group. Studies have been conducted, of course, on using constructivism in the college and public school ESL classroom. Nothing has been done on how this approach could work with the working-class immigrant ESL student. It's time.

More studies also need to be conducted that explore applying Co-cultural theory with CRT and LatCrit as a means of how members of marginalized groups cope with racism. Power and language (Reid and Ng, 1999; Nakayama and Krizek, 1995) in an educational setting needs further exploration as my study revealed elements of this within the textbooks and lesson plans used in the ESL program, as well as in the narrative and counter-narratives of the participants in the study. A great approach to studying power and language in this environment would be a comprehensive content analysis of the various textbooks published for use in ESL classrooms.

Another area that needs further exploration is the meaning of the American Dream ideology among co-cultural groups. Hochschild's (1995) original study is an example of what LatCrit scholars refer to as a white-black binary of racial issues in the United States. Analysis of what this ideology means to other marginalized groups besides African-Americans needs to be explored. Studying marginalized groups, such as immigrants who are trying to learn English, could provide a dynamic perspective on how the American Dream ideology is perceived by minority groups who are not proficient in the same language as the dominant group. My study indicated that Mexican and Mexican-American ESL students place more emphasis on how their achievements can

benefit their families. Are there obstacles or disadvantages for these English-language learners as compared to African-Americans or other U.S. minority groups?

### **Final Thoughts**

“Location, location, location.” The phrase is part of the vernacular language in the U.S. American culture. It usually refers to the importance of where a business is located in its ability to market and sell goods. I argue it is also important in the American Dream ideology and that the word “location” is important to the title of my study: ¿De Dónde Eres? Or Where are you from? Answering that question is essential to how members of the U.S. dominant group perceive who is part of the ingroup, the dominant group, and who is part of the outgroup, or those who are marginalized.

Location is also important to the American Dream ideology (and extends to the dominant narratives) because the ideology perpetuates the concept of how an American work ethic and how American virtues are superior to work ethics or virtues of any other country. Location is important to the American Dream ideology because it is essential that for anyone who wants to be a part of the U.S. American culture be able to communicate proficiently using American English. Location is important to the American Dream ideology because it is only in the United States where individuals can pursue and achieve dreams because it is only in the United States that a culture can be found in the world that is meritocratic and colorblind.

This study helped me uncover perspectives about myself and my own sense of location. It gave me great insight into my own identity as a member of the dominant group, and how I was entangled in the dominant narratives perpetuated through the American Dream ideology. The study provided me with insight on how I can and must as

a member of the dominant group go about trying to dismantle the dominant narratives. I do not see myself as a great White champion for protecting immigrants or minorities – that is the typical approach that liberal Whites take in thinking they are free of racism. I am not free of racism, but it is a relief to realize that I do not have to uphold the dominant narratives, nor perpetuate the American Dream ideology. I intend to continue conducting research that chips away at the armor of the dominant group's belief system. Allen (2001) refers to it as being a White traitor. One definition of traitor is a person who betrays a country or group by supporting an enemy. In this case, there is no enemy, other than an enemy that betrays all of us: Racism.

## Appendices

## Appendix A: Example of Student Application for the ESL Program

**Adult Education Center**  
**Student Application**  
*PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION*

Time In: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time Out: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Intro to GED Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Assessment Level: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Math: \_\_\_\_\_ Reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Date _____ SSN _____ Campus ID # _____														
Last Name _____ First Name _____ Middle Initial _____														
Mailing Address _____ Street/Box _____ City _____ State/Zip _____														
Contact Phone _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular <input type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> Message <input type="checkbox"/> Work														
Alternative Phone _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular <input type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> Message <input type="checkbox"/> Work														
Email Address: _____ If cellular, may we send you text messages? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No														
Date of Birth (Month/Day/Year) ____/____/____ Age _____ Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female														
<p><b>Ethnicity</b>          Choose only one:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic/Latino	<p><b>Race (Check all that apply):</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> White	<p><b>LAST PUBLIC SCHOOL ATTENDED: CITY AND STATE</b>          _____</p> <p><b>DO YOU HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p><b>HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED:</b>          _____</p>												
<p><b>CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS:</b>  <i>Please check one</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Employed Full Time <input type="checkbox"/> Employed Part-Time <input type="checkbox"/> Not in Labor Force (Not looking for work) <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed (Looking for work)	<p><b>CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Limited English (ESL Students) <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless <input type="checkbox"/> Dislocated Worker (laid off) <input type="checkbox"/> Single Parent	<p><b>DISABILITY:</b> Do you have a documented disability?  <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p><i>If yes, check one of the following:</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Other Special Needs <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Undocumented Difficulties												
<p><b>INCOME RANGE:</b> Number in your household _____</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> less than \$10,830</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$29,531-33,270</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$10,831 - \$14,570</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$33,271 - 37,010</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$14,571 - \$18,310</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$37,011-40,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$18,311 - \$22,050</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$40,001+</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$22,051 - \$25,790</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$25,791 - \$29,530</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> less than \$10,830	<input type="checkbox"/> \$29,531-33,270	<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,831 - \$14,570	<input type="checkbox"/> \$33,271 - 37,010	<input type="checkbox"/> \$14,571 - \$18,310	<input type="checkbox"/> \$37,011-40,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$18,311 - \$22,050	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40,001+	<input type="checkbox"/> \$22,051 - \$25,790		<input type="checkbox"/> \$25,791 - \$29,530		<p><b>HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT US?</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Works Program <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce Solutions (Unemployment Office) <input type="checkbox"/> Department of Vocational Rehab <input type="checkbox"/> HEP <input type="checkbox"/> Flyer at _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement in _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Billboard <input type="checkbox"/> Family or Friend <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> less than \$10,830	<input type="checkbox"/> \$29,531-33,270													
<input type="checkbox"/> \$10,831 - \$14,570	<input type="checkbox"/> \$33,271 - 37,010													
<input type="checkbox"/> \$14,571 - \$18,310	<input type="checkbox"/> \$37,011-40,000													
<input type="checkbox"/> \$18,311 - \$22,050	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40,001+													
<input type="checkbox"/> \$22,051 - \$25,790														
<input type="checkbox"/> \$25,791 - \$29,530														
<p><b>ARE YOU ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO  <i>If yes, check what type you are on:</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Aid to the blind and disabled <input type="checkbox"/> Food Stamps <input type="checkbox"/> Old age assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Refugee cash assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	<p><b>PROGRAM PARTICIPATION:</b>          Do you currently belong to any of these programs?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Community Correctional Program <input type="checkbox"/> Correctional Facility <input type="checkbox"/> Probation <input type="checkbox"/> Other living-assistance facility: _____													
I authorize the Adult Education Center to use my Social Security number or other identifying number to obtain follow-up information from Official GED Testing Centers, the Department of Labor, and other agencies or educational institutions.														
Student Signature _____		Revised 06/15/2011												

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