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# (RE)MAKING MESTIZAJE: THE ROLE OF RACE AND GENDER NORMS IN LATINA COLLEGE STUDENTS DISCOURSE

Sarah Leah Santillanes

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**(RE)MAKING MESTIZAJE: THE ROLE OF RACE AND GENDER NORMS IN  
LATINA COLLEGE STUDENT'S DISCOURSE**

**BY**

**SARAH LEAH SANTÍLLANES**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the Degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December 13, 2013**

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially Eric, Elonzo, Marcus and Diego. You have filled my life with love and laughter and for that, I am truly thankful.

“Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence.”—Erich Fromm

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# **(RE)MAKING MESTIZAJE: THE ROLE OF RACE AND GENDER NORMS IN LATINA COLLEGE STUDENT'S DISCOURSE**

by

**Sarah Leah Santillanes**

B.A., Political Science; M.A., Elementary Education  
Doctor of Philosophy

## *Abstract*

This ideological critique project focused on the race and gender discourse of 20 self-identified Latina community college students between the ages of 18-30. Participants were purposively sampled and recruited from a large community college within the state of New Mexico. Over a period of eight months, two or more semi-structured interviews were conducted with each research participant. These interviews highlighted the participants' race and gender experiences and their perceived expectations about these norms inside and outside of school. A critical hermeneutic methodological framework was employed in the interpretation of the participants' interviews. Discourse transcriptions were coded first for general themes and next for hermeneutical themes generated by Atlas Ti software. Significant researcher interpretations included links between illness and embodiment, problematic race and gender notions of exceptionality and empowerment, and mestizaje discourses of racial ignorance. Latina *mestizaje* discourse was juxtaposed to actual Latina practices of racial knowing. Ultimately, the author argues that *mestizaje* is a racializing and gendering process, ultimately organized by white supremacy, that offers less material privileges than it gives. Recommendations for further research and study are detailed in the concluding chapter.

*Keywords:* ideological critique, Latinas, community college, critical hermeneutics, *mestizaje*



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary field of critical education, studies of race, ethnicity, and culture have become widespread. Studies pertaining to Latina/o<sup>1</sup> students—as a race and/or ethnic group—have become more frequent and researchers have contributed much to our understanding of their lived experiences. Most notably, educational scholarship has focused on multicultural education: the intersections of race, culture, schooling, second language learners, and cultural capital. However, the use of ideology as a framework for studying race, schooling, and students of color has been limited. There is, indeed, a rationale behind the unpopularity of ideology; the word “ideology” has many fragmented meanings. For instance, the term is often inextricably linked to political ideology. The Austrian psychologist Wilhelm Reich scoffed at political ideology, stating, “The fact that political ideologies are tangible realities is not proof of their vitally necessary character. The bubonic plague was an extraordinarily powerful social reality, but no one would have regarded it is vitally necessary” (*Wilhelm Reich quotes*, n.d.). Leonardo (2003) noted, “It is not uncommon to be labeled ‘ideological’ when confronted by someone whose opinion differs from our own” (p. 21). Thus, the term ideology has often been used as a way to undermine another’s ideas and arguments. As an example, calling someone “ideological” insinuates that this person is irrational or out of touch with what is considered the majority thought.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “Latina/o” here because it is an encompassing term of identity for my racial group. There are politics in the naming of one’s racial group identity. Group identification can be related to geographical location, family history, social/political consciousness, and so forth. I use “Latina/o” to be as inclusive as possible. Research participants were asked to name their group identity in a way that fit their historical, geographical, and political personae.

Furthermore, ideology is often thought of as something that someone “catches,” something negative that must be done away with as soon as possible. Eagleton (1991) perceived ideology in this way: “On several of these definitions, nobody would claim that their own thinking was ideological, just as nobody would habitually refer to themselves as Fatso. Ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has” (p. 2). Possibly, Leonardo (2003) summed it up best: “Being ideological is considered to be an altogether bad thing” (p. 21).

In truth, ideology shapes our notions of the world and it dictates the way we live our life. Specific to this project, ideological constructions shaped (and limited) the ways my participants in this study, Latina community college students, saw themselves and others. This is why I utilize empirical studies on Latina identity but complicate these via a critical hermeneutic approach. Within this study, theoretical notions of *Mestiza/o* racial positioning become increasingly crucial. Therefore, I argue that race and gender *mestizaje*<sup>2</sup> is best understood via interpretations, and a critique, of discourse. When I refer to *mestizaje*, I am talking about an adherence to a race and gender worldview that promotes specific *Mestiza* race and gender norms. Therefore, *mestizaje*, and the hegemony that comes with this, is effectively produced and reproduced on a daily basis. In this way, *mestizaje* is both a micro and macro racial project. This project is organized under a larger system of global white supremacy.

## **Background of Study**

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with APA 6<sup>th</sup> ed., I have italicized “*mestizaje*” here because it is a non-English ethnic term. In subsequent uses of the term, it is written as “*mestizaje*.” I utilize this same approach with other frequently used ethnic terms: “*Mestiza/o*,” “*Hispano*” and “*blanqueamiento*.”

This interview project was predicated on the assumption that ideology, specifically mestizaje, has an intricate role in schooling and personal relationships. I was interested in understanding the following: 1) How do Latinas racially identify at a community college and how do they talk about these identities? 2) How does the identity talk of these Latinas relate to larger issues of racial ideology, such as white supremacy? In-depth interview data was gathered from 20 undergraduate Latinas within a community college. These women were recruited on the their larger affiliation as English-speaking “Latinas,” with no attention paid to their immigration or U.S. generational status. I wanted to learn more about these individuals and how they expressed their views on their identity, thereby adopting specific race and gender ideologies. The collected data and my interpretations of this data pointed to the micro and macro frames of mestizaje as a raced and gendered process. This ideological critique project, with a focus on discourse, provided a window of understanding into the racial worldviews of my participants. My hope is that with a new understanding of individual and group mestizaje, we can embark on subsequent work aimed at dismantling white supremacy. As a researcher I hoped to venture beyond “ideology as a negative” (Marx & Engels, 1969) to illustrate that there are, indeed, spaces for “language [and ideological] transformation” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986).

What must come first in this discussion is a clear definition of ideology and its relationship to schooling. If ideology is a worldview, then this worldview is clouded with many ideas of what ideology is or is not. Simply put, ideology is the reflection of the “inner workings.” These inner workings are best expressed through our daily discourse. Allen (2002b) likened ideology to the software of a computer. Like computer software,

ideology “is coded in language [and] represents the linguistic systems of humans that form their conceptual and ideological systems. These are the systems that shape human perception and structure consciousness” (p.111). Therefore, one may use ideological critique as a mirror of individual or group worldviews. Put most eloquently, “Through personal experience, we come to know. Through story we make it known. In narrative, we weave the fabric of our lives—to construct knowledge” (Brunner, 1994, p. 58). Furthermore, the way one takes up ideology, as measured through one’s stories and language, becomes a political act (Leonardo & Allen, 2008). Applying this understanding to the social realms of education, discourse provides a window into how race domination and social processes work on a daily basis. We can see how individual and group ideology serves to shape our social environments, including the terrain of schools. Further discussions about schooling, domination, and social processes are significant as Latinas/os continue to fare poorly in academics (López, 2003; Murillo et al., 2009; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). This dissertation illustrates that the academic disparities of Latinas/os in schools is only part of the equation. Ideological beliefs play a significant role on how Latinas see their raced and gendered role(s) in society and this includes the realm of schools. For Latinas, raced and gendered process norms are made and re-made.

### **Personal Narrative**

My personal relationship with mestizaje is deeply rooted and, indeed, drove my initial wonderings about this topic. At the onset of this project, I was an adjunct

professor at New Mexico Vocations Community College<sup>3</sup> (hereafter referred to as NMVCC), charged with teaching inquiry methods to post-baccalaureate students in an alternative teacher-licensing program. Demographically, the alternative licensure program was quite different from NMVCC as a whole. The students that I taught were mostly middle-class, White females. Compare this to the majority of NMVCC students, who tended to be of lower economic status and people of color. The juxtaposition of mostly White female post-baccalaureate students with the mostly lower class, undergraduate students of color revealed a hegemonic disconnect within both of these spheres. Where were the teachers of color in a school where the majority of students identified as non-White? How did the experiences of being Latina shape their non-visibility as post-baccalaureate students?

I chose to focus my dissertation on Latinas because of this lack of visibility. Undergraduate students of color drive NMVCC's trade industries. Courses in welding, culinary arts, and remedial subject areas draw in the highest college revenue. In fact, as an undergraduate student at the largest state university, I took a couple of undergraduate classes at NMVCC in order to fulfill my elective requirements. My parallel experiences as a student and instructor at NMVCC informed my decision to focus on undergraduate Latinas, many of whom (I assumed) had similar identity experiences to my own.

Like my research participants, I have had very distinct raced and gendered schooling experiences as a lighter-skinned Latina. I grew up in a lower class home in a largely Latina/o neighborhood in Albuquerque. Today, I currently live in a higher

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<sup>3</sup>New Mexico Vocations Community College (NMVCC) is a pseudonym for the actual college I am employed with and where I will solicit undergraduate Latina research participants.

middle-class neighborhood that is predominantly White<sup>4</sup>. During the first two years of my doctoral program, I held meritocratic beliefs in schools, student success, and society. I had come from an economically poor household and managed to “escape” my old neighborhood, go to college, and “make it.” I never thought of myself as an exception. While I always considered myself a person of color, I did not understand why other racialized groups used race as their “crutch” for not succeeding in society. If everyone worked hard in school, their efforts would be rewarded as mine had.

### **Patricia Hill Collins and the Matrix of Domination: In My Positionality**

I never questioned my privilege as a lighter-skinned Latina, until eight years ago. I was taking Critical Race Theory, a class in which I was required to read Collins’ book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). Collins puts issues of intersectionality (for example, race, class, and gender) at the forefront of her examination of inter- and intra-ethnic relationships, especially those of women. Collins termed this the “matrix of domination” and asserted that issues and constructions of oppression, while unique in their social classification, are all connected and interrelated. Because classifications such as race, gender, phenotype, class, religion, sexual orientation, and age cannot be separated by the individual, the matrix of domination is a way to explain how all of these work in concordance with one another and overlap. Collins’ assessments of race-gender frameworks resonated with me and fostered my beginning steps in critical thought.

Collins talks about how the matrix of domination works to maintain and reproduce white supremacy, albeit in hierarchical ways. To disrupt this matrix, one must come to terms with their positionality within the matrix. Who holds the most power in

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<sup>4</sup> According to the *APA Publication Manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), racial and ethnic groups (such as “White”) are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized (p. 75).

our society and why? Who holds power over you and how can this be disrupted? Whom do you hold power over? How can individuals and groups work together to form alliances for social change?

Although I did not have the critical language to understand my attraction to Collins' (2000) work, her belief in individuals becoming "race traitors" resonated with me (p. 31). According to Collins, a race traitor is one who forfeits privilege and status within one's group to work against all forms of oppression within the matrix of domination. Collins illustrated examples of race traitors who, after being met with hostility and disdain within their group, built meaningful friendships and alliances with other oppressed individuals within the matrix.

After reading this book, I started down the road of critical consciousness. I had to come to terms with my lighter-skinned Latina features, my heterosexuality, and my upper-middle class status. At this point, however, I was still struggling with an invested interest in mestizaje, but I had begun a self-questioning journey nonetheless. I was a member of several privileged groups and positioned as a more acceptable minority within society. Envisioning Collins's "race traitor" idea, I began to think in transformative ways, asking questions such as these: What would our schools, relationships, and society look like if all individuals decided to become "race traitors?" What is the process of becoming a "race traitor?" How do I need to change in order to become a "race traitor?" This was the first time I started to question my mestizaje positionality. Looking back, I see that Collin's work served as a catalyst for my own ideological shift, my first steps to understanding my investment in making and re-making mestizaje.

It was daunting, but I began to open myself to experiences that I had consciously chosen to hide from. There were raced and gendered experiences that I had conveniently departmentalized. As a Latina, I had felt the sting of racism and the burdens of mestizaje. However, I had also benefited via mestizaje, especially because of my lighter phenotype. I am closer to being racially White than Black<sup>5</sup>; my birth certificate even lists my race as being White! To use the terms of Bonilla-Silva (2010), I responded to being an “Honorary White” (p. 194) and reaped material benefits because of this positioning. My Honorary White status was evident in my personal relationships, with the individuals I had chosen to date in the past, and even in the subjects I chose to study in college. Because of my investment in mestizaje, I had truly robbed myself of a true humanity. I had restricted myself to being with people who were whiter Latinas like me and other individuals who claimed to be White. As a racially aware neophyte, I began to question the origins of my own mestizaje but I must admit, to this day, my journey is still a work in progress.

Like the women in this study, my investment in mestizaje was formed at a very early age. I understood that I was biologically “Spanish” (read: White, European)—as opposed to Chicana/o, Mexican, or Mexican-American. I was never to date Black, Native American, or Asian men. Different “biological types” of people were to stay with their own kind. These sentiments were communicated to me verbally and non-verbally. Usually my extended family expressed them when they got together and gossiped about other family members, such as cousins, who were dating outside their racial parameters. Two concerns typically arose: What would the children “look like”

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<sup>5</sup> According to the *APA Publication Manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), racial and ethnic groups (such as “Black”) are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized (p. 75).



and how would we adapt to a “different culture” that would not be accepting of our Latino culture? Interestingly, in discussions about dating White men, what offspring would potentially “look like” and the dilemma of accepting a new “White” culture was never an issue or a concern for any of us. In fact, when babies were born in my family, the first comments made were about their light eye color and hair color. Dismay arose when the baby’s eyes and hair color were replaced by their “real (and darkened)” ethnic features.

In retrospect, I am now able to identify these familial experiences as part of our pan-Latina/o claim to *mestizaje*. What is significant to this present discussion is how beliefs in *mestizaje* are shaped at an early age in most Latina/o homes. Beliefs in *mestizaje* are then adopted and reproduced unless there is some sort of critical intervention. This race and gendered process is not one that can be easily explained. Like Anzaldúa’s (1984) observations on the new *Mestiza*, Latina femininity is handed down from family members to their daughters. Latinas play the critical role of denying their *India* and promoting *Mestizo* claims to European blood. This ambiguity is riddled with contradictions. *Mestizas* attempt to be Indian in a Mexican culture and to be *less* Mexican from a White vantage point. Therefore, being *Mestiza* is physically and emotionally taxing. These cultural collisions burden our bodies as we cope with our ambiguities. Reproducing *mestizaje* becomes a raced and gendered process that we learn, and rarely question, due to our specific positionalities.

There is no doubt that lighter-skinned Latinas (like myself) are victims of racism. However, talk about this racism is often from our position as “Honorary Whites” and excludes darker skinned Latinas/os, Blacks, or Native Americans (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Hurtado (2004) echoed this point when she said, “Victims of racism and sexism have borne powerful testimony to their injuries and their resilience. We have yet to chronicle how those who oppress make sense of their power *in relationship* to those they have injured” (p. 124).

So, what is an “Honorary White?” Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) theories on the “tri-racial stratification system” are predicated on the racialized constructions of three groups—Whites, Honorary Whites, and Collective Blacks (p. 179). While the tri-racial stratification system is one of “racial fluidity,” Honorary Whites might include lighter skinned Latinas/os, lighter-skinned Asians, and lighter skinned multi-racials (p. 179). Bonilla-Silva goes on to say that Honorary Whites, as a “buffer group,” work to further stratify Whites from Collective Blacks (p. 181). In this “tri-racial system,” *blanqueamiento* is of great significance. This is why Latinas/os strive to become Honorary Whites by highlighting their lighter skin and eye-color. This is why many Latinas are told to “marry up” not “down.” This is also why maintaining and reproducing mestizaje is so critical to our group. In most cases, lighter skinned Latinas align themselves with a White group—asserting, for example, “I am Spanish and not Mexican.” Even though lighter skinned Latinas who attempt to pass as White actively distinguish themselves from Collective Blacks, we would argue that we are not the “real” racists.

When we lighter skinned Latinas talk about race with one another, it is often predicated on the racism *done to us* but not *done by us*. Racial discussions rarely center on “whitening,” and the importance of *blanqueamiento* (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 192). We rarely acknowledge how racial exclusion occurs between Honorary Whites and

Collective Blacks—whether they be darker skinned Latinas, Native Americans, darker skinned Asians or Blacks. The race and gendered process of mestizaje results in further marginalizing others within the matrix of domination. The role of mestizaje discourse works to maintain the current social order, not dismantle it. I do not wish to imply here that all Latina raced-based talk marginalizes others. However, because many Latinas prefer to “stick with their own,” our conversations about race often reflect our ideological and material positioning in a status structure.

Latina claims to mestizaje make physical markers such as skin color and eye important determinants of who belongs within the Latina group. Depending on these markers, Latinas may or may not be able to “blend” with Collective Whites. For instance, I am a lighter skinned Latina who has dark hair and dark almond-shaped eyes. Growing up in my neighborhood, I was often referred to as a *China* but there was little doubt about my Mestiza origins. In an effort to appear “more White,” I did many things, such as using make-up tricks, to try to appear “less ethnic.” Deep inside I knew I would never be perceived as fully White, but my efforts at appearing less *China* might help me to “blend” with the whiter group. All of these experiences stemmed from my own mestizaje identifications.

Racial identification extends past notions of the individual, however. From a more general point of view, Herbert Blumer (1958) argued that race relations were rooted in social interaction when he said, “[W]ays in which given racial groups conceive of themselves and others is...fundamentally a *collective process* [original emphasis]” (p. 3). The way people come to identify themselves racially is in direct relationship to the way

“others” come to identify themselves as part of a racial group. Blumer characterized this process as a “sense of group positioning” and noted,

Some may feel bitter and hostile, with strong antipathies, with an exalted sense of superiority and with a lot of spite; others may have charitable and protective feelings, marked by a sense of piety and tintured by benevolence; other may be condescending and reflect mild contempt; others may be disposed to politeness and considerateness with no feelings of truculence. (p. 4)

In this way, racialized “group affiliation” becomes more than physical demarcations. Race prejudice becomes a sense of group position, a “historical product” that may be “intensified or weakened, brought to sharp focus or dulled” (p. 5). Group positionality, specifically those related to mestizaje, is part of this varied, flexible process.

### **Focus Statement**

Mestizaje serves as a tool for maintaining domination and Latina students in higher education are not exempt. Mestizaje is a raced and gendered process where its effects manifest in material ways. One research approach to schooling and Latinas has focused on quantitative measures of structural racism. As an example, the work of Solórzano and Yosso (2006) illustrated that “[o]ut of 100 Chicana/o students entering high school, we can expect 56 to drop out before graduation” (as cited in Leonardo, 2003). Going on, the authors say that “[i]f we follow the remaining 44 students, only 11 will enroll in four-year institutions. By their junior year in college, only seven Chicana/o students will remain. Finally, although two Chicana/o students will enroll in graduate or professional programs, only one will graduate” (as cited in Leonardo, 2003). Yosso (2005) termed this the “Chicano/Chicana pipeline.” This important data explains the

schooling outcomes of Latina/o students in the “pipeline.” However, I also wanted to understand how Latina race and gender norms contributed to these outcomes.

Specifically, how does individual and group ideology play a part in the schooling of Latinas?

In this project, I make connections between *mestizaje* and argue that this is a raced and gendered process. Interpreting these connections required a hermeneutical approach to Latinas’ subjective talk. Measuring the “subjective” has not been a prevalent approach in conducting educational research. How do you measure a phenomenon when this is based on an interpretation? At first glance, hermeneutical approaches<sup>6</sup> to research may seem to lack methodological vigor. However, in other disciplines where shame, repression, and feelings of guilt and transformation are involved, it is perfectly appropriate to draw upon interpretation as a means of evaluation. Looking at “talk therapy” methods, we see that discourse and behavior are intricately linked. Talk therapy methods are reminiscent of Habermas (1989) who contends that subjects express themselves discursively. Repression is then a result of “distorted communication.”

### **Purpose of the Study**

In studying Latina *mestizaje*, I wanted to understand how our discourse manifested in our behavior. At the onset of this project, I had yet to come across any research that focused specifically on Latina discourse from a critical hermeneutical frame. It appeared that although Latina thoughts were the driving force behind their talk and actions, there had yet to be a study where this connection had been considered. I felt

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<sup>6</sup> Hermeneutical approaches to interpreting discourse are used in a variety of academic fields, including: anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology and legal jurisprudence.

that there needed to be a study that focused on Latina ideology. Therefore, I believed that this study would be an addition to the noteworthy (yet at times limiting) work on critical theory and student ideology. The work of Fordham (1988), Willis (1977), and MacLeod (1987) were intricate pieces as I began my own focus on the ideological. Fordham established that ideology does not act in monolithic ways and therefore, is a porous process. Black students, for instance, have agency as they interact with colorblind and white supremacy ideology. Further, intersectionality works in a multitude of ways when paired with the larger social structures of school and society. Similarly, Willis and MacLeod illustrated the messiness of student ideology as it is played out in schools. Within these ethnographic studies, we are able to see how gender and race do play a part in student worldviews. Ultimately, we gather that ideological beliefs are part of a social process. Student beliefs are made and eventually re-made via the ideological.

Fordham, Willis, and MacLeod established that gendered and raced identities are manifestations of conscious ideologies or worldviews. Willis noted a sharp division between the worldviews of his White working-class male and female students. MacLeod witnessed very different belief systems amongst his male raced and classed students. In both of these studies, ideological social processes did not manifest uniformly; rather, ideology was subject to contestation and even transformation. These studies in education have added to our understanding of student identity vis-à-vis ideology. A focus on individual and group identities is important because, “[i]dentity exists in relation with others, and this state of difference...gives rise to our self” (Leonardo, 2003, p. 29).

By examining Latina discourse, I also sought to challenge previous notions regarding schooling outcomes and theories on uniform identity. While these issues did

surface within my interviews, my goal was to shed light on Latina mestizaje in order to disrupt it. Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* attempted a similar goal. She sought to understand White female consciousness—the individual as well as their group manifestation. Frankenberg envisioned a day when her book on White women and their process of becoming White was no longer pertinent or necessary. She espoused hope that “White women” ideology would be turned around to fight white supremacy. In this way, the ideological would become emancipatory.

### **Significance of the Study**

Latinas, as a collective group, do not have a universal genealogical history. Additionally, Latinas not only vary in their language usage, but also in their skin color, eye color, and hair texture. In other words, Latinas can be racially “read” in a multitude of ways. However, picking out a Latina “group member” from a crowd of people is easily done. Often the Latina group does not have an open membership, and this group often excludes Asians, Native Americans, and Blacks. This becomes problematic as we consider Althusser's (1971) belief that the ideological results in material effects.

Focusing on the ideological highlights the spaces where changes in worldview are possible. In a three-pronged approach to ideology (see McLaren, Allen, and Leonardo, 2000), the authors argue that language critique has the potential to become more. Language can result in changing people's consciousness as well as the social processes that come with these. Ideology is understood, perpetuated, and challenged by discourse (Leonardo, 2003). Therefore, by highlighting these permeable spaces, we may find room for the transformation of discourse and behavior.

This present study is of significance for several reasons. A study of Latina ideology adds a dimension to the way Latinas view themselves within the matrix of domination. How do Latinas construct their understandings—their obligations, expectations, and their social “norms,” especially in relation to race and gender? Where do Latinas racially position themselves within global white supremacy? If Latinas contribute to racial discourses of dominance, what are some examples of this? Arguably, Latina ideology is both permeable and subjective. However, we must look for objective patterns in their subjective formations to discern their role in constructing society. Challenging hegemonic Latina discourse works to also challenge the processes that are part of the matrix of domination.

### **Research Questions**

This ideological critique focused on two central questions:

1. What roles do class, ethnicity, gender, and race play in Latina college students' representations<sup>7</sup> of their social and educational situations?
2. In what ways do the discourses of these participants conform to and/or resist the ideologies that sustain the U.S. racialized social system?

### **Key Terms**

This study was predicated on some key terminology. In this section, the key terms of *mestizaje*, *race*, *ethnicity*, *discourse* and *ideology* are defined. Note here that I make a clear distinction between “race” and “ethnicity” because these two terms are often used

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<sup>7</sup> When I use the term “representations” here, I am alluding to the fact that the way one represents oneself (for instance, recollection of experiences and memories) can occur on conscious and unconscious levels.



interchangeably—especially as my participants talk about their own views on race and gender.

**Mestizaje.** For purposes of this study, I argue that mestizaje is a race and gender process (see Wade, 1997) that furthers U.S. and global white supremacy. The idea of mestizaje is often associated with Vasconcelos' (1979) *La Raza Cosmica*. Vasconcelos argued that this new, cosmic race, would blend all biological races together. However, the goal of this cosmic race was to “breed out” any Blackness or Indigenusness in order for Mestizos to become more White than Black. Mestizas play an important role in promoting (and reproducing) mestizaje. Since they have the power to bear offspring, the “beauty” (read: “lightening”) of the race is dependent upon their reproductive choices. While I discuss more about mestizaje throughout this dissertation, it is important to note here that mestizaje is not simply a race ideology. There are gendered components of mestizaje as well, often making it difficult to parse out how race and gender “work” within a mestizaje social structure.

**Race.** Race is most often thought of as a natural, genetic, and social grouping based on physical markers. However, most social scientists argue that there is no biological rationale linking one's genetic make-up to one's race. In fact, “Evidence from the analysis of genetics indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies *within* (original emphasis) so-called racial groups” (“AAA Statement,” 1998). Despite this scientific evidence, much of the non-academic community reasons that the separation of human races is biological or natural.

Within the United States, this ideology of “human difference” has been used as a “strategy for dividing, ranking and controlling colonized people” (“AAA Statement,”

1998). For instance, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English and European settlers used so-called racial differences as a reason to conquer Native American peoples. Similarly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. African slave trade was predicated on notions of racial inferiority and difference. Over 100 years ago, sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) referred to the colorline and poignantly argued that it would be the most significant social problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In writing about the racial reality of Blacks as an “inferior” race, Du Bois observed that this was “a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 8). So, while race may be a social construction, it serves as a way to justify white supremacy. Therefore, social, economic, educational and political inequality are biologically linked to one’s “inferior” race (“AAA Statement,” 1998).

I believe that Omi & Winant (1994) operationalized race best when they talked about racial formation as a constructed project that undergoes an ideological process. Race is not a stagnant entity and is “hegemony” flexible. Racial hegemony allows for historical and social circumstances to be produced and reproduced at the macro and micro level.

Racism is not a problem “of people who think there are races ‘out there’ but the materially coordinated set of institutions that result from people’s actions” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 62). Micro and macro racial projects are key to understanding how white supremacy is maintained and how racial hierarchy is reproduced (see Omi and Winant, 1994). Over time, racial projects work to advantage some social actors at the expense of

others. As race is materially intertwined with individual and collective ideologies, these ideologies correlate to social, material, and structural outcomes (Leonardo, 2009).

**Ethnicity.** Ethnicity is often used in reference to a collective category of people whose members identify with one another via common heritage, cultural and social practices, and beliefs in common ancestry (Johnson, 2000). Like race, ethnicity is a social and historical construct held together by common backgrounds, allegiances, and alliances. Appealing to ethnic commonalities often acts as a group cohesion. Many people erroneously think that members of an ethnic group share both a common heritage *and* biological background. Often “ethnicity” is used as a proxy for “race” or to mask the racial interests of the collective group.

**Discourse.** Discourse refers to oral and written conversation and the underlying thoughts related to these (Johnson, 2000). Discourse can consist of face-to-face talk, written text, or media products read *as text*. Looking at discourse from a symbolic frame, Michel Foucault argued that our formation of discourse reflects what we consider to be reality. Therefore, the way we “talk” about the world in turn shapes our social behaviors.

Discourse, in the most practical sense, is also a form of language as a social practice. As Van Dijk (2008b) noted, “Everyday conversation is at the heart of social life” (p. 132). An ideological critique of discourse focuses on “the more hidden and latent type of everyday beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Habermas (1989) illustrated this best when he stated that “[l]anguage is a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. Insofar as the legitimizations of power relations

are not articulated...language is ideological” (p. 259). The present project focused on mestizaje discourse and Latina “meaning making.”

**Ideology.** Ideology is loosely defined as a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that justify either the status quo or movements to change it (Johnson, 2000). In other words, ideology reflects the interests of dominant groups, reproduces status-quo beliefs and values, or may be a catalyst for societal change. In looking at ideology within Chapter 2, I distinguished between three applications: a) ideology as a negative; b) ideology as a necessary; and c) ideology as empowerment. I applied Leonardo’s (2003) definition of ideology here: he argued for a three-prong approach to racial ideology.

Omi and Winant (1994) argued that racial ideology works to become common sense within society. Similarly, “Although racist ideology is ultimately false, it fulfills a practical role” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). Mestizaje, as a racial ideology, is often used to justify, maintain, or reproduce false micro- and macro- worldviews. Leonardo (2003) stated it best when he said that,

Ideology *is* the relations that subjects live out, whatever forms these may take. It is determining of us and is determined by us. Ideology both structures and is structured by our social practices. We act because of our prior ideological commitments, but as we act, we constitute ideology as a lived relation to our social world. (Leonardo, 2003, p. 38)

A study of mestizaje highlights potential areas of ideological disruption. In studying mestizaje, the goal is to change historical, material, and social relationships.

In Chapter 2, I highlight the extant literature related to Latina discourse, Latina talk about race, mestizaje ideology, and how ideology relates to studies of race. Latina

discourse is traced to their micro and macro manifestations. In this way we begin to see that mestizaje discourse becomes more than just “talk.” Latina literature often focuses on discourse that is reflective of our historical and social experiences. These include our experiences of our being raced and gendered. A focus on talk serves as a starting point for articulating the effects of mestizaje in our daily lives. The historical foundations of ideology illustrate the competing and overlapping thoughts on the subject and how these apply to a study of Latina mestizaje.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Latina Discourse: Fictional and Non-Fictional**

Discourse in the form of text has often been a way for Latinas to interpret their social location, situation, and positionality as raced, classed and gendered beings. Non-fictional works by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Ana Castillo have provided Latinas with a language to explain their “lived” experiences. Fictional work from Latina authors such as Sandra Cisneros have served as identity frameworks as Latinas have sought to make sense of their lives—as women of color, mothers, scholars, and activists.

As Anzaldúa (2002) stated:

The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The Mestiza’s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness (p. 179).

This state of perplexity, and how to make meaning of it, has often been the focus of Latina discourse *as text*. Some of the themes common to this fictional and non-fictional talk include: 1) “positionality” within physical and psychic borderlands, 2) the perception of Latina ethnic differences and sources of pride, 3) issues of gender and phenotype and how these manifest uniquely for Latinas, and 4) issues of Chicana (“third world”) transcendence.

In *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (1999), Gloria Anzaldúa, a self-proclaimed “borderland *Chicana*,” wrote about her experiences living on the border between Texas and Mexico. She described the conflict of the borderland as challenging and frustrating. She referred to living on the border as being a “marginal person,” existing in a perpetual state of transition and ambivalence. She expressed an ambivalent duality at what it was like to have a steady influence of different cultures. She wrote about the difficulties in claiming a culture for herself. She combined prose with poetry, Mexican-Indian mythology with psychology, and mythology with philosophy, to explore the meaningful quest for a racial and cultural identity. In her work, Anzaldúa circumvents the parameters of what it means to be a Chicana and an amalgamation of multiple identities.

Anzaldúa (1999) described the area where the United States and Mexico met as *una herida abierta*, a border “[w]here the Third World grates against the first and bleeds before a scab forms. [It] hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (p. 25). Throughout Anzaldúa’s text she employed this similar imagery as she analyzed border culture. She described a border as a place that generally separates an area that is safe from one that is unsafe. Borders are used to distinguish people —*us* from *them*. Anzaldúa was critical of the physical and

psychological borders that have tended to divide Chicanas. She believed that a re-envisioned mestizaje could unite these physical and psychological borders.

Anzaldúa continually reminded us of the frustration of borderlines. They are vague and undetermined and “created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25). Borders are always changing and shifting as people cross over. The border keeps out the forbidden, *los atravesados*, whom Anzaldúa refers to as the “strange” or the “troublesome.” These forbidden people come in the forms of *mongrels* and *mulatos*—the “half-breeds” as she refers to them. These “lost” people who cross the border are trying to get to “normal.” Normal is a place on the other side of the Mexican border. Her metaphors regarding “forbidden” people and “normal” people conjured up certain ideas about their physical (ethnic) traits.

Anzaldúa’s work pointed to the obvious phenomena that the border does not just divide two lands—*here* and *there*. Borders come to mean much more. They become social, cultural, and *psychic* borders that seep into cultures, standing in the way of Mestiza unification. This is a constant reminder that hegemonic collisions occur within the Mestiza identity. For instance, Anzaldúa (1999) challenged the notions of “legitimate” border inhabitants, often viewed as White males who are in power. Additionally there are also those who align themselves with Whites. Those Mestizas who resist these hegemonic notions are considered inferior.

Historical and political issues are also discussed in Anzaldúa’s work. Readers are encouraged to contemplate the political problem of the U.S.–Mexican border and how it affects personal and cultural identity. Anzaldúa (1999) also gave a history of the original “peopling” of the Americas. The first inhabitants came across the Bering Straits and

walked south across the continent. She went on to explain that archeologists have found the oldest evidence of humankind in the United States, the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors, dated back to 35000 B.C. In the Southwest United States, archeologists discovered 20,000-year-old campsites of Indians in Aztlán, the Edenic place of origin for the Azteca. This historical account of the Mestizos was intensely passionate. To Anzaldúa, then, mestizaje is both political, and anthropological. These elements are all part of the formation of mestizaje.

Living at the border is likened to being a “half-breed,” caught in the crossfire of two very different peoples. Therefore the new Mestiza is a social and physical manifestation of three entities—European White, Mexican, and *Indio*. As a raced and gendered conception, mestizaje highlights the various intersectionalities of Mestizas (e.g., sexuality).

In fact, Anzaldúa (1999) is best known for her ideas on mestizaje and the new Mestiza. She talked at length about how this mind-body and spirit mixture will come to define a new type of Latina consciousness. Anzaldúa, in fact, argued for a new definition of what it means to be Mestiza, especially in terms of U.S. and Mexican borders. While her critique of *The Cosmic Race* (Vasconcelos, 1979) is arguably limited, her work has been vital in the creation of new theories such as Third World Feminism. Anzaldúa's work has been used to explain the Mestiza experience and bind our group together. We can draw upon our common experiences in oppression and resiliency. While Anzaldúa problematized the social constructs of gender and sexuality, she talked less about how Mestizas can be oppressed—even as “new Mestizas.” The reader is also left to wonder whether it is the “lived experiences” of Mestizas, the difference in their “blood,” or both



that result in the new Mestiza. Ultimately, Anzaldúa does not fully challenge the ideological conceptions of mestizaje. Mestizaje is talked about on the basis of positionalities, re-envisioned, and then called upon once again as a promising identity framework. Problematizing the mind-body-spirit fusions of mestizaje is rarely the focus of her work.

Latina fictional and non-fictional work tends to follow in the similar tradition of Anzaldúa. There is a focus on the identity experiences that we, as Latinas, share. These common experiences often include our issues with intersectionality, oppression, and resiliency.

*The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1994) is a novel about Esperanza's dream, the "American Dream," to own a house of her own. More than anything, Esperanza wants a home just like the ones she sees on television, her own house on Mango Street. Like Anzaldúa (1999), Esperanza feels like a "half-breed." She does not belong to a race or class of people that live in the houses that she has often dreamed of living in. Esperanza refuses to identify herself in terms of the house she can afford. However, the poverty where she lives keeps her and her family from obtaining the "American Dream" they so fully desire.

Within Cisneros's work, as in Anzaldúa's, there is the conception between *here* and *there*. Esperanza is stuck in the *barrio* but she wants to go to the other side, outside of the *barrio*. *Those* people have the nice houses she sees on television. A nun that Esperanza meets on Loomis Street points out this concept of *here* and *there*, in a rather ironic scene. The nun teaches Esperanza to be ashamed of where she is living and be ashamed of her neighborhood. She implores Esperanza to have a "real" house someday

and points out the glaring differences between her house and the one of her dreams. Her current house is not real because it is not good enough to be considered real. Through these vignettes, Cisneros illustrates the longing that Latinas have to become something other than what they currently are. Most of this Latina longing comes via racialized beauty (read: White) and material symbols of wealth. These symbols signify the ways in which whiteness (materially, socially and psychologically) is of value.

In a sense, Cisneros' used the house on Mango Street as a symbol of whiteness deferred. The house stands for financial status and security. It means poverty has been overcome. Obtaining a new house, a new validation, would mean forging a new identity. This new identity wouldn't be exactly a "White" identity (at least in Esperanza's view) but it would be a validation of her *mestizaje*. This validation would be evidence that she belonged somewhere else.

Houses can also be symbolic of our bodies. Our bodies "house" our souls, our innermost thoughts and feelings. Our body stores our memories and is a place that is safe and secure. Esperanza's desire to have a better house is also a metaphor for her wanting bodily acceptance, from herself and others. While Esperanza literally wanted a nice house to define her, she metaphorically saw the rejection of her existing house as a rejection of who she was. This novel makes issues of *blanquemento* more visible, although Cisneros never talks specifically about *blanquemento*. Much like Anzaldúa's work, with Cisneros' work we get a sense of the borderland "divides" that Latinas face. We do not get a sense of where Latinas are positioned within a U.S. racial hierarchy or why striving for a "new house" is significant.

Ana Castillo's novel, *The Guardians* (2008), takes place on the El Paso, Texas–Juárez, Mexico border, which is referred to as a “paradise lost.” Here family members have regularly disappeared. Women are murdered for their organs or raped by “narcos.” It is a soul-less desert where undocumented workers hope to gain access to America. In this “paradise lost” people try to find love, or at least some sort of salvation. Like Anzaldúa's (1999) work and Cisneros's (1994) novel, Castillo's borderland(s) divide. Latinas must draw upon their resiliency in order to overcome.

Castillo's novel reflects four different identity experiences. Regina, a 50-year-old widowed virgin, lives in Cabuche, New Mexico. She is on a quest to find her brother, Rafa, as he tries to cross the border and join her in the United States. Miguel, Regina's love interest, is a leftist high school teacher. Gabriel (“Gabo”), Rafa's 16-year-old son, is obsessed with becoming a monk and, at the same time, is tempted by the gang life where he will find some sort of family and security. Bakelite Milton is an older man from the El Segundo *barrio* who forces his grandson, Miguel, into action. Miguel rescues Gabriel from jail one night, and then begins to flirt with Regina. The characters in Castillo's novel illustrate the complexities of Latina life, specifically for Regina.

Regina is the heart of this story. She is a modern Latina, skeptical of the church and unable to forgive the people who have hurt her. She protects her property, and uses her rifle to keep infidels from her ranch. Regina is technically Gabriel's mother in the absence of Rafa. Regina struggles in raising a “son,” a child that she did not physical give birth to. There is a very strong sense of family in the novel. Who, or what, makes up a family? Most notably, the novel illustrates that even within extended families, mestizaje norms still exist.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader becomes privy to a couple of facts. Seven years earlier, coyotes, or paid traffickers, murdered Gabo's mother, Ximena, when she tried to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. Her mutilated body was found, her organs gone—sold most likely. Fear surrounds this border town as well as the lure of the other side. The characters in Castillo's book become consumed with finding Rafa. All of these characters may not be biologically connected, but they are an extended family. *The Guardians* (2008) is rich in symbolism and flavored with Mexican aphorisms. We see how complex and perilous border life is when you're living between two worlds. Gender expectations are not the same for Latinas like Regina. Also, the values of bodies (or lack thereof) are subjected to race and gendered processes. This book speaks of faith, family bonds, and ethnic pride. "The Guardians" is a reference to the "guarding" of Latinas/os. Castillo's book is a validation of the raced and gendered manifestations of mestizaje. While Latina race and gender experiences are not equal to those of the men, they are part of mestizaje (ethnic) pride, nonetheless.

Like Castillo's novel, Cisneros' (2003) *Caramelo* focuses heavily on Latina identity. Specifically, we are made to wonder what it means to be *Mexicana*. There are many references to skin color, language, family, and points of origin. The narrator, Lala, searches for her identity and her place in the world. She turns to her ethnic roots and her familial past for both inspiration and guidance. In her reflections, she refers to the players in her life: Aunty Light Skin, Awful Grandmother, and Uncle Old. Lala tells the story of growing up in two cultures, and those challenges. Cisneros revisited a common theme within her books: oppressive gender and beauty expectations, and how these manifest uniquely for Latinas.

Much like *Caramelo* (2003), Cisneros's (1992) collection, *Woman Hollering Creek: And Other Stories*, presented a more personal account of Cisneros's navigation of these oppressive gender frames. The book is comprised of 22 short pieces, all self-contained. The vignettes are set in Texas, Chicago, or Mexico, during the 1960s to the late 1980s. One story, "Eyes of Zapata," is set in the early 20th century. Cisneros groups her 22 stories into three sections, each with a story that shares the same title as the section: "My Friend Lucy Who Smells Like Corn," "One Holy Night," and "There Was a Man, There Was a Woman." They are all first-person narratives of individuals who have been assimilated into American (read: White culture) while carrying a sense of divided loyalty to Mexico. Like Anzaldúa's arguments on the new Mestiza, we see Cisneros' struggle with navigating the Borderlands.

Some of the major themes of *Woman Hollering Creek* are poverty, the search for identity, and the lived experiences of Mexican-American woman. Misogyny, spousal abuse, violence, rape, and the limitations of traditional gender roles are recurring issues for Cisneros's female characters. These women, many who realize the soul-killing restrictions of familial and cultural expectations, struggle toward their own identity, and control over their life outcomes. In several of Cisneros's stories, the heroines try to escape race and gender limitations through education and self-expression. *Woman Hollering Creek* details many of the common race and gender experiences of Latinas. In many ways, these stories validate our experiences. However, how should we contextualize this validation, in relation to the raced and gendered processes of mestizaje?

Third world feminism has essentially been constructed around Cherie Moraga's and Gloria Anzaldúa's work. Their conceptions illustrated new social and political possibilities for Latinas. Anzaldúa and Moraga (1984) wrote the foreword to *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. The book consisted of texts by authors such as, Jo Carillo, Gabrielle Daniels, Nellie Wong, and Genny Lim. These authors gave voice to the challenges that women of color have felt. It was a forum for those women who had be silenced and ignored due to their color and gender. The book also offered a serious challenge to White feminists who made claims to a common "sisterhood." *This Bridge Called my Back* laid the foundation for what is now referred to as third wave feminism, with an emphasis on race and gendered subjectivities. It provided a loose framework for activist coalitions, new feminisms, and also issues on race, class, and sexuality. It also validated the academic frameworks for examining these. It should be noted that *This Bridge Called my Back* did not address issues of hegemony or ideology within third world feminist groupings.

Anzaldúa's (1995) *Making Faces, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* is an anthology of essays and poetry by women of color. In her introduction, Anzaldúa tells the readers that they must do the work of piecing these stories together. Our thoughts are part of a fragmented dialogue, the language in which feminists of color communicate. Anzaldúa goes on to argue that feminists of color must challenge patriarchal discourse and the problems that it creates. Some of these problems include: racism, myopia, ethnocentricity, and the blatant hatred of women. Anzaldúa's anthology is a mixture of academic and non-academic work, which serves to validate the experiences of women inside and outside of higher academia.

The authors included students, activists, and artists writing on different feminist topics. Many of the essays combine theory with poetry and personal narration that reflect a span of emotion. Again, Anzaldúa's work contributes to a sense of Latina validation and empowerment.

Anzaldúa (2002) *The Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* is another anthology with over 80 contributors. These contributors consisted of academics, artists, and activists. She modeled this book after *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). Therefore, *The Bridge We Call Home* was part of a continued exploration of the aspects and challenges for the new Mestiza. The goal of the book was to match theory with multicultural feminism and included poems, letters, essays, and stories from women and men of different positionalities. The writers explored various themes such as sexism, racism, and homophobia. Some of the writers included, Max Wolf Valero, Shefali Milczarek-Desai, and Evelyn Alsultany. Anthropologist Helen Johnson wrote that *The Bridge* gave her a new, global perspective on issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and power. This anthology challenged Johnson's utopian ideal of universal sisterhood.

In many cases, these texts have served to reaffirm many of the common experiences of Latinas and give us "voice." These fictional and non-fictional writings have reaffirmed our experiences as raced, classed, and gendered beings. The stories have also validated our place and positionality. In other words, Latina discourse *as text* has worked to make the Latina group—with all of its complexities—what it is today.

### **Latinas' Talk about Race**

Latina talk *as text* has typically come from academia where themes such as feminist epistemology, LatCrit theory, Latina/o schooling, and immigration have been

discussed. Behar (1996) talks about feminist epistemology and how *feminista* researchers have transformed the traditional methods of anthropology. Behar argued for a more “vulnerable observer” who becomes part of the discourse they are observing. Like Anzaldúa, Cisneros, Castillo, and Moraga, Behar employs the notion of being a “border crosser.” She confessed, “I am here because I am a woman of the border: between places, between identities, between languages, between cultures, between longings and illusions, one foot in the academy and one foot out” (p. 162). In this sense, Behar is wary of how traditional, hegemonic academia has “Othered” her as an anthropologist.

Sofia Villenas (1996) similarly talked about the contradictions of being both the colonizer and colonized ethnographer. She argued that her positioning, within and outside of the academia, has placed her in this vulnerable position. Villenas is charged with “authoring” the lives and stories of other Latina women while she has been “read” and objectified as “the Other.” When reflecting on this positionality, she noted that “[a]s a *Xicana* and indigenous woman, I cannot escape my own experiences of marginalization and dislocation in this artificially bound entity known as the United States of America. At the same time, I cannot escape privilege afforded to me as a university professor” (p. 76). Latina scholars, activists, and authors have provided a theoretical backdrop (a “safe space”) for this talk to occur. These academic pieces have informed Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os of the inequality that still exists in educational forums. Schooling forums have always been places where dominance and power are played out.

Academic Latina talk has also empowered those Latinas who have read it. Feminist epistemology has influenced our notions of knowledge and our inquiry practices. Our academic research, and their focus, has become more robust. As an



example, Trinidad Galván's (2001) ethnographic work on *mujeres desjuicidas*, focused on womanist centered groups in Mexico. Her participants' stories illustrate how Latina circles can foster academic, social, and personal empowerment in our everyday life. As Latina scholars, our approaches and topics of research are political. Oftentimes, we choose to illuminate the phenomenon that has been left in the shadows. For Latina academics, this research reifies our participation. We belong in this hegemonic space of higher education.

As an example, as a graduate student I was fortunate to be a part of a feminist epistemology class composed of several other Latina students, as well as a Latina professor. This class was most rewarding because I was able to speak freely about certain issues that I felt unable to address in previous contexts. This feeling of empowerment became quite useful during a family tragedy involving my husband's cousin, a presumed prostitute, who had been missing for nearly five years. When her body was discovered on Albuquerque's West Mesa along with 13 other female women of color, my husband's family was quick to point an accusatory finger at the cousin's unwise life choices. This was the first time I spoke up on behalf of these women. I used empirical work from my epistemology class as my ammunition. Had I not had access to this academic work, I am certain that I would have remained silent during this family exchange.

Another major theme within Latina academic work is that of navigation. How do Latinas navigate within their unique position, situation, and social location? The extant literature has traditionally focused on ethnicity issues such as educational inequality, immigration status, and language equality. Most recently, there have been academic

moves to term these as part of a larger discussion, deemed LatCrit theory. One may ask, however, what is the “theory” behind LatCrit theory? How does LatCrit theory differ from other ethnicity paradigms? I would say that at this point, LatCrit theory focuses more on points of identity inclusion rather than the factions or groups that it may exclude. For instance, I have not seen how LatCrit theory approaches ideological falsities, such as mestizaje. Is it possible to talk about Latina/o positionality without engaging in a discussion of hegemonic white supremacy?

Finding limitations to LatCrit theory does not dismiss its contributions to academia. Colorblind rhetoric has purported that Latina/o educational equality is much better than it was in the 1960s. However, LatCrit work has challenged this claim. In *Critical Counterstories Along the Chicana/Chicano Education Pipeline*, Yosso (2005) noted that Chicana/os are part of the youngest, largest, and fastest growing racial/ethnic “minority” population in the United States. Yet, on every educational level, they have suffered the lowest educational outcomes of any racial or ethnic group. Using a counter storytelling methodology, Yosso (2005) debunked racialized myths that blame the victims for these unequal educational outcomes. By debunking meritocratic myths, we may direct our focus on the historical patterns of institutional neglect.

Yosso (2005) used empirical data as well as theoretical arguments to expose and analyze institutional racism. In humanizing the need to transform our broken educational system, she offered narratives that highlighted the problems and possibilities, which are all part of the Chicana/o pipeline.

There is no doubt that academic Latina talk has contributed to our understandings of Latinas in schools. However, this race and gender talk has largely centered on our

group's positionality in relation to Whites. What is missing is a larger discussion about how these experiences fit within the larger schema of white supremacy. Also, we need to chart the terrains of the ideological and how this relates to race and gender process. How does the ideology of mestizaje, for instance, produce and reproduce the inequalities we see in schools? We would be best to evaluate Latina/o schooling from an ideological frame.

### **Ideology as Applied to Race**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, perspectives vary on the micro and macro spheres of ideology. Examinations of ideology, however, have long been at the center of critical social theory. An examination of ideology might begin with Marx and Engels (1969), who believed that ideology was a product of capitalism and was, therefore, a negative falsehood. Louis Althusser (1971) slightly diverged in Marxist thought when he argued that the ideological was largely unconscious and was therefore subjective in its effects. Althusserian thought leads to the belief that the individual cannot think outside of his or her ideology. Ideology, when framed in this way, is a necessary process for organizing social and material practices.

Eagleton (1991) and Giroux (1983) called for wider examinations of ideology. Eagleton urged one to not label everything "ideological" because ideology is dependent on the "meanings, signs and values in social life" (p. 1-2). Giroux (1983) argued that ideology could lead to domination but also believed in its emancipatory possibilities. Giroux stated "As distortion ideology becomes hegemonic. As an illumination it contains elements of reflexivity and the grounds for social action. It is the positive moment in the dialectic of ideology that has been ignored by education critiques" (p. 67). To

summarize, Giroux (1983) envisioned the ideological as a space for transformational possibilities.

Finally, by utilizing a contemporary critical social theory perspective on race and ideology, Leonardo (2003) viewed ideology as a three-dimensional process. He argued that ideology was socially incorporated in three ways: ideology as negative, ideology as necessary, and ideology as positive. While theories on ideology abound, some of the most pertinent themes center on: 1) spoken discourse and ideology, 2) ideology as related to class issues, 3) ideology as (re)appropriated to race, and 4) the wider examination of ideology and its possibilities.

Why is a study of spoken discourse intricately linked to ideology? Leonardo (2003) posited that spoken discourse “is one of the most important ways of representing (material and ideological) experiences” (p. 51). In subsequent work, Leonardo (2009) proceeded to argue that a study of race discourse is ideal for mirroring the subjective ideological racial worldviews of individuals; we make ideology and ideology makes us.

Discussions of *discourse* and the symbolic refer to the discourse theories of Foucault. Foucault (1972a) believed that discourse validated knowledge. That is, we come to know meaning and make sense of our world via discourse. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is merely a term for analyzing different systems of thoughts, ideas, images and other symbolic practices that make us who we are. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972a) illustrated that ideas can produce historical transformation and not just reflect it. Discourse relates to power, space, and domination; thus Foucault’s discourse theory directs us to be attentive to minimal shifts in how language expresses ideas. Language and other “symbolic exchanges” are the main topic of discourse theory.

Discourse refers to specific patterns of language that tell us something about the individual speaking, the culture of that individual, the network of a person's social institutions, and even the individual's most basic assumptions. Discourse may also give an individual power or authority over other individuals.

Jürgen Habermas (1989) was pragmatically at odds with Foucault and believed that colloquial communication was more complex. He argued that, in addition to spoken discourse, language practice is embedded with non-linguistic communicative symbols. When subjects speak, the intentions are unknown, even to themselves. Habermas posits rules of communicative competence and mirrors these from Marxist thoughts on labor processes. As part of the "second wave" of the Frankfurt School, Habermas and others such as Erich Fromm attempted to bridge material enlightenment to social-therapeutic enlightenment (Scott, 1978). While somewhat critical of Freud's "scientific" approach to the unconscious, Habermas utilized Freud's notions of the Ego, Id, and Super Ego to explain systematically distorted communication (Habermas, 1989, p. 311). In other words, Habermas views ideology as "communication distorted by power (Eagleton, 1991, p. 128)." Seen this way, discourse is either a tool of domination or an impetus for emancipation.

Habermas, in a utopic manner, focuses on the "ideal speech situation" where power and domination are null and colloquial communication can proceed in a non-ideological fashion. Habermas understands, however, that typical discourse is riddled with childhood memories repressed deep within the psyche. In these instances, discourse needs to be deciphered. Re-symbolization must undergo a de-symbolization (Habermas, 1989, p. 309). This exegesis requires an outsider who adopts the role of interpreter, or, as

Habermas argues, the role of psychoanalyst. At its best, re-symbolization expunges the unnecessary constraints of communication resulting in emancipatory self-reflection (Habermas, 1989, p. 317).

Habermas would concur that discourse does not only make up the world that we live in, it affects how we understand knowledge and “truth.” Our discourse shapes the way we live our lives, in effect building our imagination. Particular forms of discourse allow groups with similar invested interests to “speak the truth,” or at least what they believe to be the truth. Discourse can either reproduce hegemony if left in the embedded state or become part of an enlightenment process.

Traditional Marxist thought provides some of the first insights into ideology as a form of domination. In *Ideology and False Consciousness: Marx and his Historical Progenitors*, Pines (1993) stated that the concept of “false consciousness” comes from Marx’s theory of social class. He referred to the systematic misrepresentation of dominant social relations in the consciousness of subordinate classes. Marx never used the term “false consciousness,” but he did pay special attention to the related concepts of ideology and commodity fetishism. The theory is that members of subordinate classes—such as workers, peasants, and slaves—suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them systematically hide the realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination that those relations embody. He related the concepts of mystification, ideology, and fetishism to this theory.

Pines (1993) noted that Marx’s theory of class was based on an analysis of economic relations, constituting an understanding of the social order. An individual’s position within this system of property determines his or her social class. Individuals

also possess subjective thoughts, mental frameworks, and identities. These mental constructs provide a cognitive framework for understanding a person's part in the world and the forces that govern his or her life. An individual's mental constructs may conform more or less well to the social reality they seek to represent. In class society, there is an inborn conflict of material interests between privileged and subordinate groups. Marx claims that mechanisms of social control emerge in class society. These systematically create distortions, errors, and blind spots in the consciousness of the underclass. If those conscious-shaping mechanisms did not exist, then the underclass, always a majority, would very quickly overthrow the dominating system.

Simply put, Marx's and Engels (1998) use the term "ideology" in reference to a system of ideas through which people understand their world. A central theoretical assertion in Marx's writings is the view that "ideology" and thought are dependent on the material circumstances in which a person lives; systems of ideology support the advantages of the dominant class.

Ideology itself represents the production of ideas, conceptions, and consciousness -- all that people might say, imagine, and conceive. These ideas include things like politics, morality, law, religion, and metaphysics. Ideology is the superstructure of any civilization and it supports the conventions and culture that make up the dominant ideas of a society. Therefore, the way in which we understand our lives, the frameworks in which we make and distribute our experience, is fundamental to how we live them. Marx would argue that our consciousness comes into play in everything that we do, providing character as well as purpose.

Central, of course, to Marxism is the understanding of capitalism as an economic

system with two major classes. The capitalist class owns and controls all production and capital, and they are perpetually trying to increase their profits. The working class, on the other hand, which is the largest percentage of the population, sells their labor and working abilities for a certain wage. The profits mainly come from paying workers less than the value that these workers add to production, in effect exploiting the workers. Theoretically, Marx might argue that to understand racism or even gender inequality is to understand how capitalism works. By extension, the only way to end race and gender inequality is to overthrow capitalism.

In the Marxist or class-based analysis of racism (Marx & Engels, 1998), a fragmented and racially divided working class is a result of both material and ideological conditions. It is possible but not viable to dissolve racial, ethnic, gender and other “differences” within capitalism. One might wonder why racism and gender inequality often exist outside capitalistic accumulation. In their writings, however, Marx and Engels (1998) offer little explanation.

Althusser was one of Marx’s biggest critics; he believed Marx provided insufficient explanations regarding the actual process of “taking up” ideology. In the book *Louis Althusser*, Ferretter (2006) argued that Althusser revolutionized Marxist theory. Althusser’s ideas changed the face of literary and cultural studies to influence political modes of criticism such as feminism, post-colonialism, and queer theory (2006). Althusser explained that when people think that they have an identity, personality, a soul, or a belief, this constitutes their fundamental reality. This can be reduced to a single word: ideology. Ideology causes individuals, determined by their insertion in a complex series of social practices, to believe that they are free subjects.



Althusser saw ideology as largely unconscious. He believed that ideology influenced a person before birth and as the person grew. Each person was an “I,” a subject, and a site of identity, thought, and action. Althusser referred to this as “interpellation.” Ideology calls to a subject, as if another were calling the subject in the street (Ferretter, 2006). It causes others to see that individual as a subject, although in the capitalist mode of production, the individual has none of the attributes of that ideological concept.

Althusser’s theories involve contemplating how individuals are brought into ideology as subjects—why individuals are complicit with ideology in a certain culture. Althusser uses psychoanalytic theory to illustrate how economic structures inhere in the individual as requisites of their existence or being. Interpellation is the theory of how this occurs. Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among individuals. It recruits them all. And, it “transforms” the individuals into subjects. It transforms them all. It does so by that very precise operation which Althusser calls interpellation and can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace every day police, hailing, “Hey, you there!”

Althusser (2008) considers, as an example, Christian religious ideology. In *On Ideology (Radical Thinkers)*, he argues, the “subjects” of the ideology, Christians, are addressed or interpellated by the ISA of the Church. They are told that God exists, God created them, they are responsible to him, and they should behave in a certain way to please him. They are even told that God became a human being like them, and that as human beings they will become like God. It is in terms like these that Christians understand themselves and act. Althusser (2008) discerns several important aspects in

which ideology interpellates the individual as a subject. He argues, “All this ‘procedure’ to set up Christian religious subjects is dominated by a strange phenomenon: the fact that there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, for example, God” (p. 119).

Althusser’s theories do not represent one single or unified front on the concept of ideology, but rather several strands of his ruminations over some years. His theories referenced several different traditions: including Marx, Comte, and Durkheim. He regarded ideology as pre-scientific. To Althusser, philosophy was not simply ideological, or a “sheer ideological illusion” to which Marx and Engels reduced it. Philosophy is ideological when it manifests in new knowledge based on existing scientific concepts with or without the development of the new theory. The danger of science, then, is that it is accepted as a truth of reality.

Althusser (2008) preferred theory to philosophy for the same reasons that Marx criticized Feuerbach as simply interpreting, rather than transforming history. However, this isn’t meant to reduce the status of philosophy. Althusser posited that ideology is like the unconscious. Ideology is as necessary to sustaining life as breathing and people depend on ideology as a way to make some limited sense of their life experiences. Ideology is not a consciousness, which would provide ideology a sense of autonomy, but is largely embedded and unrecognized in the unconscious. Where particular ideologies may have a history, ideology in general has no history and is eternal, like the unconscious. If ideology is a system of representations, of images that individuals use to create a portrait of the social formation for their own understanding, then there is space in one’s ideology that would allow them alternative possibilities.

Althusser (2008) discussed the ways in which people are always already subjects, by which he means that no one exists outside of the realm or system of ideology. Infants are interpellated into the social system at birth or, he suggests, even before. Still, the question arises: What (or whom) is a subject? Althusser (2008) believes that the word denotes “free subjectivity [and the] author” of one’s actions. Subjects who submit to a higher authority are stripped of all of their freedom, except that of freely accepting a position of submission. He went on to assert that this condition “is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual is interpellated as a [free] subject in order that he shall [freely] accept his subjection, that is, in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (p. 119). In this way, interpellated subjects may falsely assume that they are acting on free will when a specific ideology is in effect. In fact, “those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition to be outside of ideology,” which makes the ideological even more influential. Althusser asserts that by looking “outside ideology” (for example, scientifically) one will be able to acknowledge the ideological with less subjectivity.

In looking at ideology from the perspectives of Marx and Althusser, it is clear that race and class have traditionally been positioned at odds with one another. Leonardo (2004) made this key argument in “The Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Race Critique: Political Economy and the Production of Racialized Knowledge.” Leonardo discussed how educational political policy regards orthodox Marxism as committed to objectivism or the science of history. By contrast, race analysis works with the often “subjective” dimensions of racial oppression. In this way, class and race theories are often at odds with each other. Leonardo’s article attempted to create a new “race–class”

theory by integrating Marxist objectivism and race theory's focus on subjectivity. As a result, both Marxism and race analysis are strengthened while maintaining the integrity of each discourse. This can benefit education policy theory because praxis is the dialectical attempt to synthesize the inner and external processes of schooling.

The article noted that Heidi Hartmann (cited in Leonardo, 2004) first argued for a more progressive union in the "unhappy marriage" between Marxism and feminism. Leonardo (2004) argued for a very similar union between race and class analysis in education. He noted that often when Marxist orthodoxy takes up the topic of race, it reduces race relations to a reflex within class dynamics. This essentially means that orthodox Marxism economizes the concept of race and the specific issues found within themes of racial identity, development, and representation subsumed under modes of production, or even worse, as an instance of false class-consciousness. Leonardo stated that alternately, when race analysis takes up class issues, it sometimes accomplishes this by portraying race as something primordial or fixed, rather than rooted in the social and historical. The uncritical engagement of class issues with race discourse fails to adequately explain the historical.

Leonardo (2004) goes on to state that it is generally accepted that class status is one of the strongest, if not *the* strongest, predictors for student achievement. Essentially, there is a positive correlation between the class status of a student's family and that student's success in school. He also noted that it is equally acknowledged that the working class and the working-poor are made up of a disproportionate number of people of color: "In U.S. schools, Latino and African-American students face the interlocking effects of racial, economic, and educational structures. From the outset this establishes

the centrality of both class and race analysis to school outcomes and policies designed to address them” (2004). Leonardo’s work on race-class theory is one of his earlier arguments on issues of race, class, whiteness, and the binding variable of micro and macro ideology.

Leonardo’s (2009) *Race, Whiteness, and Education* focused on racial ideology and how this relates to white supremacy. It argued that Althusser’s theory of ideology is useful in the study of race because the effects of racism are just as much a problem of the ideological as they are of the material. Furthermore, Leonardo (2009) asserted that Althusser’s *discourse* on ideology enriches debates about race to the extent that his *general* insights on ideology are appropriate for such an analysis. Similarly, Leonardo discussed the love/hate relationship of ideology, race, and science. He stated that what is passed off as science—for example, eugenics—has been used to justify racial hierarchies. Leonardo pointed out that people, especially Americans, are still obsessed with “scientizing” racial categories, especially when it is at the expense of Blacks or, more aptly put, to the advantage of Whites. He asserts that science legitimates the *meaningfulness* or (lack thereof) of this concept, stigmatizing the study of race as simply ideological and artificial, unlike its “real” counterpart: culture. Therefore, while scholarly work may involve an examination of the “science of culture,” there is less of an attempt at a scholarly examination of the “science of race.” As such, race has become an ideological concept without a science. The ultimate consequence of this is the acknowledgement of race as a “social construct” yet no theoretical bridge linking this social construct to current or past material circumstances.

Leonardo (2009) believed that critical race work should study this construct's real manifestations *in addition to* critically understand the ideological dimensions of race. The "lived out" manifestations of racism affect how people imagine race in their daily lives. Leonardo (2009) used the example of White students in his multicultural and critical education courses that maintain their ideological worldviews despite scientific evidence to contradict their beliefs. White students might assert that they stay out of ghettos or *barrios* for fear of crime—but also for self-preservation *despite* the fact that people of color are more likely to be the victims of crime within these areas, not Whites. For many Whites, or those who are accepting of white supremacy ideology, this scientific approach to racism is futile because their ideological underpinnings have not been challenged and are still intact. According to Leonardo, changing the dominant racial ideology of Whites, as well as those individuals who strive for Whiteness, would be better off playing the lottery in hopes of hitting the jackpot; using as a "scientific" approach to disrupting racism has about the same odds.

Leonardo (2009) demonstrated that in education, race analysis proceeds with "no guarantees." However, a transcendence of race is indeed possible through its analysis, not by its bypassing. Leonardo asked us to consider what we have made of race and what race has made of us. While people may fear letting go of their culture, he suggested that we maintain our "social practices" but abolish the cultural (and thereby the "scientific") approach to viewing race and ethnicity. Ethnicity works to maintain group positionalities and reproduces our current racial hierarchy. In short, there is space for race transcendence and ideological transformation. This ideological transformation is open to the individual as well as vested ethnic/race groups.

In *Ideology: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton (1991) cited John Thompson's definition of ideology: "To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning—or signification—serves to sustain relations of domination." Eagleton goes on to argue that this perspective is probably the most widely accepted (p. 5). Eagleton himself offered sixteen additional definitions of ideology, from "the process of production of meanings, signs, and values of social life" to "the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality" (p. 1).

However, Eagleton argued that the wide acceptance of Thompson's ideology definition means that proclaimed socialists, feminists, and other radicals should come clean about the ideological nature of their own values. He stated that if "ideology" were confined to dominant forms of social thought, then it would be wrong and confusing to acknowledge that domination as ideology is sustained amidst different social values. Eagleton (1991) also argued that there must be a broader definition of ideology, an intersection between belief systems and political power. Such a definition, he asserted, would be neutral on the question of whether this "intersection" challenged or confirmed a particular social order.

Eagleton reminded us that the political philosopher Martin Seliger argued for a similar formulation, defining ideology as "sets of ideas by which men posit, explain, and justify ends and means of organized social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order" (p. 114). Eagleton described how some of the most productive currents in Marxist theory have straddled the epistemological and sociological definitions of ideology. He ascertained that both the wider and the narrower senses of ideology have

had their functions, despite being mutually incompatible. Eagleton's own response to the various meanings and definitions of ideology was—very candidly—“Use what you can.”

Eagleton attempted to clarify and refine the traditional parameters of ideology. He acknowledged the pressing contradiction that, in a world that is clearly racked by ideological conflict, postmodern and post-structuralism thinking seem to have rendered the concept of ideology obsolete. Eagleton posited that this demotion related to postmodern skepticism about truth and representation and the relations between rationality, interests, and power.

An examination of ideology as *transcendence* would be incomplete without an overview of Henry Giroux's work. Giroux reminded us that although schools are sites of domination and contestation, there exists possibility for transformation and empowerment. In *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*, Giroux (1984) stated that a number of mediating forces support forms of agency and resistance among teachers. Informal cultural and ideological factors such as ethnicity, race, world-view, and social class often generate oppositional attitudes among teachers toward school authority, rules, predefined curricular structures, and institutionally sanctioned forms of teacher accountability. This means that various individuals and groups of teachers interpret the role of schooling in different terms.

The aforementioned modes of opposition speak to the vitality of certain mediations from various social groups. These groups try to affirm their individual and collective identities via social structures and settings that have been predefined for them. Giroux (1984) analyzed Willis' (1977) study where working-class lads reject the middle-class mores of the school, supporting more fundamental assumptions about the existing



division of labor, gender, and power in the dominant society. Though Willis' the working-class lads rejected individualism, conformism, credentials, and other elements of the ideology of meritocracy, they supported ideas of sexism, racism, and anti-intellectualism. Teachers, Giroux argued, find themselves in these same types of situations. Though they may have recognized imperfections in meritocratic ideas about curriculum and pedagogy are, they supported a variety of myths and beliefs about social class and other forms of social domination. These false assumptions prevented them from developing insights into the political nature of their own praxis or the structural limitations imposed on them by existing social and economic arrangements.

According to Giroux, the confines and contradictions of the schooling process are mainly ideological. They are deep-seeded images, beliefs, and values that make the social construction of reality look like an essential aspect of society and schooling. Structural and social processes shape teachers, as well as students. We find these processes at the day-to-day levels of schooling. While the practical conditions of the schooling experience have varied from school to school, they have shared certain features that unite them into wider societal forces (1984). All school environments create certain pressures, constraints, and limits on the nature and feasibility of what students and teachers can do to "shape their own reality" (1984, p. 107). The size of a class, school authority, community influences, ideology, and the strength of a school board all play significant roles in determining the political vulnerability of students and teachers if they "innovated" or tried something different in their classrooms. The question of overt and covert "rules and meanings" that govern teacher decision-making cannot be ignored when analyzing the relationship of theory to practice.

Interestingly, much of Giroux's work focused on media discourse *as text* and how this discourse shapes the micro and macro ideology of students, teachers, and society. For instance, in *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth*, Giroux (1996) makes the argument that within our society, youth culture is often viewed as a problem of deviance that needs to be solved (p. 3). Giroux contemplated Snoop Doggy Dogg's *Newsweek* cover photo along with its headline about Black men spreading violence like a social disease through their music. He cited the *Newsweek* article that proclaimed that the "problem" of (Black) violence isn't just in the music; (Black) violence is an everyday part of life for *these people* (Giroux, 1996). Sarcastically, Giroux has us contemplate the following questions. Who are the potential victims of this music and, in general, this violent lifestyle it generates? White male and female youth, of course.

Giroux also insisted that White youth are also subject to objectification. They are seen as being generally lazy and not wanting to live up to the potential afforded them by their middle–upper class baby–boomer parents. The youth are blamed and punished for their social and economic problems. Giroux (1996) argued that we needed to rethink the conditions of these youth. There is little consideration that jobs are not as abundant as they were five, ten, or twenty years ago. Shifting "production goods" to Third World countries, as well as corporate downsizing, lessen the financial prospects for today's youth.

Further, Giroux (1996) discussed the racial coding media discourse of violence, which is especially powerful and pervasive for Black and Latino youth. Black and Latino boys signify danger while their female counterparts signify welfare. Racialized students are all considered suspects. As an example, Giroux recalled Bob Dole's attack on rap

artists such as Tu Pac Shakur for contributing to violence in the social order. This is the same Bob Dole who was a staunch supporter of the National Rifle Association and who also led the charge in the Senate to repeal the ban on assault weapons.

Similarly, Giroux pointed out how racially coded language promotes racist ideology. For instance, Disney films such as *Aladdin* portrayed the ‘bad’ Arabs with thick foreign accents, while the Anglicized Jasmine and Aladdin spoke in standard Americanized English (p. 106). Giroux definitively stated that Peter Schneider, the president of feature animation at Disney, confirmed that *Aladdin* was modeled after Tom Cruise. *The Lion King* provided another example: Scar, the evilest of lions, is darker in coloring than the good lions. The royal family speaks with posh British accents while the despicable hyenas speak through the voices of the likes of Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin. Giroux argued that Whiteness, as a form of racial identity, is universalized through privileged representations rooted in White middle–class social values and linguistic practices.

Giroux goes on to say that these racialized media representations serve to further naturalize race separation and notions of difference. In films like Disney’s *Pocahontas*, there is still the overt suggestion that, in the end, racial identities must remain separated. Giroux (1996) concluded that the film “*Pocahontas* is one of the few love stories in Disney’s animated series in which the lovers do not live together happily ever after. It is also one of the few love stories that brings lovers from different races together” (p. 107).

Since these films *do* teach our youth about their social identities, they may also be suggesting that structural inequality is part of the natural order. For our nation’s youth, the messages offered to them by Disney’s animated films suggests that social problems

such as racism, the genocide of Native Americans, the prevalence of sexism, and the crisis of democracy are simply willed through the laws of nature (Giroux, 1996).

Finally, in *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Giroux (2001) offered parents and teachers a vision of schools as democratic and emancipatory public spheres. This book acts as an angry reply to those who wish to *vocationalize* education—especially for the working class, Blacks, Latinos, and other dominated groups. Giroux believed that education must incorporate critical social theory if schools are to become democratic public spheres that engage parents, teachers, and students. The hope that the book offered is that education can become an end rather than a means once again. Additionally, learning can be a creative act. Most importantly, public life can be transformed from its current cycle of advertising and consumerism to a place of authentic dialogue and debate about things that matter to the commonwealth.

*Theory and Resistance in Education* (Giroux, 2001) was first written at the beginning of the 1980s in attempts to reassert the political nature of teaching. Giroux stressed the importance of joining pedagogy to social change by connecting critical learning to the experiences and histories of students. Schools would become sites of contestation, resistance, and possibility. Giroux noted that at the time of the book's first publication, right wing perceptions of schooling heavily influenced the teaching curricula. Schools in effect had become adjuncts of the workplace. Right wing schooling theories, or technocratic rationality, turned schools into testing and sorting mechanisms. Schools were reproducing the wide range of inequalities that characterized the larger social order. Students marginalized by race, class, and gender seldom were invited to participate in the educational discourses, pedagogical practices, and institutional relations

that shaped their everyday lives. Even worse, they were further marginalized and oppressed within educational discourse. While Giroux stated that the force and nature of this legacy has changed, it still exerts powerful influence in public and higher education.

If our goal is to further understand the role of domination in schools and in wider society, an examination of the ideological is key. Ideology, while varied in its definitions and usage, is best described as the worldviews we adopt. We may or may not act upon these worldviews in conscious ways; however, these worldviews also make something of us. As Leonardo (2003) argued:

Ideology *is* the relations that subjects live out, whatever forms these may take. It is determining of us and it is determined by us. Ideology both structures and is structured by our social practices. We act because of our prior ideological commitments, but as we act, we constitute ideology as a lived relation to our social world (p. 38).

A review of the literature linking ideology to race and schooling processes has revealed the ways that ideology or worldviews manifest in material ways. It also demonstrated that ideology could enable social domination or promote individual and social transformation.

### **Mestizaje Ideology**

Mestizaje ideology is a space where varied constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, phenotype, and other forms of privilege and oppression collide.

Within the academic world we are told that “race is a social construction.” In the case of mestizaje ideology, mestizaje is also a raced and gendered social process (see Wade, 1997). Like Vasconcelos’ (1979) notions on the *Raza Cosmica*, the common sense

notion that races have different cultures, “blood,” and “roots” continues to persist. The way that many Latinas talk about race in fictional and non-fictional spaces is often indicative of these obscure contradictions. As an example, Anzaldúa (1999) talked about the Mestiza consciousness in her book, *Borderlands*:

Indigenous like corn, like corn, the Mestiza is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn—a female seed-bearing organ—the Mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads (p. 103).

There is no doubt that Anzaldúa’s work has served the valuable purpose of Mestiza validation (the Mestiza consciousness). I talk about this at the beginning of this Literature Review. However, we should question the symbolism she employs. The “female seed-bearing organ,” where she is like “an ear of corn,” does not seem to challenge the biological myths of mestizaje.

Latinas, as a collective, do not have a unified racial history. Therefore, the Latina racial existence is largely supported by the philosophical, practical, and often mystical beliefs of mestizaje. In order to explain this lack of unified history, Latinas may turn to explanations of “blood” mestizaje or the significance of blood. Linked to the historical colonization of Latin America, Miller (2010) extended the definition of mestizaje as the “pan-Latin American embrace of racial and cultural mixture” (p. 2). Mestizaje ideology has been utilized as a sense of pride in nationalist contexts *and* at the expense and exclusion of indigenous communities and Blacks.

Attempts by New Mexicans to appear culturally White are prevalent in historical documents such as tourist advertisements encouraging explorations of the Southwest (Johnson, Pimentel, O. & Pimentel, C., 2008). Tracing New Mexican mestizaje, Nieto-Phillips (2004) noted at least 15 various ethnic (phenotype) distinctions; these were typically documented in official Catholic Church records such as marriage certificates. As a social act, marriage offered a unique set of privileges for Latinas. As cited in Hurtado (2003) Gutiérrez (1999) related that contemporary marriages, like past social unions, were a means for creating social alliances and merging property. Gutiérrez further noted that marriage, “is the most intimate linkage, besides biological ties, that two individuals may engage in—therefore, it is not surprising that like tend to marry like because it is through the ritual of marriage that defines the local contours of class and status” (p. 11). The offspring of these Mestizo marriages were often viewed against a backdrop of pigmentocracy (Gómez, 2007). Similarly, Nieto-Phillips (2004) noted that past notions of race in New Mexico were “not a fixed, constant idea” (p. 27). Therefore, “an individual’s *casta* could change over his or her lifetime, especially if one had the economic or political means to redefine one’s official designation” (p. 28).

Within the Latin American canon of literature the Mestizo has indeed become more than an exclusive race or caste. Under mestizaje, conceptions of the Mestizo are subject to race and gendered frames. Therefore, raced and gendered conceptions of mestizaje embody notions of betrayal, deception, craftiness, opportunism, and moral degradation (Miller, 2004). These mestizaje myths are especially true for Mestizas. The transcendental birth of the Mestizo began with the Conquistador Hernando Cortés and his indigenous slave who is known by multiple names—Doña Marina, *La Malinche* (the

“traitor”), and *La Chingada* (the “fucked one”).” Doña Marina is often chastised in Latin American folklore for betraying her indigenous people (Miller, 2004, p. 23). Third world feminists such as Anzaldúa (1999) have re-appropriated the mythology of *La Malinche*, however. The Virgín de Guadalupe is often juxtaposed to *La Malinche*, thereby establishing Latina mestizaje parameters. Romanticized notions of mestizaje persist to this day, despite their falsities.

José Vasconcelos’ call to Mexican nationality, *La Raza Cosmica/The Cosmic Race* (1979), argued that Mestizos would become the chosen race of the future, the fifth “great” race. Vasconcelos’ work spurred a variety of nationalistic efforts. After the Mexican Revolution, artists Diego Rivera and José Orozco were summoned to paint murals such as Rivera’s *The History of Mexico* Fresco (Rochfort, 1993). Rivera began working on this mural in 1929, around the time of Vasconcelos’ *Raza Cosmica*. This mural is proudly displayed at the Palacio Nacional de Mexico in Mexico City. *The History of Mexico* details the inception of the Mexican people, depicting pre-Columbian Mexico and ending with Mexico circa 1930. On one fresco panel, the birth of the Mestizo is depicted—the (male) offspring being a very light-skinned infant with black hair and piercing blue eyes. Like Vasconcelos’ vision of the cosmic race, Rivera’s fresco adds validity to the ideologies of *blanqueamiento* and mestizaje.

The complexity of racial distinctions in Latin America, past and present, are not easily disambiguated. Race, while a social construction, still manifests in social and material ways for non- or –pseudo Mestizos. Bonilla-Silva (2010) posited that a heuristic mapping of a Tri-Racial order is needed to fully understand racial stratifications within the United States and Latin American countries. Historically speaking, disrupting



mestizaje ideology has not been the object of revolutions by the working-class. Few Latin American revolts in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have centered on race, the Zapatista movement notwithstanding (Bonilla-Silva, p. 181). Therefore, to understand the Tri-Racial order is to also understand how Latin American countries are racially organized under white supremacy ideology and mestizaje.

Latin American racial stratification must be contextualized, taking into account mestizaje and blanqueamiento. Bonilla-Silva (2010) insisted that the following six features should be considered: 1) miscegenation, 2) plural racial stratification systems (for instance, the development of “buffer groups”), 3) colorism or pigmentocracy, 4) whitening Ideology or blanqueamiento, 5) the national ideology of mestizaje, and 6) race as nationality or culture. According to Wade (1993) the Colombian contexts of mestizaje are not just “variants of nationalist thought” (p. 21). Their practice yields and reproduces racial hierarchies “imbued with meaning” (p. 21) where “blackness and indianness [*sic*] are not only absorbed but *erased* (original italics, p. 19). Wade (1993) continued:

Mestizaje...is as much a process of darkening as of lightening, but the very hierarchy that it mediates means that moves upwards, away from indian or black and towards white, are more valuable. Mestizaje takes on powerful moral connotations: it is not just neutral mixture but hierarchical movement, and the movement that potentially has greatest value is upward movement—

blanqueamiento or whitening, understood in physical and cultural terms (p. 21).

Skidmore (1990) similarly pointed out that ideas of “whitening” were intricately linked to social policy in Brazil during the years of 1870–1940. He noted that past Brazilian thinkers relied on aesthetic eugenics. These Brazilians hoped that the “Black

problem,” if left to miscegenation, “would gradually and inexorably ‘whiten’ and thereby ‘upgrade’ the Brazilian population” (p. 9). Therefore, when Latin Americans utilize national or cultural descriptors to identify themselves rather than racial terms, this results in diverting attention away from the racial hierarchy.

Miscegenation and ideas of whitening have affected Latinas/os in many ways socially, materially, and psychologically. Depending on where they are positioned within the racial hierarchy, darker-skinned Latinas may believe that blanqueamiento and upward mobility may be achieved through marriage to a lighter-skinned person. Hunter (2002) asserted that although race is a social construction and is based on erroneous notions that race is biological, “skin color stratification and patriarchy interact to limit the life chances of Mexican American and African American women” (p. 175). Colorism, Hunter (2002) argued, manifests as a form of social capital for lighter skinned Mexican American and African American women. She stated that “[l]ight skin tone is interpreted as beauty, and beauty operates as social capital for women. Women who possess this form of [beauty] capital are able to convert it into economic capital, educational capital, or another form of social capital” (p. 177).

Racial standards of beauty, across ethnic groups and class levels, tend to be universal. Women almost always agree who possess beauty and who does not. Colorism, in fact, manifests in tangible ways for Latinas across color gradations. Hunter (2003) confirmed that for every gradation of lightness, educational attainment increases for Mexican American and African American women by one-third of a year (p.181). Additionally, “Mexican American women are much more likely to be married than are African American women” (Hunter, 2003, p. 185). Hunter (2003) also noted that African

American women on average married men who were less educated than they were and that “for every increment in light skin color, women’s spouses completed another 0.28 years of school” (p. 186). Simply put, “African American and Mexican American women with dark brown skin (and ethnic features) receive fewer rewards in society, even when they invest the same amount of human capital as those with lighter skin” (Hunter, 2003, p. 188).

One does not need to look far, especially in the realms of pop culture, for verification of Hunter’s (2003) findings. Lighter skinned Latina icons have reached a high level of popularity; actresses and singers such as Jennifer López, Shakir, Eva Mendez, Salma Hayek, and Rosarıo Dawson are epitomized as “ethnic beauties.” Rap artist Pit Bull (also known as Armando Christian Perez) sings the popular party anthem “Crazy,” where the chorus rhymes, “Latinas/they get crazy, *Blanquitas*<sup>8</sup>/ they get crazy, *Negritas*<sup>9</sup>/ they get crazy.” While darker–skinned Latinas cannot choose the social perception of them as “Collective Black” (using Bonilla-Silva’s terminology), lighter skinned Latinas, depending on their physical features, may find a sense of exotic group membership at the expense of Latina Collective Blacks. Furthermore, contemporary media perceptions such as those typified by Pit Bull function to further naturalize the separation of races; being *Blanquita* is linked to biological Whiteness similar to Shakir and Jennifer Lopez. While *Blanquitas* are the recipients of this blood fortune, *Negritas* represent the antithesis of this definition of beauty.

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<sup>8</sup> *Blanquitas* refers to any lighter skinned woman of any ethnic background, often of Latin American origin.

<sup>9</sup> *Negritas* (derogatory) refers to darker skinned women, most often Black.

This brief examination of mestizaje illustrates how issues of race and gender have riddled the identity and treatment of Latinas/os. A project that centers on mestizaje would be a step toward dismantling this ideology. Most importantly, an ideological critique aimed at understanding mestizaje has possibilities for ideological transformation. Furthermore, there are promises for building group alliances across color, phenotype and racialized groups. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research methods, methodology, and approaches I used in order to complete this project.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

In this chapter, I outline my rationale in selecting ideological critique as a method of inquiry. Recall in Chapter 2, I discussed how Latina discourse has been used for making meaning in Latinas' lives, albeit furthering mestizaje in the process. Mestizaje has influenced Latina norms—in imagined and real realms. While Latina discourse and mestizaje have been the subject of many fictional, non-fictional, and empirical texts, there are few studies that focus on mestizaje and discourse. Appropriating Habermas' (Roderick, 1986) ideas on “communicative competence,” we can say that Latinas make their mestizaje beliefs known through their language. As Leonardo (2009) argues, to study race one must study the ideological discursively. He goes on to say that racist worldviews are driven by misinformation, fear, and distance from the other. In short, “[Theories] of racial ideology must come to grips with contradictions that seem to defy reason and scientific understanding” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 33).

Taking a critical hermeneutical approach, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews of undergraduate Latinas at NMVCC<sup>10</sup>. I focused specifically on their identity experiences along with their beliefs about mestizaje. My semi-structured interviews

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<sup>10</sup> New Mexico Vocations Community College (NMVCC) is a pseudonym for the college that I will be using as this project's research site.

centered on what Habermas terms “systematically distorted communication.” Critical hermeneutics centers on these “barriers” of distorted communication, which are self-imposed. Only through “self-reflection can [one] reveal structure[s] of distortion. [This] assists human beings in overcoming them” (Roderick, 1986, p. 56). I talk more about this later in Chapter 7 of this dissertation. Ultimately, my aim was to make this a political project that would work to disrupt group and individual mestizaje. Discourse may be distorted, but there are spaces for transformation. Best said, “Ideology is a way of reading the world and becomes a particular position that people take up through discourse” (Leonardo & Allen, 2008, p. 416). Conversely, studies of ideological discourse may also open up spaces for changing the world.

### **Science as Ideology and Critical Social Theory**

Before we can talk about mestizaje, we must look at larger theories of ideology and Critical Social Theory. Critiques of “science as ideology,” also known as anti-positivism, are linked to the formation of the Frankfurt School (Bottomore, 1984). Officially established in 1923, intellectuals such as Lukács, Korsch, Pollock, and Wittfogel came together in the hopes of reappraising Marxist Theory (Bottomore, 1984). This Marxist reappraisal would come to be termed “Critical Theory,” representative of “a new form of Marxist critical thought” (Bottomore, 1984, p. 13). Seen as an antithesis to societal and individual enlightenment, Frankfurt intellectuals viewed science as an ideology that enabled “false consciousness” (Bottomore, 1984). Application of the scientism and empiricism as “truth” promoted a “false reality.” Critical theorists argued that society and the individual could not be generalized in a uniform manner. Scientism

was no better than “false (capital) consciousness”—each was an ideology worthy of critique.

Critical social theorists continue to be wary of scientism. In applying “science as ideology” to studies of race, Leonardo (2009) argues that ideology, race and science have historically had a “love/hate relationship” (p. 29). The science of race has been used to justify racial hierarchies. Take for example the “eugenics movement,” “the one drop rule,” and the “bell curve” (Leonardo, 2009). Scientism used in this way upholds erroneous notions that ethnic differences are linked to biology, not to how race is constructed vis-à-vis society. This form of scientism reinforces individual and group beliefs that racial formations are natural and rooted in the biological. Therefore, social and racial inequalities may be explained as natural or normal.

As critical social theorists, we maintain that race ideology cannot be measured solely by a scientific method. Leonardo (2009) argues, “Science alone seems lacking as a conceptual apparatus [in explaining] a very unscientific racist process” (p. 33). He further posits that there is nothing scientific about how Whites (in general) view their racial world. In fact, White racial ideologies often remain unchanged, despite scientific reasoning (see Allen, 2009). Individuals re-create and re-imagine race as an “imaginational” within their daily lives (Leonardo, 2009, p. 33). This “imaginational” was quite evident throughout the later chapters of this dissertation. Falsities and erroneous beliefs about mestizaje are easily rationalized and then dismissed. Clearly empirical data alone is not effective in changing one’s racial worldview. We must change one’s imagination about race. Ideological shifts are key in making alternative perceptions of race possible.

Still, a study of race ideology without *any* science is not an appropriate framework for an ideological shift of racial worldviews. Critical social theorist Jürgen Habermas, who ushered in the “second wave” Frankfurt School thought, argued for a balance between interpretation and practical life to fully understand social processes. While “racism is not a scientific mindset,” this does not mean it is “uncalculated or unpredictable” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 33). Leonardo goes on to say that while critical theorists have critiqued the ideology of science, critical social theorists also need a science of ideology (p. 33). This means that race ideologies need to be viewed as calculating and intentional. Ideological critiques of racial discourse, therefore, work to disrupt what Habermas termed a “theory of *truth*” while making “claims to *rightness* (Bottomore, 1984, p. 77).” Similarly, Leonardo (2009) and Allen (2009), like Erich Fromm (1956), argue that there is a dialectical relationship between the fate of the individual and the fate of society. Emancipating false racial consciousness brings us one step closer to emancipating the individual who acts amongst hegemonic groups.

### **Critical Hermeneutics, Discourse and Ideological Critique**

Ideological critique centers on the belief that language is a form of social practice. It stems from the larger methodology of critical hermeneutics or interpretation. Critical hermeneutics, then, is concerned with interpreting the discourse, or interpretative structuralism, of a text. What generally separates discourse from text is that discourse “refers to the whole process of interaction” whereas text is only a partial product of that interaction (Fairclough, 1989, p. 20). Taking a critical hermeneutical approach, Fairclough (1989) notes that any attempt at discourse analysis must look beyond the text



by evaluating the relationship between the discourse, its processes, and their social conditions of production (Fairclough, 1989, p. 20).

Fairclough (1989) argues that context and history, especially surrounding discourse, largely affects how one should interpret that discourse. Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* is one example of an ideological project that focuses on gendered White discourse from a critical hermeneutical frame. Frankenberg (1993) utilized long interview methods to interpret White women's racial worldviews. About her ideological critique, she noted that:

I share in a feminist commitment to drawing on women's daily lives as a resource for analyzing society. I also share what is, in a sense, the converse of that commitment: the belief that women's daily life experiences can only be adequately understood by "mapping" them into broader social processes (p. 7).

Simply put, Frankenberg's exegesis speaks to the racial imagination of White women as a group as well at the social process of this.

So what role does discourse play in this social process? Dismembered meanings leave ideologies intact and "leave the history that 'interpellates' them untouched" (Leonardo & Allen, 2008, p. 419). The authors continue to argue that dismembered discourse is a form of "discursive violence": "There is an underside to meaning that is repressed, that is silent but subverts the security of the apprehended meaning" (p. 419). Dismembered discourse speaks to the racial imagination and cannot be interpreted solely by what is said. The racial imagination is also an interpretation of what is *not said*. Fields such as critical discourse analysis have provided researchers with a framework for approaching ideological discourse. Unspoken discourse—such as the use of avoiding eye

contact, shifting in one's chair away from the researcher and recorder, or biting one's upper lip is indicative of a certain sense of anxiety or feeling uncomfortable. Certainly an avoidance of certain topics in conversation, changing taboo subjects, or refusing to answer a question directly, are all examples that inform us about racial worldviews. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, we see clear evidence of these tactics. What is said and "not said" points to the process of making and re-making mestizaje.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objectives of this interview study were to understand the racial worldviews of Latinas within a community college setting. More specifically, I was interested in understanding the following:

1. What roles do class, ethnicity, gender, and race play in Latina college students' representations of their social and educational situations?
2. In what ways do the discourses of these participants conform to or resist the ideologies that sustain the U.S. racialized social system?

In the next section, I detail my reasons for selecting semi-structured interviews as a research method, my procedures for gaining informed consent, and how I protected the rights of my participants. Additionally, I discuss my methods of data collection, how I analyzed my data, and how I saw my role as researcher.

### **Interview Study**

For this project I conducted two open-ended interview sessions with Latinas from NMVCC. Each interview was about 60 minutes in length. I left the option of conducting a third interview session open, in order to answer, resolve, or further probe into the initial interviewees' responses. I chose the semi-structured interview method because it is the

most basic and a highly reliable method of conducting research (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). Research interview questions are typically structured in an “open-ended” way so that the respondents have the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. By using open-ended interview questions, the interviewer can ask the respondent to “tell me more” even after a specific interview question has been answered. This aspect of “telling me more” became a significant part of the methods I used to illicit additional, meaningful discourse from the women.

While there are various approaches to semi-structured interview methods; in this project I utilized a raced-gendered approach to structuring my questions and protocol. My focus on race and gender stemmed from my initial research interests. Initially, I had framed these research interests as questions regarding Latina identities. Over time, I came to understand that these discursive identities were very much aligned with *mestizaje*.

Interviews were audio-recorded with an MP3 (digital) recorder. While a transcription company was used, I reviewed the transcriptions to verify for accuracy. I also relied on demographic intake forms (see Appendix A) and handwritten field notes. These three forms of data were then collected for later coding via Atlas Ti (a qualitative software product).

Ideological critique, as a methodological frame, was critical to the completion of this project. Part of the process of ideological research is to unveil: “The goal of deconstruction is to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to continuously demystify the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal” (Lather, 1991, p. 96). Lather’s thoughts are reminiscent of

Habermas' (1989) ideas about distorted communication. Distorted communication may be considered "distorted" due to repressed childhood memories, events, and other social processes. Frankenberg (1993) concluded that the "daily relations of race," the "content" of her participants' description of others, and their reasoning behind their knowledge could not be explained outside of a hermeneutical narrative analysis (p. 9). My research study makes parallel arguments to Frankenberg's. The interpretive knowledge gathered from my participants' provided new understandings on the raced-gendered process of mestizaje.

Appendix A and Appendix B were research tools I utilized throughout this study. Appendix A, the "Participant Demographic Survey," was used to screen for potential Latina participants. All participants were 18-30 years old, with the exception of one participant who turned 31 years of age between the time of our first and second interview. Appendix B, the "Interview Protocol," lists the initial questions I used throughout the first interview. The anonymity and protection of my participants, their rights as research participants, were responsibilities I did not take lightly. I detail these procedures later in this chapter. However, I will say here that every effort was made to make these women comfortable during their interviews while also protecting their identities.

## **Participants**

In this study, which spanned between the years of 2010-2013, I used purposive sampling in choosing Latina participants. This purposeful sampling selected participants based on the order of the dates they expressed interest. Those who expressed interest first were selected first. As such, there were four potential participants that had to be turned down for the study. I looked for NMVCC Latina students who were open and willing to

discuss their identity experiences. My first task was soliciting participants via two colleagues who were entry-level English instructors. This “Introduction to English” course was mandatory for all NMVCC students. By focusing on entry-level English classes, I felt that I would have better success recruiting younger community college students.

My second task was to present the nature of my project to the entry English classes and request that interested Latina students fill out the “Participant Demographic Survey.” Interviewees were given an extra credit option by their instructor as recompense for their effort and time.

I made a concerted effort to recruit participants who had diversity in phenotype, social class status, sexual orientation, marital status, and parental status (see Appendix D, “About the Women in the Study” for more information.). What I found was that most of the women were of lighter phenotype (yet could visibly be “read” as Latina). Other participants appeared (or could “pass”) as White. In fact, only two participants were visibly darker than myself. Of course, this phenomenon needs to be looked into further. Was the participant affinity due, in part or whole, to my own phenotype? Are the majority of NMVCC Latinas of lighter phenotype? What are the ramifications of lighter phenotype on community college success? Most importantly, how does lighter phenotype affect the discourse of *mestizaje*? All of these questions were ones I entertained during the research process. Therefore, these questions should be large points of consideration when this study is referenced or replicated.

As a researcher, I was inspired by Pillow’s (2003) strategies on reflexivity. This idea of “reflexiveness” was one that I was very uncertain of. I see this method as a

delicate balance that requires a certain amount of intuition and faith. Even seasoned ethnographers such as Villenas (1996) navigate similar struggles in their work and wonder, “How do I keep myself grounded in a collective struggle, mindful of the politics of representation and critical of the concealment of power in the construction of the discourse of a crisis of representation” (p. 91)? My own struggles as a researcher, however, were trumped by my belief in this researching process.

### **Procedure for Gaining Informed Consent**

The following procedures were used in obtaining informed consent of research participants:

1. IRB packets were completed, reviewed, and accepted by the Human Research Protections Offices—both for the University of New Mexico and NMVCC.
2. The researcher discussed the nature of her project with two of her colleagues from NMVCC. As previously mentioned, these colleagues were instructors of “Introduction to English” courses.
3. The researcher requested permission to present the nature of her project to entire classes during her colleagues’ Introduction to English classes. The “Participant Demographic Form” was circulated in order to solicit Latinas. Research participants were given one week to return the “Participant Demographic Form.” I then returned to the classroom to pick up these forms from my colleagues.
4. After reviewing the completed “Participant Demographic Forms,” 20 interview participants along with two alternates were chosen. These participants were chosen based on their initial interest in the project. Interview participants were contacted by phone and email to secure the initial session one appointments.

Interview sessions were held in semi-private environments, such as unoccupied classrooms and library study rooms at NMVCC. After the interviews were completed, participants were offered course extra-credit as compensation for their time.

### **Protection of Participants' Rights**

The following measures were taken to ensure the protection of my research participants:

1. Participants were given two of my contact phone numbers, an email address, as well as a physical address for contacting me before, during, and after the semi-structured interviews were completed. Many of my participants preferred to communicate via text messaging, which was another form of communication that we utilized.
2. After signing the informed consent, research participants were given a choice of possible dates, times, and semi-private spaces for Interview Session #1 to take place. Interview sessions were scheduled at the convenience of the research participants.
3. Throughout the project, fictional names were used in place of the participant's real name. The identity of the research participant was only shared with the two NMVCC instructors, who were asked to give extra credit points to the participants involved in the project. Any references made within the interview that might identify the participant were omitted from the project.
4. Before I delved into the interview questions, I double-checked that the participant had given written consent for the audio recording and subsequent publishing of our exchange. As the interview began, participants were reminded that the

interview was being recorded for the purposes of later transcription and dissertation publication. After the interview was completed, I verbally asked each participant if they would like me to omit (or not talk about) any of the interview exchange within the dissertation write-up. Requests for any omissions were honored throughout this dissertation.

5. In the instances where explicit life experiences are detailed, I gained verbal consent to use this material *in addition to* the consent(s) I mention above (in #4 above). Therefore, in the case where explicit stories were detailed, each woman gave me their permission to use the material during the interview. After the recorder had been turned off, I also gained another verbal permission to use the material.
6. All participants were offered a copy of their transcribed interview and were allowed to make corrections to the text if they felt the need to do so.
7. While the semi-structured interview method is associated with conversational interaction, I had anticipated minimal physical, mental, or emotional risk. However, as the reader will discover, I found that some women did experience a certain amount of unanticipated emotional (and in a few cases, physical) distress. When participants displayed these distress symptoms (verbally or non-verbally), I made arrangements for further interviews to occur. My goal was to end the sessions with positive thoughts of personal transformation and possibilities for the future. In some cases, I arranged for free individual or group counseling at the local Rape Crisis Center. Finally, I verbally “checked in” on each participant



after the interviews were fully completed. I did this every two weeks for a period of two months after their interviews.

### **Role of Researcher/Positionality**

As a lighter skinned Latina who focused on the raced-gendered talk of other Latinas, I was an “insider” within this group. Physically, I could be termed an “Honorary White” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) although my physical markers appear Mestiza. My positionality as an able-bodied NMVCC instructor, who is upper-middle class and heterosexual also positioned me as having more relative privilege than my research participants. Most of my participants were lighter-skinned, yet visibly Latina) like myself. Most participants, aside from one, identified as heterosexual. Also, all women identified themselves as “able-bodied.” I mention my own privileges (and how these were related to my participants) because positionality does, indeed, matter within a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000).

I also consider myself a feminist scholar who is especially interested in issues of mestizaje. Like Lather (1991) I often wonder why we must choose between conceptual vigor, and methodological vigor (p. 78), especially when it comes to ideological critique projects? I believe that feminist approaches to “meaning-making” have fallen prey to negative reputations, like that of ideology. I appreciate Leonardo’s (2003) view that “[e]ducational agendas, like ideology, [are] something everyone possesses. Just as educators often react negatively to talks of ideology, talks about agenda have suffered a similar fate” (p. 209). If one is to become committed to the interpretation of the

ideological, it must be understood that these attempts at apprehension are ones that are *perpetual* and not *stagnant*. Researching the ideological is a “friction or productive rubbing of worldviews between researchers and participants” (p. 416). Therefore, the researcher and their participants are always involved in negotiating meaning making. Best put, this dialectic of ideology and discourse embodies the potential to change the world, not just to describe it (Leonardo & Allen, 2008).

### **Data Collection Approach**

My method of inquiry was one of ideological critique. This method was used in the interpretation of my interview transcriptions and also with my field notes. Obtaining interview data and field notes consisted of the following:

- 1) Conducting recorded interviews of NMVCC Latinas—session #1, session #2 and at times a session #3 over a period of eight months during the summer and fall of 2010.
- 2) Collecting personal, hand scripted field notes in conjunction with the above recorded interview conversations. These researcher field notes were used as a reference, indicating non-verbal participant cues or themes to later follow up on.
- 3) Coding and interpreting selected data episodes in search of general themes such as race, class, gender, identity, and other personal episodes. I used Atlas Ti qualitative software in order to code for hermeneutic themes and key participant phrases.
- 4) Interpreting this research in the form of a written dissertation. This process took about two years.

I used an inconspicuous Zoom 300 MP3 recorder to capture the semi-structured interview conversations. I conducted all interviews in a semi-private, low-noise environment so that interviews took place without interruption. These interviews were always conducted at NMVCC—either in a private library room, or in an empty classroom. After each interview, I uploaded the MP3 file, noted the date and time, and erased any first name identification. The file was assigned a generic title—for instance, “participant #2.” I also password protected all interviews the same day they were conducted. This procedure insured that no one had access to the recorded interviews.

Similar to the audio files, my handwritten notes were transcribed into Word document form the same day of the interviews. These documents were stored on three password protected memory drives to ensure participant confidentiality. My transcribed notes were stored in a security vault that was also password protected. In December 2015, all transcribed documents will be destroyed.

In November 2010, I was notified that I had received a University of New Mexico monetary research grant. This monetary grant permitted me to submit my MP3 interview files for transcription. The transcription company I used (an out-of-state company) converted my MP3 interview files into written texts. Before I uploaded my MP3 files for transcription, I checked the audio recordings again for any identifying information. After I received the transcribed interview texts, I re-listened to the MP3 files to proofread for wording accuracy. This second listening also provided me with new understandings that I had forgotten about or missed the first time around. These procedures were part of a larger effort to record the participant-researcher conversations.

### **Interpretation of Data**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I deliberately utilized ideological critique as method of inquiry. Most significantly, utilizing this approach implies that “research is a problem of meaning” (Leonardo & Allen, 2008, p. 417). Furthermore, the study and production of knowledge is not free of biases (Dei & Johal, 2005). The researcher “has some theoretical constructs about the workings of the social world. The choices that researchers make about what to study, what data are to be collected, and how, are influenced by these among other factors” (Dei & Johal, 2005, p. 247). Sandoval (2000) referred to the hermeneutical process as one that is potentially driven by love, a “middle voice [that] represents a differential, politicized, and modal form of consciousness” (p. 155). What aligns the varying perspectives of hermeneutical methods is the stance of the researcher—one of being “unapologetically political” (Dei & Johal, p. 247).

For the positivist researcher, hermeneutical interpretation may incite “reflexivities of the uncomfortable” (Lather, 1991). Sandra Harding (1986), regarded these methodological tensions as being advantageous: “[I] think we need to see many of our disputes not as naming issues to be resolved but as pointing to opportunities to come up with better [research] problems” (p. 245). Every researcher makes politically driven choices as to which meanings they choose to represent (Leonardo & Allen, 2008).

For me, the interpretation of my data came organically. Although I was the researcher, I came to know and understand my participants through conversation. Their willingness to share certain experiences with me over others, their non-verbal cues, all of these shaped my initial understandings of the themes I should follow up with. After I listened to their MP3 recordings for the first time, the conversations took me back to the initial interviews. I remembered their reactions (and the words that went with them, my

own thoughts, and how the participant and I made meaning of the interviews together. With the transcriptions, I was able to see how discourse was negotiated between the participant and I. Manual color-coding came easily, since I was already familiar with the topics that had come up in the conversations. When my initial coding confirmed many of these themes, I simply applied these same code words and phrases to the Atlas Ti qualitative software. The software was able to generate a printable list of participant quotes that were all related to these hermeneutical themes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As a hermeneutical project based on the interpretation of discourse, I imagine many researchers will question the validity of this project. However, I do maintain that this methodology is one of the very few ways to successfully gather information about group and individual ideology. Interpreting the ideological is not a neutral endeavor and the researcher is never an objective bystander.

Also of significance are the limited number of participants in the project, the scope of participant ages I focused on, and the geographical location of these women. While I anticipate that the ideological themes would be similar throughout the U.S., variation in the interpretations of these would be highly subjective.

The purpose of this project was to represent the race and gender norms of Latinas, interpret them as text, and foster a process of critical self-reflection. The act of self-reflection is part of the meaning making process for both the researcher and participant. As such, the hermeneutical researcher must be introspective and interpretive, all at the same time. Reflexivity of the researcher is key because, as Behar (1996) confessed, “[W]hen you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably” (p. 16).

In Chapter four, I begin to outline the prominent theme of Latina illness and embodiment. In this study, race and gender culminated in the bodies of my participants, despite their unconscious belief(s) that their body was nothing but silent. This chapter will illustrate how Latina words and bodies may echo ideological positioning, even when there is a concerted effort to repress these feelings.

## CHAPTER 4: LATINA EMOTIONAL EMBODIMENT and ILLNESS

*“Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack within that same body”*—Michel Foucault, 1980, p. 56.

### **Introduction**

Cari (age 21) sits in front of me with large darkened bags under her eyes. About five minutes earlier she had juggled her 2 year-old son and newborn baby, along with a stroller, in order to open the door to the classroom we were meeting in. Although clearly exhausted, she manages to give me a large smile and a quick hug. This would be the last “formal” interview that her and I would have together, although I still receive text messages from her time to time. Cari’s story, which I will discuss in further detail within this chapter, aptly illustrates the above quote by Foucault—despite criticisms that his theories on the body overlooked the lived experiences of women. Cari, like most of the women I interviewed, displayed a variety of physical responses due to their socially and historically inscribed bodies (see Schilling, 2003). Nineteen out of my 20 participants were under the age of 30. Issues related to the Latina body ultimately became a question of Foucault’s (as appropriated by Sawicki, 1991) “biopolitics of the population” where the (female) body served as the basis of bodily processes such a birthing, death, longevity and health (p. 68). Extending Sawicki’s appropriation of Foucault’s work, I argue that these bodily processes are in response to the race and gendered processes of mestizaje.

This chapter focuses on illness and emotional embodiment. Research on race and embodiment acknowledges that “while bodies tell [his]stories, they reveal stories that are also not conscious, hidden, forbidden, or even denied by individuals or groups” (Walters, et.al., 2011, p. 184). With this in mind, this chapter highlights the emotional embodiment of Latina students at NMVCC. Their illness, then, “spoke” for these women’s raced and gendered bodies as they struggled with their ascribed and prescribed identities.

My interest in raced and gendered embodiment began with a reading of Finkler’s (1994) *Women in Pain*. Finkler examined the social constructs of gender, class, and morbidity in Mexico, linking these to what she termed “life lesions” amongst her research participants. Finkler utilizes a fairly loose conception of “embodiment,” where emotional and physical illness culminated in a range of sickness amongst women in Mexico. Finkler talks about race, gender, and frames of patriarchy while linking them to the illnesses of her case study participants. She explains her use of the term “sickness” in this way:

I employ the term “sickness” to signify both disease and illness. By sickness I mean an assault on the very being of the human body embedded in an inimical ecological environment...sickness speaks to suffering, to anatomical dysfunctions expressed symptomatologically; it is usually associated with bodily pain. (p. 11)

Finkler’s distinctions between illness and disease were alluding. At first, I had difficulties trying to distinguish between the definitions of both “illness” and “disease.” After consulting the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/illness](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/illness)), I discovered that an “illness” is “an unhealthy condition of body or mind” while “disease” is a “disorder of structure in a human...an abnormal



bodily condition that impairs functioning, usually recognized by signs and symptoms.” The state of illness typically refers to a period of time that one is sick, either within body or mind. Disease may affect an entire group of people and “disease” typically causes “illness.” A summation I found on the internet was the most helpful as I struggled to sparse out the two terms: “Disease, then, is something an organ has, illness is something a [wo]man has” (“Disease,” Retrieved from [www.bboyscience.com/disease](http://www.bboyscience.com/disease)). So, the perception and bodily affect of one “not being well” coincides with the definition of “illness” regardless of whether or not this same person has an actual disease. Emotional embodiment and subsequent illness (whether this be via depression, stress, or attempts at suicide) appeared to always be at the core. Therefore, Foucault’s (2004) theories on body politics and Schilling’s (2003) ideas on corporeal realism, as social processes, were helpful to my examinations. The manifestations of being race and gendered are paid via our bodies.

In the past, many critical feminists have rejected Foucault’s examinations of the body due to his lack of specific attention to “being gendered.” While Sawicki (1991) thoroughly argued that Foucault’s theories could be appropriated and shed light on identity politics and sexual freedom, standpoint theories like those of Collins (2000), and Harding (1991) wisely problematize the ambiguity of orthodox Foucault theory. These women would caution us, even when appropriating Foucault for our own purposes, because we risk losing the power and privilege relationships that occur by and within marginalized groupings.

A further examination of Butler's (1990) notions of gender as performance and the materiality of the female body also adds a dimension to the ways in which patriarchy is normalized and ultimately made "real" (see Harding, 2004, p. 325). Butler argues that,

When we consider...those textual occasions on which Foucault criticizes the categories of sex and the power regime of sexuality, it is clear that his own theory maintains an unacknowledged emancipatory ideal that proves increasingly difficult to maintain, even within the structures of his own critical apparatus.

(p.127)

As I struggle to weave together these perspectives, re-appropriated" Foucault, feminist standpoint theory, gender as performance, it is almost an easier path to disregard the muddy and debatable. At the risk of taking an easy way out of the difficult, I would argue that in theorizing the nature of the female body is by no means an easy endeavor. I believe that much of what is missing from the above perspectives is a clear-cut examination of raced and gendered ideologies. If the body is a manifestation of our social positioning, where does ideology "fit in?"

My earliest readings of Foucault erupted in what had become a love-hate relationship. Like any intimate relationship that must stand the test of time, the very aspects of Foucault that I admired and loved also became the sources of my discontent. For instance, I found Foucault's appraisal of ideology (or lack thereof) quite disjointing. Also, I felt that Foucault minimized race and gender. At the time of this writing I do feel, like Sawicki (1991), that race and gender frameworks may re-appropriate Foucault's ideas despite his shortcomings. For instance, the idea of body politics may highlight the

female struggle in subjugation and objectification. However, we should still be critical of Foucault's theoretical shortcomings, as we draw upon his work.

Alternatively, standpoint theory, post-modern approaches to gender as performance, and how these relate to the body, are all approaches that cannot be ignored. The realities of race, class, and gender construct our positionality, as well as how we actively become them. I must wonder, however, if these raced and gendered theories might be strengthened with an ideological focus? The stories I detail within this chapter, for instance, speak to raced and gendered positioning, but there is always ideology at work. These ideologies were part of these women and their physical embodiment.

Critical examinations of embodiment should include Chris Shilling's (2003) idea of corporeal realism and social processes. In effect, Shilling connects our understandings of the material world to issues of the body. He argues that the human (social) body cannot be perceived or analyzed in isolation. There are processes and social structures that exist and interact within our bodies. The human body is a "multi-dimensional medium of the constitution of society" (p.1). Therefore, Shilling said it best when he argued that,

[B]eing a subject of marginal academic interest, the intellectual significance of the body is such that no study can lay claim to being comprehensive unless it takes at least some account of the embodied preconditions of agency and the physical effects of social structures. (p. 1)

Shilling goes on to say that social practices and processes are capable of exerting direct impacts on the body. Hence the negation of the female body and their gendered social practices. Conceptions of illness and disease, then, are subject to gendered and raced

positioning. Shilling's work is an extension of what Foucault (2004) had been saying all along. Subjugated knowledge, or our "ways of knowing," are not only filtered through the body but they also matriculate within our "lived" bodies as well.

Ultimately, there are limitations to both Foucault's and Shilling's theories on the body. While both scholars discuss the role of materialism and the body, there are feeble attempts in examining raced and gendered processes, especially when it comes to women of color. Again, this is where standpoint theory and gender performance theory may inform us. Social processes and their manifestations do not stand alone, however. There are still questions about how these processes are normalized, despite their falsities. This is where theories of ideology are helpful.

Whereas I focus on nine separate cases of emotional embodiment and illness within this chapter, 19 out of my 20 interview participants made direct mention of some sort of personal illness within their lives. Since this study is a critical hermeneutic project, I paid particular attention to the times that they mentioned (or visually indicated) their traumatic emotions in relation to their bodies. My participants' talk of unplanned and/or unwanted pregnancies, domestic, sexual, and emotional abuse, and, finally, conforming to cultural expectations, such as heterosexual "normality," often precipitated their discourse. As they talked about their raced and gendered positionalities, I witnessed how these were directly related to their embodied emotions and subsequent illness. Within this chapter, I focus on the stories of Alameda (age 19), Florita (age 20), Cari (age 21), Elsa (age 22), Felisa (age 26), Alegria (age 21), Modesta (age 30), Lourdes (age 25), and Carletta (age 22). I chose these nine women's stories, as I felt they provided powerful vignettes regarding race, gender, illness, disease, and embodiment.

## **Alameda**

Alameda and I seemed to have a sense of unspoken trust from the beginning. She appeared to have a tough exterior, but I immediately appreciated her verbal transparency and forthright personality. During our first interview, she admitted to me that she was an alcoholic and former drug addict. She began drinking when she was twelve, and her aunt encouraged her to have her first beer.

After Alameda began drinking, she didn't know how to stop. Before she knew it, she was experimenting with methamphetamines and heroine. She tries not to think about the times she lost consciousness and fears she exchanged sex for drugs on many occasions. She was scared of being hurt—physically and emotionally. Protecting one's self may involve a variety of coping mechanisms. For Alameda, the emotional component of “belonging” appeared to be the most pressing. This is why she joined a gang. Alameda explains, “I don't know what really got in to me when I started thinking, ‘Oh, let's join a gang.’ I think it was more of, ‘They're probably better family than the one I have,’ which probably wasn't a great idea.”

One night after drinking a little too much, Alameda got into a verbal exchange with some girls outside of a bowling alley. “I actually have the scar from getting stabbed. I had to be 11, 12 maybe.” They challenged Alameda to a fight and she took the three girls on by herself. She pulled up her cotton blouse to show me the left side of her chest. “This is what one of those girls did...they knifed me but they missed my heart.” She laughs as though she is telling a joke, but its clear her laugh hides the pain of a not-so-distant past.

About two years ago, Alameda decided to attend NMVCC. She started going to church and has actively worked to stop drinking and doing drugs. She met her boyfriend there, and it appeared that they were going to get married. But one night a heated verbal exchange turned physical. Alameda decided to stay with him because, as she said, she thought he was a “better man than that.” The physical abuse continued and the week before our first interview, she ended the relationship.

Alameda then shared with me what was now her greatest fear. She had freed herself from the abuse of her boyfriend, but now anticipated she was pregnant with his child.

It’s actually scary right now because I’ve been getting symptoms as if I’m pregnant. I’m like, “crap,” because even my tummy has gotten a little bit bigger. I don’t know if it’s from stress or being pregnant. My main thing is that [being pregnant] doesn’t stop the fact of what he did. And he lied to me about the domestic abuse...and I’m not going to put myself through that again because I’ve already been through violence.

As it turned out, Alameda was not pregnant. However, for the entire month she was convinced that she was developing symptoms of morning sickness, dizziness, and fatigue. What I witnessed first-hand was Alameda’s physical response to her emotional state of mind; illness precipitated by her fears that resulted in symptoms of early pregnancy. Alameda’s struggles with stress, abuse of drugs and alcohol, as well as domestic abuse are unfortunately not unique. We must wonder how Alameda’s physical body, and the devaluation of it, was shaped by her worldviews on race and gender.

## **Florita**

Like Alameda, Florita, a twenty-year-old mother of a one-year-old son, had experienced domestic abuse first-hand. When I met Florita, I saw her as a shy woman. She wore her hair in a long braid and waved nervously at her boyfriend. He had dropped her off at NMVCC and told her to be waiting out in front of the college in one hour; he had given me a suspicious glance. I thought that maybe he was trying to place my face. Unlike my interactions with Alameda, Florita and I spent many moments of silence together. I felt that she needed me to be patient as she formulated her answers to my interview questions. Toward the end of our first interview, it appeared that we built a trust with one another. Florita recalled how her relationship with her boyfriend clouded the happiness of her pregnancy:

When I was pregnant, our relationship wasn't too good for the first four months. We would fight a lot, and we just didn't get along. He would always tell me, 'Oh, you're looking at a guy,' or he would not let me wear certain stuff. I think he even accused me of looking at his step-dad or something like that. Before that I had had a miscarriage. I felt like I was stuck, and like I had to be with him, and stuff like that. I used to cry a lot. I was always crying.

With all of our exchanges, I noticed how Florita framed her problematic issues with her boyfriend using the past tense. She "use to" have problems keeping food down during her pregnancy, but now she is okay. She "use to" have post-partum depression and anxiety issues, but now those symptoms have gone away. It was as if she was trying to tell me that although things were once unstable with her relationship, it wasn't like that anymore. When I asked her about the details of her giving birth to her son, she confided

in me that on that particular day she and her boyfriend had been in a physical altercation. He had yelled at her and hit her. She does not know whether or not her labor symptoms were due to natural labor or a premature labor. Florita was quick to sum up her negative experiences with her pregnancy and labor as part of “post-partum depression.” In regard to issues such as post-partum depression, Oakley (2000) encourages us to look deeper at the identity formation of motherhood. She argues that,

The primary loss of women in becoming mothers is a loss of identity. The fragility of self-esteem, the tangentiality of the idea and feeling that women can “master” their own fate...they are characteristics of women and their induced subordination to men. Childbirth is no exception to this general rule; it needs to be understood in terms of the psychological trauma to women as human beings.  
(p. 180)

Thinking back to Florita, the above excerpt from Oakley becomes especially relevant. When Florita found herself pregnant, she admits to feeling “stuck.” She became a subordinated subject who referred to her past relationship trauma as events of the past. It was as though Florita’s utility of the phrase “use to” was a coping mechanism for dealing with her current reality.

Around 45 minutes into both interviews, I noticed Florita beginning to shift in her chair nervously. Next, she began to consistently glance out the window or at her phone for text messages. This apparent nervousness at the end of both interviews caught my attention. I recalled Florita’s story of physical abuse during her pregnancy and I became wary of her wellbeing. After the second interview was almost over I said, “Did your boyfriend say what time he was going to pick you up? I’m going to stop here because



I'm afraid he is going to come for you." She gives me a nod and runs out the door. Globally, domestic abuse and the sexual abuse of women are, tragically, common occurrences. In fact,

Women aged fifteen through forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined.

The World Health Organization found that in most countries, between 30 percent and 60 percent of women had experienced physical or sexual violence by a husband or a boyfriend. (Kristof & WuDunn, 2009, p. 61)

Florita's experiences with physical violence unfortunately highlight the above statistics. As a result, Florita had admitted to thoughts of suicide and what she termed "post-partum depression" which was an emotional state that she still readily adopted. We must wonder how raced and gendered norms, like Florita's, are readily accepted in society? Like Alameda and Florita, we can surmise a very similar emotional embodiment, detailed below.

### **Cari**

The first interview I conducted was with Cari. Upfront, she asked me if she could bring her children to the interviews. She went on to explain that she did not have a babysitter nor the money to hire one, but she really wanted to participate in my study. Cari appeared pale and much older than she actually was. Her beautiful smile let me know, however, that she wanted to share her story with me if I was willing to listen.

Quickly after we met, Cari opened up to me about her bouts with depression, a failed suicide attempt, and her physically demanding pregnancies. The physical and

emotional abuse she endured by her ex-fiancé before she became a student at NMVCC often left her fearing for her life:

I've been in abusive relationships. He [my ex-fiancé] was abusive. We were wrestling one night when we were fighting. He bruised me really bad on my arm. The last day he tried to suffocate me and choke me. Right before we had broken up, he told me he was a sex offender. His charges were against him for performing oral sex on his brother, his younger brother, and other boys in the neighborhood. If [my son] had been a girl, I wouldn't have worried about it. But because it was a boy, it was something that I just didn't want [him] around.

After moving to a different state and becoming a student at NMVCC, Cari met her current husband. She felt that it was love at first sight. They were together for two months before she found out she was pregnant with her daughter. However, she had wanted to terminate the pregnancy because her husband did not acknowledge her son from her previous relationship and gave little indication that he was going to change. She said that,

After two months of being with my husband, I was pregnant with my daughter. I told him I just, I can't do it [continue with the pregnancy] because I would see it the rejection of my son] in a small minor way, the way he would treat [him].

I asked Cari if she had considered leaving her husband over his mistreatment and she told me that she hadn't because she feared that no one else would ever want to be in a romantic relationship with her. She told me, "Part of me is like, 'You chose to be with

me, who has a kid, I'm pregnant, you decided to get me pregnant.' But I would never tell him that."

With Cari, the most telling exchange occurred while we were walking to the parking lot together after our first interview. She told me, nonchalantly, that she had recently had her kidney removed. In the second interview, I returned to that parking lot conversation. I posed a question to Cari. What do you think is behind your need to remove a kidney? You are only 21 years old! She shrugged and then explained,

Pretty much since I've started having kids, it's been constant stress. Getting an apartment and having a baby and having the stress of having two babies, I've been very stressed. After my last pregnancy, I would get [my son], change his diaper, feed him, and I would lay on the couch and go to sleep. I would put on his cartoons and give him snacks, change his diaper, and go back to sleep.

The parking lot exchange I had with Cari made me wonder why she, a woman whom I had just met, would share such an intimate facet of her life with me. I felt that the sharing of this information went beyond the participant-researcher trust relationship. Remember, this conversation happened after our very first interview. As a researcher charged with interpreting this happening, I came to one conclusion. We shared a group connection and similar identities so she gathered that I would understand her health issue and predicament. Namely, our experiences with raced and gendered processes connected us. When it came to the manifestations of depression, stress, motherhood, and health, who could argue with what was our "normal?"

Interestingly, Walters (2011) connects issues of race, gender, and health (much like those mentioned by Cari) with what she terms "embodying historical trauma" (p.

184). Walters reminds us that recent “human studies have demonstrated pervasive and enduring effects of the neurobiological toll[s] of stress” (p. 185). In fact, the effects of stress “increases [the] susceptibility to depression, hypertension, and diabetes” (p. 185). Walters speaks to many of participants’ stories, including Cari’s, when she says that “biological expressions of historical trauma may, in part, produce health disparities in a wide spectrum of outcomes, from chronic and persistent illnesses to poor mental health” (p. 185).

### **Elsa**

Some of the most difficult moments for me were hearing my participants share their stories of sexual assault and rape. Having been first molested and then raped while in college, I felt physically ill as Elsa, Felisa, and Alegria talked about these experiences while linking them to their identities as students and mothers. As Leonardo (2009) reminds us, “Women of color are more likely to be raped than white women, but least likely to be believed” (p. 87). Specifically, in New Mexico, “One in 4 females will experience rape or attempted rape in their lifetime” (“Rape in New Mexico,” Retrieved from <http://rapecrisisnm.org>). Although rape and sexual assault<sup>11</sup> involve forced sexual intercourse and/or sexual domination, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls rape “a powerful tool” as “power...stems from relegating sexual violence to the private, devalued, domestic sphere reserved for women. The ability to silence its victims also erases evidence of the crime” (p. 228). Elsa’s story illustrates Collins’ work in a heart-wrenching manner.

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<sup>11</sup> Rape typically refers to criminal sexual contact, for instance, forced sexual intercourse. Sexual assault involves crime with a sexual motivation, such as fondling of genitalia.

Elsa was a responsible single mother of a six-year-old daughter. She was quick to schedule her two interviews with me over the phone. We were to complete one interview on a Friday and another interview on Monday since her work schedule was going to be extremely intense during that upcoming week. At first, I noticed how guarded Elsa was. Her hands were crossed and her eyes did not focus on me, rather, she was busy watching students going to classes from the window. Finally, it was the questions about what she was studying at NMVCC that spurred her initial trust in me. She wanted to be a social worker, she said, because her life to this point had been so hard.

Elsa told me that she and her best friend had been talking to some boys in her high school and they offered to take them to the nearby grocery store to buy some snacks. Instead of taking them to the store, however, they ended up giving her and her friend some alcohol to drink and drove them to a nearby city. While the girls asked politely for them to take them back home, these same boys refused. Later that night, Elsa and her friend were raped by both of the boys, but they pretended the acts were consensual because they were afraid for their lives.

Typically, rape is rarely reported. The New Mexico Rape Crisis Center (2013) noted that “only 16% of rape survivors report the crime to law enforcement” (“New Mexico Rape,” Retrieved from <http://www.rapecrisiscnm.org>). After being raped, Elsa immediately felt guilt and shame because she had just started to date a nice guy and she did not want to involve him in the event. Elsa thought she had put the rape behind her, but then discovered she was pregnant:

I had gotten raped, and I got pregnant. I just told them [my family] that I got pregnant by this guy that...I was seeing. I told them, “No, I got pregnant from

him.” And I had to tell him [my boyfriend] I was pregnant because he knew everything, and I had to tell him, “Hey, I’m pregnant by that guy.” I had to stop seeing [my nice boyfriend] because my mother was like, “Oh, you got pregnant from *him*.”

Elsa, in a bold move, decided not to terminate her pregnancy. She felt her daughter needed a father so she attempted to befriend her assailant. To Elsa’s chagrin, her family was quite accepting of her daughter’s father. Even when Elsa told her family that her boyfriend would abuse her, even providing the physical evidence, Elsa became the target of blame. At one point, Elsa decided to leave her boyfriend, taking her daughter as well. Her boyfriend then approached her mother, saying that Elsa appeared to be having a mental episode where she needed psychiatric help. This individual act caused Elsa to lose custody of her daughter for a brief period of time.

As years progressed physical and sexual abuse permeated the relationship. The confrontations became more intense and Elsa regularly feared for her life. One example that Elsa shared with me details her fear of being killed by her daughter’s father. Note how Elsa received little support from the judicial system:

I’m still going through stuff now with the courts but the last time I saw him, it was a really bad fight. I put a restraining order on him because he came to my house and tried killing me. He had told me the night before, he’s like, “I’m going to kill you, chop you up in pieces and murder you.” Then he started laughing. So the next thing is, he was just slamming my head into everything and just throwing me around like a rag doll. I was like, “He’s going to kill me. He’s going

to kill me.” [When I explained the situation to the judge] I was like, “I have been emotionally, verbally, and physically abused for five years.” And the judge is like, “You’re his first love, how do you expect him to act? He’s young.”

Elsa’s lack of judicial support resonates with the findings of Anderson and Aviles (2006), who noted that “Latinas reported more types of violence (physical and emotional) during counseling sessions; however, they were the least likely to report the violence to law enforcement officials or seek medical care” (p. 131).

I shared with Elsa my own experiences of first being sexually assaulted by a college neighbor and then 3 months later, raped by a college basketball player. After I was assaulted, I went to the city police, the activities director and head coach at the university. I filed a police report, had a rape kit collected, and talked with the district attorney. All individuals claimed to be well meaning, but ultimately the charges against the star basketball player were dropped. Seeing him on campus, knowing he got away with this crime was almost as painful as the sexual assault itself. Elsa and I shared a new understanding during this first interview; she started to cry and we hugged each other feeling a sense of sisterhood that only this kind of soul-murder can produce.

When I saw Elsa on the following Monday, I could tell she was in emotional turmoil. She said, “Yesterday [I was thinking about my situation] and I was feeling really depressed.” She told me that she had tried calling her psychiatrist, but she was not available during the weekend so she just stayed in bed for the day. “I was worried and sick to my stomach. Then she [my daughter] got sick so we were in bed again.” Elsa’s physical reaction to our conversation made me realize that issues such as rape and

domestic abuse are not isolated phenomenon but represent a complex, yet intertwined relationship with race, class, and gender. Furthermore, as a feminist interpreter and researcher I felt ill-equipped (and also a sense of guilt) as I reflected on how our interview had followed down a potentially dangerous path.

While the experience of Elsa's rape was in her past, it continued to poison her present. She then confided in me that she had been in counseling for attempting suicide. In retrospect, I now have to wonder why Elsa and I, (and countless women of color) have been especially susceptible to sexual assault? Do raced and gendered bodies, and their (de)valuation signify larger ideological beliefs? Furthermore, like with Cari, how did Elsa know that I would "understand" her experiences unlike some one else? In the meantime, I felt torn as a researcher and now her friend. I asked her if she wanted me to mention this information and this story within my write up. She smiled and said, "Yes. I hope my story will help others because we need to share this and not hide it." I took Elsa's reference to "others" as an indication of her desire to help "other Latinas."

### **Felisa**

While Elsa initially saw motherhood as a result of a "loss of control," other women like Felisa saw motherhood as an escape from painful inscriptions on her body, all of which she had no control. "I was four months pregnant when I was having my party for my wedding and everything. I was really happy that I was pregnant, and that I had a boy, because I always wanted a boy." Felisa's perspective on pregnancy and motherhood reminded me of Butler's (1990) musings on the female body and psyche, "The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing



its embodiments all together” (p.17). Felisa went on to tell me that her grandfather had routinely raped her from the age of 3 until the age of 7. She related that,

I thought in some way that might have affected me, and I’m like, I probably can’t have kids, because I was so little [when the rapes happened]. I was three years old and it was my grandpa, my mom’s dad. Until I was seven. It was a lot of damage, but you don’t realize it until you get older. You don’t even know at that age what it is, what’s happening.

While Felisa had told her mother about the assaults, nothing was done to stop them. In fact, Felisa remembers a time when her entire family was going on a road trip in a large van where her grandfather molested her during the entire trip. “I was just depressed about everything years later. My parents don’t understand. I was depressed, and just sleeping and just wanting to cry.” This was the reason that Felisa, at age 16, tried to commit suicide for the first time. By her own account, she continues to struggle with the lack of support she received from her parents and even ran away from home several times:

I think everything I did, running away and going with a boyfriend and all that, that he [my father] really judges me on that and doesn’t realize where it came from and why. I feel sad too because, then I have my son, and my boyfriend has his little boy, and then I’m like, I have to pull myself together for them, too.

I told Felisa I appreciated that she shared her story with me. “Our words and our stories are powerful,” I said. She told me that her son was her main motivation for “getting better.” I tried to reassure her that she was on the right path:

You know, I think too, that as women and as mothers, a lot of times we put our needs at the very last and a lot of times we don't take the time we need to grieve.

It would be a blessing if everyone had a mother like you that was so proactive and so insistent about stopping these things [sexual abuse].

I then assured her that I would not use this aspect of her story in my write up. To my surprise she said, "No, please share this. I want things to change. I want things to get better and people to be more understanding." When I think of Felisa's appeal to others for understanding, I also think about how she had struggled in school—dropping out of NMVCC for a couple of semesters and having issues with class attendance. With our interviews, however, I saw a side of Felisa that her instructors probably had overlooked. Being a Latina researcher, and a NMVCC instructor, I was able to comprehend the significance of her raced and gendered positioning. She struggled with her roles of being a mother, girlfriend, a daughter of purity, and a model student. These race and gender norms manifested in severe depression.

### **Alegria**

Like Elsa and Felisa, Alegria was also a victim of sexual assault. Alegria appeared to be an "old soul." She was wise beyond her years, detailing her interests in cultural anthropology, Chinese medicine and philosophy. Her history as a survivor of sexual assault had been the source of many emotional breakdowns. She told me, "I understand how you feel when you say, I mean, I wasn't raped, physically. But I was molested, and I know how that felt." As our conversations continued, it became clear that Alegria's her experience of having a biracial baby had been her most formative

identity experience thus far. Having a bi-racial (Black and White) baby had seemingly opened her up to harsh criticism from her family.

Like Elsa, Alegria associated her experience with pregnancy with feelings of insecurity especially in the face of familial rejection. She related that she got pregnant in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade while using birth control. Alegria told me about her and her boyfriend's relationship before she became pregnant and said, "Six months later [after having sex], I found out I was pregnant. So I didn't even know I was pregnant, and we only had sex once. [My boyfriend's family] hated me." Alegria went on to tell me that she had been in some kind of "denial" regarding her pregnancy. Continuing she said,

I guess I should tell you how I found out. A Latino boy [at school] happened to tap me on the shoulder and he asked me if I was [pregnant]. He said, "I grew up around my aunties and mom, all of them, and they were all pregnant." So, I went to take a [pregnancy] test, and yes, I was pregnant. [The school nurse] told me, "You're already almost six months pregnant."

I asked how Alegria's family had reacted to the news that she was pregnant at 16 years of age. She relayed, "Well, except for my mom, my whole family was disgusted, I guess, not for the fact that I was pregnant but because it was with a Black guy." In a manner congruent with Foucault's (1977) ideas on the disciplined body, Alegria's high school friends also abandoned her. "Once they'd see my boyfriend and my baby, they were like, 'Whoa,' and they wouldn't want to be my friend anymore." Alegria's experiences continued to manifest due to her son's dark phenotype in comparison to her own. "To this day, I've had mothers come up to me and be like, 'Oh, what adoption

agency did you go through?” Just by the expression on Alegria’s face, I could see that this fact was heartbreaking for her.

It was then that Alegria went on to tell me about her post-labor experiences, “[The doctors] told me I was too young to get the epidural. Then, six weeks later, I hemorrhaged. I just happened to look down and I was in this pool of blood.” Alegria went on to tell me that this hemorrhaging still “comes and goes” and was unlike a menstrual period. “Sometimes it lasts for months at a time.” I asked Alegria if she thought that this hemorrhaging was due to her childbirth, but she rejected this because her son was now 5 years old. “It’s just something my body does,” she said.

I was awe struck by Alegria’s matter-of-fact way of describing her hemorrhaging. While I am not a medical doctor, I was sure that this hemorrhaging did not signify a “healthy” body. Also, this hemorrhaging seemed “normal” to Alegria. Alegria’s story of hemorrhaging had been brought up by her. This was directly after we had talked about her son’s phenotype, and how other’s often perceived him as “not her son.” Recall that Alegria had also struggled with her own family and friends, as she did not adhere to the “normalized rules” of Mestiza procreation. Obviously, even five years later, the shunning of her family and friends was part of her painful memories. In breaking the rules of mestizaje, it seemed as though Alegria continued to pay the price emotionally and physically.

During our second interview, I probed Alegria further about her interest in Chinese medicine, hoping she would share with me more information about her non-degree status at NMVCC. Alegria’s interest in alternative medicine, it turned out, was due to other health issues (in addition to her persistent hemorrhaging) that she had

encountered. Like Cari, Alegria had been plagued with kidney disease. Her doctor had diagnosed this as “kidney failure” but otherwise gave her no reasons for the diagnosis. As Alegria tells it, “My kidneys just stopped working.” The doctors only gave her medicine for her discomfort and pain. Only after Alegria had gone to see an alternative medicine doctor was she able to regain full function of her kidneys. This is when the pain finally went away. Like in interview one, we see how Alegria normalizes her embodiment episodes. Her kidneys “just stopped working.” Was Alegria simply a sick person or did the societal processes of race and gender play a part in how her body reacted to these norms? Also, did her beliefs in the significance of blanqueamiento and mestizaje become part of her physical embodiments?

### **Modesta**

Modesta was my oldest research participant. She celebrated her birthday the week after our second interview so I considered her to be my only participant that was over 30 years of age. Modesta and I instantly connected because her daughter and one of my sons were born only a couple of days apart. Also, Modesta always had a smile and seemed eager to make me laugh. Modesta and I initially talked about her history with physical abuse—first with her father, and then later with her daughter’s father.

He [my father] did a lot of things to all of us. He was very abusive. I’ve seen him hit my mom with an iron. He beat me. He beat all of us. I remember one night waking up. He woke us up because he was going to kill our mom in front of us. We were crying, in tears on the sofa. He’s all like, “Talk to her right now because

I'm going to kill her!" Because she [my mother] was from Mexico [and undocumented], he had to always threaten her. "I'll send you back or kill you but you'll never leave."

When Modesta's father went to prison, she said that she actually felt relief. However, as the oldest child in the family, she was frustrated with her new role as co-provider of her family. At the age of 16, Modesta was working a full-time night job as a waitress and going to school during the day. All her earned money, minus her tips, went to supporting herself, her mother, and her brother and sister.

Modesta eventually grew tired of working full-time, doing her chores at home, and going to school. She decided to move to a friend's house, but she left because her friend's father tried to rape her. When she tried to return home, she discovered that her mother would not take her back. "You want your freedom?" her mother asked. "Then go, 'Freedom!' Go live your life!" As she was saying this, Modesta's mother was throwing her few belongings out on the front lawn.

With nowhere else to go, Modesta moved in with her boyfriend. She explains,

I moved in [with my boyfriend's family]. That was a bad mistake. My daughter's father would get mad and throw things at me in front of them. No one would stick up for me. He would kick me and call me names and [my boyfriend's family] wouldn't say anything. The mom would tell me why do you make him mad for [*sic*]? There was [*sic*] plenty of times, I swear, I think like I'd cry in my bed, where I just wanted to go home. I just didn't. Then I found out he had a drug problem.

It was around this time that Modesta discovered she was pregnant. She secretly fled the state she was living in, telling no one where she was going. About a year later, she met her most current boyfriend. By this time, Modesta had re-established a relationship with her mother. However, Modesta's romantic relationship had become what she termed "disrespectful." Like Cari, Modesta found that her boyfriend was unwelcoming of her child. She recalled, "There was a point where I wanted to separate from him because he just had himself like, 'Oh, I'm the breadwinner, I do this. I do that. I can do anything I want.'" This phenomenon sheds some light. She explains that children who have experienced home violence are often sufferers of similar relationship mistreatment. This leads to an intergenerational succession of relationship mistreatment. Modesta seriously considered leaving her boyfriend but when she told her mother about her plans, she found little support:

I was telling my mom, "You know what? I think I'm just going to move back [home]." And she's all like, "No. You have it made. You have a big house. He pays for everything. You have nothing to worry about." I was like, "What? You want me to just stay here and let him do what he wants?" And she's all like, "Well you don't know how hard it is." And I'm like, "I'd rather be by myself and sink alone than to feel like someone's above me and better than me." But she's just like, "It could be worse. He could be cheating on you. He could be beating you. But he doesn't lay a hand on you. There's [*sic*] probably other women out there that are worse off with other guys."

Modesta, then, felt essentially bound to her boyfriend even though she says that the "good times, are more than the bad." There are many days that she feels depressed and

suicidal, though. “I’ve often wondered” she says “if I am better off dead than alive.” Looking back on Modesta’s interview, I see that her beliefs in being a “good” mother, daughter, and girlfriend have much to do with mestizaje ideology. Like Florita, she feels “stuck” because she is bound to the race and gender norms of mestizaje. This has manifested in severe depression and routine thoughts of suicide.

### **Lourdes**

When I met Lourdes, I was instantly drawn in by her composure and grace. Her long curly hair fell past her shoulders as she sat upright and attentive in a plush chair. At the onset, Lourdes talked about her faith in God and how He had provided for her in the past. When I asked her about some of the obstacles she had endured, she mentioned that her mother had abandoned her and her father was in prison. Like Modesta, Lourdes had cared for her siblings with little assistance.

In one exchange, Lourdes told me that her mother, who was addicted to heroine, was a prostitute who worked in several bars. Because of her drug addiction, her mother would forget about Lourdes and her siblings for 3 to 4 days at a time. She would lock the doors of their house from the outside, leaving the children with little or no food. Lourdes, who was about 10 years old at the time, would get her younger brother and sister ready for school and would open a little window—the only window without a screen on it. “Come on,” she would tell them, “let’s go to school. We can eat over there.”

At age 16, Lourdes got pregnant. I asked her about her reasons for having sex with her boyfriend (now husband) because earlier she had mentioned that she didn’t like “his attitude...he was just really mean.” She went on to tell me that,



One day, it just happened. We were there and he kept bugging me about it, bugging me. I wasn't ready and I knew I wasn't ready. He kept bugging me and bugging me and finally I was like, "Fine." Then I was like, "Wow, this really sucks." I got pregnant that first time or that first week that we were together.

After finding out she was pregnant, Lourdes, like Elsa, felt stuck in a relationship that had become riddled with domestic abuse after she became pregnant:

We had domestic violence at the beginning [of my pregnancy]. It was like living in hell. I'd rather die than be with him. Yeah, it was bad. Then I got pregnant.

Then it's like, "Dang, I'm kind of stuck with this guy."

At this point, her boyfriend proposed marriage in order to keep the now pregnant Lourdes in his life. It was a tempting offer to her because she was not a U.S. citizen at that time. However, the domestic abuse continued in their relationship, but Lourdes never called the police because she was afraid she would get deported.

This is the time when Lourdes "thought of suicide almost every day." However, she stepped into a church and found solace there. She thought of her situation as "God's plan" and decided to marry her boyfriend. I pushed Lourdes further to think about this decision, as shown in this exchange:

[Sarah:] When you were applying for your citizenship and you were planning to get married and issues were coming up, do you think maybe you endured a little bit more than you wanted to just because you needed to have that citizenship?

[Lourdes:] Probably. Yeah. Probably. If I wanted to, I could just be, "Forget you, I'm out of here." I think I knew that I needed to be there.

Lourdes had clearly turned to her faith in God as a means of coping with her marriage, her pregnancy, and her bouts of depression. Turning to religion as a means of coping is a theme I talk more about in the next chapter. However, what is telling here is that Lourdes has used her faith as a means of dealing with raced and gendered norms. She, in a sense, uses her faith to further justify her roles. However, if she admits to having “bouts of depression,” I have to wonder if her coping strategies have been successful?

### **Carletta**

In the case of Carletta, a lesbian who had recently come out to her parents, her frequent bouts of depression were centered on her belief that she had severely disappointed them.

I have nothing but regret. My family put me up on this pedestal because I'm the only girl. They had, and not only did I have these big dreams, but they had big dreams for their only sister, their only daughter. I don't understand why I took the path that I did. It's just frustrating for them. I lied a lot. It's been four years and I can't take it back. It's time wasted.

Carletta had just begun her schooling career at NMVCC after a four-year hiatus from high school. She seemed reluctant to start school once again because, nearly four years prior, she had found school to be a time that was extremely difficult for her. She had been in denial about her sexuality and it was during this same time (in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade) that she suffered gallbladder failure:

I remember my junior year [in high school]. I felt like a little outcast and stuff and didn't fit anywhere. I had surgery to remove my gallbladder, so I was out of school for like two weeks. I came back to school with everybody just, “How are

you? Are you okay? Do you need anything?” For the first time, I don’t know, it was like they really liked me or something.

Now Carletta had started classes at NMVCC and was interested in becoming an elementary teacher, but admitted that it was currently an overwhelming time for her. As she explains,

I stress a lot and stress gets to me and I don’t know whenever [*sic*] I’m going to be good, like whenever am I going to be financially stable or okay with my family or in a relationship?

Like Alameda, Carletta had just ended a long-term relationship with her partner the week of our first interview. In fact, her car was still packed up—full of boxes and her things from her old apartment. She shared more with me about her past relationship with her partner:

[Our relationship] had lots of ups and downs. We were never really stable and then came

lots of domestic violence. We were always fighting, drinking, and doing drugs. It was difficult being with this partner. I tried committing suicide twice.

Like Felisa and Modesta, suicide seemed a logical response to race, gender, and in this case, sexuality norms. I am reminded of Anzaldúa’s work here, as she noted that being a lesbian is, indeed, a reproductive threat to patriarchy.

I asked Carletta about these suicide attempts. Why did her life, at that time, seem so hopeless? She went into more detail about one suicide incident that had occurred only eight months earlier:

I didn't see a way out. This last serious [attempt] was over my relationship. I was begging [my girlfriend] to stay and she just left. I walked into the kitchen, grabbed the biggest knife we had and I just stabbed myself like by my heart three or four times. I was in the hospital for like a week and a half. And, I don't know, the doctors told me that the tip of the knife was two centimeters away from puncturing my heart.

"How are you feeling now?" I asked. "Not too good," she said. "I'm like, oh my God, how am I going to do it, she's been the one supporting me, my family is not really helping me, I'm just going to be depressed, I don't want to deal with all that." I ended up interviewing Carletta on three separate occasions because I was concerned about her volatile state. Carletta knew that she had "let down" her family. She had not followed the hetero-normative "rules" of being a "good Latina." As a lesbian, she would never live up to her family's expectations of her. She would never bear a grandchild for her parents and she would not live up to the gendered expectations of her being the single girl in the family.

### **Conclusion**

Hooks (1984) notes that, "Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality" (p. vii). I feel this sentiment is particularly important to this study. These women and their reality were shaped not only by their positionality but also by their ideology. What the narratives of these women illustrate is their race and gender knowledge under *mestizaje*. They knew that there were raced and gendered expectations of them as mothers, daughters, girlfriends, wives, and students. Also, they knew that the societal positionality of their bodies was not equal to other women, specifically white women.

In Chapter 5, I focus on my participants' stories of coping and empowerment. We find that the race and gender norms that go along with their daily lives play a part in their need for coping. On the other hand, the beliefs that go along with these processes are also as a source of resiliency and empowerment.

## **CHAPTER 5: LATINA RACE AND GENDER NORMS: COPING, EMPOWERMENT, AND PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I focused on the life experiences of nine women whose intimate stories illustrated how family, biological or otherwise, often contributed to their transposed physical and emotional embodiment. The present chapter focuses on the race and gender norms of NMVCC Latinas. Navigating these normatives requires strategies in order to help these women be successful as students. Their multiple stories demonstrate their coping strategies, sources of empowerment, and their promises for the future. In their stories, I recall the phrase “psychological limbo,” a term I borrow from Hurtado (2003), as they navigate race and gender processes. Ultimately, this chapter

illustrates how educational forums often “bring out” the empowerment and resiliency of NMVCC Latinas. These women believe that their lives will change for the better via education. They have a desire to “prove people wrong” about who they are as a raced and gendered group. Also, in a response to these race and gender norms, these Latinas have hopes for their financial betterment (thereby the betterment of their families’ lives) and their personal fulfillment of learning. In her explanation of the matrix of domination, Collins (2000) argued that all women of color have personal histories and experiences that shape their response to oppression, domination, and resistance (p. 285). Focusing on these women’s individual subjectivities, their means of empowerment and strategies for coping, it is clear that there is also a dialectical relationship at work. Even though racial processes may limit NMVCC Latinas in many ways, schooling enables their empowerment and transformation.

As I began to interpret the multiple narratives of my participants, I was reminded of Hurtado’s (2003) larger interview study in Latina identity. In *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak out on Sexuality and Identity*, Hurtado noticed how her respondents were forced to come to terms with their own social realities and their situated *positionality*. During the interviewing process, she observed that,

Respondents embodied this *facultad*, born out of their daily existence. They developed...*multiple subjectivities* that allowed them to *see* the *partial truths* in what on the surface appeared to be contradictory social realities...they had to function in a social context of psychological limbo in almost every aspect of their lives (original italics intact). (p. 274)

This “psychological limbo,” as Hurtado called it, is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s (1999) conception of the *Borderlands*, where Latinas navigated their lives within the confines of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Arguably, these social and material *Borderlands* stem from Latinas’ ambiguous, yet hegemonic, race-class historicism (Leonardo, March 10, 2010, personal communication). Within Chapter 2, I detailed how ideology worked in tandem with *positionality* despite the efforts of some feminist frames. Feminism has long been subjected to critique (see bell hooks, (1984). Similarly, Hurtado (2003) noted that “[w]hite women...are not held accountable to the demands of these subjected positions because they are not the descendants of *La Malinche*” (p. 16). It is true that traditional notions of feminism have proven to have a Whiteness problem. Like a mirror of society, the Latina schooling experience is one that is often hegemonic but not universal. But how does ideology “act” within race and gender frames? It is for this reason that scholars such as López (2003) have suggested the use of a race-gendering framework. This framework highlights the multiple *positionalities* of Latinas all of which are (re)produced in schools. I extend López’s notions of race and gender here, as I argue that the ideology of mestizaje is also part of this schooling process.

### **Patriarchy and Latina Gender Scripts**

As in the work of both Hurtado (2003) and López (2003), all my participants had experienced living within patriarchal families (what many of them deemed the “double standard”) in cue with beliefs in mestizaje. Hurtado (2003) noted that “Latino family life...defines what constitutes acceptable gender scripts, the way female and males

should behave, and the role they should take on as gendered individuals” (p. 45). She continued on to say:

As female family members, young women realized early on that male privilege would impact their daily existence and would need to be negotiated. They learned their role in the family was (a) to provide services to others, (b) to obey and be subservient to men, and (c) to expect to be socially controlled.”

Within my own study, the narratives of Trella, Elena, and Sunshine, illustrated the significance of race and gender norms, often left unchecked under *mestizaje*. Often these scripts involved differing expectations for female and male siblings in the home despite the age of the child. For instance, Trella continued to say that:

My mother expected more from me regardless if I was younger [than my brother]. She expected me to make more right decisions in dealing with stuff. She expected the house to be cleaned, the dishes to be done, dinner to be started, stuff like that. [I was taught] the woman has her role.

Like Hurtado (2003) argued, Trella learned from a young age that “there are rewards for women who comply and punishments for those who rebel against the model of a ‘good [Latina] woman’” (2003, p. 16). I would argue that these rewards and punishments also align with *mestizaje*, thereby determining the definitions of a “good Latina woman.”

What does it mean to be a “good [Latina] woman?” Baca Zinn (1975) noted that “To be a ‘good woman’ is to remain a virgin until marriage and to invest devotion, loyalty, and nurturance in the family, specifically Chicanos’ definition of family” (as cited in Hurtado, 2003, p. 13). Baca Zinn goes on to explain that the definition of family is cast in a wide



sense here but includes “extended networks of kin as well as friends and parts of the community” (p. 13).

Under this belief of being “a good Latina woman” that Elena found herself juggling two competing worldviews—one that stemmed from her family’s expectations and the other from her boyfriend, who is ethnically White. She and her boyfriend of six years had lived together for four of those years and had recently purchased a home together. According to Elena, her boyfriend was supportive in every way but had strong beliefs against marriage. As an atheist, he strongly believed that a religious ceremony was a false expression of their commitment and love to one another. Elena was touched by one symbolic action and she eagerly shared this with me.

My boyfriend gave me this ring. It took a couple of days for me to put it on or anything. It’s not an engagement ring. It’s more of a commitment thing. He was like, “There’s really no other way I could express to you that this is for real and I’m in it for the long haul.”

Elena admittedly respected the logic behind her partner’s beliefs. However, she had been raised in a Latina/o family where marriage was expected before her thirtieth birthday. She found herself struggling as she tried to decide which worldviews fit her own personal beliefs. As she details here,

I always thought that I saw [*sic*] myself married. Now, in the back of my mind, the only guilt that I have is my parents’ and grandparents’ [disappointment], who are traditional Catholics. This was kind of the only thing that tugged at my heart, that my grandparents are not happy with this situation.

I went on to ask Elena her opinion of her parents' and grandparents' beliefs. "After all," I said, "your parents are divorced, right?" Elena thoughtfully replied,

I think religion plays a lot into it. It [religion] is huge. Marriage is still expected of you [as a Latina woman]. My grandma still wants to know when [my boyfriend and I] are getting married. I'm like, "Grandma, it's not happening." She's still holding out hope that there will be a wedding though.

Elena's statement above illustrates Villenas and Moreno's (2001) beliefs that mothers (and, in this case, grandmothers) continually practice the "act of 'gendering' each other...evaluating who better met the 'cultural standards of being a good woman and...kept an eye on each other's social actions in relationship to men" (p. 680). This type of gendered surveillance coincides with other Latina race and gendered expectations.

As Elena and I continued to talk about gendered expectations in her family, she related to me that despite having a twin brother who was also in college, her family just assumed that she was going to help all the [other] family members out. This expectation was not extended to her brother, however. "I'm willing because that's the way I grew up," said Elena. "If someone had something [within the family], they're just expected to share it, whether it be knowledge, facilities, money, something. They [family] just expect it." I continued to press Elena about these expectations—shouldn't these same standards of sharing be applied to the males of the family as well? Elena shrugged her shoulders and told me that the selfless life her mother had led compelled her to also take on these family obligations. "My mom has stories [of helping family] like mine too, so I start to feel guilty, like, why am I ever [*sic*] complaining because this [expectation] is so small in comparison to what my mom did or what my grandmother did." In this transaction, we

see how “gendering acts” extend beyond marital status. There are additional expectations associated with being Latina as well.

According to Sunshine, some of the most important life lessons that she learned from her mother were those regarding her own “role” as a woman, mother, and wife. “Those traditional roles, even though my mom was a business woman, intelligent, a really hard worker and really independent, she didn’t let me forget what my [Latina] roles should be.” It seemed that Sunshine’s understanding of independence included having the highest of cultural standards (arguably even impossible), where Sunshine took care of herself financially, maintained a home, and took care of her husband’s every need while also tackling the tasks that any partner might do around the house. In a matter-of-fact statement, Sunshine told me that she had come to learn that “every man wants a mother.” She seemed confident that these gendered expectations were not only doable: “Even though she [my mother] really stressed independence, it was really important for me to learn how to do everything from running [a] whole business, to changing the oil in the truck, to fixing the roof.”

I went on to ask Sunshine about how her mother’s teachings, as well as her own expectations, matched or differed from the relationship she currently shared with her boyfriend. Sunshine said she was grateful to have her boyfriend because “he helps me with the store [my business] so I can go and spend more time studying and stuff.” She paused for a moment and then continued to say, “Truthfully, my current boyfriend doesn’t fill all of the [expected Latino] roles, but I am mature enough to realize that you can’t put everybody into a box and expect them to fulfill this obligation as stated by our culture.” Even though her boyfriend does not fit her ideal of a mate, she excuses his

“obligations” because of the subservient, and ideological, role she has taken. After Sunshine told me about her struggles in maintaining her business, cleaning and cooking at home, and going to school full time, I asked her to tell me more about the times when she is unable to maintain household expectations. “Well,” she said, “like even [*sic*] yesterday I felt like such a piece [of shit] because he [my boyfriend] had to make dinner because I was doing homework.” Here we see how Sunshine “normalizes” her ideas of “traditional Latino standards,” where she is bound by hegemonic expectations.

### **Issues of Class**

One issue that I have talked little about is that of socio-economic status. There has been a reason for this lack of discussion stemming from the fact that all of my participants, as full-time NMVCC students, identified as “working poor,” as cited within their research intake forms. Additionally my participants, much like the majority of first-generation Latinas in higher education, were living (and barely surviving) on minimum wage jobs and financial aid. In many cases, these women were working two jobs while going to school full-time—as a full-time student status was part of the condition for receiving financial aid. Many of my participants were un-married mothers who were also the sole providers of their family. For those of my participants who were single, being self-sufficient women often shaped their race and gender schooling experiences.

As an example, Sunshine talked about how her lack of financial resources compelled her to quit her social life and presence at the larger state university in order to obtain a full-time job and then start her own business. Sunshine had juggled a variety of roles before settling on her goal of obtaining a degree in Business. First, she had decided

to join a sorority at the university in which she had initially enrolled. She said that it was “fun at first,” but later noticed how she and her roommate (another Latina) were ostracized because of the “Spanglish” they used in the sorority house. According to Sunshine,

They [our sorority sisters] would just look at us like we were crazy when we would play our *corridos* in our bedroom. We finally just said, “Forget this!” It was getting too hard to pay for the [sorority] dues and the girls had no idea why we had to go to our jobs to work instead of just getting drunk all the time.

Sunshine and her roommate worked as bank tellers full-time, and they took their positions very seriously. While both women encouraged each other at their jobs, they found that the working day provided little time for study—let alone time to go to their classes. Most of the introductory classes were offered during their 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work schedule, forcing the decision by both women to drop out of the university.

Soon after she had dropped out, Sunshine discovered that her bank teller job was a “dead end” position.

They [the bank supervisors] would treat us like shit. We’d have our hours all planned out, and then they would just switch our “off” days or make us stay late, or spring something else on us. One day me and [my friend] just went on our break and never came back.

At this point, Sunshine found herself in a desperate situation. While she knew her mother would welcome her back home if she desired, Sunshine was intent on taking care of herself no matter the cost. This is when she started exploring the option of starting her own business, selling nutritional supplements and weight loss products. Sunshine was a

proud small-business owner but, as she was not making much of a profit with her business, she felt an overwhelming need to complete her studies at NMVCC. Here we see how race and gender norms compelled Sunshine to return to school. She would rather struggle financially, rather than return home.

Time after time, I heard stories from my participants of having to choose between a \$135 textbook or food and gas for the next couple of weeks. Sasha's own expectations (albeit from a *mestizaje* frame) summed up many of my participants' *positionality*. She said that she was "coming here to school and can't wait to get ahead [financially]." She went on to say that she "cannot wait to get at least my associate's [degree] because to me that'll be like, oh, my God, a huge [financial] accomplishment." Sasha explained that while "going to school and getting your education and getting the highest degree possible [is the most important thing], I am going to school, I'm not getting paid, I'm paying money that I don't have, and I can't seem to get a scholarship or anything." Clearly, being a student at NMVCC is a financial commitment and sacrifice. However, this situation offers the perceived notion of "something better" as the result of achieving a college degree. Beliefs in achievement ideology and meritocracy (see Bonilla-Silva, 2011) are clearly at work here. Sasha believes that if she works hard enough, she will be successful, no matter what.

Albuquerque's current poverty rate has been erroneously pegged as a parenting and education problem. This deficit perspective on ineffective parenting (read: parents "who do not care about their kids") and the belief that early childhood education programs are ultimately the answer is due, in part, to the 2013 statistics on child well-being where New Mexico has been named 50<sup>th</sup> in the Nation (see

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>). Data taken from the Kids Counts Report (2013) has political conservatives saying, “Where are the parents?” Ironically, early childhood programs that were once a source of employment for NMVCC students have cut student work-study jobs due to an overall lack of educational funding in New Mexico. Luz (age 23) had recently been laid off from her pre-school teaching position associated with NMVCC and was forced to look for any employment that she could find. The first job that opened up for her was at the airport, where she was required to work late hours in a relatively unsafe location, encountering many instances of racism from customers. She told me that she “sees older people working there [at the Sunport] and [thinks] ‘How could anybody want this for themselves the rest of their life?’ It’s not what I want.” Luz hated her job and the people she encountered, but she kept this job because she knew she had to pay her bills. Like most of my participants, Luz took pride in taking care of herself financially. She explained, “I’m the type, I don’t like accepting money from people or having them buy me stuff. It just feels weird because I’m just so used to getting things on my own.” Here, Luz illustrates the importance of her “making it on her own.” These race and gender self-expectations were ones echoed throughout all of my participant interviews.

The financial difficulties that my participants encountered in their day-to-day cannot, therefore, be summed up simply as an education problem (or a lack thereof). Rather, they are due to socio-historical problems that are rooted in race, class and gender. My participants, as mothers, never came across as lacking in their parental skills. In fact, these women cited that their day-to-day life struggles were worthy of their endurance

because that they might better their children's lives. This leaves the logical question that only a race-class framework can answer.

### **Catholicism as a Source of Empowerment**

Within my participant interviews, time after time, the women mentioned their belief in God as a means of empowerment as they dealt with the everyday stressors of life—especially those that involved health issues, sustenance, and race-gender norms. While some of the women were decidedly non-practicing, all identified as Catholics within their intake forms. The Catholic religious worldviews these women shared echoed Hurtado's (2003) larger interview study where she noted that, "As adults, especially in times of crisis...respondents used religion as a source of solace" (p. 108). A belief in God, then, proved to be a source of resiliency for these women.

Natalia, for instance, openly shared with me her health experiences as a child. As a six-year old she had been dealing with a reoccurring, unidentifiable cyst on her neck since the age of four.

I don't know if you can see them but I have some scars on my neck. The doctors didn't know what it was. I kept getting this cyst. It was one of those first memories I had. Within two days, it swelled up to the size of a grapefruit. After that, I kept having reoccurring surgeries on my neck. I had seven surgeries. Natalia recalled that no doctor had been able to diagnose this condition except her grandfather, who was a *currandero* and a very religious man. She explained how her grandfather had been the monumental catalyst for her healing.

Then there was a like a whole religious experience. My grandfather took me to Lubbock, Texas, because he had just seen a bunch of spottings in the sky. He



used to do religious tours. So we went down there. The priest blessed me. The day after that, I just broke out in a really big fever. It came overnight. That was the last time I had [the cyst]. My grandpa always said it [the healing] was a religious thing.

In turn, Natalia's healing experience strengthened her resolve in God and an early awareness of the fragility of life. As a living example of faith, Natalia's grandfather was instrumental to her growing belief in God, even though her White fiancé shunned her worldview and did not wish their son be exposed to her religious beliefs. I asked Natalia about this resolve in her faith. How did she sustain her strong beliefs in spite of her partner's lack of support? She said that she could not ignore the spiritual experience that she had encountered as a child. I sensed that Natalia's experiences were to remain part of her life-long identity as she told me,

You keep having this thing [a large cyst], it keeps coming back and they [the doctors] don't know how to fix it. Is it something you forget about? I'm like, "No way!" Every morning [as a child] I would check myself because the cyst used to come overnight. I would be normal and the next day I'd have this really big cyst on my neck. You never forget about that...you never forget who healed you.

I went on to ask Natalia if she thought this spiritual experience had changed her perspective on life in any other ways. She went on to say that her experience with this cyst made her more aware of life's delicacy. "I had this [health issue] going on as a kid so [now] I don't take things for granted as much. I was always aware of my mortality a lot younger than most people are."

Like Natalia, Luz (whom I talked about earlier in this chapter) had formed a strong relationship with God—mostly due to her daily financial struggles as well as balancing the demands of school, work, and family obligations. She confided, “I do pray when I’m in need, and I do believe that God does have a purpose for my life. He does help me through things.” I asked Luz if she would share an example with me of how she defined “God’s plan.” Luz continued on to say “Well, I think there is a reason why I haven’t got [*sic*] married, got pregnant. God has a plan for me. He doesn’t want me to do that yet.” This is telling because her younger sister Nelia had just given birth to her niece and Luz (much like Elena) had been receiving great family pressure to get married and become pregnant. As in my interview with Natalia, I asked Luz about her faith in God. “What sustain your beliefs in God?” I asked. She explained:

Honestly, I think the only thing that gets me through is God. He helps me to say, “Okay get up. You can do it.” That’s who [*sic*] I turn to. I’m like, “God, I need your help, I need you, I don’t know what to do.” Surely enough, there’s something that will pop up and I’m like, “Oh, thanks!” With my family I have to be strong. I want to wait [to have children] because I’m not ready for kids right now. I don’t really care if I’m married or not, to be honest. I tell my family, “God knows what is best for me.”

In the above narrative, Luz gives breadth to Trinidad-Galván’s (2006) argument that “If we truly come to understand spirituality as that essence that moves us, that makes us whole, that gives us strength, then essentially spirituality gives us a purpose” (as cited in Villenas, S., Bernal, D., Dolores, & E., Godinez, F., 2006, p. 173).

Other women like Alegria, Elsa, and Lourdes talked about the importance of “passing on” a strong belief in God to their children. Alegria, whose boyfriend was not religious, described how she had talked to her son about the importance of Jesus: “I tell him [my son], you thank Jesus, thank God for your meal, for waking up today. I don’t want to necessarily say God, but I want him to have a sense of something to believe in, a higher power that watches over him.” Elsa, who is admittedly still recovering from a rape that ended in the birth of her daughter, talked about God’s role in making her a wiser and stronger woman.

I just thank God [for my daughter]. Sometimes I feel like crying and I just keep telling myself like God—I just think this is what is going to make me who I am. And we both are going to make it...so I thank God that he brought her into my life right now. He [God] brought her here for me...to help me, and everything.

Probably the most religious and devout Catholic was Lourdes, who had endured several years of domestic abuse by her husband in order to gain her citizenship. She attributed her strengthened marriage to their current involvement in the church.

I think now that we have God in our lives, it [our marriage] just comes together because I know without God it was just a mess. During that time [when there was domestic abuse] I was like, well maybe that’s God. I think it was just God working in my life. It [a strong belief in God] is also important for me as a mother. First of all, you’re a model in the church, and then you’re a mother.

These narratives on the importance of God and religion support race and gender norms, at least in the ways that these women conceptualized them. Religion is one way in which group expectations are communicated to NMVCC Latinas.

Like Lourdes, Alameda, and Carletta turned to their religion to understand and navigate their daily life experiences. Here, Alameda talks about her experience in losing her grandparents, whom she had cared for in high school. After her grandparents died, many of her family members came to “collect” the few assets that belonged to her grandparents. This made Alameda livid to the point of physical violence. She told me “I could have pushed them [her family members] into the grave because of how furious I was, but I was taught by my grandparents not to stoop down to their level, to be the bigger person, because God is a man of justice and they’ll have their day.” In this exchange, it seems that Alameda looks to God in order to curtail her behavior and feelings, which she has come to believe are inappropriate.

Like Alameda, Carletta who had recently “come out” as a lesbian to her parents, also told me how she had looked to God in order to “change her lifestyle” along with her then partner. Her desire to become “sexually normal” stemmed from her beliefs in God and her understandings of Catholicism via a heterosexual, mestizaje lens. Carletta and her partner had even started to attend church on a bi-weekly basis and read scripture together. “I told [my partner] we need to believe more in God and stuff. We would sit at the dinner table and we’d pray [for direction], give thanks and stuff. When we ended [our relationship], we were not as connected as we used to be with God.” Carletta’s desire to somehow “change” her sexual orientation speaks to the ways in which religion acts as a “gendered lesson...specific to the ideas that the body contains ‘power’ associated with (hetero)sexuality and reproduction” (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 678). These gendered lessons, however, are not without an ideology.

Many of my participants offer revealing stories about their mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers who supported them in times of triumph, troubles, or duress. Additionally, when mothers were working, when fathers were emotionally or physically absent, multi-generational parenting supported these young women as they came into womanhood and focused on their goals for the future. Hurtado (2003) brought up this same phenomenon and deemed it “parenting as a ‘family affair’” (p. 88). She continued to state that she “discovered...most of [her] respondents had similarly been relinquished to grandparents who took primary responsibility for raising them” (p. 88). The examples of Trella, Elena, Sunshine, and Luz illustrate how their own mothers shaped their mestizaje perspectives on motherhood, being wives, and dealing with the trials of life. Additionally, the example of Natalia’s mother gave testimony in demonstrating “what not to do or what not to be.” Trella, Alegria, and Luz offer the stories of their grandmothers who helped to raise them, often during the times when their immediate family members were absent from their life. The support of their extended family offered these women a means for coping with some of their life struggles. Finally, the role that grandfathers played within the lives of Nelia (age 20) and Natalia proved to have shaped these women’s goals and beliefs in their abilities.

### **Mothers who Modeled Empowerment, Strength, and What not to Be**

With Trella, it was clear that her mother’s example had shaped her own perspectives as a new mother and wife. Trella talked about her family’s dynamics, especially her relationship with both her father and mother. “I don’t get along with my father whatsoever. My father cheated on my mom a lot so I never looked up to him as a role model. But my mother, she is like my best friend.” Trella went on to tell me that

she talks with her mother on the phone every day and visits her nearly every other day. Having her son close to her mother is one of the most important values that she would like to pass on to him. I then asked Trella to describe her mother to me.

My mom is wonderful. She is heaven sent. When it comes to family, she is there no matter what. She is very strong. She's been through a lot. My dad's put her through a whole lot but she's always stayed strong for us. She should have left [my father] a long time ago, but she hasn't. I think she's wrong [to stay] but I admire her for it.

After talking more with Trella, it was clear that she did not agree with many of the values she was taught as a child. Also, Trella did not always understand the rationale behind many of the beliefs that her parents—especially her father—tried to instill in her.

I was raised [to understand] that women should be respectful and not speak out and do certain things. When I was younger, we were told, “Do as I say, don't do as I do. I'm the dog, you're the tail.” So my mom never spoke out [against my dad]. My dad was the man and she was the woman. I learned from her.

I asked Trella if she had a similar relationship with her own boyfriend. “Do you think that wives should be submissive to their husbands?” “Hell no!” Trella said. Following up, I asked “So what motherly lessons, what values will you pass on to your own kids from your own childhood?” Trella went on to praise her mother and then she cited what she thought was the most important of her life lessons. “Your kids are your kids. Your family is your family. Stick by your husband no matter what. Most important as a mother...raise them [your children] to love people, not to hate.” Trella seems to shun

race and gender norms here. However, she still seems to struggle with her own role as a mother and girlfriend. “Stick to your husband no matter what.”

Like Trella, Elena also admired the personal strength of her mother. Elena, a family studies major, valued the notion of “family”—personally and academically. Elena’s mother, who was a single mother of two children, had struggled to raise both Elena and her brother and to support them both emotionally and financially. Elena went on to tell that she admired her mother’s resiliency,

My mom had my older brother and I when she was 17. We were three months old when she graduated from high school. She still went on to night classes, graduated and moved away from my grandparents. To this day she makes it known [to my brother and I], “You can do this. You don’t have to go the straight and narrow. Whatever path you go on, I’m here for you.”

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Elena’s mother had also instilled a sense of duty within her. Coinciding with race and gender normatives, Elena’s mother was self-sacrificing and also was a role model in the church. These were all attributes that Elena sought to emulate. As Elena told me,

My mom taught catechism. She was my teacher all through first communion. Seeing her do that, I wanted to do it, too. I volunteered during high school for my church. I actually taught catechism all through high school. It was a really big undertaking, being 16 years old.

Elena told me that, for reasons such as these, she viewed her mom as a feminist—as a woman who paved her own way in life. Her mother, even without a partner, was willing to support Elena as much as possible financially because she wanted her to be able to care

for herself. As an example, Elena told me “I knew I was going to college and my senior year I was ready to go. When I started college, I didn’t work my first semester. My mom took out a loan and was like, ‘Just go to school and get used to it. Get acclimated.’” The example that Elena shares here displays how work in the home may be emphasized or de-emphasized and is a “space for social transformation for daughters to be the same (a hard worker) and different (an educated woman with new and different opportunities)” (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 684). Additionally, the many strong women in her life influenced Elena’s idea of feminism. Many of these women were hard working with very little formal education. It is telling how Elena links her mother’s personal resiliency to that of female empowerment. Juxtaposed to the thoughts of Villenas and Moreno, we also see how female empowerment is not the same for all female groupings. Specifically, I wonder how race and gender processes drive resiliency and empowerment?

On of the many raced and gendered lessons Elena learned from her mother was that of family duty. This sense of family duty is one that her mother embraced many times throughout Elena’s upbringing. Elena recalled when her aunt, who is her mother’s sister, abandoned Elena’s five cousins. The children were to be sent to a different state to live with their father, a known drug-addict. Elena’s mother, however, would not allow it. As Elena recalled,

We had five cousins living with us for two years. My mom was like, “We can’t let your cousins go to a different state for two years. It’s just not right.” So there she was, feeding seven kids. Going to work, coming home, helping us with our homework.



This was a lesson for Elena, who obviously learned much about her race and gender expectations.

Like Elena, Sunshine (age 21) looked to her mother for continual guidance. Sunshine talked lovingly about her mother as she navigated the patriarchal terrain of being a student, a business owner, and a benevolent girlfriend who provided for her and her boyfriend financially. The contradictory messages of being both independent and also giving of herself completely were values that Sunshine readily adopted. Her sentiments speak to what Villenas and Moreno (2001) call “contradictory gender teachings” that “involve knowing how to be *una mujer de hogar* (a woman of the home), while at the same time knowing how to *valerse por si misma* (be self-reliant)” (p. 673). Again, I would argue that these “contradictory messages” are part of a belief in mestizaje race and gender norms. Sunshine’s admiration for her mother was evident throughout our interviews so I asked Sunshine to describe her mother to me. Sunshine beamed when she said, “I have the utmost respect for my mother. My mother is a beautiful woman.” As it turned out, Sunshine’s father had left their family when she was two years old. At that time, Sunshine’s mother had only worked within the home and had never worked in a business setting before. However, with Sunshine and her infant brother to take care of, she realized that she could not allow fear to consume her, and she started up her own corner grocery store in order to pay bills. Sunshine continued to tell me that “It’s nothing physical that makes her [my mother] beautiful because she’s very different. It’s just her demeanor that I find nurturing, her ‘mothering’ of our family.” The contradictory messages that Sunshine received from her mother reminded me of Hurtado’s (2003)

research participants who, like Sunshine's mother, approached their mothering in similar ways. As Hurtado stated,

Many of their mothers saw their mission as giving their daughters as much education as possible so they would not be economically dependent on a man. At the same time, most mothers assumed that marriage was not only inevitable but also desirable. They simply felt that education was insurance against a bad marriage. (p. 80)

Like Trella, Elena, and Sunshine, Luz had been struggling financially and was also finding it difficult to maintain her full-time student status while also working night hours at the Sunport. However, the advice of her mother was key as she sought solace in God. She confided that:

There have been times where I have been so stressed with school and finding a new job. I think the best advice my mom has ever given was "Just trust in God. He'll help you. There's always a way. Don't give up." There have been times where I have just wanted to cry and say, "I can't do this anymore. I'm done. I don't know where to go." Then I think about her advice.

The previous exchange speaks volumes about Luz because when we first met, I noticed that she seemed very guarded—arms crossed—until she gained trust in me. Thus, it was no surprise when, during the second interview, Luz confided that she had reservations about dating. "I have problems with trust. Honestly, I'll say it, I'm afraid. What if something happens down the road, it [the relationship] doesn't work out, and I'm left with nothing?" Consistently it had been Luz's mother who eased her fears. Luz spoke with confidence when she said,

My mom, she's the one that's always been, "You don't need nothing [*sic*] else as long as you turn to God. It's all that you need. He'll never leave your side." I do believe that. Then I think about the things that we [our family] have gone through. Whenever we needed help, that's who we would turn to was God.

I also found it telling that Luz maintained the utmost respect for her family (especially her mother) despite family members' pressing her about marriage and bearing children. She went on to tell me that "Family is very important because they're always going to be there. You may have your fights and your arguments, but at the end of the day, they're always going to be there to support you."

Unlike Trella, Elena, Sunshine and Luz, Natalia's (age 26) mother's life was one that she did not want to emulate. Clearly, Natalia's mother had supported her educational goals and was a pivotal person in her life. However, Natalia saw how a fear of the unknown had come to paralyze her mother, and Natalia wanted to live her life more fully. "I feel like my mother was very much like me growing up and then somewhere along the lines my mom just decided that she couldn't do stuff." Quite possibly, Natalia's different approach to life stemmed from her previously mentioned health experiences.

Nonetheless, Natalia actively worked to "try new things" and continue with her education because she saw how unhappy her mother appeared to be. "I think a lot about it [my mother's unhappiness], her really being forced into that mother role, it was almost like she felt like she had to give up everything else that she ever wanted." While Natalia loved her mother dearly, it was apparent to me that Natalia's pursuit of her nursing degree was due to her desire to have an academic life outside of her mothering or home life. Arguably, Natalia saw her own mother's unhappiness as a cautionary tale, namely,

that one should not lose themselves in their roles as mothers. “I think it [losing one’s dreams] is a pretty common theme amongst our mothers and grandmothers. I always think about the stuff that I’m repeating. Is it because my mother said it or did it or is it stuff that all mothers think?” Natalia’s beliefs in mothering “differently” echo what Pérez (as cited in Villenas & Moreno, 2001) calls a “willful act of imagining and practicing alternative ways of community, family and nation” (p. 672). In this case, Natalia’s mother had taught her alternative pathways to parenting, schooling, and life.

Ultimately, Trella, Elena (age 26), Sunshine, Luz, and Natalia acknowledged that they were bound to their mother’s teachings—whether they agreed or disagreed with these lessons. It appeared that these women, while loving and respecting of their mothers, often did not agree with their mother’s race and gender norms. However, the race and gender process of becoming Latina women was one that they struggled to articulate. Unlike the limited experiences they had with their fathers, the relationships these five women shared with their own mothers echoed Hurtado’s (2003) own sentiments,

Several respondents spoke about “standing on their mothers’ shoulders” and of their mothers telling them, “I don’t want you to have my life.” Many wanted their daughters to have the choices they never had. In essence, the opportunity to choose their lives was the gift these mothers were giving their daughters. (p. 83)

Like the guidance of my participants’ mothers, the love and nurturing of their grandmothers sustained these women when their mothers were working or their fathers were absent. Most notably, Trella, Luz, and Alegria looked to their grandmothers for advice and guidance. The guidance these young women received from their

grandmothers was different from that they received from their mothers. Their grandmothers' advice stemmed from their "nanas'" beliefs and hopes for a better future for their granddaughters and grandchildren.

Trella, for instance, lived with her mother and father in a rural town outside of Albuquerque. However, because both of her parents worked in Albuquerque, Trella was dropped off at her grandmother's house for nearly the entire day. As she related, "I lived in [a nearby city] for a while, but I would come to school in Albuquerque near my grandmother. I was dropped off around five o'clock in the morning, and I would come from school and stay there until like eight o'clock at night." Trella learned many valuable lessons from her grandmother's stories about the past, especially when she started dating boys in high school. According to Trella, her own resolve to date "a gentleman" was attributable to the *cuentos* that her grandmother had told her. As Trella told it,

My grandma was strong like my mother...my grandpa was an alcoholic. He would stay out a lot at night, and my grandma put up with it but only for so long. My grandma was more strong [*sic*] than my mom in certain areas because she wouldn't put up with certain things. She would tell me stories about those days when she would catch him at the bar with other women. My grandpa would be drunk, and she would drag my grandpa home from the bar and say, "You're coming home."

Trella learned many race and gender norms from this experience. According to Trella, it was not an irregular practice for men to be drinkers or womanizers. It was the wife's

responsibility to take care of the husband, despite his behavior. In fact, Trella viewed this race and gendered role as an example of her grandmother's empowerment.

As with Trella, Luz's grandmother raised her when her own mother was working. Because Luz's father was in and out of jail, this left Luz's mother with all of the financial responsibilities. Luz's relationship with her grandmother was important because she knew, from a very early age, that few adults could be trusted. As she told it, when her father was out of jail, he'd buy her "a pair of shoes or something little but he was never a father figure that gave advice or that helped." It was Luz's grandmother, however, that was a consistent source of nurturing.

[My grandmother] was always there. I even called her mom. I remember, every time I wanted to go somewhere, she would take me. I really liked it because I had my own stuff there. I had all my toys so I could just play all day and do whatever I wanted. Even when something went wrong, she was the one I would turn to instead of going to my mom.

Luz grew very emotional during our interview when she talked about her grandmother's death when Luz was in the sixth grade. Interestingly, Luz saw her grandmother's death as a "turning point" of sorts. It was during this time that Luz began to lose interest in school.

When my grandma died, I felt like everything just came crashing down on me. I was like, "What do I do? Where do I go? Who do I talk to?" I felt like I didn't have no [*sic*] one. That's when my whole world did a 180. I started getting into trouble and started hanging around with the wrong crowd and then I ran away [from home].

It was then that Luz remembered how her grandmother valued education. Thus, she had decided that she should value it too.

In the case of Alegria, her grandmother was not only her caretaker. She had taught Alegria the art of being a *curandera* and even saved Alegria's and her son's lives when she went into premature labor. Looking back on this time of her life, Alegria compared her grandmother's loving care to the neglect by her own mother, who had abandoned her. When both her mom and her stepfather went to prison for the possession of methamphetamines, Alegria was placed in the care of her grandmother. I asked Alegria to tell me more about this special relationship. As she fondly recalled,

I was closest to my grandmother. Because she was a *curandera*, she said I was a lot like her. One day she [my grandmother] got sick with a rash and I knew, by instinct, what to do. I just went into the kitchen and I got different herbs. I remember collecting lemon, bay leaves, and milk thistle. I mixed them all together, and I soaked rags with what I had made. I just hoped it would work. I put the compresses on her skin, and then it [the rash] went away.

Alegria seemed to have a sense of pride as she remembered how she had inherited her grandmother's gift of healing.

One of the most painful memories that Alegria had was becoming pregnant at age sixteen. Alegria recalled having to tell her grandmother this news. She knew that her grandmother would be disappointed in her, and Alegria was right. Initially, Alegria's grandma rejected both her and her unborn child. She did this by giving her the "silent treatment" at home. A couple of months later, however, Alegria fainted at school, and the school nurse sent her to the emergency room. The

hospital first called her boyfriend, but “nobody was answering [so] they had to call my grandmother.” It turned out that the health of Alegria’s baby was in jeopardy, so the doctors recommended that her labor be induced. However, because Alegria was a minor, her grandmother had to be in the labor room with her. She recalled that:

[The doctors] were checking the baby’s heart and she [my grandmother] just starting crying. It made me feel good and bad at the same time. Ever since she heard the baby’s heartbeat, she’s stayed by my side. I know she will never leave me.

Alegria went on to narrate that she still looks to her grandmother for advice, especially when it comes to issues of health. With these women’s testimonies, we see how notions of the family provided sources of support for them. We must remember that family roles, however, are subject to race and gendered processes.

With Nelia and Natalia, the example of their grandfathers proved to be influential in how they viewed masculinity as well as their own perspectives on how life should be lived. Nelia spoke fondly of her grandfather during our first interview, telling me that “My grandfather was a hardworking Hispanic man. He raised six kids. He was the only one who worked because my grandma was sick. He put everything into his family and he would take us [grandkids] everywhere with him.” Even though Nelia’s grandfather had since passed away, I asked her how her grandfather had influenced her life up to this point. She told me how his example had shown her how a man and woman should take care of each other, especially when one of them gets sick:



My grandma was diagnosed with schizophrenia. She would see things, and she tried to light their house on fire. It was really bad. But my grandfather never gave up on her. Now she is on medication, and she's the smartest, giving [*sic*] person ever."

Nelia continued to tell me how her grandfather's example had taught her how to deal with life's struggles. "He has helped me to keep going. Sometimes I am like, 'This is frustrating.' I just think about him and then go, 'Okay, I have to do it.'" Before Nelia's grandfather passed away, she told me that it was vital that her fiancé meet him. "It was very important to me that my future husband knew my grandfather and had a good relationship with him. That meant a lot to me." Nelia went on to say that she had hoped her grandfather would "approve" of her fiancé because she valued his advice. She was overjoyed when her grandfather issued his approval.

As previously mentioned, Natalia continually struggled to not "fear life" as she felt her mother had. The one person who brought her closer to God via the healing of her cyst was also Natalia's biggest supporter of her as a young woman. As Natalia remembered, "Growing up, my grandfather raised me with the mentality that you don't need a man to take care of you, you can do it yourself, and I learned a lot of that. I really appreciated my childhood a lot." She believed that it was her grandfather's time with her that initially sparked her interest in nursing. After her grandfather passed away and she became a NMVCC student, she found a tape with her grandfather's voice on it. Natalia thinks about this tape a lot as she continues on with her education.

Now I'm in school and I will be the first person in my family to graduate from college. As an adult, my grandfather isn't here, but there is this one [audio] tape

with his entire story from the Korean War. I try to put it in perspective. My grandfather wasn't just my grandfather. He was a man. He fell in love. He was his own person and he had his own life. He did some really amazing things.

I went on to ask Natalia about this audiotope and why this "find" had shaped her perspective. Natalia explained,

You know, it's so stupid, but like [*sic*] everything bad happens for a reason or everything stressful happens for a reason. I guess now [that I found the tape] there is a difference from when I first started school.... I'm really letting go of the fact where I'm anal-retentive about everything, where I'm like, "It has to be done!" I just deal with it when it happens, instead of stressing out the entire semester about my classes. I try to think about how my grandfather would handle it.

Here we see how Natalia has used her grandfather's race and gendered expectations as a source of personal empowerment.

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about how the raced and gendered expectations from religion, mothers, and grandparents have made Latinas more resilient in their everyday lives. As we look at the role of individual empowerment within schooling environments, women such as Engarcia (age 18), Alegria, Alameda, Katia (age 22), and Nelia talk about the few but significant teachers who advocated for them, in turn helping them to find their "own voice." When Engarcia was having a difficult time at home due to her parents' ongoing domestic abuse, she admittedly took her anger out on her teachers. However, there was one person that stepped in to help her out. "I was in basketball and my coach was like, 'If you don't calm down with your [other] teachers

you just won't play.' He went out of his way to talk to them [my teachers] and let them know that I needed to go to counseling." Since Alegria's parents were alcoholics and used methamphetamines, she was responsible for taking care of herself. Alegria remembers the bold, yet caring move of her fourth grade male teacher. "Because my mom was almost always out of it, it was my fourth grade teacher—a man—who told my mom that I needed a bra. Now I think about how nice that was because he didn't want me to feel embarrassed."

Alameda, Katia, and Nelia cite at least one influential teacher in their lives, educators who cared about them and empowered them. Alameda, who is currently a drama major, remembers how her high school theatre teacher "saved her life." As she explained, "If it wasn't for drama and the drama teacher that was there, I probably would have went down the wrong path because I was really going toward there." Katia related to me how she was "still depressed" because her favorite teacher from high school had recently passed away.

I had one of my good teachers pass away recently. I thought it was so cool during my senior year when he came to eat at Pizza Hut with us [students]. We had dinner with him because he wasn't going to be able to go to our graduation. You could tell he really cared about us.

Katia was visibly upset as she remembered this teacher whom she now called her friend.

As a new mother, Nelia was grateful for the support that she received from one NMVCC instructor who allowed her to step out of class periodically to pump breast milk for her daughter. "Some of the professors really don't care if you're a mom. My sociology teacher was different. She always wanted to see pictures of my baby and she

even found an empty room where I could go and pump milk for [my daughter].” Clearly, those teachers who were caring and performed gestures of kindness shaped how my research participants came to understand the fluid structure of schools. There were many teachers who did not seem to care or support them in their academic endeavors but there were some kind educators, as well.

Like most of my research participants, Sasha (age 19), and Trella (age 21) were academically driven because they wanted to improve their financial situations. The ability to provide for themselves and their family financially meant a freedom from abandonment (as with Sasha) and freedom from mestizaje stigmas about young Latina motherhood (as with Trella). For instance, in my interview with Sasha, I asked, “Have you thought about why it’s so important to get your master’s [degree] and keep on going with school?” Sasha replied,

I want to achieve my master’s degree, and hopefully, maybe, a Ph.D., like you. Then I won’t have that stress...trying to find a man, then ‘Oh, my gosh, he worked late so what if he’s out there with someone?’ I won’t have that stress...I’ll just have my high degree, my hopefully good paying job, and new friends that come along the way.”

With Trella, her thoughts of simply “being comfortable” financially drove her to continue on with her schooling. As she puts it,

I don’t want to be rich. I don’t want to have everything. I want to be happy where I am with my own little house and my husband. I want us to be happy and be able to go on vacation if we want to. Just have extra money, and just go if we wanted to go.

Trella is obviously looking at higher education as a means for her family to get ahead financially, rather than struggle. However, there is also an element to Trella's story that indicated her desire to "prove everyone wrong" about her as a young, Latina mother.

My definition of [academic] success wouldn't be lavish. Not having to live paycheck to paycheck, not wondering are we going to make the light bill on time—I don't want to be worrying about those things. I want to show everyone that no matter what, even if you have a kid young, you don't have to rely on anybody, just yourself, to become great. I want to give that to my family.

In the above exchange, we see how Trella associates academic success with empowerment. For Trella, true empowerment meant not having to rely on anyone for her daily needs. Academic success, then, meant a hope for the future.

Alternatively, the examples of both Natalia and Alegria showed me that these women saw education as more than a "means to a financial end." Natalia and Alegria saw their educational experiences as a way to better themselves as individuals and as mothers. These educational possibilities, however, did not come without a certain amount of guilt. As Natalia told it, "It's harder being a mom—I know you understand that, going to school and everything—but it's not impossible." Natalia went on to tell me how she viewed education as a positive endeavor, seeing how her own mother fears schooling environments. She said, "I am really fortunate to go to school, because I see that she is having a hard time right now with how much technology has changed." As mentioned previously, Natalia desires her life to be much different than her own mother's.

Therefore, Natalia's decision to go to school is also rooted in her desire to be a good

example for her son. “Now that I am a mom, that was probably the biggest change of my life because I wouldn’t have gone back to school [otherwise] I don’t think.”

From this exchange, we see that Natalia feels a certain sense of duty, “to be a good example,” to her son. This “duty” is yet another example of Latina race and gender norms.

I mentioned in the previous chapter that I instantly found a deep connection to Alegria. Her interviews reminded me of my own childhood, especially when she said, “I’ve always been the weird one in the family.” When I asked her why she felt she was “weird,” she told me that none of her family members really understood why she enjoyed school so much. “School had always been my safe house. I would go there and I would dream, I could learn and I would travel in my own way without being too far from home.” For Alegria, school became a site of empowerment and fertile ground as she issued her own agency. From an early age, Alegria knew that she did not want to be like her family members, but wanted more for herself and her life. Her love of reading helped her to cope with her family’s problems, and led to her own feelings of empowerment: “I would always have a book and I would get lost in the stories. I would tune everybody out and I would go into my la-la land. When something bad happened [in my family] I’d go read and try to address it that way.” Alegria’s reflection reminded me of Hurtado’s (2003) own observations that “Education was transformative in developing... respondents’ political consciousness. [It] gave them exposure to a variety of frameworks for examining their life experiences and attitudes and those of their families” (p. 229). When I asked her where she obtained all of her reading materials, I was intrigued and impressed with her answer.

Ever since I was nine, if I was able to get my mom's keys, I would drive her car. I would drive on my own and I would go to the library. If I couldn't get the keys, I'd take the bus by myself. People didn't say anything. They see little kids and, really, they don't care.

Both Natalia and Alegria echoed similar beliefs about their status at NMVCC. Both women saw their opportunity to learn as a privilege rather than an obligation or a "right." The time they contributed to their academic goals, however, did not come without a price. For instance, both women mentioned their "guilt" in taking away time from their family and their children. Natalia admitted to feelings of stress when it came to studying for school. As she puts it, "My fear is that I'm going to miss out on time if all I do is focus on school, and before I know it, my kid's going to be grown-up and I'm going to have missed all that." Like Natalia, Alegria confided that "I do feel bad sometimes because I am at school a lot and I am doing [school] work. When I am at home [my son] wants me to play with him and I just can't. I always say that I have to do this now in order to give him a better life." Yet another experience that Alegria shared was her feelings of regret. She had missed her son's first steps because she was attending class at the time. I was awe struck when Alegria mentioned how she dealt with others' judgment of her as a mother as well as a student. "There's no reason to be, 'Oh pity me, pity me.' I just keep telling myself 'Keep going to school. I have a baby, so what? Just keep going about your business.'"

## **Conclusion**

As I end this chapter, I am reminded of the convoluted nature of *intersectionality*, ideology and how these play out in our lived experiences. Race and gender norms dictate

our behavior and our ascribed and prescribed social expectations. As shown by my participants' narratives, there is not a universal Latina experience because power relations within the matrix of domination are fluid, not static. Race and gender processes have also shaped what we believe to be true. However, as my research participants have noted, schools are sites where empowerment is to be found—in God, parents and kin, promises of a better life, and through an intrinsic love of learning. These are coping strategies for Latinas at NMVCC. I believe Luz says it best: “Life is hard, but you’ve got to make the best of it. Education is really important.” So, part of debunking problematic ideology is finding those coping strategies that lead to empowerment while being ideologically critical of them, as well.

In Chapter six, I continue to address my participants' mestizaje discourse. This chapter provides a backdrop for understanding how mestizaje, as a race and gender process, works in tandem with white supremacy. By maintaining and reproducing mestizaje beliefs, manifestations of white supremacy have provided power and privilege over others. My participants' discourse is indicative of their racialized positioning and subsequent power.



## CHAPTER 6: (RE)MAKING MESTIZAJE—DISCOURSES OF IGNORANCE AND PRACTICES OF RACIAL KNOWING

*“It is clear that domination by the Whites will also be temporary, but their mission is to serve a bridge. The White race has brought the world to a state in which all-human types and cultures will be able to fuse with each other. The civilization developed and organized in our times by the Whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past”*—Jose Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, p. 9.

### **Introduction**

Reading the above sentiments of Vasconcelos often conjures up a host of negative emotionality. Despite our contemporary “era of race ambivalence” (see Leonardo, 2010), we would like to believe that there is a common understanding. Race is a social, not a biological, construction. However, projects of racial formation are usually means to an ideological end (see Omi & Winant, 1994). It would appear that Du Bois (1903) was correct when he argued that the color line would be the most significant social “problem” in the Twentieth Century. Indeed, amongst NMVCC Latinas, the raced-gendered ideology of mestizaje drove their intimate identity choices.

This chapter focuses on Latina mestizaje discourse as a form of racial ignorance and complicity. The reader will come to understand that a racially ignorant mestizaje ideology is anything but ignorant. In fact, mestizaje ideology is a tool for reifying white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, pp. 180-182). During this project, I have been concerned with two questions: 1) What roles do class, ethnicity, gender and race play in the lives of NMVCC Latinas? and 2) How does their discourse conform and/or resist the

ideologies that sustain the U.S. racialized social system? Recall that in Chapter 4 I focused on the physical embodiment of NMVCC Latinas, all in response to their marginalized positioning in society. Chapter 5 focused on issues of resistance and agency, highlighting the tools that the individual participants used to navigate their hegemonic landscapes—within and outside of NMVCC. This present chapter illustrates how NMVCC Latinas consciously and unconsciously conformed to, and in fact reproduced the ideology of mestizaje within their daily life.

### **The Racial Project of Mestizaje**

In Chapter 2, I briefly discussed the historical underpinnings of mestizaje. While I will not cover those ideas again here, we must recall that the ideology of mestizaje began much earlier than Vasconcelos' (1979) conception of *La Raza Cosmica*. The pivotal basis of mestizaje has always surrounded issues of blood purity and desires for whitening. In his critique of blanqueamiento and mestizaje, Bonilla-Silva (2010) argued that there is also a material contextualization of *these*. In his mapping of the Tri-Racial order, Bonilla-Silva posits that this order is composed of three categories: 1) “Whites,” 2) “Honorary Whites,” and “Collective Black” (p. 180). The “White” grouping consists of Whites, new Whites (for instance, Russians and Albanians), assimilated white Latinos, assimilated Native Americans, and a few Asian-origin people. The “Honorary White” grouping includes: light-skinned Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and most multiracial groupings. Finally, the “Collective Black” grouping refers to the following ethnic groups: Vietnamese Americans, Filipino Americans, Hmong Americans, Laotian Americans, Dark-skinned Latinos, Blacks, New West Indian and African immigrants, and

Reservation-bound Native Americans (p. 180). This “Latin Americanization thesis,” as Bonilla-Silva terms it, best explains group stratifications. These stratifications are often dictated by pigmentocracy, but the groupings are “porous,” meaning that individual members’ children may move “up” or “down” the strata by marrying someone who is higher in the order or by obtaining more material wealth than their ethnic counterparts (see page 180).

A discussion of Bonilla-Silva’s Latin Americanization thesis is important to this present project for several reasons. First of all, most of the women that were interviewed were visibly White—what I would either term “honorary White” or appearing non-Latina White. For instance, if I had met Alameda, Felisa, Alegria, Sunshine, Natalia, Sasha, Cari, Trella, or Luz before I interviewed them, I would have assumed that they were non-Latina. Nelia, Malita (age 19), Carletta, Elsa, Florita, Anna (age 19), Elena, Lourdes, and Katia appeared Latina to me but were lighter-skinned Latinas, like myself. I would classify Modesta and Engarcia as darker-skinned Latinas, but even Modesta had the potential for moving up in the strata, as her current fiancé was White. The fact that this project attracted mostly “Honorary Whites” or visibly White Latinas was a curious phenomenon. As an “Honorary White” researcher who solicited Latinas in person, is it possible that lighter skinned Latinas and Whites felt more at ease with me? Also, what does this research sampling say about the “order” of students who attend NMVCC? Both of these questions would be an appropriate starting point or yet another research project in years to come.

A second reason why Bonilla-Silva’s thesis is relevant is my participants’ seemingly shared racial ideologies. Their interviews made significant references to

blanqueamiento and pigmentocracy, although the women simply described these as the “way things are” in their family or in their life. As an example, while 18 out of the 20 women were born in New Mexico, all women claimed a “pan-ethnic” Hispanic identity in their intake forms (see Appendix D). If you recall from chapter one, I was anticipating more of a claim to being “Spanish” or *Nuevo Mexicano*, so this aspect of the research was surprising. Three women claimed to be “Latina,” three claimed to be “Mexican-American,” and fourteen cited “Hispanic” as their ethnicity on the intake forms. The identifier of “Hispanic” is problematic as López (2013) reminds us that this term refers to one’s ethnic origin, not their race. Relying on one’s ethnicity, and using this as a proxy for race, “tells you nothing about their social position in society that is usually related to the meanings assigned to...physical traits, including skin color and facial features” (p.1).

Also significant was the fact that these same women made specific distinctions about race and ethnicity markers, especially when it came to categorizing their parents’ ancestry. For instance, while Engarcia termed herself “Mexican-American and American,” she described her parents as “Mexican from Mexico” and “Mexican-American.” It would appear that by claiming a pan-ethnic Hispanic identity, these women made conscious choices to align with a larger pan-ethnic group.

Why would Vasconcelos’ work prove relevant to a discussion of NMVCC Latinas and their racial ideologies? How might “mythical” beliefs in a cosmic race serve a larger purpose, such as upholding and reproducing white supremacy? Wade (2009) points out that larger ideological issues of white supremacy, gender subordination, and mestizaje often work in concordance with one another (see page 3). He argues that “[m]estizaje becomes necessary in reconstructing globalized white supremacy and in promoting ‘new

ethnic doctrine[s]” (p.34). Based on Wade’s arguments, mestizaje ideology (and the power that goes with this) does not stand alone. Like Collins’ (2000) matrix of domination thesis, race and gender subordination, and other identity politics come to shape the ethnic doctrines of mestizaje.

Indeed, a reflection on Vasconcelos’ thesis of *La Raza Cosmica* illustrates the significance in this *ideological effort* that is “but for the redemption of all men” (p. 35). Vasconcelos deliberately utilized the term “ideology” as he hoped to ignite a new worldview that would affect a new type of Latin Americanization. In his words, “We have...all the elements for the new Humanity: A law that will gradually select elements for the creation of predominant types...according to a criterion of universality and beauty” (p. 38). As we reflect on this quote, we must remember that mestizaje is not only a call for the amalgamation of culture but also the amalgamation of “stock” or blood. Interestingly, a brief glance back to Chapter 2 offers a strange juxtaposition in the understandings of mestizaje, albeit due to colonization. While New Mexican Hispanos often claim to be full-blooded Spanish, Vasconcelos’ conception of mestizaje relies on the Indio as bottom most in a hierarchy of (blood) racial mixing.

While Wade (1997) argued that race identifications within Latin America were “partial, unstable, contextual, [and] fragmentary,” (p. 19) he also argued that mestizaje works in zones of intimacy (e.g., sex, family, the body). This means that racism lodges deep in the heart of people and society, making it both difficult to see and resist” (p. 94). At several junctures, Wade makes the argument that mestizaje is a process of being both “masculinized and whitened (or at least de-feminized and de-indigenized)” (pp. 95). Formations of race then organize other societal constructions, like gender.

## **Mestizaje as a Race Process**

Much like Daniels (1997) assessment of White female reproduction, Latinas serve a larger purpose in promoting mestizaje. To Vasconcelos, physical “forms of beauty” were important because their “genius” and “superior ideals” would bear “the fruit of superior faculties” (pp. 25-26). Vasconcelos goes on to explain that “[w]e see with profound horror the marriage of a Black woman and a White man. We would feel no repugnance at all if it were the union of a Black Apollo and a blond Venus, which goes to prove that everything is sanctified by beauty” (p. 31). From his statements above, it is clear that Vasconcelos associates beauty with White femininity, in his words, that of a “blonde Venus.”

So when it comes to ideal frames of mestizaje, what function(s) do non-White women serve? Vasconcelos advocates “taking up” specific love preferences. He goes on to state that the Indigenous Indian is “a good bridge” but “inter-breeding will no longer obey reasons of simple proximity” (pp. 26-27). Vasconcelos’ idea of “simple proximity” referred to “colonist[s] [that] took an Indian or Black woman because there were no others at hand” (pp. 26-27). When it comes to reproducing the Mestizo, “The mysterious eugenics of aesthetic taste will prevail. The very ugly will not procreate. They will have no reason to procreate. [The] mediocre couple feeling proud of having multiplied misery will seem repugnant then, it will seem a crime” (p. 30). Again, to Vasconcelos, the conception of “ugly” and “misery” is associated with pigmentocracy. Even though Vasconcelos promotes the idea of a new “mixed race” people, his beliefs in mestizaje has a purpose: “Inferior races, upon being educated, would become less prolific and the better specimens would go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement, whose maximum

type is not precisely the White, but that new race to which the White himself will have to aspire with the object of conquering the synthesis” (p. 32).

Vasconcelos’ beliefs in “inferior races” and the role of ethnic improvement reminded me of two of my participants, Alegria and Malita. As mentioned in previous chapters, Alegria found out she was pregnant at the age of sixteen and gave birth to a biracial baby. Much of her struggle with being a young mother had to do with how her family received her Black boyfriend and her baby. This struggle carried over into the perceptions of both her son and the way Alegria viewed their physical connection:

[My son] usually says that he is a penguin or a zebra. He always refers to himself as being like that because a zebra’s not a horse and it’s not whatever else. He knew that the penguin was a flightless bird and I think that’s his way of kind of expressing that he is confused. It’s kind of hard to have an interracial relationship, to have an interracial child. I feel like he rejects my culture and it makes me cry, you know. He’s mine. He’s me but no one sees me in him. It hurts my feelings but I know I’m trying to shape him into a society where you’re either Black or White.

Similar to Alegria’s son’s animal analogy, Malita mentions her family’s expectations of staying amongst her own group. In this transaction she sums up her parents expectations that she and her siblings stick close to mestizaje:

[Sarah:] So if you had to say, what would be your parents’ idea of your “perfect” dating partner?

[Malita:] My parents want me to date a Hispanic guy, I guess. They would say when we were little, “Zebras with zebras and horses with horses.”

[Sarah:] Your statement makes me curious, though. You had said before that your brother is gay and your sister is lesbian. Do your parents feel any different about the people they date?

[Malita:] Well, time has passed by and [my parents] kind of just deal with it, but my mother, she still has that kind of mentality with them, “horses with horses.”

The previous exchange with Malita occurred during our first interview and we were scheduled to complete our second interview the next day. I chose to pursue this line of questioning further especially since her discussion of ethnic attributes had been compared to animal attributes. What did Malita think about her own parents' beliefs? Would she date outside of her own ethnic grouping?

[Sarah:] I've been thinking a lot about what you said last time—“zebras with zebras and horses with horses.” How do you feel about your parents' expectations of you and your dating choices?

[Malita:] Well, I really don't think much about it. I guess their kind of thinking was because of the way they grew up. My grandma and grandpa were kind of like that, too. That was normal back then.

Malita's answer certainly told me more about the reproduction of her family's mestizaje beliefs, However, I continued to press her about her own worldview. I wasn't able to get a clear response. She told me, “Well, I'm not really dating right now, so I really don't know who I would pick. I guess it would depend.” Finally, I used a strategy that had worked with many of the other women I interviewed. I asked Malita a series of hypothetical questions:



[Sarah:] So what do you think would happen if, let's say in your math class, a Black guy sits next to you and he treats you well and he asks you out. He's good looking, you know. He's attractive by most standards. Would you go out with him or would you have to think twice about it?

[Malita:] If I brought home a Black guy, I think it would be difficult because that is really out of bounds, out of range. I just don't see myself with a Black guy because I'm not attracted to those kinds of people.

[Sarah:] Even if he was really nice? A real gentleman...everything you have said you would want in a boyfriend?

[Malita:] I would definitely think twice about it. I would feel awkward, kind of stepping out of my box a little bit and I'd probably have to get to know him a lot more before we would go anywhere outside of campus.

[Sarah:] Would it be easier, would there be less of a question in your mind, if a Hispanic guy or White guy asked you out? Would you have to think twice about that?

[Malita:] I don't think so. It's just about comfort, I guess. Like, I'm most attracted to White guys. I guess it's the whole colored guy thing, they are a little bit different, but I haven't thought of a reason why.

In the extended transaction above, we see that Malita has already made a deliberate choice in following her parents' and her grandparents' beliefs in *mestizaje*. While she sees her family's beliefs as a relic of the past, she plans to follow in their footsteps.

There is a claim to ignorance (as Mills, 2007 argues) in not knowing why she believes the

way she does, yet she will likely be complicit in reproducing mestizaje, limiting her dating and mating choices to Hispanic or White men.

The ideology promoted in *La Raza Cosmica* is not only about (re)producing ideal Mestizos but is also about determining the appropriate roles for Mestizas, as well. Beauty is associated with Whiteness while the “ugly” is associated with Blackness. As the statements of Alegria and Malita point out, mestizaje means an allegiance to blanqueamiento, or the whitening of their group. While Alegria regrets not heeding the call, Malita deliberately stays within her mestizaje boundaries.

### **Mestizaje: The Pan-Ethnic Alliance of Group Belonging**

As previously mentioned within this chapter, mestizaje relies on ideas of blanqueamiento and pigmentocracy to rationalize the choices that NMVCC Latinas make when it comes to their intimate relationships. Mestizaje, like the racial construction of Whiteness, involves a mythological history as well as a claim to pan-ethnic unification. Vasconcelos acknowledges this in saying that “[c]ivilization is neither improvised nor curtailed, nor can it grow out of the paper of a political constitution. It always derives from a long, secular preparation and purification of elements that are transmitted and are the beginning of History” (p. 11). First, mestizaje works by attempting to unify the geographical and spiritual barriers amongst the Mestizo grouping:

Our geography...was and continues to be an obstacle to unity, but if we are to overcome this obstacle, first it will be necessary that we put order in our spirit by purifying our ideas and delineating precise orientations” (Vasconcelos, p. 15).

Next, mestizaje advocates the “purification” of our “orientations,” especially when it comes to building up an ideal fifth race. In the following statement, Vasconcelos talks about this importance of purification when it comes to blood:

[The Latin’s] infinite quietude is stirred with the drop put in our blood by the Black, eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust. There also appears the Mongol, with the mystery of his slanted eyes that see everything according to a strange angle [and] the clear mind of the White, that resembles his skin and dreams, also intervenes” (p. 22).

The idea of ideal “Latino stock” reminded me of Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) arguments on color-blind discourse and the naturalization frame. Naturalization, as a power-laden discourse strategy, promotes the myth that racial hegemony is just the way that things are. My participants utilized this discourse strategy often. This was, indeed, an effort to instrumentally rationalize their alliance with mestizaje. In the following excerpt, we see how Elena explains how her White boyfriend’s parents have accepted having two grandchildren, one half-Black and the other half-Indigenous. As a reminder about Elena, she detailed in chapter five how she really wanted to marry her boyfriend but he was hesitant in getting married. Elena told me that:

[My White boyfriend’s sisters] once dated a Native guy and the other dated a guy who was half-Black. [My boyfriend’s sisters] both had babies out of wedlock. His niece, who is half-Black, his parents’ don’t give her much attention. But my other niece, who is Native, they love her more. I don’t think that it’s a bad mistreatment. It’s just different. If she came out green she’s still their grandbaby.

My boyfriend, he'll tell you, 'My parents are racist.' But they're not racist. They don't know that it's racism. They're just old Catholic.

The above excerpt, I would argue, is less about Elena's future in-laws and more about Elena understanding her "place" amongst a racially mixed family. She clearly understands how racial hierarchy works in her boyfriend's family, but sides with mestizaje as she explains her in-law's behavior as being "old Catholic."

Elsa, similar to Elena, appealed to a script of "not knowing" when it came to explaining her parents' and grandparents' beliefs in reifying mestizaje. As Elsa puts it, "My mom and my dad are totally against it [dating a Black or Native man]. I wouldn't be able to tell my grandparents his race. I would *never* be able to. They're just like, 'You need to date a Latino man and that's it.' It's all about their culture." Like I did with Malita, I pushed Elsa to think outside her conception of "culture" by giving her hypothetical questions:

[Sarah:] But let's say the guy you are dating is White rather than Black or Native. Would your family care, then? Would they care if he were a different culture, a different way of life, this White guy?

[Elsa:] No because White people have married into my family, so [my family has] gotten used to that. But [White is] the only other race that has been in my family.

If you recall from Chapter 5, Elsa had been kidnapped and raped by her daughter's father (a Latino) when she was in high school. Elsa had stuck by his side for many years until he tried to slash her face and kill her. Elsa's adherence to mestizaje had come at a large price. Still, she seemed intent on sticking to her race and gender script.

Much like Vasconcelos' appeal at creating unification amongst *La Raza Cosmica*, Bonilla-Silva's conception of White habitus (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) gives us examples of how this unification may be explained discursively—all under the auspice of “normal” racial behavior. By Bonilla-Silva's definition, White habitus is “a set of primary networks and associations with other Whites that reinforces the racial order...fostering racial solidarity among Whites and negative affects toward racial ‘others’” (p. 16). Within this “White habitus,” Whites can therefore create their own culture of solidarity and promote a sense of group belonging. White habitus largely explains social and spatial segregation and the White phenomenon of over-reporting friendships and relationships with people of color. Bonilla Silva speaks to this intentionality. Like Fairclough (2001), he argues that our social structures are constantly created anew through our discourse and our racial practices. Simply put, the racial stories we tell legitimize white supremacy—or, in this case, mestizaje. Mestizaje testimonies promote mestizaje beliefs all in an effort to persuade others and legitimize mestizaje and white supremacy. In light of Mills (2007) and Applebaum's (2010) analyses on racial ignorance and complicity, White habitus is also dependent on erroneous claims of *unknowing* (“I really don't know much about that.” or “Hmm...I really don't think about those things.”) in order to explain and excuse mestizaje.

Sasha, Lourdes, and Nelia illustrate this point well. In these excerpts, we see their efforts to rationalize and excuse the parents' and grandparents' compliance with mestizaje. This is what Applebaum (2010) would term a “White complicity claim” (p. 8) where Whites have the privilege of not thinking about Whiteness while continuing to reap the benefits associate with being White.

In the case of Sasha, she spent a great deal of time telling me about how her religion plays a great part in her life, helping her to continue on with school, despite the physical, psychological and emotional strain. When I asked her a hypothetical question about her ideal mate, she referred to her mother's beliefs in mestizaje in order to justify her own personal stance.

[Sarah:] So if you had a choice of who your mate would be, what he would look like, what would be your ideal? For instance, if there was a Black guy, a Native guy or an Asian guy that attended your church and he was very nice to you, do you think you would date him?

[Sasha:] Probably not. My mom wouldn't approve. We're just not attracted to them, you know? She just wants someone who isn't some bum getting in trouble or some abusive idiot and someone not weird looking. I would just want somebody within my own ethnicity, like dark hair, and not too dark of skin. Someone who has nice hair and someone who has good hygiene—someone Hispanic or White, you know?

Here, Sasha normalizes her personal choice—which she attributes to her mother—by insisting that only a Hispanic or White man would treat her well, despite a similar religious affiliation. She also equates her own ethnicity with other Whites, someone with “not too dark of skin.” Also good hygiene and “not being a bum” are attributes associated with “dating up.”

Lourdes, like Sasha, is also a devout Catholic who worshiped on a bi-weekly basis. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Lourdes was compelled to marry her current Latino husband—who had beat her while she was pregnant—so that she might obtain her

citizenship. In a previous interview, she had told me that she had seen herself marrying a White man and not her current husband:

[Sarah:] You had said earlier that you always saw yourself marrying a White guy. What do you attribute to this, or what do you think is behind this belief?

[Lourdes:] My mom thought that a Black guy wouldn't treat me well. She didn't want me to make the same mistakes that she had made. I had a lot of Black [male] friends but I never dated them. I guess the opportunity didn't come by.

Again, like Sasha, Lourdes associated being with a White male with "being treated well" while being with a Black man would be considered a "mistake" by her mother's (and also her own) account. She follows her claiming of *mestizaje* by employing a form of ignorance: "The opportunity didn't come by."

Here Nelia shares with me an incident of her feeling racially marginalized while using her WIC card at the grocery store. From this exchange, you will see how Nelia resents her own racialization but readily excuses her family's similar worldview:

When I go shopping, because I have WIC and food stamps, I notice that [White] people do treat me different, badly. I'm educated and I'm a hard worker and for them to treat me like that, it bugs me. They talk to me like I'm stupid and I'm like, seriously? Not everyone on WIC is stupid and poor.

She goes on to mention that she does not return to that same store, thereby utilizing a form of agency. In the next exchange, however, that same agency is nonexistent. She argues that maintaining *mestizaje* is part of being a family and protecting certain traditions:

My family doesn't flat out say, "I'm racist." But all of them would flip out if their daughters dated a Black guy or someone outside of their race. If they see you with a Black guy they are like, "Why are you around them?" I think it's just sticking to your own. They see it as we're all family, you know, they don't want to stem away from different traditions and they want to protect us from harm.

As with Sasha and Lourdes, Nelia is quick to dismiss her family's worldview. There is nothing wrong with "sticking to your own" and in fact this is normalized. Also, by protecting Latina (*Mestizaje*) femininity, Nelia perceives this as a form of love and guardianship.

As Bonilla-Silva (2010) reminds us, part of naturalizing colorblind ideology is the use of social geography—where one lives and which individuals they choose to live by. In the case of Modesta, who grew up in El Paso, her preference for White and Latino men was shaped, by her account, via an incident that happened when she began liking a Black adolescent who lived across from her homogenized Latina/o neighborhood:

[Sarah:] Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in. I am not too familiar with El Paso and where everyone lives.

[Modesta:] Well, the majority [of my neighborhood] was Mexican then you have this creek that divides. It's pretty long and it divides the whole neighborhood where all the Mexicans live. Then you have some apartments on the other side, that's where all the Black people live.

[Sarah:] So did you have friends that lived across the creek?

[Modesta:] I had one guy friend that was Black. I kind of liked him

[romantically]. I brought him home and my mom was all like, "Who is that?" I



was like, “That’s so-and-so. He lives across from us.” [My mom] pulled me aside and was all like, “You can be his friend all you want but as for dating him, it’s never going to happen.” She would have probably thrown me out of the house if I continued to see him. Then I started dating *gringos* and mom was like, “*Gringos, gringos!*” She said that White people had better manners than Blacks or Hispanics.

Modesta’s account truly saddened me, as I could relate to her story on a personal level. As Fromm (2006) reminds us, the love and acceptance of a parent, especially when you are a child, is critical to forming intimate and unconditional relationships, whether they are friendships or intimate love. However, much like my own past experiences, other life experiences had falsely reified what Modesta had been taught by her mother. The following experience, according to her, instilled a fear of “going beyond her creek”:

[Sarah:] So did you ever go to the other side of the creek again?

[Modesta:] Not really. You just don’t go over there. When I was 14, I ended up getting jumped. I had to take some *tamales* to some lady over there and I came back barefooted. I had worn green Filas and all of them [Black people] took my shoes. I guess I should have known better.

Thinking more about Modesta’s story made me recall, however, how she had endured poor treatment from her current White fiancé and his parents. She readily excused this behavior time and time again. However, this one Black Brown collision that she had experienced as an adolescent had prevented her from forming friendships and romantic relationships with other ethnic groups outside of Latinas/os and Whites.

## **Mestizaje and Biological Mythology**

*La Raza C3smica* is an appeal for a “new biological humanity. [One] that will gradually select elements for the creation of a single, conquering race” (p. 38).

Therefore, Vasconcelos’ idea of the fifth race did not involve a critique of the “blood” conception of race. Rather, he believed that race(s) could be assimilated and recreated.

As Vasconcelos explains here:

The future race will not be a fifth, or a sixth race, destined to prevail over its ancestors. What is going to emerge...is the definitive race, the synthetically race, the integral race, made up of genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, more capable of true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision. (p. 20)

In sum, mestizaje requires an Indigenous-White compromise—“the period of the fusion and mixing of all people”—in order to “make genius more powerful” (p. 16). However, as with most compromises, the balance of power is not the same. For Latinas, as those in my study, this compromise came in the form of “marrying up.” Marrying up signifies a conscious belief in mestizaje. In the follow transactions, we see how this facet is not only important to Sunshine and Natalia, but to all of the women who were interviewed.

In Chapter five, you will recall Sunshine’s painful experiences of being rejected by her White boyfriend’s parents. I asked Sunshine to tell me about her current boyfriend, whom I had met at the end of our first interview. Interestingly, phenotype and the issue of “blood” was the first item that came to her mind. In this exchange, she emphasizes the European descent of her current Latino boyfriend: “My boyfriend, he is Spanish. He is really light. His family is descendent from Spain. They’re all pretty light. We don’t really know much about his dad but his grandma told me that his dad

was [Spanish] and the dad's mom was from France.” Given the methodological limits of this study, I truly have no way of knowing whether Sunshine's boyfriend had these European ties. However, what is telling here is that she *wanted* me to know this. In this way, her claims to mestizaje could be met. She was “dating up” and was therefore closer to White than Black.

Like Sunshine, Natalia had experienced a rejection of her fiancé's parents due to her ethnicity. However, in this exchange, Natalia details a certain type of comfort when she tells me more about how her Latino family received her fiancé: “My great-aunt, she is like a 90-year-old Hispanic lady. When she found out my fiancé was going to marry me, she goes, ‘Good job, good job. You traded up.’” I would argue that in sharing these stories with me, Sunshine and Natalia found a certain validation as marginalized women who wanted to be White but knew that they would never be given that opportunity. Quite possibly, they sought to impress me somehow. With both women, I asked the question: “How important is it that your boyfriend or your fiancé is White?” Both Sunshine and Natalia seemed taken back. I perceived a sense of “Is she really saying what I think she is saying? That I am racist?” This is when both women told me that they really didn't care about skin color. They would love their partners no matter their color, “Black, brown, green, blue—whatever.”

Unlike the idea of “marrying up,” mestizaje relies on the idea that one does not “marry down.” A mythology of biological difference and inferiority is often called upon to explain these hegemonic beliefs. Much like the myth of biological difference, Bonilla-Silva's (2010) *cultural racism* frame may be applied to colorblind discourse. Simply put, Bonilla-Silva (2010) calls this the “They don't have it all together” frame. Cultural

racism, via mestizaje ideology, attributes faulty behavior or myths of biology as a means for sticking to the Mestizo group. As the following stories illustrate, these women rationalize what they know to be problematic mestizaje beliefs via their racial testimonies of the “other.” Notice their conscious mestizaje stance, as most end their stories with some type of colorblind explanation or rationalization.

Florita, as mentioned in Chapter 5, had undergone a premature labor with her son because her boyfriend had hit her in her eighth month of pregnancy. However, in this exchange, she rationalizes her preference for Latino and White men:

My boyfriend now, he’s Latino, but I’ve dated White guys who are pretty nice, too. It’s just that I’m attracted to only them. It’s not like race or anything. The first thing I look for is looks and then they have to be clean. Most other guys, Black guys or Indian ones, how do I say, they look “scrubbish,” but I guess they can’t help it.

Like the instance of the women who are mentioned previously under the *naturalization* frame, Florita sees her dating and mating choices as simply her own personal choice. However, she validates her ideological stance by providing what she considers logical (biological) reasons: Black men and Native men are not clean and in her words “scrubbish” while Latino and White men are not. Also, she implies that these attributes are innate because Black and Native men “can’t help” but be dirty.

While the following example given by Sasha certainly echoes Bonilla-Silva’s *cultural racism* frame, this response is reminiscent of Said’s (1978) arguments regarding the imperialistic worldviews about the “Orient.” You will see here that Sasha wrongly attributes the 9/11 World Trade Center Attacks to *all* people from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Then, under the same breath, she transitions from the World Trade Center bombings to a Filipino man that she once knew:

Everybody seems to have a problem with Mexicans coming over here but they're not trying to hurt us, so what's the problem? You have all your people from Afghanistan and Iraq and they're coming over here to bomb and blow Americans up, so why would we let them come over here? I haven't heard of Mexicans blowing up our towers. We have Americans who are homeless on the street, but I know a Filipino man who owns six homes! We have Americans on the street hungry—that makes no sense! [My mother and I] knew this Filipino guy, he was our landlord and he was just hungry for money. He tried to make us pay for water after we were gone. How does he have what Americans don't have? I don't get it.

Here Sasha has equated Mexican immigrants as American (read: White) while distance both groups from Asians and Middle Eastern people. To Sasha, her former landlord is not American despite owning property in the U.S. Also, with unfounded factual knowledge, she attributes a small group of Al-Qaida actions to two separate countries and greediness to Asian individuals.

Trella, in Chapter 5, spent much time telling me of the abuse she endured by her White father. By all of her accounts, she termed her childhood as “dysfunctional,” knowing from an early age that her family was not a loving one. Here, however, she explains to me why different ethnic groups are more “family oriented” than others:

I would say that Black people are more ghetto and not family oriented. There's a lot of baby daddy and baby mama drama. Hispanics, obviously, I see as more

family oriented. I don't know much about Orientals [*sic*]. You don't really see a lot of them where I used to live. I've only known a few Natives. My family worked at their fiestas and when we would go and clean up they would just throw their trash right in front of us. They would tip the porta-potties over and we'd have to clean it. I don't know why they have to be so disgusting.

Sasha, while having very limited experiences with Black, Asian, and Natives has clearly formulated a concrete ideology regarding these groupings. For instance, because of her past experiences with Natives she argues that the whole ethnic group is "disgusting." Interestingly, she says little about Latina/o and White families, even though her own personal (and by her accounts dysfunctional) family experiences have primarily centered on these two groups.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Cari related how her previous Latino fiancé had almost choked her to death after she discovered that he had been arrested for molesting his male cousin and two other neighborhood boys. Reminiscent of Fanon's (1967) and hooks' (1990) work on male hyper-sexuality, Cari attempts to rationalize why she hardly ever dates Black men:

I went out with maybe one or two [Black men] but I've had bad experiences with them all around. They just seem to want sex and won't take 'no' for an answer. I always have to fight them off but that's just the way they are. Now I just stay away from them. Maybe it's just a cultural thing, but I like their movies, though.

Here, hyper-sexuality becomes an innate Black male attribute, despite Cari's own experiences with her pedophile fiancé. Cari seems to rethink her first statement toward

the end of this conversation by trying to explain perceived “difference” as “cultural” just as movies are a cultural activity that she can appreciate.

Sunshine, like Cari and Sasha, has formed her own opinions of Black men and what they deem as cultural deficiency. Sunshine, as you recall at the beginning of this chapter, was intent on convincing me that her Latino boyfriend was at least partly European. Here, Sunshine tells me more about her assumptions of men from different ethnic groups:

[Sunshine:] I think that when Hispanic men do have a kid they are more apt to take care of it, more than other races. African-American men, they are very persuasive, but ultimately they want to chase a bunch of tail. My experience with Hispanic men, at least you have a history. Caucasian men are like that too. They probably have the same type of [family] structure that we have.

[Sarah:] So how did you come to the conclusion that Hispanic men and White men have the same type of family structures?

[Sunshine:] Well, the [gender] roles are similar. That’s the way our traditions are. And I guess I kind of stick to my own. I go where my skills are appreciated. Where I’m at now my skills are appreciated. [My boyfriend] likes our food and the language and all that.

Irony is at play here. As in Chapter 5, Sunshine lamented how she often felt like “such a piece [of shit]” when she was unable to provide a hot cooked meal for her boyfriend, despite managing her own business and going to school full-time. At times, she had resisted what she considered her unfair gendering role, learning to fix her own car and

being the sole provider of the relationship. In the above transaction, however, she argues that her skills are best appreciated in her current partnership.

### **Mestizaje: The Role of Discourse in Ignorance**

The thesis I have argued here is that mestizaje is an ideology, specifically an ideology of white supremacy. This ideology, as a process, has produced the raced and gendered identity experiences of NMVCC Latinas. If we want to better understand, mestizaje we must focus on the discourse that promotes this worldview. I echo Leonardo's (2009) argument when he says that "racism *requires* [original emphasis] language to do its daily work: no language, no racism" (p. 3). Discourse only serves to naturalize our ideologies, recreating them and reproducing them as common sense (Fairclough, 2001). In fact, the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of ideology is dependent on the merging of this "common-sense background" (p. 64). Ideological discourse is both *effective* and *affective*. Fairclough sums this idea best when he says that discourse "does not merely reflect a reality which is independent of it but is an active relationship to the reality that *changes* reality" (p. 31). Distorted discourse (in the spirit of Habermas' theory of the "Ideal Speech Situation") becomes a discourse of dominance with and through our social constructions. This is the crossroad where discourse and mestizaje ideology meet.

Yet another way that mestizaje was minimized and reproduced amongst my research participants was when they made claims that racism was a thing of the past. Their responses were reminiscent of Bonilla-Silva's (2010) *minimization of racism* frame that is predicated on the belief that race was once important but is no longer of significance. This declining significance of race is best illustrated by Alameda and



Sunshine, who both wondered why there was *still* talk about race at NMVCC and in the media. When I asked Alameda about instances of racism at NMVCC she told me, “I think that’s more in high school but not here. I think mostly people have matured by the time they get here. But of course in high school it could have been an issue.” Sunshine, on the other hand, appealed to a “Why can’t we all just get along?” argument:

It bothers me that we as Americans pick apart our own race. Why do we have [political] polls on how many [white] people voted for Barack and how many Black people voted for him? Why do we even want to know what their race is? I feel that running those kinds of polls and doing that kind of data is what causes racism. Why can’t we just all be Americans?

In saying that “Americans pick apart our own race,” Sunshine is really denouncing the resistance of racially marginalized people. Therefore, racism is a “Black problem,” where collective Blacks “pull the race card” in order to call attention to something that no longer exists. From Sunshine’s perspective, true Americans would not be concerned with racial issues of the past.

Recall that mestizaje ideology relies on racial myths and stories to explain and normalize white supremacy. Another type of racial story that was told to me, time and time again, was that of the colorblind friendship. I sensed deliberateness on their part, as they tried to make it clear to me that they accepted “all kinds of people” as their friend despite their differences. Illustrating this point, Alameda told me, “My friends are all racially different. Ever since I was little, I got along with everybody. The gangsters and the preppy kids.” In this line of questioning, Sunshine gives a similar response to that of Alameda:

[Sarah]: So tell me about the friends you hang out with. Do they pretty much have the same ethnic background?

[Sunshine]: I have friends from all walks, all ages, all income levels, everything. My two best [girl] friends are Caucasian and my guy friends, they were all Hispanic and we all had the same kind of families. Everybody had the same expectation, to be at church in the morning, working hard, and the families' businesses.

As shown with Alameda and Sunshine, while they notice “difference” amongst others, all of these differences are equated in the same way. There is no power or positioning involved: “preppy,” “gangster,” “Caucasian” or “Hispanic.” When I specifically asked the women about the ethnicity of the their friends, they (similar to Alameda and Sunshine) do not mention any specific ethnic groups other than White and Latino, even while claiming to get along with all “walks of life.”

In the following exchanges, we see how Carletta and Anna talk about their fond memories of high school where issues of race and phenotype did not matter.

Interestingly, both women had attended the same high school where over 90 percent of the student body was identified as Hispanic. Because both women were part of the largest ethnic grouping, they have privilege of “not remembering” any issues with race. When Carletta and Anna do remember the ethnic groups at their school, they do so with fond memories, where everyone got along and race did not matter.

[Sarah:] Tell me about the ethnic groupings at your school.

[Carletta:] Your largest group were the Hispanics. Throughout my four years there [were] only two African Americans. All of us, we were one big family, so according to race none of us were discriminated.

Anna's response to this same question coincides with Carletta's. High school was a place where race and ethnicity were never problematic, much less noticed. As Anna remembers,

There were no Blacks at my school [or] Natives. Really, you can't really tell them apart anymore. So the Natives just fit in. They're not just like out there by themselves. They have clubs and stuff so they're always there [at their clubs].

Clearly Carletta and Anna have privileged memories of their high school past. Everyone was treated equally and no one was left behind.

### **The Resiliency/Agency Double Standard**

In the interpretation of my data, I came to a puzzling discovery. It appeared as though the door of resiliency and agency could swing both ways. As an example, Chapter 5 was devoted to the various forms of marginalization that NMVCC Latinas encountered, many of which were rooted in *mestizaje*. However, in this present chapter, we see how these same women work to achieve *mestizaje*, all evident via their discourse. Thinking back to my central research questions, I had to wonder if it were possible for Latinas to both conform and resist simultaneously? In this project, that was indeed the case. These women's stories were not always tragic. There were many instances of them issuing the tools of resiliency and agency to overcome (and even succeed) despite many of their obstacles. However, as Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate, *mestizaje* was an

*effective* and *affective* process that devalued the material reality of their bodies and became overly oppressive when it came to expectations they held for themselves.

Keeping mestizaje in mind, I pondered this resiliency/agency duality. Many of the pivotal research specific to Latina/o students has arguably focused on positive notions of student ideology. Within TESOL scholarship, Moll (1992) urged educators to consider language minorities' extended community, terming them a "fund of knowledge." Yosso (2005) focused on Latina/o students and argued for a shift of thinking regarding whose culture has capital. Utilizing a historical perspective, Solórzano and Delgado (2001) paired a CRT and LatCrit framework. They pointed to the 1993 UCLA student strikes and argued that understandings of resistance theory needed to be more dynamic. In this way, Latina/o student resistance could be a catalyst to educational success and transformation. These research pieces have indeed shaped the way we view mestizaje and Latina schooling possibilities. By employing the use of counter storytelling it is possible to give marginalized Latina stories a voice. We hear about Latina marginalization, the pain involved, and how many are intent on "proving" their oppressors wrong. In fact, *all* of my participants had these stories, but I want to share the examples of Anna, Sasha, Florita, Luz, and Engarcia here. As you will see, these stories of being raced and gendered encompassed their experiences at school, with the police, and their working lives.

Anna, who had just graduated from high school, had tears in her eyes when she told me how one incident had made her more wary of speaking up in school:

When I was in eighth grade, there was this teacher. He made a racist comment towards me because everybody was White there. He was giving a lollipop for

whoever knew the right answer. And so I said the right answer and he gave me one. But then he said, “Oh, but you have to go back to Mexico, though.” I really didn’t understand it at first. Then he gave me another one because I answered right again. Then he said, “Oh, okay you can jump the fence again.”

Like Anna, Sasha had learned to be guarded when she attended classes at NMVCC—especially when her instructors were White:

I had this English instructor. She was White. I noticed us darker people, she gave us a harder time. She was like, “Redo this. Redo that.” Just nitpicky on stuff. She was always making me redo my papers even though a tutor has gone over them and thought they were pretty good. [My instructor] had this favorite White student and she would always give this student super-high grades and would say [to the class], “Good job, so-and-so,” even though she would copy from the rest of us in class. In my head I’d go, “Blah, blah, blah, blah.”

Then, in the case of Florita, we see how her racialization followed her outside of school. Here, she talks about a police officer that targeted her and her Latino friends. This officer ignored other White adolescents (by her account they were troublemakers) as they caused disruptions in her neighborhood:

One of the neighborhood cops used to really harass us. He would just come and pass by real slow. And then he would go tell my mom, “Your kids were throwing gang signs at me,” when we weren’t. All this because he was a White cop and we were Latino. Then there were these [White] kids who lived across the street and they’d go so fast through our neighborhood, smashing mailboxes and throwing

beer bottles and he doesn't say nothing [*sic.*] at all. They'd do it over and over and he doesn't [*sic.*] tell them anything.

Outside of schools, encountering racism at work was yet another topic of relevance. In this conversation, Luz talks about her negative experiences with "rich, White old ladies" with whom she saw at her job within the international airport:

Some people are just so rude. They'll throw their money at me, like "oh, here."  
[White people] are just nasty, they don't clean up after themselves. You get these rich White old ladies, and they're so rude and snotty. One thing I hate the most is when they buy a little pack of gum or a newspaper for 50 cents and they give you \$100 bill. I'm like, "You don't have anything smaller?" They're like, "No," but I see in their purse that they have the change.

Engarcia talks here about her experiences in working at a mostly White, upper-class country club as a food server:

[The country club] has free water and tea across the pool and the [White] ladies will be like, "Can I have a glass of water with ice"? And I'll be like, "There's free water across from the pool." But then they are like, "Well, can't you just walk over there and give me a cup of water"? And I say "No, if I have to get you the water here, I will have to charge you.". So then they roll their eyes at me. I always think, "Quit being so lazy."

Engarcia went on to tell me how she interpreted this behavior by Whites, speaking to what Solórzano & Yosso (2007) and Sue (2010) term racial microaggressions:

A lot of the White [club members], it's not that they are mean to you. They just ignore you, kind of. It just depends on their mood. If they are in a good mood, they

will talk to you. If they are not, they just ignore you. I'm like, "Yeah, hello to you, too."

The selected stories of these women clearly speak to their racialization and marginalization within and outside of school. As detailed in Chapter 5, Anna, Sasha, Florita, Luz, and Engarcia have clearly found ways to incorporate ways of coping, especially when it comes to schooling. They show us they can use their positive resiliency as agency. These experiences may or may not act as a catalyst for "rising above." However, I have to wonder if our conceptions of resiliency merely highlight the positive transformation of marginalized Latinas while minimizing the ideological inertia of *mestizaje*? Do theories that highlight Latina resiliency also explain their group investments in this ideology? If Latinas at NMVCC have found ways of coping with issues of race and gender oppression, is it feasible that these same ways of coping could be applied to disrupting privilege and *mestizaje*?

Over time, I believe that these questions regarding resiliency scholarship will be addressed, albeit from race-ideology frameworks. However, in the meantime, I am reminded of Wade's (2009) argument regarding a "positive" *mestizaje*. He said that "[w]e need to be very cautious in celebrating *mestizaje*. [The] mixture in general by no means erase[s] racial hierarchy. Mixing is no guarantee that racial hierarchy and racism are on the way out: they can just change their form" (p. 239).

## **Conclusion**

In a study of ideological critique there is always the question about what one *consciously* or *unconsciously* knows; what does one believe about their world? I spent much time pondering these same questions. Despite the telltale discourse that pointed to

colorblindness and an investment in appearing “more White than Black,” I was resistant in thinking these women knew their words and actions were racially problematic.

However, as Mills (2007) cautions, “White ignorance has been able to flourish all of these years because a White epistemology of ignorance has safeguarded it against the dangers of an illuminating blackness or redness, protecting those who for ‘racial’ reasons have needed not to know (p. 35, as cited in Sullivan and Tuana, Eds., 2007).” Simply put, racial ignorance is not something one stumbles upon and then falls into.

This project on NMVCC Latinas has led me down a variety of paths, many of which were scary and painful. Like most dissertations, my investigation began well before my entrance into graduate school. I always considered myself friendly with the few Natives and Blacks in my school, but never thought of dating them. By the time I entered college, all of my friends were either lighter skinned Latinas or White. I made conscious decisions to only date White men until I met my current husband, a darker-skinned Latino. Perhaps colonization played a large part in my friendships and dating choices, but delving deeper into this project has made me come to a painful realization. Yes, I am a Latina and I have experienced marginalization because of that positioning. Have I marginalized others in the past, working toward my own beliefs in Mestizaje? Have I reaped the benefits of being more White than Black? Most certainly. Applebaum (2010) argues that, “[d]ifficult knowledge [in regard to White complicity] cannot be learned without emotional trauma” (p. 45). Despite the actions or path(s) we take, no one can turn back the hands of time. I talk more about my personal investment(s) in mestizaje within the next, concluding chapter. However, here I will confess that most of my life as a Latina has been overshadowed by a Whiteness problem. Certainly shame



and guilt (see Zembylas, 2008) must be part of the long process in moving toward a meaningful life of humanization, one that leaves White racial ideology behind. Partaking in humanization (or as close as one can get in my current ethnic group) mandates a responsibility, though. This responsibility, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues, begins with a *life committed* to racial equality (p. 16). While Hurtado (1996) reminds us that, “[r]acial] oppression is enforced at a group level” (p. 36), unveiling our individual and group complicity in mestizaje offers us the promise of group and individual transformation.

The conversations I was privileged to have with Latinas from NMVCC provided me a priceless opportunity. I challenged their ideological stance and their positioning. They held up a mirror to me, digging into the core of my own experiences. Truth be told, the appeal to mestizaje is easily normalized and easier to partake in. This is a privilege not afforded to many marginalized groups (see Yancey, 2003) yet this privilege offers a point of meaningful departure. My raced and gendered group has been “made,” but it may also be “un-made.” We must respond courageously because as Baldwin (1961) wisely reminds us, “[We are] *responsible* for life: It is [this] small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we shall return. [We] must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible, for the sake of those who are coming after us” (as cited as cited in Sullivan and Tuana, (Eds.), p. 359).

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE LATINAS, RACE-GENDER NORMS, AND IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING**

### **Introduction**

As an ideological critique project, the task is to synthesize the talk of NMVCC Latinas and make sense of it. One last look at the discourse put forth in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 returns us to the essential goals of this project. Methodologically, a focus on Latina discourse is key. However, a critical hermeneutic framework requires an in-depth interpretation of these. There are larger questions we must ponder. Ideology is always at work in our everyday life (see Chapter 1). These ideologies use discourse to do their daily work (see Leonardo, 2009). Keeping these arguments in mind, the following questions may guide our interpretations of this project:

- 1) What were the representative ideologies of NMVCC Latinas and how do these relate to white supremacy?
- 2) How does mestizaje ideology relate to the processes of race and gender?
- 3) How do Latina race and gender norms collide with their mestizaje positioning?
- 4) Finally, what are the implications of raced and gendered mestizaje on Latinas in community college?

In the first part of this concluding chapter, I return to the discourse of my participants in order to answer the above questions of interpretation. Ultimately, I argue that the race and gender ideologies of Latinas at NMVCC point to a larger Mestiza/o ideology, namely that of mestizaje (See Chapter 2 for an overview of this ideology). I maintain that a raced and gendered mestizaje ideology works to bind the Mestiza group together. Mestizaje is

rarely questioned amongst the Latinas in my study and because of this mestizaje beliefs are easily produced and reproduced on a daily basis.

The process of meaning making, especially when it comes to discourse, is also subject to ideological positioning. Therefore the second part of this chapter is devoted to my personal collisions with mestizaje, during my past as well as my time as researcher of this project. The reader will quickly comprehend my own struggles with mestizaje, what this ideology has “cost” me, and how I hope to disrupt mestizaje as a teacher and academic. Additionally, I point to some suggestions for further research.

### **What were the representative ideologies of Latinas and how did these relate to white supremacy?**

Based on the discourse I detailed in Chapters 4-6, race and gender ideologies manifested in real (material) ways for NMVCC Latinas. In Chapter 4, recall that the majority of my participants were dealing with issues of emotional embodiment and the manifestation of subsequent illness(es). First and foremost, their stories made it clear that their raced and gendered bodies are of less value than White women. This is an important fact because many race and gender identity theories do not adequately explain how issues of embodiment are part of larger social (and ideological) processes. Chapter 5 highlights some of the sources of empowerment for NMVCC Latinas. Clearly, the Latina family structure offers some significant sources for coping. However, unequal family expectations (and the burdens that come with these) appear to take more away from Latinas than they give. In sum, perceived Latina empowerment comes at a high cost. Finally, in Chapter 6, we see how Latina claims to racial ignorance point to their actual practices of racial knowing. Even though NMVCC Latinas maintained that racial

worldviews were not a part of their lives, time and again we saw contradictions in their discourse. Most notably, these practices of racial knowing were most evident in the choices they made regarding intimate relationships.

Ideologies are never “free-floating” but they always manifest materially. In this case, NMVCC Latinas, under the organization of white supremacy ideology, became part and parcel of yet another raced and gendered ideology—mestizaje. Mestizaje ideology speaks to the desire of Mestizas/os to be White, with full understanding that they will never be White. Mestizaje, as a hegemonic racial stratification, organizes notions of gender as well. As “Honorary White women,” NMVCC Latinas received a certain amount of relative privilege (for instance, as objects of “ethnic” beauty) but this privilege came with specific costs. Their physical bodies paid the price. They bought into race and gender expectations that were nearly impossible to achieve. They “stuck to their own” when they contemplated dating and marrying their partners. In sum, the price of privilege was more than this privilege was worth.

### **How did mestizaje ideology relate to the processes of race and gender?**

Under white supremacy, the experiences of Latinas at NMVCC were subjected to the raced and gendered processes of mestizaje. As previously mentioned, most of the women experienced issues of emotional (physical) illness and embodiment. Some cases of physical manifestations were worse than others. Here I revisit the specific example of Alegria, who encountered the shunning of her family and friends because she was pregnant with a Black and White child. She told me that “[her] whole family was disgusted...not for the fact that [she] was pregnant but because it was with a Black guy.

Once [her friends would] see [her] boyfriend and baby, they wouldn't want to be [her] friend anymore.”

Alegria's story reminds Latinas, like myself, of the race and gender “rules” we must adhere to in order to be accepted in our raced and gendered group. First, our intimate relationships should be heterosexual. Second, Latinas should work toward the “lightening” of their offspring. Alegria had gone against this raced and gendered mestizaje expectation, and therefore paid the price of losing relationships with her friends and family. Subsequently, this breach of mestizaje resulted in issues of physical embodiment. As she told it, “Six weeks later [after the birth], I hemorrhaged. I look[ed] down and I was in this pool of blood. [The] hemorrhaging comes and goes. Sometimes it lasts for months at a time.” With Alegria's story, we are reminded that our bodies are representative of our raced and gendered positioning. Our bodies speak *through* us.

### **How did Latina race and gender norms collide with their mestizaje positioning?**

In this project, it was clear that NMVCC Latinas had specific race and gender norms, all of which proved to reinforce mestizaje processes. Like any marginalized group, these women found sources for coping with their oppression. They looked at their mothers, grandmothers and religion to help them through tough times. In so many ways, these women proved their resiliency. Many of them were full-time students, worked full-time, single mothers, and doting daughters and girlfriends. How were they able to rise to this exceptionality? Many of the women looked to these raced and gendered expectations as a means of making them stronger individuals. However, these strong women did not hold their Mestizo partners to the same standards. In fact, their interviews seemed to revolve around their relationship to the men in their lives. By defining their own

expectations and identities via Latino and White men, we see that mestizaje is not only the subjugation of race but of gender as well.

Mestizaje subjugation, if you recall, was best detailed by Sunshine who reflected upon her own raced and gendered positioning. She told me that “[e]very man wants a mother. Even though [my mother] really stressed independence, it was really important for [me] to do everything from running [a] whole business, to changing the oil in the truck, to fixing the roof.” Remember that Sunshine also admitted that her current boyfriend didn’t fill all of the expected roles and she felt horrible because he had to make dinner while she was doing homework. From the above, we are able to see how Sunshine explains the collision of race and gender norms with mestizaje. An adherence to mestizaje is an added obligation for Sunshine, but seems an inevitable predicament. Sunshine proved to be an extremely exceptional (and empowered) Latina inside and outside of the home. However, her empowerment and exceptionality were due to the many norms she found herself obligated to.

### **What are the implications of raced and gendered mestizaje on Latinas in community college?**

Upon visiting any community college, it is apparent that many of the students are between the ages of 18-30. Being a young student (or younger than most) provides many benefits that are not afforded to others. Many young students see their life as just beginning. They believe there is a promising future ahead of them. While there may be temporary setbacks with jobs, school, finances, or romantic relationships, there is likely a sense that situations can (and will) get better. Along with this perceived optimism comes

a sense of individual independence. College represents a time when students can break away from their childhood and forge new ideas and beliefs.

In this project, however, we often see how NMVCC Latinas forgo their sense of individualism in order to “stick with their own.” It appears that being part of a collective group provided a sense of belonging (and privilege) that was not offered elsewhere. Because these Latinas chose to adhere to mestizaje beliefs, their relationships were limited to the confines of Latino and/or White friends and partners. Recall how Sasha, while not in a relationship at the time, had specific requirements for her potential mate. Below we see how Sasha attached an ethnicity, physical markers, and phenotype to her hypothetical mate.

[Sarah]: “So if you had a choice of who your mate would be, what he would like, what would be your ideal? For instance, if there was a Black guy, a Native guy or an Asian guy that attended your church and he was nice to you, do you think you would date him?”

[Sasha]: “Probably not. My mom wouldn’t approve. We’re just not attracted to them, you know? She just wants someone who isn’t some bum getting in trouble or some abusive idiot and someone not weird looking. I would just want someone within my own ethnicity, like dark hair, and not too dark of skin. Someone who has nice hair and someone who has good hygiene—someone Hispanic or White, you know?”

Looking back at Sasha’s exchanges in Chapter 6, we gather that her adherence to mestizaje has limited the individuals she has trusted in the past, and especially, how she racially “reads” others who are not Latina or White. Sasha’s sense of the “Other” keeps

her from relating to most other people, simply because she feels she must stay in her group.

For NMVCC Latinas, college could have been a place where they forged new relationships with different individuals from various ethnic groups. However, NMVCC became a place where most of these Latinas continued to reproduce and reproduce mestizaje beliefs. In truth, raced and gendered mestizaje bound their Latina experiences and norms.

### **Reflections on Racial Ideology and Ignorance**

*“Jerry, just remember, it’s not a lie if you believe it.”* — George Costanza, from the television show *Seinfeld* (1989)

From the show that claimed to be about “nothing,” one episode of *Seinfeld* (1989) points to larger discussions of ideology and epistemologies of ignorance. In this particular episode, Jerry begins dating a female police officer who suspects he is a closeted *Melrose Place* fan. Being a fan of the shallow telenovela places Jerry in an uncomfortable position. He enjoys watching *Melrose Place* and believes it to be great entertainment. However, he quickly comprehends that his new girlfriend would not approve. Jerry’s girlfriend is almost sure of Jerry’s deception and therefore challenges Jerry to undergo a lie detector test. We, the audience, know that Jerry will not pass. He becomes consumed with beating the test and asks his good friend George Costanza for help. George seemingly comes up with a perfect epistemological solution: “Jerry,” says Costanza, “Just remember, it’s not a lie if you believe it.” Like most *Seinfeld* episodes, we find that George’s advice is a dismissal failure. Jerry is “outed” as a *Melrose Place* fan and must come to terms with his own Achilles’ heel.



What can a show about “nothing” teach us about mestizaje? How does Jerry Seinfeld’s attempts at ignorance inform us about the mestizaje race-gendering process? From the vantage of white supremacy, many lighter-skinned Latinas have bought into the lie of mestizaje because of our fears of losing *something*. This *something* may be a sense of love and acceptance from our immediate family members or close circle of friends. We may fear having to examine our own lives in critical ways, even remembering our raced and gendered experiences as the traumatic events that they were (and are). Finally, it is advantageous and ultimately easier to go along with the expectations and norms that are made of us. As Leonardo has pointed out, we make something of race and race also makes something of us. As Latinas, however, can we be sure that the burden of mestizaje isn’t taking more from us than it is giving?

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Nearly 35 years ago, a little girl about three years of age would get tucked into bed by her grandfather, a stoic and loving *Nuevo Mexicano*. The little girl, an only child, felt secure and loved at her grandparents’ house, but she always hated this time of the night. It meant sleeping alone in an unfamiliar room in a less than cozy bed. There was a cheap dime store light that remained on throughout, the only light in the dark. Under this dim light there was a figurine. It was of a *santo*, the Black-skinned Saint Martín de Porres. The statue sat on the armoire and haunted the little girl because she feared him and his Blackness. In fact, while her parents and grandparents were very religious, she had little knowledge of Martín de Porres and thought he had evil powers due to the color of his skin. “Papa,” she would say, “Please don’t make me sleep here. I am afraid of *that* man and I will have bad dreams.” “You are afraid of St. Martín?” he would say. “You

must understand that he will protect you. He is the saint of miracles, the saint of justice. There are times when miracles seem impossible and so far away. That is why he lights up this dark room.” The grandfather went on to tell the little girl his stories. These stories both scared her and intrigued her.

Amongst the Catholic community, it was rumored that this dark-skinned, Peruvian priest spent most of his life trying to prove his worth to his convent. In fact, the parishes he worked with often thought of him as sub-human due to his social caste and phenotype. He performed all of the tasks that no one else wanted: scrubbing floors, washing laundry, and performing the most menial of tasks because he was Black. One night Martín was deep in prayer at his alter when a fire erupted. The fire grew yet he did not feel the flames and was left unscathed. Arguably, it was this *exceptionality* (or the stories that supported this) that made him more acceptable to this religious community.

Another story talked of the young Martín, who was known to collect food and clothing for the poor. As a young priest, he became increasingly dismayed. The church was battling a large rodent problem where many routinely spoiled the collection of food and clothing meant for the poorest of people in the Dominican Republic. As a vegetarian and animal lover, Martín refused to kill the rodents and in fact chose to speak with one of the pests, attempting an alliance: “If you and your friends promise to not spoil the goods that were meant for the poor, I will provide for you and feed you along with my pets: the cat, the dog, and the parrot. We may coexist, and even flourish if our intentions are the same.” As a commonly known story, the details intrigued the girl. The rodents kept their promise, as did Martín. This is why, to this day, Martín de Porres is always depicted with a broom in his hand and with the rodent, cat, dog, and parrot at his side.

These stories brought comfort and feelings of compassion to the girl. She grew to love the figurine that watched over her as she slept. Now, when she sees the figurine, she thought of her grandpa's stories. She thinks of the cat, the dog, and the parrot at Martín de Porres' side. While she was still afraid of the saint, her grandfather's stories had challenged her own common sense notions regarding the racialized body. In short, by opening herself up to a new worldview, her old perceptions began to slowly change. The grandpa kissed the little girl's forehead, his little *princesa*, and promised to see her in the morning.

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The little girl quickly grew into a young woman. She was curious about boys, curious about intimacy, and curious about love. In middle school, she would imagine having a boyfriend and practiced her kissing technique on her bedroom mirror. This time of her life was full of excitement and insecurities, much like any other twelve-year-old girl. She recalls the admiration of one boy, a boy with dark, Black skin. He stared at her during their Language Arts class and he wrote her long letters during lunchtime. These letters were full of love and promises: "When, do you think, should we hold hands?" Those letters touched her heart but she was unsure (in fact she was afraid) of what other people would think of them as a romantic relationship. Her state of ideological limbo went on for nearly two months until one afternoon when the girl's mother sat her down after school. Her mother had read her diary and knew about the boy. She did not mind the girl's interest in boys, but she did not approve of *that* boy. The mother ordered the girl to stop talking to him. "It is for your own good," the mother said. "You don't know what you are getting yourself into." That night was a long one for the girl. She cried all

night. However, the next day she did as her mother had ordered. She told the boy that she could not date him. She used some lame excuse. “You don’t understand me or what I want. I never liked you and I never will.” The girl even found a new boyfriend to provide some credibility to her words. This boyfriend looked more like her, porcelain colored skin, dark eyes, and black hair.

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By now, the reader is probably wondering what these vignettes have in common with one another? These vignettes carry one common theme: they are held together by false ideology. Ideological *positionings*, such as that of *mestizaje*, do not manifest overnight. There is a process involved, one that is hegemonic and reproductive in nature. Our raced and gendered worldviews are shaped by the many experiences we have throughout our journey as humans; we make our stories and our stories make us (Leonardo, 2009). Like Jerry Seinfeld, we have agreed to believe a lie in hopes of receiving benefits in return. The story of *mestizaje* compels us to believe this lie and make it true, no matter the cost.

### **Mestizaje: The Myopic Lie**

These lies become a burden, yet they are the glue that holds our synthetic grouping in place. As a means of coping, as a means of explaining *mestizaje*, we tirelessly work to live this lie. We don’t think twice as we surveil and enforce our group beliefs (see Foucault, 1995). We normalize our race and gender roles with little regard to how these may manifest. In many of my group circles, I have heard that these beliefs give us something to hold on to. What about our common racial history? What about our common goals as a Latina group? We need to stand together. However, after hearing my

participants' various race and gender stories, I have to question these beliefs in mestizaje because it has taken so much from us in return.

It is probably apparent by now that the little girl and the young woman in the earlier vignettes are me. These stories are part of my own racial memory, my personal investments in mestizaje. Like a bad hallucinogenic "trip," I am "cursed" (or is it blessed?) with my own de-humanizing memories, all of which come to me routinely. Looking back, these memories are painful. Also, I feel as though I have been duped.

I am like the Betta fish that lives in the small, plastic cup. I have been told that there are bigger bodies of water to explore, but they are too big for me. I am meant to live in this cup, and with a few shiny rocks, I can pretend this is my home. I am told that there is beauty in my individuality, which cannot be separated from my "unique" group. These lies have immobilized me, (in fact, I can barely move my fins!) but I am still covered with water. I am still promised food. Out of fear, I desperately hold on to what I know.

### **Being White—How Much Do We Know?**

There is no doubt that the structures of Whiteness immobilize us. However, we must wonder, how much do Whites (and aspiring Whites) consciously know? Part of the obligation of Whiteness scholars (of whom I humbly strive to be) is to point out some inconsistencies that I have observed in Whiteness scholarship. There appears to be two competing tropes of thoughtfulness. One argues that Whiteness is an invisible and unintentional phenomenon amongst Whites and those invested in Whiteness. The other trope begs to differ, arguing that there is a very visible, conscious, and structural machination in place. These two tropes assume very different ideologies and therefore

competing paths in research and scholarship. In sum, both unconscious and conscious Whiteness are ideologically at odds.

Since the earliest conceptions of Whiteness studies, the arguments have largely centered on unconscious racism, where Whites (and other White allies) must be called upon to recognize their trespasses and therefore become better Whites. The appeal to (White) morality is key. First Peggy Macintosh (1988) offered us the example of the “Invisible Knapsack,” while Howard (2006) put forth that teachers “can’t teach what they don’t know.” Evaluations of White “habits” was yet another approach to Whiteness (see Macmullan, 2009). The argument goes that unconscious racism is perpetuated by “well-meaning Whites” (see Trepagnier, 2006) and is therefore a “silent racism.” In fact, I recall attending a diversity training that advised non-White people to say “Ouch!” when racial slurs were said in the workplace. The “Ouch!” is suppose to let White folks know that, while their words were unintentional, they still hurt. There may be a utility in many of these pieces, but Whiteness is problematically whittled down to an observed behavior that is not deliberate. Furthermore, Whiteness becomes more of an individualistic issue rather than what Blumer (1969) would term an invested group positioning. Ideologically, unconscious racism requires a “re-training” of the individual and not a “working through” (see Leonardo, 2009).

Another scholarly stance maintains that Whiteness (in this case vis-à-vis *mestizaje*) is an ideology, a way of viewing the world, a way of making and re-making the world. Whiteness has intent and those intentions are reproduced. This project can be taken up by anyone within the system. In fact, claims of ignorance and active complicity reify and reproduce group and individual racial ideologies. Charles Mills (2007) said it

best: “Society is one structured by relations of domination and subordination. This conceptual apparatus is likely going to be shaped and inflected in various ways by the biases of the ruling group(s)” (as cited in Sullivan & Tuana, 2007, p. 25). Mills goes on to say that White group interests are key in generating beliefs of White ignorance. In order to disrupt Whiteness as an ideology, we should be wary of the “not knowing,” especially when it comes to our memories. White discourse produces White ignorance (see Van Dijk, 1987). Going back to Mills (2007), White ignorance has worked to protect those “who for ‘racial’ reasons have *needed* not to know” (p. 35). Therefore, Du Bois (1935) was right to term these race benefits the “psychological and material wages of Whiteness.”

There are obstacles and possibilities for those scholars who believe in working *through* problematic race ideologies and not *around* them. The dismantling of individual and group Whiteness, in this case mestizaje, will be a challenge for those race-conscious individuals and their allies. We will be called traitors. We will be told that we are colorblind and are trying to “be Black.” We will be told that we are denying our ethnic pride. But how can we be proud of a system that is based on our phenotype and gender, and the limitations of these? How are we “trying to be Black” when we simply seek humanization? If I can keep my social practices, why do I need to form an alliance to my ascribed group?

### **In the Family**

As we have seen from these women’s interviews, central to holding mestizaje together is the notion of family. Fromm (1956) reminds us that forming intimate relationships, romantic or otherwise, are all part of the human condition. The individual

breaks away from her mother and father and ventures to find her place in the world. The conditional/unconditional love that the individual receives from the family is one that will shape her future relationships. Fromm argued that the nuclear family was the purest form of a microcosm of society. Issues of power, control, resistance, and dominance are played out amongst our closest relationships. Therefore, it is healthy to seek independence from our parents and extended family, but as neophytes in the world, we still seek our parents' love and approval. Applying Fromm's understanding of conditional/unconditional love to mestizaje, we see how (gendered) Latina worldviews are formed early in life and how they may quickly become oppressive. "I will only love you if you follow these (racial) rules." "You belong *here*, not *there*."

Even so-called colorblind discourse amongst parents produces and reproduces dehumanizing Latina racial worldviews—all in the name of preserving the "family."

Latinas are often portrayed as family centered (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 6). A focus on family is often seen as a positive trait that Latina families "hand down" to their children. However, is the "family focus" the only belief passed on to Latina children? Might other race and gender beliefs be passed on as well? Based on my own experiences, I would say that all of these beliefs are passed on to young Latinas, whether these be humanizing or dehumanizing.

For this reason, I have always appreciated Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) take on racism being the first "R" in preschool. Children do see the color of their peers, even as early as age three and they work to produce and reproduce racial hegemony. One memorable story is told of a White girl who protests the fact that her Black classmate is taking the white class rabbit home. He should not be allowed to take the bunny home



because the bunny is white and he is Black. In another story, several little girls are playing “house” together and Van Ausdale witnesses racial surveillance amongst the group. Only White girls can hold the White dolls and Black girls must hold the Black dolls. What these stories illustrate is that Whiteness is created and made, even at a very young age. Like Whiteness, beliefs of mestizaje are made and re-made, all with a similar commitment to white supremacy.

Similar to Van Ausdale and Feagin, Thandeka (2005) argues that, from birth, one learns to be White and is not born White. In fact, Thandeka argues that familial notions of white supremacy actually cause extreme harm to children who consider themselves part of this White group. She believes that White ideological beliefs are a form of child abuse. White children who have been taught in the spirit of normative white supremacy later foster feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. All of these feelings (much like my own experiences) persist throughout their lifetime.

I believe that Thandeka’s observations regarding Whiteness are accurate and true. Reflecting on my own experiences, and now with the candid responses of my research participants, I see how notions of family create the understandings we have about our group position in the world. The conditional love of the family is dependent on the rules of mestizaje: whom I *should* love, how the world is, and where I belong socially and ideologically). The ideological glue of gendered mestizaje holds all of this together.

### **Adherence to Mestizaje: A Benefit or a Trap?**

In this project, I have seen how many women have taken on the mestizaje lie, all in the name of preserving white supremacy. Of course, my participants did not have the language to associate their race and gender experiences with this. The women viewed

these race and gender norms as part of their many roles as mothers, daughters, girlfriends, wives, and students. Alegria's persistent health issues, detailed in Chapter 4, are all part of some perchance phenomenon. In Chapter 5, Sunshine feels "like such a piece" because she fails at being the perfect student and girlfriend. We read of depression, attempted suicides, the rationalization of physical and sexual abuse, all because these women are positioned in a hegemonic raced and gendered society. Of course one might say, "Well, these raced and gendered experiences are the sources of Latina empowerment." But does Latina empowerment have to come at such a high cost? Must it be our raced and gendered stories (under mestizaje) that unite us? Why do our race and gender battle wounds have to bind us the most?

Of course, our dysfunctional group ideology cannot excuse our mestizaje "buy in." Our conscious, yet departmentalized, racial experiences are relegated to "safe spaces" of privilege where meaningful introspection may be easily avoided. Latinas benefit from these material and psychic wages. Because of our "blood," we are unique, special, and part of a cosmic race. We actively work to make and re-make this mythical story. I think of Sunshine who feels compelled to tell me about the racial purity of her half-French boyfriend. I think of Malita and Alegria who tell me stories of being surveilled by their parents—"Zebras stay with zebras. Giraffes stay with giraffes." I recall how Alegria is still in emotional pain. She still remembers how her family and friends rejected her because her son, now five, appears more Black than White. All of this in a quest to maintain our alliance with mestizaje, hoping to contend with other Whites, all of which do not accept us into their White male "club."

In reality, the dangling carrot of Whiteness is nothing but an illusion. Even poor Whites, which are the closest to being privileged Whites, become trapped in this lie. Allen (2009) argues that poor Whites “invest” in Whiteness because they believe that it will improve their economic and social positions. He concludes that this promise of privileged Whiteness ultimately deceives poor Whites. Acceptance into the more privileged White group comes with several costs. They must agree to be the brunt of “hillbilly” and “redneck” jokes, pegged the “real” White racists, and they must become the definition of what privileged Whites consider “backward” social behavior.

While Latinas cannot compete (in hegemony) with poor Whites, we can apply some of their ideological beliefs to those of *mestizaje*. As a race and gender process, *mestizaje* ultimately dehumanizes Latinas. Our race and gender norms are burdens that we continually struggle with. We have been told that these gender roles are “normal,” that the devaluing of our bodies is “normal,” and that our oppressive positionality (albeit in relation to Whites) is also “normal.” Our “Honorary White” (see Chapter 1) status, reserved for Whiter and more privileged Latinas, is dependent on our compliance with *mestizaje*. Of course, the nature of *mestizaje* (under white supremacy) is its expansive capabilities. White supremacy allows for flexibility, in order to preserve its power. Whiter people of color (similar to Latinas/os) may also be accepted into the fold despite their lower status (Yancey, 2003). Ultimately, the myth of raced and gendered *mestizaje* is always at the detriment and expense of those groups below us. This will not change until white supremacy changes.

## **Feminist Projects and Mestizaje**

As I struggled to apply traditional feminist notions of mestizaje to this project, I found myself wanting more. On the one hand, I felt that Borderland theories had contributed to my race and gender consciousness. On the other hand, I felt that this work was somewhat at odds with positionality theories. Recall from Chapter 1 that my journey into critical thought came to fruition with a reading of Collins (2000) ideas on being a “race traitor.” Adding issues of embodiment and mestizaje to the mix, I began to further realize the limitations of mestizaje feminism.

Mestizaje ultimately blocks the focus of feminist projects because when we “buy in” to mestizaje, we are also “buying in” to normalized frames of patriarchy and white supremacy. In fact, I felt that could not tell these womens’ stories, with all of their complexities, until I could dissect my own mestizaje consciousness. The mestizaje consciousness that I struggled with throughout this project is telling—not only about my participants but also about myself. I had waivered back and forth as I worked to interpret these women’s stories.

Clearly these women shared a problematic discourse regarding their mestizaje beliefs. But I also knew where they were coming from ideologically. They were not morally bankrupt nor could they simply be disregarded as “racist” people. What I am trying to say is that *I had once been at their ideological location*. So to say that these women, my former self included, were bad people, beyond redemption, meant that there was no hope for a “doing away” of mestizaje. If my goal was to create a project that would dismantle mestizaje, I would also have to begin a critique of feminist mestizaje frameworks. Exposing the ideological falsities of mestizaje, and the race and gender

norms that come with it, appeared to be the clearest path to our humanization. In an effort to be ethnically and racially inclusive, we must always question who is being excluded. We must also be aware that these ideological excuses are the very seeds that produce and reproduce white supremacy (Mills, 1997).

### **Onward...Community College Pedagogy in the Face of Mestizaje**

This research project has led me down an alternate teaching path—one a bit different than when I began this project. Currently, I am working as an adjunct professor at a large university in New Mexico. I am teaching introductory reading courses in a class that focuses on the purposefully allusive topics of reading and critical theory.

Yesterday, one of my Latina students, who happened to be from my childhood neighborhood, came up to me after class to solicit my help. She is taking a Chicana/o Studies class where her professor is having her read Laura Gómez's (2007) book on the making of the Mexican-American race. Her dilemma is this: she has an essay exam in five hours on chapters three through four where she is required to talk about the significance of the book and how the text relates to her own personal life. I asked her if she has read the material and she nodded yes." I say, "So, do you see your family or yourself in any of the descriptions made in the book? What do you think about this idea—the idea of 'Mexican blood'? Do you think it is something that is real or false?" She gave me a quizzical look. "Well, I've always been proud of my Mexican heritage. My dad always told my sisters and I that we need to stand tall because we have some Aztec blood in us." She laughed and then I was the one with the quizzical look.

My student, much like my former self, has "bought in" to the biological, psychic, and material falsities of mestizaje. Her perceived ties to Aztec blood have provided her a

*social position* and a *historical place*. Because of her “blood,” she is not White but she is also not part of the Collective Black grouping. Her perceived status within this group is a validation for her, but this validation is not immune to the processes of being raced (e.g., through *blanqueamiento*) and being gendered. In order to reap this *mestizaje* belonging, she must stick to the *mestizaje* rules.

What is clear from this experience (as well as this dissertation) is that I have my work cut out for me. *Mestizaje* is a positioning that exploits Latinas at the individual and group level, disabling us physically, psychologically, and materially. *Mestizaje* is also a racial project that maintains the structural and material institutions of white supremacy by safeguarding them, making them, and then re-making them.

So how do we move forward? Of course this question is the beginning of a lifetime of scholarly work. I am not going to pretend that I know all of the answers. The concluding chapter in a dissertation hardly seems an adequate space to discuss this lifetime of work (at least in an in-depth manner). At this juncture, however, I do have some recommendations for further research:

1. As feminist scholars, we should actively work to debunk theoretical beliefs in *mestizaje*. We should challenge the fictional and non-fictional work that supports this ideology and use these pieces as new points for critique. Furthermore, how does our work exclude and/or oppress others?
2. When we think of Latina empowerment and resiliency, we should also problematize the romanticized notions of these. Where does Latina empowerment come from? What are the costs? Are the costs worth the reward and how can we re-envision empowerment?

3. More research must be done on intersections of race, gender, and ideology. One area that is especially lacking is how these processes manifest in emotional and physical illness.
4. As professors and instructors in higher education forums, we should ideologically problematize biological notions of race and ethnicity. By critiquing these myths, we will be closer to dismantling them.
5. As a Latina professor, I feel that I have an added responsibility. I need to expose the race and gender processes of mestizaje, while also exposing the dehumanization of white supremacy. Is it a humanizing act to avoid individuals who are of a lower status than you? Why do you have these beliefs and where do they come from?

I am sure that I will think of more recommendations as I continue to navigate my own humanization. This is simply the nature of a dissertation. It is a picture in time. I do know that this process has changed me for the better. Therefore, I feel the need to pave the way for others who are willing to question their own individual and group alliances.

In this dissertation, I argued that NMVCC Latinas had conscious mestizaje knowledge. The race and gender processes of mestizaje were continually made and re-made in these women's lives. Ultimately, mestizaje has taken more from Latinas than it has given. However, like Frankenberg (1993) argued in her study of (the social construction of) White racism—if mestizaje can be done, it can also be undone.

Relatively privileged, lighter-skinned Latinas who struggle with mestizaje still have meaningful choices that can be made. Until white supremacy no longer exists, we will always be closer to the top. However, our history (or lack thereof), will always call

our claims of White authenticity into question. As we work “through” race, we are offered a much better alternative. While our investments in mestizaje have clearly robbed us of our true humanization, there is still hope and possibility for us.



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## Appendix A

### Participant Demographic Survey

Instructions: The following survey questions will help me to better understand you and your circumstances as a female student within our community college. ***Your answers will not be shared or viewed by anyone but myself.*** Please answer the following 20 questions below as accurately as possible and thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey.

1. Please print today's date: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please print your full name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please print your full address (For emergency use only.): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please print a current phone number (For emergency use only.): \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please print a current e-mail address where you may be contacted: \_\_\_\_\_
6. How old are you (Age in Years)? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin?
  - a. YES, I am of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin
  - b. NO
8. What was your first (primary) language?
  - a. ENGLISH is my first (primary) language
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ is my first (primary) language

9. As a person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin, do you consider yourself to be

(Circle Identifier):

- a. Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- b. Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
- c. Puerto Rican
- d. Cuban
- e. Other Identifier (Please List Here):\_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your race (Circle Race Identifier. You may Circle More than One.):

- a. White
- b. Black, African American, Negro
- c. American Indian or Other Native American (You may List this Race Here):\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Asian or Other Asian (Please List Here):\_\_\_\_\_
- e. Some other race (Please List Here):\_\_\_\_\_

11. Were you born in the United States? (Please Circle YES or NO)

- a. YES
- b. NO

12. What is your ancestry or ethnic origin? (Please Explain in 2-3 Sentences Below):



13. How long have you been attending community college (List amount of Semesters Here): \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your current living arrangement (Circle Arrangement):

- a. Apartment (either living alone or with someone else)
- b. College Dorm (either living alone or with someone else)
- c. Mobile Home (either living alone or with someone else)
- d. House Rental (either living alone or with someone else)
- e. Owned Home (either living alone or with someone else)

14. What area of town is your living arrangement located? (Circle Area)

- a. Central (South East) Albuquerque
- b. West (South West) Albuquerque or Los Lunas
- c. North (North West) Albuquerque or Rio Rancho
- d. Far North East Albuquerque
- e. Other (Please List Here): \_\_\_\_\_

15. How would you describe your current marital and/or partner status (Please Circle Status)?

- a. Single
- b. Married/Partnered
- c. Widowed
- d. Divorced
- e. Other Status Not Listed (Please List Here): \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you have any children? If YES, please indicate how many children below:

a. YES, I have \_\_\_\_ (number) children

b. NO, I do not have any children

17. What is your current working status (Please Circle Status)?

a. Working, part-time (outside of home)

b. Working, full-time (outside of home)

c. Working, within home

d. Not Working, Actively Seeking Employment

e. Not Working, Not Seeking Employment

18. What is (was) your mother's primary source of employment? (Please Circle

Source of Employment)

a. Working, within home

b. Working, part-time

c. Full-time/Part-time student

d. Working, full-time (below minimum wage)

e. Working, full-time ("working" wage)

f. Working, full-time (above "working" wage)

g. Working, full-time (above "professional working" wage)

h. Other (Please List Here): \_\_\_\_\_

19. What is (was) your father's primary source of employment? (Please Circle Source of Employment)

- i. Working, within home
- j. Working, part-time
- k. Full-time/Part-time student
- l. Working, full-time (below minimum wage)
- m. Working, full-time ("working" wage)
- n. Working, full-time (above "working" wage)
- o. Working, full-time (above "professional working" wage)
- p. Other (Please List Here): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

**Confidentiality Statement** (to be read aloud before each interview session): This interview talks about some of the issues that you answered in the Participant Demographic Survey. Your participation is voluntary and if there is a question you do not want to answer, this is fine. I can also explain any questions further. You may stop this interview at any time.

To insure that I am not missing anything, I will be audio recording our interview. I will protect your confidentiality to the maximum extent that the law allows. Your name and any identifying characteristics will be removed from all of my written records and reports. I will be keeping all the interview tapes in a password protected security file; only I will have access to this file and the interview tapes. I am interested in knowing how you think and feel about these issues so try and answer the interview questions as honestly as possible.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

#### **PART I (Interview Session #1)**

- 1) Can you tell me your name and how old you are?
- 2) Tell me about your current school status at the community college?
- 3) Tell me about the place you live at now; how is it similar or different from the neighborhood you grew up in?
- 4) What was it like growing up in this neighborhood? What types of people lived there?
- 5) Did you get along with the other kids in your neighborhood? Can you tell me about the close friends you had growing up?
- 6) Tell me about your parent(s). What were/are they like?
- 7) What is your family ancestry?
- 8) How would your parents identify themselves racially? Do you identify in the same way?

- 9) If given a choice, how would your parent(s) best identify (Not Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish Origin) (Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano) (Puerto Rican) (Cuban) (Something else not Mentioned Here)?
- 10) How would you describe your financial background growing up (Lower Income Bracket) (Lower to Middle Class Bracket) (Middle Class Bracket) (Upper Middle Class Bracket) (Higher Income Bracket)? What circumstances in your childhood make you identify with this bracket?
- 11) Do you think your parent(s) viewed females different than males while raising you? What experiences or events make you say this?
- 12) Are there any personal viewpoints that you do not share with your parent(s) (As an example, viewpoints related to race/racism, ethnicity, immigration policy, gender in/equality, appropriate gender roles for females/males, marriage or non-marriage, childbearing, religion or non-religion, Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay/Homosexual/Transgendered issues, political parties or other political views)? Can you tell me a little bit more about why you and your parent(s) differ on these viewpoints?
- 13) Can you tell me about your dating experiences in the past? Have you ever dated someone outside of your racial or ethnic group? How was this experience for you?
- 14) How do you feel about the way things currently are in the United States in relation to issues such of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and gay and/or heterosexual spouse/partner equality? Do you think things are getting better or worse over time?

15) As a female community college student, what dreams and/or aspirations do you have for your future? What do you think others (your parents, spouse/partner, friends, outside family members, teachers, larger society) expect of you?

**Interview Conclusion Statement:** Is there anything else you would like to add to your interview that I did not ask you about? Do you have any questions of me before we bring this interview to a close?

I appreciate your assistance; you have been a great help. In addition to the extra-credit points your instructor will be giving you in class, please also accept this \$20 bookstore gift card as a token of my appreciation. If you think of any questions that you want to ask me about, you can reach me at (505) 720-7207 or via e-mail at ssantillanes@gmail.com.

[Interview participants will be given the above exit information in hardcopy format for their personal records.]

Will you please verify your phone number, physical address and e-mail address for me?

Thanks once again for your help.

## **Part II (Interview Session #2)**

[Note: Session #2 will be a follow-up interview session that will revisit or further expand on the issues or themes that were raised in interview Session #1.]

Appendix C

About the Women in the Study

<b>Fictional Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/Ethnic Identity</b>	<b>Years in Community College (During time of Interviews)</b>	<b>Generational Status in U.S.—1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>Parents' Income Status</b>
Sunshine	21	Hispanic	2 years	3	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Modesta	29	Mexican/Mexican-American	3 years	1	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Sasha	19	Latina	1 year	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Trella	21	Hispanic	1 year	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Malita	19	Hispanic	1 year	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Alegria	21	Latina	4 years	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Anna	19	Mexican-American	1 year	1	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Alameda	19	Hispanic	1 year	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Lourdes	25	Hispanic	3 years	1	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual

					income)
Cari	21	Hispanic	2 years	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Elsa	22	Hispanic	2 years	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Elena	26	Hispanic	3.5 years	3	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Carletta	22	Hispanic	1 year	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Katia	22	Hispanic	3 years	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Natalia	26	Hispanic	4 years	3	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Felisa	26	Hispanic	2.5 years	2	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Engarcia	19	Mexican-American	1 year	1	Working-Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Nelia	23	Latina	2 years	2	Working- Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
Florita	20	Hispanic	1 year	3	Working- Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)



Luz	20	Hispanic	1 .5 years	2	Working- Poor (<\$25,000 annual income)
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