

5-7-2015

Blood from Blood and Earth from Earth: Examining Cultural Identity in Second and Third Generation Hispanic Americans

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BLOOD FROM BLOOD AND EARTH FROM EARTH
Examining Cultural Identity in Second and Third Generation Hispanic Americans

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2015

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ABSTRACT

To what extent does a Mexican American identify with Mexico? With the U.S.? How are these identities formed? Through a series of semi-structured interviews with second- and third-generation descendants of migrants emigrating from seven Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, I explore what it means to be Hispanic American. I begin by examining the informants' perceptions of boundaries between the broad Hispanic and American ethnic groups and their self-defined positions relative to those boundaries. Having established this position, I then analyze the impact of external conceptions of authenticity and access to "ethnic raw materials" in their construction of this ethnic identity. Findings suggest 1) that informants as a whole consider the boundary between Hispanic and American significantly blurred, and 2) that the positive impact of interaction with cultural resources outweighs informants' relatively slight negative experience with challenges to authenticity, the latter of which are, in many cases, constructive motivators.

Keywords: Ethnic Identity, Hispanic Americans, Ethnography, Social Boundaries, Assimilation, Immigration

*Dedicated to
my mother,
Dr. Vicki Berling,
for teaching me that the only thing a girl should have more of than shoes is books,
and
my late grandfather,
Ira Culbreth,
for teaching Dad to teach me that education is the only thing that can never be taken
away from you*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people without whom this project would never have been possible. I am grateful first and foremost to the men and women who participated in my study, giving of their time and insight without ever asking for anything in return. If it weren't for your selflessness, there would be no "thesis" to speak of. I hope the pages to come make you proud.

I am equally grateful to my advisor, Dr. Kate Hudepohl, who took me under her wing on a leap of faith. Without her openness to adventure and willingness to walk me through the more detailed aspects of ethnography, I would still be wandering aimlessly through the halls of FAC, unsigned project proposal form in hand. Thank you for believing in me and putting up with all my changes in plans. I've been lucky to have you.

I owe thanks also to several additional members of the WKU community who have impacted me in one way or another during my time here. Thank you to the other members of my committee, Drs. Jeffrey Samuels and Wolfgang Brauner, for your support of me as a student and of scholarship in general. To Dr. Sonia Lenk, thanks for your confidence in my dreams, and to Ms. Yang Liu, thanks for being a great teacher and an even better friend. To WKU Anthropology alumna and my dear friend Susy Solorza, thanks for being a great source of insight and my idea "sounding board." To the Honors

College, Office of Scholar Development, and Office of Study Abroad and Global Learning, thanks for helping me live my old dreams and find new ones along the way. It's been a crazy ride.

Finally, I must extend my most heartfelt appreciation to my family, whose unconditional love and loyalty have gotten me through what has at times been a rough four years. Thanks to Christy for seeing the best in me, to Jenny for keeping me grounded, to Dad for making me feel important, to Kathy for laughing at my jokes, to Matt for being unfailingly loyal, to Bobby for putting up with my messiness, and to Luke and Lydia for reminding me what really matters. Mom, there are no words. Without your relentless love, honesty, and conviction, I quite simply wouldn't be here.

I am who I am because of all of you.

VITA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project grew out of a friendship. In the fall of 2011, the week before the start of my first semester of college, I met Susy Solorza during sorority recruitment at Western Kentucky University. Though wholly unfamiliar with her family life or upbringing, when she mentioned that she was Mexican American, I assumed she meant this identity in the symbolic sense. In my mind, her experience as part of the migrant second generation was, by default, similar to that of my half-Thai cousins, whose “Thainess” extended about as far as making the occasional trip to a Thai resort and begrudgingly obliging questions from their peers about why they were so “tan.” Like them, Susy seemed as American as I was: she donned the same t-shirt-and-no-makeup style to class, called her peers “dude” more often than not, and spent her weekends at sorority meetings discussing football games and Homecoming banners.

As we grew closer, though, I found myself confused and frustrated with some of the things Susy did. I couldn’t understand why she would choose to drive two hours each way to watch her little brother play soccer in the rain on a Wednesday night instead of watching a movie with me in town, or why she seemed to always find it

necessary to bring her now-husband along any time we made plans together. I mean, I loved my family, too, but wasn't that a little bit...extreme?

It wasn't until I finally got to meet what Susy aptly calls her "big fat Mexican family" (*fat* being of figurative use) after she graduated nearly two years later that it all made sense. As a woman with a notoriously big and loud family of my own, I can convincingly say that being a fly on the wall at a Nevarez party takes the idea to a whole new level. That night, after I spent hours dancing to *norteño* music with her cowboy-boot-wearing cousins; struggled to understand line dancing instructions blurted by her aunts in a chorus of Spanish; and filled up on what I'm fairly certain was about a hundred homemade *polvorones*, I realized how wrong I'd been about Susy's ethnicity. Susy was as American as I—that much was true—but what I hadn't realized was that she was also just as Mexican as if she'd been born and raised in Chihuahua.

My failure to understand what, exactly, Susy meant when she said she was Mexican American is a personal example of the relevance of this study. As the fastest-growing minority group, accounting for 56% of all United States population growth in the first decade of the new millennium (Latino Branding Power, "Hispanics in the U.S. Are..."), and one-sixth of the overall resident population, Hispanics are influencing American society in increasingly significant ways. Around 60% of the 50.5 million Hispanics living in the U.S. were born here, and despite increasing Hispanic immigration levels in recent periods, the native-born population claims an increasingly larger share of the overall Hispanic population. This trend isn't likely to decline any time soon; Hispanics are the largest immigrant group in most U.S. states, with Mexicans alone

claiming the top spot in 33. Furthermore, Hispanics as a whole are young compared to the rest of the American population: the median age of Hispanics, at 27 years, “is a full decade lower than that of the U.S. overall” demographic (Manuel Krogstad, “11 Facts”), and the number of Hispanics younger than 18 increased by a margin 96% higher than that of the non-Hispanic under-18 population from 1993 to 2013. Notably, the median age of native-born Hispanics is considerably younger than that of the foreign-born, at 18 and 40 years, respectively. If Hispanic social, political, economic and cultural influence is strong now, it surely will become even more prevalent in the coming decades and will be led above all by the later generations¹ (Manuel Krogstad).

As this group becomes increasingly important to the overall sociocultural structure of American society, so, too, does understanding its values, norms, and customs. Like Susy, many members of this group identify to varying degrees with both Hispanic and American cultures; also like Susy, many consider themselves both fully American and fully Hispanic. As such, when interacting with members of this group, it is easy for those unfamiliar with Hispanic American culture to unknowingly ignore any cultural differences that might inform those interactions. The role my own cultural incompetence played in my initial misconception of Susy demonstrates this possibility.

This study attempts to understand that cultural context. By analyzing how Hispanic Americans both construct and perceive their ethnic identity as expressed through their own words, I hope to shed light on what it means to be a Hispanic

¹For an explanation of my use of the term *later generation* in this work, see page 13.

American. Perhaps in so doing, I might save another pair of friends the same misunderstanding.

Assimilation and Identity: An Overview of Scholarly Perspectives

To be able to properly discuss the degree and formation of migrants' identification with one or more cultures, one must first understand the relationship between identities at the individual and social levels and how each is complicated by the very nature of the immigration process. Cultural identity as defined by Bernardo Cantens is "a form of social identity based on and determined by an individual's lived experiences among a group of people and her participation in the group's shared properties" (169). Due to the fluid and subjective nature of culture itself, these properties may vary across time, space, and individual, but, Cantens notes, they often include traditions, customs, language and values. The immigration context inherently complicates the process of cultural identity-building in the sense that it expands both the range of social participation expected of an individual and the social framework through which she is expected to perceive social interactions. The degree to which an individual is able and willing to meet these expectations—and why—are topics that have long been the domain of assimilation studies.

Countless studies have been conducted on immigrant assimilation and identity in the United States, with no shortage focusing on the Hispanic diaspora more specifically. Though scholarly theory on the assimilation has continuously evolved over the generations, Waters and Jiménez note that the fundamental question considered as the

starting point to measuring assimilation has remained constant: “How different or similar to other Americans are immigrants and their children in terms of socioeconomic standing, residential segregation, language use, and intermarriage” (106)? These four categories and their related subcategories can be seen as the primary indicators used to evaluate the level of assimilation of a group in the scholarly context.

Tanya Golash-Boza notes that in traditional assimilation theory, the core assumption is that at some point down the line of descendants, migrant generations will eventually lose all non-symbolic ties with their family’s original place of origin. This assimilation is assumed to be so complete as to result in their becoming “unhyphenated” Americans, identifying solely as “American” and omitting all reference to any other ethnicity (431). (The allusion to hyphenation references the trend of labeling many later-generation migrants by preceding the term *American* with the demonym common to the migrant’s familial place of origin, joining the two terms with a hyphen, e.g., Mexican-American.) Furthermore, at the time of this theory, assimilation was not a mere expectation; it was an obligation. The process of assimilation necessarily carried “the expectation that immigrant groups should swallow intact the existing Anglo-American culture while simultaneously disgorging their own” (Alba and Nee 17).

However, many modern scholars, Golash-Boza among them, note that the view of assimilation as both inevitable and necessary has since changed for two primary reasons: 1) ability or inability to assimilate has proven practically dependent on racialized cultural views of belonging, and 2) an ideological shift in mainstream American culture regarding the desirability of assimilation itself has expanded the

options presented to migrants as they negotiate their ethnicity. Kevin Johnson echoes the conclusions of many scholars by pointing out that the “idealistic vision” of assimilation “has proven to be more problematic for people of color than for previous European immigrants” (1279). Indeed, as migration patterns have shifted to include increasingly fewer white ethnics of European origin and more non-white ethnics from Latin America and Asia, scholarship, too, has begun to note that because American society “thrusts a racial identity on minorities of certain phenotypes” (1286), this limits the prospect of assimilation for migrants displaying that phenotype. This is due to a combination of migrants’ own internalization of this racialization and because of the dominant society’s refusal to accept as “true” or “unhyphenated” those Americans who do not meet this phenotypic “rule.” Where later-generation white migrants largely have the freedom to choose whether their ethnic identity will remain an integral part of their overall self-concept or become symbolic, this is often not the case for their non-white counterparts (Jiménez 164).

Meanwhile, others note that the very connotation of the word *assimilation* itself has shifted, reflecting a greater ideological shift in mainstream understanding and perception of cultural diversity. Alba and Nee assert that mere mention of the term “seems to conjure up a bygone era, when the multicultural nature of American society was not comprehended, let alone respected, and there appeared, at least to white Americans, to be a unitary and unquestioned American way of life” (1). The contemporary era, in contrast, has presumably demonstrated a shift in values, whereby “Americanization now stands alongside the formidable ideological contender of

multiculturalism, which values, however superficially in some cases, a strong connection to one's ethnic origins" (Jiménez 103).

Scholars have begun to embrace this idea of a "multicultural" framework to migrant identity construction and adaptation, devoting more and more resources to studying what factors determine whether or not later generations will form such a connection. These studies often analyze identity in terms of ethnic boundary formation, or "the social construction of the boundaries that define [ethnic] groups" (Jiménez 102). The theory behind the idea of boundary formation is that ethnic categories, as constructed rather than biological or natural concepts, "result from human interaction and are shaped by social, political, and economic processes" (101-102). These processes are a fundamental part of determining what forms the basis of group identity and thereby the contours of group divisions. As the assimilation process unfolds, boundaries between ethnic groups can become *crossed, blurred, or shifted*. Boundary crossing occurs on an individual level: a particular individual "moves from one group to another without any real change to the boundary itself" (Alba and Nee 60). Unless this is done on a large scale, the overall social structure framing ethnicity remains unaltered. Boundary blurring, meanwhile, happens if "the social profile of a boundary [becomes] less distinct, and the clarity of the social distinction involved [becomes] clouded" (60). In essence, this can be seen as the creation of "a new racial/ethnic zone" (61) characterized by less rigid ethnic division. Finally, boundary shifting is the process whereby a boundary is repositioned "so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other: former outsiders are thereby transformed into insiders" (61).

The relative centrality of each ethnic identity to an individual's overall self-concept could thus be seen as a reflection of his or her position with respect to the boundary.

Bernardo Cantens notes that "membership in cultural groups depends on both external and internal factors" (179) and "is a matter of degree" (169). In order to understand how an individual negotiates his or her position with respect to the ethnic boundary, then, there are two primary factors that must be considered: externally-imposed *restrictions* to entrance on either side of the boundary, and individual *desire* to be included on either side of the boundary. External restrictions to group entrance can range from benign skepticism of the authenticity of an individual's claim to group membership, whether originating within the group itself or reflecting an outsider perspective of the group characteristics, to outright refusal of entrance, perhaps in the form of discrimination fueled by nativist sentiment (Jiménez 2010). The expression of such external restrictions is dependent upon their being perceived as necessary, i.e. that individuals who are "unwelcome" in the group claim membership within it—the desire for entry.

Tomás Jiménez, in his study on Mexican American identity construction, analyzes the factors that determine whether or not an individual might make this claim. He asserts that a crucial determinant of an individual's desire to claim an ethnic identity is his or her access to what he and other scholars call "ethnic raw materials"—the "'ethnic stuff' commonly referred to as culture" (102). Because racial and ethnic identities are constructed, "the strength of attachment that people have to an identity rooted in ethnicity depends in large part on the availability of ethnically linked resources for their

construction of that identity” (102). In essence, the frequency and significance of the opportunities presented to an individual to participate in a culture are crucial to determining whether or not he or she will seek to claim the associated ethnicity.

Relating this desire for entry to external restrictions thereto, Jiménez goes on to note that even if an individual desires to assert a particular identity, his or her ability to do so may be hindered if others express doubt regarding the authenticity of that claim. Individuals often face “a stringent authentication process that requires them to display [certain] characteristics” in order to be perceived as an “authentic” member of a group (165). These characteristics are those enclosed within the ethnic boundary of the group and, as previously noted, can be determined differently from in-group and out-group perspectives. In the case of Mexican Americans, Jiménez discusses three factors particularly salient in conceptions of authenticity: language use, styles and tastes, and perceived “foreignness” (164-172). The first two, he notes, are characteristics particularly important to “insider” conceptions of authenticity: whether or not other Mexicans perceived as valid Mexican Americans’ claims to “Mexican-ness” often depended on whether or not the later generation individuals were able to speak Spanish (and with what accent) and/or liked typical Mexican cultural products, such as Mexican food and music. Perception of “foreignness,” meanwhile, was largely outsider-imposed: because non-Mexicans conflated conceptions of what it means to be Mexican American with their perceptions of recent Mexican immigrants, their judgment of Mexican Americans’ authenticity as Mexicans depended on whether or not those individuals possessed characteristics they considered typical of Mexican immigrants, such as dark

hair and skin or the ability to speak Spanish. Because identity is itself a fluid concept, perceptions of authenticity are inherently both formative and reactive parts of the identity-building process. How strongly later-generation individuals ultimately identified with each ethnic group could therefore be seen as the end result of their reconciliation of desired identity and others' reactions to those claims.

Structure of the Present Study

My goal at the onset of this project was to determine how well Hispanic Americans identified with the cultures both of their family's place of origin and of the United States. I have constructed my own approach to answering this question within this "boundary negotiation" framework, modeling my study off of the theories of Dr. Jiménez. The objectives were two-fold: identify *how* my informants identified, and determine *why* that was the case. To decipher the *how* of identity, I sought to discover two things: what characteristics informants perceived as drawing the boundary between groups and how well they felt they met their own qualifications for membership in each of those groups. Once I figured this out, I moved on to the *why*, examining the relative roles of access to the "ethnic raw materials" of each culture and challenges to claims of group membership in the informants' construction of identity.

Where Jiménez focused on later-generation Americans of Mexican descent, I was interested in Hispanic Americans from all Spanish-speaking countries. Furthermore, where Jiménez was interested mainly in examining his informants' identification with Mexican culture alone, I took a broader approach, focusing on construction of both the

Hispanic and American identities. This interest in the construction of an American identity, I thought, made the second generation the most relevant, as this group as a whole is implicitly considered by many scholars to be in a more transitional or “insecure” state of identity formation (Jiménez 126). This relative insecurity on a macro level is useful in studying negotiation of boundaries *between* two groups (as opposed to negotiation of the boundary *enclosing* a particular group, which Jiménez studied by analyzing attachment solely to country of origin). For this reason, I have chosen to focus primarily on the second generation,² although I also gained valuable insight from one third-generation individual.

The remainder of this text contains my findings and interpretations of those findings. In Chapter 2, I discuss the methodology I used to gather information, including a brief profile of my informants. In Chapter 3, I discuss the *how* of identity, outlining first informants’ perception of the boundary between American and Hispanic identity and then their self-identified position relative to that boundary. Chapter 4 deals with the *why* of this identity, analyzing the relative roles of conceptions of authenticity and contact with ethnic raw materials in identity formation. In Chapter 5, I discuss my conclusions that the positive impact of contact with “ethnic stuff” was significantly more important in my informants’ identity creation than was the negative impact of challenges to authenticity.

²For my understanding of the often ambiguous term *second generation*, see page 13.

Note on Terminology

As I will discuss in Chapter 3, terms and names are a particularly important part of identity construction, making them an equally important part of this study. For this reason, I find it crucial that, prior to outlining my conclusions on Hispanic identity, I begin by explaining what I mean by certain terms that I will use throughout the text of this document and why I have chosen them. First and foremost, I must discuss my choice to use the term *Hispanic* rather than *Latino* when referring to my informants. As I also note in Chapter 3, there is considerable debate in the scholarly community over the propriety of the term *Hispanic*. Indeed, so fervent was this community's denunciation of this term that, in preliminary drafts, I referred to this as a study examining solely Latino identity. However, and as I will discuss throughout, most of my informants indicated a preference for the term *Hispanic* for a variety of reasons, and though a few did consider *Latino* preferable to *Hispanic*, none found the latter to be offensive or demeaning. Thus, in an attempt to respect their preferences, and to clarify that this study does, in fact, concern only those Latino migrants whose country of origin is Spanish-speaking, I will most frequently use the term *Hispanic* to mean people whose heritage is in a Spanish-speaking country. This will include both migrants of any generation, as well as non-migrant Hispanics—those who are still living in a Spanish-speaking country. Where it is necessary to clarify the migratory status of a particular individual or group, I will do so by referring to the generation of migration in which I consider them to be.

However, the concept of generations is itself a complex matter and thus requires a clarification of its own. As Oropesa and Landale note, though outlining who falls into various immigrant generational categories should, in theory, be simple, in practice, it is not always so clear-cut. This is particularly so in the case of child migrants, who, though born and partially raised in another country, also spend a considerable part of their formative years in the country of immigration. As such, “the term *second generation* sometimes refers to both the children of immigrants born in the United States and those brought here at an early age. Some would include children brought here at older ages as well” (432; italics added). As this child migration status applies to nearly half of the informants in my study, I would like to clarify here that I am using the term *second generation* to include those informants who immigrated to the United States with their parents as children. This encompasses all but one of my informants, who, by virtue of her parents’ having been born in the US, I will refer to as in the third generation. Additionally, though the term *later generation* is often meant to denote individuals of the third generations and beyond (excluding first generation immigrants and their second generation children), because this study often relates the second generation experience to the status and perception of first generation immigrants, I have found it more useful to use the term *later generation* to include generations from the second and beyond.

Another term I will use often is the term *American*. Like *Hispanic*, this term is also controversial when applied to mean people from the United States as opposed to including all people originating in the Americas. Obviously, this controversy applies

particularly in this case, as the foreign-born families of my informants have a strong claim to inclusion as Americans. I would like to note that I do personally consider as American all those identifying as such and try to avoid conflating *America* with the United States in my own life. However, Tomás Jiménez echoes my frustration when he notes that “there is no other widely recognized, parsimonious adjective or noun to refer to [people originating in the United States]” (303); thus, for the sake of clarity, I will still use the term *American* here to refer to the U.S. citizenry. In that vein, I would like to finally clarify that I consider all those informants who identified themselves as American to be precisely that. However, to avoid confusion resulting from different informants’ having preferred a variety of terms, and because I reference nationality primarily in a context of contrast (i.e. to show how particular Hispanic nationality may factor into informants’ overall Hispanic identity), when I refer to particular informants’ nationality, I will leave the *American* to be implied, indicating only their Hispanic nationality. In most cases, I will indicate this nationality in parentheses following introduction of each informant in an attempt to avoid using it as an overgeneralizing label.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is qualitative in nature, and information was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews complemented by participant observation. Beginning in late October 2014 and over the course of the following five months, I conducted interviews with sixteen adult informants with familial origin in one or more of the following seven Spanish-speaking Latin American countries: Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Colombia. The study had previously been granted expedited approval by Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), required for all research on human subjects. A digital copy of the IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix C.

The interview questions were open-ended in nature, designed to enable participants to respond in the way they deemed most relevant. (For a list of sample questions, see Appendix B.) Interviews were primarily conducted face-to-face and one-on-one; however, for logistical reasons complicated by having to meet out of town for the interview, 2 of the 16 participants, brother and sister Paulina and Adrián Durón, were interviewed together following a focus group-like structure. One interview was

conducted via Skype and recorded, with the informant's prior consent, using a free computer recording software downloaded to my personal laptop. Each informant was interviewed once. Interviews were an average length of 39 minutes, with the shortest lasting 22 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 7 minutes, for a total of nearly ten hours of interview time. All interviews were recorded using a Zoom H2 Handy portable audio recorder loaned to me by the WKU Department of Folk Studies and Anthropology and were later transcribed using a free computer software also downloaded to my personal laptop.

To locate informants, I relied mainly on prior relationships and community networking. Seven of the 15 informants were friends or acquaintances that I knew prior to beginning the study, and three were friends of friends or friends of family with whom I had no prior connections. The remaining five participants were recruited at a meeting of the Western Kentucky University Hilltopper Organization for Latin American Students (HOLAS), whose president, Salvador Hernández, graciously permitted me to give a speech outlining the purpose and nature of the study and to pass around a sign-up sheet for interested members. (He also signed up himself and proved a source of great insight chronicled in the following pages.)

Of the informants interviewed, 9 were of Mexican descent, 2 of Cuban descent, 1 of Honduran descent, 2 of Puerto Rican descent, 2 of Salvadorian descent,³ 1 of Colombian descent, and 1 of Guatemalan descent. (Note that this adds to a total

³While the term *Salvadoran* is the term perhaps more widely used to denote people originating in El Salvador, because my informants have preferred the (also accepted) term *Salvadorian*, I will use that throughout. The same is true of the term *Ecuadorian*.

greater than the actual number of participants given that two participants had familial origins in more than one Hispanic country.) Nine of the 16 informants were born in the United States; the remaining 7 were born abroad but immigrated to the US at the age of 10 or younger. Fifteen of 16 were second generation⁴ Hispanics, and one was third generation. Fifteen of the sixteen informants also were between 18 and 24 years of age, with the remaining informant being of middle age. Ten of the 16 were current undergraduate students at WKU; one was a high school student; three had college degrees (both from WKU and elsewhere); and one had a high school diploma. Four informants had no direct connections with the university or the state of Kentucky. As all informants consented to the use of their real names in the published version of the study, I will be referring to them accordingly throughout. A more detailed representation of the demography of study informants can be found in Appendix A.

Participant observation was conducted to gather complementary data. I interacted with Hispanic and Hispanic American cultures by attending various cultural and community events, including the Bowling Green International Festival, an HOLAS meeting, a talk by Ecuadorian American visual artist Sandra Fernández, a “New Neighbors” presentation by the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services of the Bowling Green Municipal Government, a performance by Mexican-American comedian Gilbert Esquivel, and a meeting of the AMIGOS Resource Network of Bowling Green, Kentucky. I also conducted informal interviews with three leaders of the Hispanic community: Leyda Becker, International Communities Liaison for the City of

⁴As defined by this study; see page 13.

Bowling Green; Susana Solorza, Director of Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Diocese of Owensboro; and Dr. Sonia Lenk, Associate Professor of Spanish at WKU and Hispanic community activist. Finally, I collected information through Hispanic-oriented social media forums, such as the Facebook group “Being Latino,” and through the websites of prominent Hispanic advocacy organizations, such as the National Council of La Raza. My participant observation experiences largely served to provide better context through which to structure my interviews rather than as a source of primary data.

Once I had gathered my interview data, I analyzed it using an open coding process that separated information into thematic categories and subcategories. After transcribing all interviews, I printed hard copies of the transcriptions and reviewed each carefully. Having identified the core themes in the data and the particular categories and subcategories to be addressed within those themes, I went back through the transcripts and marked excerpts with phrases indicating the category or categories to which they related. After doing this for all transcripts, I created a list of four main categories—terms and definitions, boundary identification, internal factors in identity construction, and external factors in identity construction—which I then separated into subcategories (for example, “importance of language” and “perceptions of discrimination”). I then listed the page numbers of all excerpts relating to each subtheme and consulted the list as I went about writing on each specific topic.

As you will see, my discussion of the findings of my study relies heavily on the use of extended quotes from informants. This can be seen as a reflection of my

emphasis on establishing an informant-driven approach to both the researching and the writing process: My primary goal in collecting and discussing my findings has been to allow the informants to determine the issues most important to them and to express those issues through their own voices. In accordance with this stress on presenting an accurate and complete representation of the informants and my dialogues with them, I have chosen to quote them *verbatim*—I have included exactly what they said, exactly *how* they said it, including all filler words (such as *um* or *like*), repetitions, hesitations and mid-sentence modifications, colloquial expressions (such as *gonna* instead of *going to*), and, to the extent possible, non-verbal communications (such as laughter).

It is important to note here that the scholarly community is divided on the merits of including these filler words and other “non-essential” communications, as many scholars consider them unnecessary utterances serving only to hinder readability. However, I tend to disagree with this view, favoring, instead, the following opinion expressed by journalist Mike Wise: “I just have a hard time cleaning up anyone's quotes. I just feel it robs people of their personality. And if I'm not capturing who the person is through the rhythm and cadence of their words, I'm not telling the readers who they are” (qtd. in Howell). Clark and Fox Tree note that many scholars claim that “at least some performance additions [i.e. filler words or modifications] are genuine parts of language” (74) or, in other cases, are “nonlinguistic signals” (76) that demonstrate the nature of speech as “an on-going performance” (78) through which speakers articulate their thoughts *as they are constructing them*. Indeed, I favor the idea that including modifications and fillers is useful in showing how “committed” the informants are to the

ideas they are expressing or perhaps even how intricately they have considered the concepts at hand in the past, making them of particular value in identity studies. Furthermore, I disagree with the assertion, propagated by some, that inclusion thereof highlights some sort of speech “deficiency” that may humiliate informants. Rather, I see these “twists and turns” of articulation as a natural part of everyday life that helps humanize informants for the reader and consider their inclusion important to my attempt to provide an accurate portrayal of informants’ own voices. Thus, to the best of my ability, I have included a true *verbatim* account of our encounters.

The main methodological issue to note in this study is one that is a continuous challenge in the study of migrant ethnic identity and is summed up well by Ross Douthat: “subsequent generations become less likely to identify with their ancestral identity, thus throwing off survey data that relies on ethnic self-identification to track immigrant assimilation” (“The Great Assimilation Debate”). In other words, because locating later generation migrants inherently depends on knowing their migration status, and this status may not be publicly known if those migrants do not choose to make it so, it is easier to locate informants who *do* identify with their ethnic roots than those who do not, potentially skewing analysis. This problem may be exacerbated by my having recruited several informants by means of a Hispanic organization, as their membership therein inherently proves recognition of this identity. However, as this is an ethnography seeking merely to recount the stories of those informants who were gracious enough to share them and does not aim to make any generalizations about the Hispanic American population as a whole in the process, this bias might well be

considered only mildly relevant. Notwithstanding, it may be good to keep in mind as you proceed throughout the text.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TIES THAT BIND ESTABLISHING THE HISPANIC/AMERICAN BOUNDARY

I noted previously the nature of ethnic categories as fluid social constructs with boundaries prone to shifting and blurring. Because of the subjective nature of these categories, understanding individuals' relationships with them relies on first understanding those individuals' conceptions of their boundaries. In order to know *why* an individual identifies as Hispanic, American, or both, we must first know *what* she perceives these terms to mean—what characteristics she considers pinnacle to making a legitimate claim to belonging in that group. Furthermore, and as I will discuss below, the very process of defining a boundary can also provide insight on the definer's own perceived place along it, thereby being an illuminating activity in and of itself. For these reasons, I begin my discussion of informants' identity-building process by outlining the boundaries of *hispanidad* as seen through their eyes.

Choosing Terms

Before asking informants to outline their conceptions of the Hispanic/American boundary divisions, I considered it crucial to figure out what terms the informants

themselves gave to the people within those boundaries. Understanding the terms used to label a group can, in many cases, be as important as understanding the characteristics associated with the group. Indeed, “names both signal and affect sensibilities – they both respond to and shape social reality” (Martín Alcoff 398). Importantly, the terms used to categorize a group can (and often do) differ depending on the user’s position relative to the group (i.e. inside or outside). When these differences occur, they can be the cause of frustrations ranging from benign confusion to outright hostility, as in the case of malicious terms such as slurs. In the Hispanic American context, *Hispanic* and *Latino/a* are terms of particular interest. The term *Hispanic* is the subject of much scholarly and popularly debate, so much so that it has even been “barred from use in the *Los Angeles Times* because of strong opposition” (395). Those in favor of the word cite its being a convenient and straightforward means of denoting all people who speak Spanish. Opponents, most of them *Latino/a*⁵, assert that the term, created by the U.S. government for Census purposes, “homogenizes class experiences and neglects many different linguistic, racial, and ethnic groups within the different [Latino/a] nationalities themselves” (Oboler 9).

Because of this debate, I was particularly interested in informants’ perceptions of the term *Hispanic*, expecting them, like the voices in the scholarly and artistic literature, to prefer the term *Latino/a*. Indeed, a few did, although their reflections could best be classified as a positive preference for *Latino/a* rather than an outright

⁵As an exception to my general intention, outlined on page 12, to use the term *Hispanic*, I have used the term *Latino/a* in this case out of respect for the subject in questions’ dislike of the alternative.

denunciation of *Hispanic*. Among them was Susana Solorza (Mexican), who, when asked how she felt about both terms, responded:

Um, so I work in Hispanic Ministries for the Catholic Church, and, um, the word Hispanic, um, was a...a word kind of...not made up, but used by the American government in the Census in the 1980s. So, um, it just kind of groups people that speak Spanish that were here in the States. Um, so I...I can see where here in the U.S., people can identify with that term, just because I hear it in my ministry a lot, and that's how we're grouped here in the United States. Um, but I can...so I mean, I can identify with it, but it's not the first thing I...if someone ever asks me, like you did, that's not the first term I come up with. Um, Latina, I like the word Latina because, um, I feel like it's an empowering word. I don't know. When I hear it in, in literature or in, uh, pop culture, any reference to it, really, I feel like it's always a positive, empowering term. Um, and I like that it groups, um, Spanish-speaking women of...with a lot of different stories, um, from a lot of different countries and that were maybe either immigrated to the U.S. themselves or born in a different country and then immigrated here, um, or that were born here, but, like me, have been raised in these two cultures (Solorza 2015).

Hector Corcino (Puerto Rican) agreed with Susana about *Latino/a* being preferable to *Hispanic*, also noting its Census origin. He tells me:

Uh, well, I...I could be wrong on this, but I'm pretty sure the word Hispanic is actually, like, an American-created, uh, term for categorizing Latinos for the Census, and so, therefore, I don't really prefer it. Not that I think it's a bad word or anything, but I just use Latino (Corcino 2014).

Notably, neither found the term *Hispanic* directly offensive; rather, their mildly negative perceptions of it existed primarily in juxtaposition to the more favorable term *Latino/a*. Indeed, later, when, remembering her preference for *Latino/a*, I corrected myself for referring to Susana as *Hispanic*, she reassured me:

No, I mean, you can use the word. I use the word Hispanic all the time. I, my, position...my title is Director of Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministries, so I, no, it doesn't offend me (Solorza 2015).

Other informants also indicated a general avoidance of the word *Hispanic* but cited reasons other than its use in the Census. Francisco Serrano's (Salvadorian) aversion to the term stemmed from his associating it with the brutality of the Spanish conquest of his country:

Um, I guess I've kind of been reluctant to kinda identify as Hispanic because of the whole thing of like the...the Spanish ruling there, and I don't know, it doesn't sit right in my mind, like, knowing that the...they, like, they, they conquered El Salvador, and they took over and made practically all the natives there their slaves (Serrano 2014).

Ricardo Córdova (Mexican), meanwhile, spoke of the non-Hispanic community's misconstrued association of being Hispanic with being Mexican as grounds for his preference of the presumably more positive *Latino/a*. His sentiments echo the frustration of many informants, both Mexican and non-Mexican, who consistently complained of non-Hispanics' very common tendency to assume that people perceived to be Hispanic must inherently be Mexican. Ricardo began discussing his preference for the term *Latino/a* by discussing its association with Latin music, but when I asked if that was the main reason for his use of the term, he expanded:

Yeah, and also just because I, you know, Americans are really bad at just being like, "Oh, he looks Hispanic. He's Mexican." So everybody's really bad at that. I mean, I'm sure it's just gonna, you know, go away in a couple of generations, but right now, like, as I'm growing up, everybody's really bad at that. And I don't look Mexican, so whenever I hang out with my Latino friends, every...like, they say that everybody else is Mexican except for me, and I'm like, "Actually, nobody else [in this group] except for me is Mexican." So it's just a little awkward. So I just like to kinda skip over that and just kinda try to educate my friends and say that, you know, everybody's just Latino. Let's just try to keep it at that. It's a little bit easier for everybody else. And then, you know, if they actually care about not being so, I hate to say racist, but so, like, uninformed enough to know that, like, somebody's El Salvador...like, Salvadorian, you know, Ecuadorian, and it's just...everybody seems like the same, kind of like how they do it with the Asiatic, like, type of people. It's just like, oh, they just look Asian, and then everybody says you look Japanese or Chinese. It's like, no, it's just not the same. Once you've talked to somebody that's from there, it's just like, it's not really the same. [Laughs.] So

I just kinda wanna say Latino. Latino's a little bit better, well known, especially since Puerto Rico is kind of, um, a property of the U.S., so it's a little bit better to identify as a Latino rather than just Mexican, Honduran... (Córdova 2014).

One final argument presented against the term *Hispanic* was a matter of convenience. Several informants indicated a preference for their specific nationality over the terms *Hispanic* or *Latino* because, among other reasons, they felt that the latter terms were too ambiguous. When asked why he preferred the term *Cuban* over *Hispanic* or *Latino*—two terms with which he also identified—Cuban⁶ Miguel Acosta responded:

I think it's just more direct. I mean, if I had to think about it, saying Hispanic covers a lot of different types of Hispanics, different cultures [...] and all that, so being more direct. A lot of people around here [in South Florida] know Cubans, so I just throw out straight Cuban (Acosta 2015).

Third generation Marissa Webb (Mexican) shared Miguel's concern for being direct but compared the clarity of the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* instead. When asked why she preferred the former, she responded:

Latino doesn't bother me at all. It's just, uh, more specific. Um, I don't know. Instead of Latino, which is so generalized, Hispanic is more specific, and I feel like a lot of, um, Mexican Americans also identify more with Hispanic rather than Latino because Latino just is so overview, and I don't know. It's just kind of what I've picked up here at school and through my [Hispanic] organization (Webb 2014).

Interestingly, Marissa explains her preference for *Hispanic* as partially informed by the term's use by other Hispanics she knows, perhaps reflecting the role of intragroup conceptions of ethnicity in her own construction thereof. Illustrating

⁶Here, I have refrained from putting this informant's nationality in parentheses as a reflection of the importance of that nationality in contextualizing the informant's term preferences. I will do this for the same reason in similar cases throughout.

Marissa's point about the relative clarity of the term, many informants indicated that they used *Hispanic* precisely because they considered it more likely to be understood than other terms. Allan Moreno (Honduran), who identifies primarily as Hispanic without emphasizing his particular nationality, cited the comparative accessibility of *Hispanic* in popular discourse when asked whether or not he ever used the term *Latino*:

I do, but it is kind of like, Latino is more used in, like...it's kind of weird in a way. It doesn't, like, when you say it, [...] it's like, "I'm Latino," instead of like, "I'm Hispanic." People would recognize more the word Hispanic than Latino. And, I mean, it is an easy word, Latino, people know what [...] that means, but it's just like, Hispanic is used more, so therefore, that is what we, I, use. That is what I hear most of the time (Moreno 2014).

When describing the term's "weird" usage, I think Allan means to reference the phenomenon I myself outlined earlier of *Latino*'s use in the realm of art and literature as a deliberate means of protesting the term *Hispanic*. Phil Fernández (Cuban) agrees with Allan's assertion that the term is better recognized:

I will generally say, uh, Cuban American. I mean I will sometimes say Hispanic or Latino, but that's also because, um, to make it, maybe easier for people to understand. But for the most part, yeah, I mean, I, I consider myself Cuban American more than anything else (Fernández 2015).

Many informants preferred the term *Hispanic* for reasons beyond its presumably being easier for non-Hispanics to understand. Gilberto Martínez (Mexican), again alluding to the role of external factors in the construction of ethnicity, discusses the role of institutionalization of the term. When asked, "If people ask you what your ethnic identity is, what [do] you say?" he responds:

Um, well, I, I'll say Hispanic or Latino. I mean, like, the options where, where you're filling out applications, those are the options given, so I guess those are the options that I've learned to identify as (Martínez 2014).

Carolina Escobar, whose mother is from El Salvador and whose father is from Guatemala, liked the term *Hispanic* because she felt it prevented her from having to choose between the two nationalities:

Carolina: [My parents] don't...they don't like...like I said, they don't like me choosing sides. Like, I don't like doing that, so they don't like it, either. They...they prefer me as Hispanic, so...Yeah, they don't really choose sides. Although...the cultures do mix together, so that's what makes me, like, all three of them [Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and American] (Escobar 2014).

In contrast, many informants, including several who also used the terms *Hispanic* or *Latino* intermittently, indicated a preference for the demonym associated with their specific Hispanic nationality above all. Mateo Sepulveda (Colombian) was among those who, when asked to define his ethnicity, spoke of this preference:

Um, Latino, Hispanic, Colombiano. Especially, like, my nationality is over anything else. That's for sure (Sepulveda 2015).

These responses indicate that a majority of informants considered their ethnicity to be a fluid concept—the terms they used to define themselves depended on the audience they were addressing. For many, this related back to the importance of clarity. However, in several other cases, informants spoke of their ethnic identity as a concept activated by perceived difference with that of their audience. When I mentioned Gilberto Martínez's prior mention of using the term *Hispanic*, this is the exchange that followed:

Gilberto: No, I don't, um, I don't really use the term Hispanic. You know, all right, this is something. I identify myself as a Hispanic, say, here in...in America. But if I'm talking to, let's say, say I travel. Say I go out, and I travel, say I go study abroad or...or I go on vacation to another country, like maybe somewhere in Europe or somewhere in Asia or something, I'll identify myself as an American.

CEC: Okay. Have you ever been abroad?

Gilberto: No. But when I see myself...I guess when I see myself, I see myself as an American, but when I identify with other people, I identify myself as...or, like, say here in the U.S., if you ask me, "What are you?" I'll say I'm Hispanic. But inside, I'm thinking, "I'm American." So I gave you the answer that I would give but I guess not the answer that I would relate myself to being. You know?

CEC: Okay, so do you feel like you have to...I guess depending on the context, you have to pick, kind of—you have to adjust your identity to the person that you're talking to?

Gilberto: Yeah.

CEC: Okay. What about when you're talking to other Hispanics? Do you still say you're Hispanic, or do you say that you're Mexican?

G: Uh, I say that I'm Mexican, yeah (Martínez 2014).

Paulina Durón (Mexican) had similar thoughts but spoke specifically of how this concept manifests within the Hispanic community itself:

I mean, here, I say I'm Mexican, but whenever I go to Mexico, I mean, I say I'm from America (P. Durón, 2014).

The responses of Paulina and other informants seem to prove that ethnic categorization, beyond just being a reflection of social boundary construction, also has the power to help shape this construction. The preference indicated by many informants for *Hispanic* on the basis of its being well-understood indicates the status of certain categories as institutionalized social constructions. Meanwhile, the widespread use in the artistic realm of the term *Latino/a* as a deliberate rejection of *Hispanic* illustrates that term's (arguably successful) intent to construct a new ethnic reality.

Establishing Belonging

Once I established informants' means of indicating one's status within the Hispanic ethnic boundary, I sought to identify how one came to belong within that boundary. Informants had a variety of perspectives on the issue of what makes someone Hispanic, but the "common denominator" among these views was overwhelmingly that being Hispanic necessitated a commitment to family values. When asked what people who are Hispanic have in common, Gilberto Martínez responded:

Oh, I think there's, um, and I think this is something that's really profound is that there are a lot of...well, family values are really strong within the Latino community. Family is really important, so the sense of, of family, having a sense of belongingness within your biological family is, is a really important thing. So I think having that sense of family is one thing that would define you as being someone [who] could identify with being Hispanic (Martínez 2014).

Carolina Escobar spoke of this sense of family values in a comparative sense, indicating that her own commitment to those values was a factor hindering her ability to identify with non-Hispanic Americans, whom she did not perceive to have a similar commitment:

Um, sometimes I do feel more Hispanic [than American], and that deals with my skin tone color, as well, and just the way that I've been raised is, like, a lot different from Americans. Like, for example, you [non-Hispanic Americans], once you turn 18, you're basically on your own almost. For us, it doesn't matter what age we are. Like, we're not saying that, oh, you're gonna be 30, and you're gonna be living with your parents still, but they are always there for, like, a backup for us, and they, like, never...they basically, we're like...Hispanics, I would define us as, like, a really...like a really close family. Like, our families are really close. And from what I've seen with white, they are close, but I feel like my family is a lot closer than other people (Escobar 2014).

Other informants agreed that values were an important part of *hispanidad* but spoke of a broadened value set. Several relayed a view that Hispanic culture was more open and friendly, particularly as compared to American culture. Ricardo Córdova

spoke of his stronger identification with Mexican culture than American culture because of a distaste for the latter's relative individualism:

It's what I knew as a kid; it's what I like the most. Just because the American culture's just a little bit colder. You know, I just...I like to be friendly. I really don't like to give people the cold shoulder, but it's almost expected here. Like, you walk [past somebody on the street], or if you met somebody...this is the craziest thing. Somebody can introduce me to somebody, and I talk to them for like five minutes, and then we split up, leave, whatever. I see them like a month later, have to walk straight past them, not even look at them, and they will do the same. It's like, really? Like, that's unnecessary. Like, why would you talk to somebody...like, I don't know, I feel like a friendship is better than just wasting your time talking to somebody, you know (Córdova 2014)?

Similarly, Gilberto Martínez, when asked why he felt he identified more as “just plain ‘American’” than as Hispanic, spoke of values of multiculturalism and tolerance:

Um, I think, I think it's the time period that, that we're living in...Um, there's a large amount of tolerance here in the U.S. compared to other countries in...in things that are even being debated, and we think, you know, they're huge deals, and which they are, uh, but there's a greater deal of tolerance in, like, sexual orientation and race equality and, you know, civil rights and things like that. Tolerance is huge, whereas, you know, [in] other countries, like maybe Latin American countries, there isn't much tolerance for things like abortion or...or sexual orientation or things like that. And so I feel like I [...] can see myself as an American in the sense that I can include, you know, different ideas and different ways of thinking, and I'm open to a melting pot, you know? Since America has been described as a melting pot, I'm open to imitate being a melting pot (Martínez 2014).

Alongside values, language also played a pivotal role in informants' discussion of belonging, but many had diverging opinions regarding that role. Most considered the ability to speak Spanish a crucial aspect of being able to fully identify with Hispanic cultures, even if not a defining factor. Carolina Escobar spoke of language as comprising an important difference between her relationships with Hispanic and non-Hispanic friends:

Um, there is a little bit of a difference, I feel, just because whenever we joke around, I can't...I feel like I can't joke around with my [...] non-Hispanic friends [like I can with] my

Hispanic friends. So I feel like just because I do kind of know the language, Spanish, a little bit, I can joke around with them in different ways. Like, say, jokes in Spanish with my Hispanic friends. And then if I try to say that in English, it doesn't really, like, match, so they wouldn't really get it (Escobar 2014).

Jessica Viñas (Mexican) even indicated being somewhat bothered when she met Hispanics who spoke no Spanish, perceiving their inability to do so as an indication of a lack of interest in their ethnic roots. For this reason, she encouraged her sisters, whom she fears are losing their Spanish, to speak the language more at home. When I asked Jessica why it was so important to her that her sisters speak Spanish, this dialogue ensued:

Jessica: Well, I just...it's important to me because I feel like if they don't speak Spanish, they're gonna be one of those people who are like, "Yeah, I'm Mexican, but I don't speak Spanish," and that's kind of like, I don't know, it kind of bothers me, especially if your parents were born there. I feel like they should, you know, carry that on. It will benefit them, too. 'Cuz, like, you know, like, [the] Hispanic population is, like, growing so much, like, every year, so, you know, it will definitely be helpful, you know, wherever you go to, like, have that background.

CEC: Okay, so [...] it does bother you a little bit when there are people, when you meet people whose parents are from Mexico—

Jessica: Yeah.

CEC: ...or are from somewhere [Spanish-speaking], and they don't speak Spanish?

Jessica: Yeah. I feel like they kind of don't, like, claim their...they're maybe ashamed of it (Viñas 2014).

Marissa Webb, who does not speak Spanish, had a different opinion:

Um, a lot of people, when I tell them that I identify as Mexican American, they say, "Oh, well, do you speak Spanish?" and I say, "No, my mom never taught me or anything." Then [they're] like, "Oh, well, I mean, you aren't really Hispanic, then." And, I mean, that was something that at first, I was like, I just kind of, like, agreed with, but now that I'm older, I guess, and I'm more comfortable with, like, who I am and like my...now that I know more about, like, my culture, I'm very much so like offended when people say that, because then it's like, "Okay, well, that's like saying, 'You don't like hot dogs, so you

aren't American', " type thing. And that's something that, I don't know, it's always really bugged me and especially because, um, I'm, like, currently in, like, a Spanish class right now, but I'm not very good at Spanish [laughs]. Um, but I really try to, like, learn and like pick up phrases, but I think it's, even though the language is the big connector, I don't think it stops at just the language. It's really, like, if you identify that way, and you have, like, a genuine respect for, like, the culture, then I don't think that the language should be, like, why you don't identify (Webb 2014).

Susana Solorza, meanwhile, spoke of a combination of both values and language in her construction of *hispanidad*, mentioning the role of Catholicism:

What I think it means to be Mexican American, I think you have to either know how to speak Spanish or have heard Spanish or, um, your parents, your family...somewhere in the mix, Spanish is used. Um, so I think that's a very important part of the culture. Um...Catholicism is a big part of the culture—that shared space. Um, I think the, the music and the food...I mean, I know I'm just list...listing typical things about culture, but, um, just having Mexican music playing, having Mexican TV on, um, eating Mexican food. Uh, I think having a big family, having that, having that extended family, as well, and not just, like, my immediate family, but my extended family who's Mexican, and we share in that culture, and we share in the food and the dancing and the being loud [laughs]. Um, I don't know, it's just a mix of all that (Solorza 2015).

Others were more technical in their discussion of belonging, speaking of a combination of birthplace, citizenship, and parents' nationality. In my focus group with brother and sister Adrián and Paulina Durón (Mexican), they disagreed about the role of citizenship:

Adrián: It makes you more, like, Mexican if you come from that place. Where you were born defines you. 'Cuz if you were...I mean, we were born here, so we are considered Americans. When you go...wherever you go, we're Americans, but now, if...we're just Americans if you think about it, but, like, we have our parents. That makes us...they are Mexican. That makes us both, 'cuz we were born here, and my parents are Mexican. That's why we're called Mexican Americans. So, like, just...it depends where you're from. So if you're from Canada, you're Canadian. So that's where it comes from.

CEC: Okay, so you feel like it's just, like—

Adrián: Where you were born.

CEC: Where you were born, okay. [To Paulina] And do you feel the same way? I mean, do you feel like you're [...] American because you were born here, but the fact that your parents aren't...that your parents are Mexican, that gives you that kind of Mexican-ness?

Paulina: Right. Well, I mean, I don't think...I don't think it depends where you're born 'cuz I have cousins that were born here but lived their whole life in Mexico. They're Mexican.

Adrián: But they're American 'cuz that's where they were born.

Paulina: No, I, I think—

Adrián: If you see their nationality, it's like...if you sign a paper that says your nationality, are you gonna put Mexican? 'Cuz you're not from there. You put American, where you're from. Like if you were born in, like, in Spain, you put, like, you're a Spaniard.

CEC: [To Adrián] Okay, so what you're saying is you think it is based on citizenship.

Adrián: Yes, where you're from.

Jonny García (Mexican) and Susana Solorza (Mexican) echoed Paulina's sentiment that a combination of birth and surroundings were important and that ethnicity depended upon more than just citizenship:

Jonny: Um, I mean I was raised here, so I've gone through all the schooling here. English is my second language, but I developed it just as well and as fast as Spanish. So yeah, I definitely could say I'm more...I was Mexican by birth, American by my surroundings, I guess (García 2014).

Susana: I picked [the term Mexican American] because, um, my family considers, we're considered Mexican on the different levels—on the level that my mother was actually born in Mexico, lived in Mexico until she was 23, when she married my father, and Mexican because even though my dad was born in the US, um, he grew up with that Mexican culture. Um, because even, I think even because we lived in El Paso, and just because it's so, um...the city's so Mexican American itself. I mean, there's a huge population...uh, [a huge part] of the population is either Mexican or of Mexican descent. Um, and so, and then I was there 'til the age of 10, and then we moved to Kentucky, and so I consider myself Mexican because of all that, but then I consider myself American because I was born in the US. I wasn't born in Mexico, and I grew up here, I went to school, I've lived in American culture, and, um, so... (Solorza 2015).

Francisco Serrano (Salvadorian), who does not identify as American, was adamant about the role of family lineage in his own identity, arguing that he is Salvadorian by virtue of his parents' being such:

Francisco: I always say I'm Salvadorian. Always. [Laughs.] And they ask me, then they're like, "So you're from El Salvador?" I [say], "Oh, well I was born here." And they're all, "Oh, so you're American?" "Uh, no, I'm Salvadorian." I'm salvadoreño.

CEC: Okay. So you...you don't consider yourself American at all?

Francisco: Um, I mean, I was born here, but my...both of my parents are 100% Salvadorian, so I'm salvadoreño. Cien por ciento. De sangre. Just born here. I appreciate United States for letting me be born here, but I still have love for El Salvador. That's my blood (Serrano 2014).

Mateo Sepulveda (Colombian) also felt that one's birthplace set the stage for his claim to belonging in that place. Ultimately, though, he saw that identity as a matter of individual choice:

Um, well, I guess basically when it comes to people that immigrate at a younger age, that we're born there, and especially if you are born there, and you spend a little bit, you know, at least, the first, beginning stages of your life, you have a more likely chance of, you know, being able to recognize yourself as the place where you were born in because, you know, you have, like...first, for me, I understood that's like, I was born there. That's blood from blood, you know, Earth from Earth, you know. And in the end, it's only the decision of the person that immigrated here to either embrace completely or maybe halfway, a little bit, adapt, but at the same time understand that you are not from here (Sepulveda 2015).

Francisco's and Mateo's reflections on the role of lineage in belonging beg the question: If belonging is a matter of blood, are there limits to a family's claim to this belonging, perhaps after intermarriage or, indeed, migration? Hector Corcino (Puerto Rican) discusses this ambiguity, presenting self-determination as a potential solution:

If your parents were Latino, or are Latino, then you're Latino, and it's just so on and so on. I don't really know at what point a person stops calling themselves Latino, 'cuz I know my best friend Ryan's a quarter Honduran, but he doesn't claim it (Corcino 2014).

Despite the existence of some ambiguity surrounding who “qualifies” as Hispanic, the informants clearly demonstrated that certain factors, particularly family heritage, values, and language were important topics to consider. Some felt strongly about the inclusion of certain categories, and others allowed for a combination thereof. If nothing else, they have confirmed that the boundaries of ethnicity are not always particularly easy to define. This will make the next phase in our study of those boundaries particularly interesting.

Blurred boundaries

After establishing informants’ categorization of *hispanidad* and perception of belonging within that group, my next step was to discover where they felt they fit relative to the group’s boundaries. As promised earlier, this position was partially illuminated through the very process of discussing belonging. However, prompting informants to discuss their interactions with individuals of different ethnic categories yielded even more insight. I did so by asking them to tell me how well they felt they could relate to individuals in three ethnic categories: non-Hispanic Americans, non-American Hispanics, and Hispanic Americans of a national origin different than their own. I (correctly) anticipated that this discussion would help establish the state of the boundary between *Hispanic* and *American*, as well as the intragroup boundaries, if any, within the Hispanic community itself.

Many informants reflected the same sentiments expressed earlier by Carolina Escobar upon discussing the importance of Spanish in her ability to build relationships.

Most felt they could identify better with Hispanic Americans than with non-Hispanic Americans, albeit to varying degrees. For many, like Salvador Hernández, this was, indeed, a matter of sharing two languages and cultures:

Um, I feel like the relationship with my friends [...] who are Hispanic is a lot closer. I don't know, maybe because we've known each other longer, so that kinda helps. But just the fact that we are able to communicate in two languages, and we share two cultures, we have a lot more things in common, and it's, uh, a lot easier to communicate with each other (Hernández 2014).

For others, like Jonny García (Mexican) and Gilberto Martínez (Mexican), sharing those cultures was also important. However, they indicated that another reason behind their being able to relate better to other Hispanic Americans was their shared minority status and ability to understand one another's struggles with the obstacles this status presented:

Gilberto: Um, when talking with someone who's Mexican, uh, or [...] another person from the same place that I am, I feel like we have a lot more in common, and we can relate a lot more. So maybe we can talk about other things, like, deeper [things] and culture. Like, "My mom does this." "My mom does that." Well, yeah, we maybe have music in common or customs or maybe how you celebrated, you know, Day of the Dead, how you celebrated Mexico's independence, how you feel about...and I feel like I can be more honest on how I feel about, maybe, oppression here in the U.S. with them, whereas maybe I can't be as open with someone who's not of my own race. And I think that's just being cautious. It has nothing to do with [wanting] to hide this [...] but it's just being cautious because I may not be able to identify how they will react, but I can identify how maybe someone who's going through the same things I am [will] (Martinez 2014).

Jonny: I would say it's easier to connect with, like, [my Hispanic friends] Allan and Sal because they know...that they went through similar things. Um, as with my [non-Hispanic] fraternity brothers, they...all they see is who I am now, but they don't know what all I've done or been through to actually be able to come to college or be, like, a first generation college student, etc. Nevertheless, they...they relate to me in the way...from what they know since I've been here, and then with Allan and Sal, I would say we relate from before college because we've been through similar situations (García 2014).

Still others noted that, while perhaps not feeling more able to identify with one group or another, their friend groups were notably separated between Hispanic and non-Hispanic members. Third generation informant Marissa Webb (Mexican) noticed a sense of discomfort between her friend groups, observing that the sentiment seemed stronger among her non-Hispanic friends:

Marissa: Some of my Hispanic friends live together in an apartment, and just, like, the social aspect of it, um, when I go to, like, a party for, like, my sorority versus a party for, like, [the Hilltopper Organization for Latin American Students, HOLAS], it's very different. Like, the atmosphere is very different. They have, like, traditional, like, dancing that happens, um, at HOLAS. There's also, like, they'll make, like, traditional Hispanic food, and it's...I don't...I don't think that I act, like, complete 180 different, but, I mean, there are certain, like, I don't...I wouldn't bring all of my [non-Hispanic] sorority friends over to my HOLAS friends 'cuz I know that they would be uncomfortable with just kind of the atmosphere of it and some of the people even.

CEC: Your sorority friends would be uncomfortable or HOLAS friends?

Marissa: My sorority friends would be uncomfortable. I mean, I'm sure my HOLAS friends would be a little uncomfortable too just because of stereotypes of, you know, some people [have], and how, like, they react. And I'm sure that they wouldn't talk any differently, so they may be like, "Well, if they can't handle us, then they should just stay away," 'cuz that's kind of how they are (Webb 2014).

Allan Moreno (Honduran), like Marissa, also spoke of the separation of his interactions with Hispanics and non-Hispanics, and like Gilberto and Jonny, he spoke of what this meant in terms of being able to relate to each group. However, Allan felt neither that these differences were rooted in any intergroup tension nor that he was better able to relate to one group over another. Instead, he describes the groups as complementary—each brings out a different “side” of him:

Allan: It's weird because I enjoy [spending time with] both, both [at] the same level. Uh, you know, let's say that I enjoy reading a book with my American friends here, and like, oh, we're going to a party that's not necessarily, like, salsa dancing or, like, but it's just, it's different, I guess. The environments are different. But I will...my friends are more,

like, energetic, the Hispanic people are more energetic...Tropical, in a way. I don't know if that makes any sense. [Laughs.]

CEC: [Laughs.] It does.

Allan: So, yeah, they have more of a flavor, like, a spiciness, in them. So, yeah, and then here [where my non-Hispanic friends are] is more of, like, a calmer environment, but I enjoy it. So it's kind of like a balance that I keep. Like, when I go back [home where my Hispanic friends are], they fulfill something that [is] not being fully fulfilled here. And when I'm there, I don't get this (Moreno 2014).

Meanwhile, several informants noted differences even in their interactions within the Hispanic community itself. Interactions with non-American Hispanics were reported to be particularly different than those with Hispanic Americans—perhaps even more so than those between Hispanic- and non-Hispanic Americans. Indeed, Carolina Escobar (Guatemalan/Salvadorian) felt she could hardly identify at all with the non-American group. She explains:

[It's] just because they've lived [in their country of origin] basically their whole life. And so there will be some things in common that I have just because my dad has kind of incorporated that culture into me, but for the most part, I feel like I've adapted to here so much that it's just gonna be different (Escobar 2014).

Most other informants expressed being able to relate to the non-American Hispanic group to a certain extent, but several noted that there were significant obstacles. Adrián Durón (Mexican) asserts that, when he traveled back to Mexico, he often experienced difficulty connecting with his Mexican friends beyond the surface level because of differences in lifestyle and experiences:

I mean, it's not the...it's the same...if you just wanna have a good time, but if it comes to, like, economics, to, um, life experience and all that [...] you feel a little bit, like, different, because you've never been through [the same financial difficulties], so now you feel a little sorry for them. 'Cuz they, yeah, they've been through so much that you haven't because of your parents gave you a better life than them (A. Durón 2014).

For Gilberto Martínez, having different backgrounds also played an important role in his interactions with this group:

Um, yeah, it is different because I don't expect them to relate to what I...what I have to say. You know, maybe because the school system is different. Politics are different. Um, everything that has to do with how life is [run] or business or, you know, how you even get around, like the luxury of having a car, or public transportation, or the types of jobs. Whereas maybe in Mexico, you're working, uh, land, or you're working on a field, or you're, you know, herding cattle, where here, the jobs available to me would be maybe retail, working at a mall. You know, I wouldn't expect them to relate to what I have to say (Martínez 2014).

Jessica Viñas' struggle to form connections with non-American Hispanics, rather than being an issue of her being able to relate to them, arose from a perceived hesitance on their part to connect with her. She recounts this distance:

Um, well, whenever...in high school, there were definitely people who they were older, and, you know, they had just come to America, so they didn't know a lot of English and whatnot. I feel like they kind of were put off by, like, maybe, like, people who were, like, raised here. Like for me, I felt like they didn't really, you know, they didn't feel...even though I was Mexican, and they knew I was Mexican, I feel like they weren't really...I wasn't approachable to them just because I, I don't know, maybe had, like, more friends that weren't Hispanic, and, you know, I was nice to them and whatnot, but I just felt like maybe they were...kind of, like, distanced themselves. Not distanced themselves, but they wouldn't, you know, I guess they didn't feel open to, like, come talk to me or whatever. Um, it's not...I feel like, you know, if we were [to] end up [talking], we would probably most likely have a lot of the same things in common, like how we grew up and whatnot, but the fact that, you know, we, I...Mexican Americans have been here for longer, they know how, like, the culture is, so and they don't. Obviously, in Mexico, I think it's similar, but maybe it was just, like, a language thing. You know, maybe they thought I wouldn't be willing to speak Spanish with them, which I would be, but I definitely saw that disconnect between them, between, you know, Mexican Americans (Viñas 2014).

Not all informants felt the same disconnect, however. Puerto Rican Hector Corcino agreed that his interactions with Puerto Ricans still living on the island were different than those with Hispanics living in the States but commented that these differences didn't impact his ability to relate to the former. He explains:

Uh, it, it's different, but it's not negative. Um, whenever I go to Puerto Rico, since my Spanish isn't the most polished Spanish, I, you know, I let them know that I grew up in the States, and so they're very understanding, and, uh, the conversations don't change. You know, they ask me questions about, like, what it's like in the United States, and then I, you know, and since I, I'm not always immersed in, like, Puerto Rican culture and, like, up-to-the-minute news on Puerto Rico, I'll ask questions and stuff, and, like, we'll just, we'll exchange information, I guess, and...and, uh, and sports is another big thing because everybody loves sports, and so I'll go over there, and we'll play basketball and stuff and, uh, and I just...I mean I fit in just fine (Corcino 2014).

Meanwhile, Susana discusses the interactions in comparative terms, conveying that any difficulties connecting with non-American Hispanics exist only relative to her stronger connections with those Hispanic Americans with whom she shares two cultures:

I think someone, um, that, like you were saying, is Mexican and, like, came here for a while, I could relate with them, and I could definitely be friends with them, and we could, that's all...but yeah, I guess if I do meet someone Mexican American, there's even more of a connection just 'cuz, like I said, we've had those same shared experiences (Solorza 2015).

The above comments clearly confirm that there are boundaries even in the intragroup context. Establishing this, I then sought to determine whether or not interactions were similarly complex among Hispanic Americans of differing national origin. Several informants felt there were some differences in whether or not they connected with Hispanic Americans depending on their particular Hispanic nationality.

Carolina Escobar discusses this:

Yeah, I think it's a little somewhat different. What we do have in common is that we were both born here, but it's just different because of the cultures. Like, I don't...I wouldn't know how their culture would work compared to mine. It could be completely different, so I feel like that would be the difference (Escobar 2014).

Phil Fernández notes even sensing a mild atmosphere of rivalry as the only Cuban in his otherwise-Puerto Rican friend group in college:

[Being of different nationalities] made it a little different, yeah, because, like, because like I said, even among Latinos, you know, Venezuelans are...and I think that goes earlier where, even that, and I've been using it, obviously, freely, Latino, Hispanic, but each of the, you know groups or people from different backgrounds have a lot of pride in, you know, being Venezuelan. Like if, if you ask someone from, yeah, Venezuela, they're gonna...they're not gonna say, "I'm Latino." They're gonna say, "I'm Venezuelan," or Puerto Rican, or whatever it is. And so, yeah, so they...everyone has different dynamics and different, you know, slight cultures. Maybe the language, there's slight variations. Um, so, uh, so yeah, so there, it's a little different being the Cuban friend with Puerto Rican friends 'cuz there is a rivalry aspect for whatever reason (Fernández 2015).

Marissa Webb also spoke of national pride among her friend group but, unlike Phil, saw this pride to be a bonding factor in a certain sense, especially compared to her perception of the rivalries between other broad ethnic groups:

Um, it's...they're always, like, there's a lot of, like, "Oh, wow, do you, like, do this, um, in your home country?" or whatever rather than, like, a, "Oh, well, that's not what we do, so that's not right," which I think is very different than, like, a lot of other, like, big generalized, like, group of people, because, like, people who are like [...] let's say Europe, for example. Like, the French are very, like, quizzical, in like, maybe, like, a negative way, of like stuff that other countries do. Like, and then, I don't know, it's just like different because it's...even though it's like a broad group of people, it's more of like a, "I just want to, like, find out what you do," rather than a, "Oh, well, that...you're doing it different than us, so that's wrong." So I think that's really cool (Webb).

Mexicans Salvador Hernández and Jessica Viñas, meanwhile, felt that ability to relate to Hispanic Americans of different Hispanic nationality depended on the particular nationality in question. After noting many similarities between Colombians and Mexicans that made them particularly able to connect, Salvador explained that he did not perceive the same to be true between Mexicans and Argentines, for example:

I know if I was to meet somebody from Argentina, it'd probably be waaay different, just because they're [...] I don't know. Just, like... I mean I've never actually met somebody from Argentina, but just a stereotype, I feel like it'd be a lot different because they're a lot more Europeanish, I guess (Hernández 2014).

For Jessica, the “European” factor also played a role. Though she perceived few significant differences between Mexicans and Central Americans, she notes significant differences between Spanish and Latin cultures:

Personally, I haven't met anyone who is, like, Hispanic and was very different. Except for maybe, like, Monica. I don't know if you know her. She's from Spain. [...] She's, like, an exchange student, and, like, I feel like maybe she grew up different since she grew up on, like, a different continent...But, like, we both speak Spanish, and, you know, we like the same foods, so it's still similar in that way, but I'm sure, you know, there's [...] differences that something that she didn't get to go through, like, growing up, or I didn't. [...] It's not that I relate less to her [as an individual], but I just know that, you know, we probably grew up different, which doesn't make us less relatable to each other, but, um, I'm just saying, like, that's the only person that I felt like maybe was a little different than everyone else [in HOLAS] (Viñas 2014).

The overall sentiment among the informants was that, apart from a few exceptional country-specific cases and some minor cultural differences in other cases, particular nationality wasn't much of a factor in how well one related to other Hispanic Americans. Indeed, similarly to the previous allusions indicated by Gilberto Martínez and Jonny García, Miguel Acosta (Cuban) notes that the shared minority experience can be a “tie that binds” among different Hispanic nationalities:

I mean, there's always that "Hispanic in America," you know; being a minority is always something. And, you know, Spanish culture is a general factor. You know, we have very common beliefs, one of them being family, um, so it's like we always relate to that at the end of the day, but we [do have] little things here and there. Maybe, you know, they may have a different way of saying something or, you know, a different way of preparing a certain dish, or things like that. But it's not...it's never been a problem [in my being able to relate to them] (Acosta 2015).

Salvadorian Francisco Serrano even felt that these shared experiences made it easier for him to build a connection with non-Salvadorian Hispanic Americans than with non-American Salvadorians—including those non-Americans now living in the States.

This resulted, at least in part, from his impression that many Salvadorians who immigrated to the U.S. often changed once they arrived:

Well, my friends who are, like, Mexican, they were born here, so I felt like I kinda have in common that, that we were both born here. And we've kind of dealt with like those old, like, you know, people judging us and telling us we're different and everything, and so I feel like I have in common with them more than, like, actual El Salvadorians that were actually born in El Salvador and, like, come here. Uh, or, yeah, that's what I'm trying to say. Like, the ones that are born over there, and they grow up in El Salvador, um, and then they come here, they...I feel like they actually, you know, change, like really. [...] I guess it's mostly the money thing that changes people. Like, you get money here. In El Salvador, you don't have anything, and then, so you're more humble, and then you get here [...] and uh, yeah, so money is a huge thing here. That's what...main reason everybody comes here (Serrano 2014).

Thus, whereas many informants felt that there were little to no differences between their interactions with Hispanic- and non-Hispanic Americans, others had experienced some significant distinctions that made it easier to relate to Hispanic Americans. In the latter case, these differences did not preclude them from identifying with non-Hispanic Americans, with whom they still felt they shared many commonalities. In fact, many felt that the boundaries separating them from non-Hispanic Americans were less rigidly constructed than those dividing them from non-American Hispanics, with whom several felt they had little in common. I present these reflections as grounds to conclude that the Hispanic/American boundary is in a blurred state as opposed to a shifted or crossed one.

These findings coincide to a certain degree with those of Tomás Jiménez, although he notes that beyond merely noting obstacles to identification with non-American Hispanics, his informants actively “[sought] distance from coethnic immigrants by highlighting the distinctions between the two groups” caused, in part, by differing

social class and sociocultural divisions (240). Furthermore, the desire for this intragroup distinction was the source of “an uncomfortable irony” (241) expressed in their articulations. Though they actively sought “to create social distance” (241) from non-American Hispanic individuals, particularly in terms of residential location, this was a source of cognitive dissonance when they were not able to reconcile this desire with “the belief that ethnicity tied [the groups to each other]” (245).

Jiménez notes that a primary source of his Mexican American informants’ yearning to distinguish themselves from Mexican immigrants in their U.S. cities was a fear “that non-Mexicans would be unable to draw distinctions between U.S.- and foreign-born Mexicans, resulting in...nativism” (244). These informants focused particularly on immigrants’ exhibition of behavior “that is all too indicative of a lack of assimilation” (244) to which they felt averse. This perception and the role it played in Jiménez’s informants’ identity construction indicates the possibility that experience with negative external forces such as discrimination and stereotyping may diminish desire to identify with one’s ethnic roots or to do so conditionally—to identify as Mexican *American* as an intentional distinction from just plain *Mexican*. Though few of my own informants articulated similarly strong desires to be classified as a group wholly apart from non-American Hispanics, their relative difficulties in developing strong connections to this group may be a milder derivative of this trend outlined in Jiménez’s findings. (I would argue that the difference in salience of this theme between Jiménez’s study and my own may most aptly be considered a reflection of varying prevalence of immigration rates and rhetoric in the geographic regions in which the respective studies were

conducted.) In the next chapter, I will further discuss the role of external forces such as these in identity construction.

CHAPTER FOUR

I'M NOT WHO YOU SAY I AM THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, I concluded that the boundary between Hispanic and American ethnicities was significantly blurred for my Hispanic American informants. Most identified best with other Hispanic Americans, and many experienced a certain degree of obstacles to identifying both with non-American Hispanics and non-Hispanic Americans for a variety of reasons. However, especially in the case of non-Hispanic Americans, most felt at least some degree (and many a strong degree) of connection with both groups, also for various reasons. The main purpose of this section is figuring out *how* these connections came to be.

As I discussed in my introduction, both internal and external forces shape migrants' identity construction process. Ethnic categorizations can be (and often are) externally imposed: quoting Ian Haney López, Kevin Johnson argues that "choices [in ethnic identity] are exercised not by free agents or autonomous actors, but by people who are compromised and constrained by the social context" (1286). These constraints can both shape one's construction of his ethnic reality and/or hinder his practice of an already-constructed one. To illustrate the first case, Tanya Golash-Boza notes, "[W]e

learn our racial place through interaction with others. If others classify us as white, we learn to expect preferential treatment. If others classify us as something other than white, we learn to expect marginalization” (431). Demonstrating how this imposition of racial place may mold an individual’s ultimate ethnic reality, she recounts the story of a Dominican individual partaking in a study by Prudence Carter. Though the informant was U.S.-born, she asserted “that she was Hispanic and not American because American society does not accept her” as American due to her “Hispanic-looking appearance” (431).

Indeed, many scholars discuss the role of external conceptions of belonging in the construction of Hispanic American identity more particularly. Analyzing the influence of this principle as applies to the Mexican second generation, Portes and Rumbaut argue that Mexican American children “are the most likely [of any migrant group] to have shifted self-identities away from any American label...[and] to racialize their national origin. Both trends reflect a strong process of reactive formation to perceived external hostility” (423). Golash-Boza notes that these external hostilities are experienced at various levels by Hispanic individuals, ranging from general stereotypes to direct discrimination. Stereotypes particularly prevalent to the Hispanic condition include the perceptions that Hispanic Americans are “less intelligent or culturally advanced than Anglos, less affluent than whites or Asians, [and] less intelligent, more prone to be on welfare, and more likely to be engaged in drugs or other criminal activity than whites or Asians” (430). She contends that the objects of these stereotypes are not protected by a shared minority status, as “blacks and Asians have a more negative

view of Latinos/as than they do of whites” (430). Furthermore, she argues that those Hispanics experiencing outright discrimination “are more likely to self-identify as Hispanic or Latino/a, because [these experiences] teach Hispanics that they are labeled as such by others in the United States” (430). Disagreeing, David G. Gutiérrez references several historical examples illustrating that the opposite may be true: in response to nativist sentiment against them, “increasing numbers of Texas Mexicans began to take exception to Anglo Americans’ nonchalant dismissal of them [as un-American]” (400). Reacting to this refusal for inclusion on the American side of the ethnic boundary, they gradually began to distance themselves from their Mexican identity, attempting, instead, to prove that Mexican Americans formed a separate but equally American ethnic group (much like the informants in Jiménez’s study, discussed in Chapter 3). Though they “continued to profess respect for Mexico and for their Mexican cultural heritage, they insisted that the best way to advance in American society was to convince other Americans that they too were loyal, upstanding citizens” (401). Thus, depending on which scholar one believes, discrimination may prompt either acceptance or refusal of a particular identity; in either case, the underlying point is clear—external forces can and do shape identity.

However, Golash-Boza also notes the role of internal factors in this identity-shaping process: “It is important to point out that, even though external categorizations affect identity, each individual has the ability to accept, embrace or reject these categorizations” (432). Indeed, self-determination influences one’s negotiation of identity and “weighs significantly in cases of cultural identity” (Cantens 170). As regards

the role of this self-determination relative to external forces like those mentioned above, it is not a stretch of logic to assume that the stronger one's attachment to a particular identity, the more likely he or she will be to resist external deprivation of that identity.

Tomás Jiménez argues that a primary factor in determining whether or not an individual will decide to identify with a particular group is the extent of his or her interaction with "ethnic raw materials." Indeed, he contends that continued access to these raw materials is what distinguishes the Mexican American experience from that of past migrant groups (such as those from Northern and Southern Europe) and makes them more likely to develop a sense of ethnic solidarity with both Mexican immigrants and other Mexican Americans. Because the Mexican population in the U.S. experiences continued "ethnic replenishment" due to long-standing and nearly uninterrupted waves of Mexican immigration, Mexican Americans are both less likely and less able to construct their Mexican ethnicity as purely symbolic. By virtue of the sheer size of the Mexican first generation immigrant population, Mexican Americans are in constant contact with Mexican cultural products and symbols and have "abundant opportunities to engage in the practice of ethnicity" (104). Furthermore, because Mexican immigration is such a salient and controversial issue in American politics and society, Mexican Americans are more likely to experience questions or assumptions about their ethnicity. Both circumstances make ethnicity an active part of Mexican Americans' daily lives and, therefore, their identities.

Though Jiménez focuses mainly on Mexican Americans, the phenomenon of "ethnic replenishment" applies also to many other Latin American migrant groups,

particularly several groups from Central America, Colombia, and the Caribbean, who also have a long-standing history of U.S. immigration. Furthermore, though Jiménez focuses on access to raw materials through contact with Mexican immigrants or their contributions to the American social space, these are not the only means by which Mexican Americans or other Hispanic Americans access these raw materials. They may do so, for example, by visiting their country of origin, being in contact with individuals or cultural artifacts from their host country, or by spending time around other Mexican Americans dedicated to continued practice of their ethnicity.

External Influences on Identity

When speaking to my informants, I began by studying the role of external factors in the construction of ethnicity, asking them to share their experiences with stereotypes and discrimination. Though few informants reported having experienced direct discrimination, a couple did. Francisco Serrano's experience with discrimination from non-Hispanics was particularly important to his identity development:

Um, there's been a couple times, uh, like not too long ago...one I'm just remembering now 'cuz it was recently. There was this guy on Facebook that he was just, like, started saying some things, some post. I don't remember what happened, but the thing is, he started, like, he just started targeting my, like, my ethnicity. He was like, "Oh, you're...go back to where you came from," and he started saying, uh, "You don't...you need to go back and take some English classes," or some grammar courses, that I...he couldn't even spell grammar was the...that was the thing that got me (Serrano 2014).

When asked if this type of experience had any role in his lack of identification as American, he confirmed that it had a partial role but also referenced the greater impact of his access to ethnic raw materials upon returning to El Salvador:

Uh, I feel like it's because...because of that, what I went through and also what my parents have gone through with...it's just how, how the Americans have really treated, like...I say "my people" because Hispanics, that's how...that's what I identify with, so, like, just how I've seen how they've been treated unfairly, and how they don't want us here and see us as, like, aliens, or like some other type of species or something, and yeah, just mainly 'cuz of that. And I acquired love for El Salvador when I first went there, really. When I was 13. 'Cuz I...I'd never, like, been there at all. They have, like, I saw pictures and stuff, but not...[I] was like, oh, I guess my parents are from El Salvador, and I would say I'm from El Salvador, too, but I had never been there. People would ask me, "Have you gone there?" And I'm like, "No. But I, I wanna go." But when I first went there, I fell in love with the place (Serrano 2014).

Ricardo Córdova (Mexican) disclosed similar experiences with discrimination but different responses to them. Answering my inquiry as to whether he'd ever been excluded from an opportunity or discriminated against on the basis of his ethnicity, he says:

Yeah. I mean, we live in Kentucky. Everybody's hicks. Uh, growing up, you know, I obviously went to high school and middle school and some elementary school here, so you get the farmers' boys who just won't really deal with any sort of foreign people. And, I mean, that's fine. You know, they're just...I don't blame them. I just blame the lack of knowledge, you know, the lack of education on us, about how, you know, it doesn't really matter who you are. It's just how much you put into whatever you're doing is really what should count as a person and how you should be judged instead of, you know, where you come from. [...] Um, but yeah, obviously, you know, during parties, [people have] been, like, you know, "Oh, this person, like, can't come in." Like, "What are you doing here?" And then I always have...I've been fortunate enough to have some [...] friends to stick up for me and be like, "No, let this guy in. He's awesome." You know? I still go in, but it's just funny how you can be excluded from certain things. And I've heard of plenty of friends who just get excluded from other events just for being Hispanic, and just, I don't know. It's stupid, but it happens (Córdova 2014).

A more familiar experience among informants was that with stereotypes, which most people reported having dealt with at some point or another. A particularly commonly-reported stereotype related to academic achievement. Many informants who were high-performing and highly-involved students felt that other students, both

Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike, did not expect this to be the case. This was true for Gilberto Martínez:

Um, in school, I think people expect less from me, and I tend to I guess give them more, um, even [...] here at WKU, working in groups. Let's say we have a project. We work in groups. I guess maybe sometimes my group members don't expect me to contribute as much as I do, um, and so I, I feel that sense, although it may not be, you know, direct, but there's still a sense of, oh, I'm kind of being excluded because they think that I don't know this, but I do. And so once I show them that I do know what I'm talking about, and I can provide answers, and I can contribute to whatever they're talking about, um, then I get more of a sense of belonging in the group. But just starting out, I feel like people expect less [of me] because of stereotypes or, um, prejudices that have been made in society (Martínez 2014).

Though Gilberto later made a point to note that this was a misconception commonly held by people of any race or ethnicity, Jonny García spoke specifically of its existence within the Hispanic community itself:

Um, I think with the very little amount of students who...Hispanic students who come to...that...pursue higher education, I've definitely, I don't know...I don't know if they were my friends or not, but sometimes I'm...not looked down upon or thought of different, but because I actually tried really hard throughout school and got good grades and made it to college, whereas a lot of my other friends who were Hispanic did not do the same. Um, most of them end up just working after high school or having families. [...] So for...for my Hispanic friends, I think they, a lot of them would expect me to be more like them and not go to school, and to my non-Hispanic friends, they always saw me as one of them. Like, they didn't think of me any differently, but I know that being brought up, especially in the South in Nashville, I had two very...two very, uh, different sides of friendships, like the American friends, I would say, and then my non-American friends, Hispanic friends. [...] Sometimes, unfortunately, I feel like amongst the Hispanic population, those who seek to do more and get the most out of the experience are...are seen as, like, you think you're better than everybody else, and I get...I know I get that vibe (García 2014).

When asked to clarify that he meant this “vibe” was coming from the Hispanic community, he continued:

Yeah, so I would say in general, like, because I guess it's the stereotype that society has molded us into, that, you know, like...first of all, if you make it college, you know, they don't expect you to even go past just going to class, and if you did make it to college,

then you obviously just work, but once you're in college, not, not just being in college, but also going the extra mile and being involved at your university in that kind of way. So, I would say that the other people who aren't as involved would see it as, like, "Why is he doing all these things? Like, who's he doing it for" (García 2014)?

Perhaps one of the most aggravating stereotypes for informants, and one I discussed briefly in the previous chapter, was the tendency to associate *Hispanic* with *Mexican*. This phenomenon was also important to Francisco Serrano, for whom, like other informants, this was often the source of fights in middle school:

In school, in high school, uh, elementary school, middle school, like there was all...there was always kids that would, uh, like call me names and say that I can't...that I was, like, Mexican. That was the big thing. I'm Mexican to every, every, every white person. Um, I speak "Mexican," apparently, to many. Uh, I would...I would get into a lot of fights, um, just because of that throughout middle school. High school, I started maturing a little bit more and just like letting it go, but in middle school, yeah, I was, uh, I would get into a lot of fights because of that, and uh...it's always been tough, but I'm just...I just look at it as a way to better myself and not, not like fall into all that, all those stereotypes and stuff that they have of me and kind of, uh, show them, you know, that they're wrong, and they're ignorant (Serrano 2014).

Others perceived a notable lack of understanding among non-Hispanics regarding the diversity of the Hispanic community, particularly in terms of linguistic ability and phenotype. Marissa Webb, a white third generation Mexican who does not speak Spanish, felt particularly frustrated by this phenomenon:

I've had like actual like people that like, like when I was working the [Bowling Green International Festival], um, last year, actually, I had this guy tell me, like, he's like, "No, you aren't Hispanic. You don't speak Spanish," and I was like, "Yes, I am." And that kind of like...that almost hurts my feelings more than, like, somebody I know [saying that]. Because I know somebody I know, like, I mean they know that I'm very serious about [my ethnic heritage] or whatever, so they're doing it in like a joking type manner, or whatever, but somebody that I don't know, it's like, "You don't know me. I'm sorry. Like, like you shouldn't be making those types of stereotypes." That would be like if I wanted to say, "Well, you aren't this," when, like, I don't even know you. So that really bugs me

a lot more [...] when, um, like, when people I don't know are like, well, you're actually not, because you're, like, white (Webb 2014).

Expectations regarding lifestyle were the root of several other commonly-experienced stereotypes, including expectations that informants must inherently have particular tastes or interests because of their ethnicities. Ricardo Córdova and Allan Moreno discuss these expectations:

Ricardo: Um, whenever I came here, I was really young, and I was just kinda a different kid in the fact that I just didn't like, like spicy food. I didn't like, like avocados and stuff. But that's just typical things about Mexicans. So, like, whenever I would go somewhere, it'd be like, "Oh, you should try this. This is spicy. You would love it." I'm like, "I actually don't like spicy food." I mean, now I do. I've grown accustomed to it. It's actually quite good. But, you know, there just comes some sort of expectations in being Hispanic or Latino. And I mean, I don't know. They...they're out there for a reason because most people do like that stuff, but, you know, there is definitely exceptions. Just nobody really cares enough to really pay that much attention to people, so it's all right (Córdova 2014).

Allan: You're expected to dress differently, like, "Why do you dress so white?" And then it's like, "Why are you defined...how do you define..." Like, you know, I always ask myself, like, "I'm sorry, did I dress properly to what a normal male would dress like?" You know? You know, so yeah, or "Why don't you play soccer?" That's a big one, like, "Why don't you play soccer?" So, um, yeah, people expect that only because I'm Hispanic, like, I do certain things, you know? So it's just like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I don't, so..." (Moreno 2014).

Jessica Viñas discussed the role of the media in fomenting similar stereotypes about Hispanic lifestyles:

Well, um, sometimes, like, the media, like, I feel like, especially movies, they'll, whenever they have someone Hispanic, they'll have them, like, be, like, cholo, and like a gangster and stuff like that, and it's like, not all Hispanics...like literally almost every single time there's like a Hispanic person, they portray them this way, and I'm like, you know, it kind of...I mean it's funny, but at the same time, like, I wish they didn't do that all the time (Viñas 2014).

Though many informants argued that the media had little role in their own or others' conceptions of ethnicity, others responded similarly to Jessica when asked questions about the non-Hispanic media's perceived role in the spread of stereotypes. Allan Moreno outlines how the media portrayal of Hispanics often leads to jokes by non-Hispanics about his fulfillment of those media-constructed roles. He asserts that the Hispanic media played its own role in the construction of these expectations, as well:

In like, in the American social media, like movies, Hispanic people are always mowing the grass or working construction, and so people make these jokes, like, oh, are you working in construction? Or they're like jokingly saying, "Hey, come and cut my grass." And it's just like, and that's all because of the American social media and like media, because of what they have influenced into the American culture. Um...and then, I guess, uh, the Hispanic social media has a blame into it, too. Like, you know, they do, like, rap videos or reggaetón, all that, they show women in like skinky clothes, or like the way they dress in the Hispanic social media, and then people assume that that's the way we should dress instead of, like, what you actually want to dress like (Moreno 2014).

Many felt that the main problem with the media was not misrepresentation but rather a lack of representation at all. Susana Solorza discusses this:

Other than, like, watching Selena, like the movie Selena, where I'm like, "Oh, she lived what I lived as a Mexican American," there's very few films, especially in mainstream American culture, that I can be like...or like literature, where I can be like, "Oh, that's...like, I lived that, like, as a Mexican American woman." Um, other than like Selena and the book, when I was young, Esperanza Rising. [...] Um, so...so those two, especially when I was young, it was those two things (Solorza 2015).

Indeed, Hispanic representation in the media is the subject of much scholarly interest; in particular, many claim that the "Spanish-language media in the United States avoids representing the racial and economic diversity of Latinos in favor of more unifying images" (Avila Saavedra 137). This may result in the exclusion of minority Hispanic groups, a subject discussed by Salvador Hernández:

Um, well the shows I watch are mostly from Mexico, and like, they do show them in...here, and I feel like people who are not Mexican kinda feel offended, because that's all they pretty much show—the Mexican culture of it. And so I know, like [...] I know a lot of people who complain [about the Hispanic network Univisión] because basically all it is is Mexican stuff, and so I don't know if maybe that influences them or maybe makes them mad that they don't show things from other countries... (Hernández 2014).

Ricardo Córdova saw this lack of representation in terms not just of nationality but also general diversity of interests:

The [non-Hispanic] media's really calmed down about the whole Latino thing being that much different. You don't really see it that much anymore. Um, you know, I guess the only negative media that I can think of is just what we do to ourselves [as Hispanics]. Like, like the ESPN Hispanic version is all soccer. The Spanish channels are all soap operas. Like, it's just really typical Hispanic stuff. We're just really not helping each other. It's just because the level of television is just not the same as in America. Like, we don't have as much stuff to show as anybody else, so we just usually do soap operas, which, I don't know, kinda helps the whole, "Oh, everybody watches soap operas. Everybody watches soccer" (Córdova 2014).

Perhaps related to the role of the news media in particular, others discussed having encountered the assumption that all Hispanics are undocumented. Salvador Hernández noted that although he normally preferred to call himself just Mexican, when he was in Kentucky, he preferred the term *Mexican American* because of this stereotype:

Salvador: Um, around here, on campus, I say more Mexican American just because, I don't know, I feel like it's more socially acceptable. I don't know.

CEC: It's more socially acceptable?

Salvador: Yeah.

CEC: Why's that?

Salvador: I don't know. Sometimes, when you say you're Mexican, people will start saying, "Oh, are you here legally?" or stuff like that. So just to make sure. I know it's kinda weird, but...

CEC: Okay. So people actually have asked you that?

Salvador: Oh, yeah. They've asked me if I'm legal.

CEC: *Hmm.*

Salvador: *Yeah.*

CEC: *Does that happen a lot?*

Salvador: *No.*

CEC: *Just sometimes?*

Salvador: *I mean, I'm not gonna say they actually meant it as a bad way. They were just kinda asking, but...yeah.*

CEC: *Um, so when they do ask you that, what...like, what's usually your response? Or how do you...how do you react?*

Salvador: *Um, I mean I haven't been asked that a lot of times, but when [it happens], they usually ask it, like, playing around, so I kind of, like, laugh it off and like be like, "Oh, no, no. I'm...I'm legal." I mean I don't like to say people are illegal. I think that shouldn't be a word that should describe people. I like to use "undocumented," and I usually will tell them that, but...(Hernández 2014).*

Indeed, many informants who had previously lived in more diverse places noted that the migrant experience was different in Kentucky, where people seemed more unfamiliar with Hispanics. Jessica Viñas noted that this was particularly the case due to her dark features:

I feel like since I look different, sometimes, people, they're not used to it. And I don't look, like, very different, but, um, and I...sometimes people, like I told you, they'll assume, yeah, like, oh yeah, you're Mexican, and...I mean, for myself, I guess I'm still getting used to, like I told you, that, you know, where I, like, grew up there was so much diversity [...] so now it's kind of, like, I have to get used to not...you know, to being the only, like, minority in, like, a class. Like, some of my class will be all, like, white people (Viñas 2014).

Susana Solorza noted that because of this relative lack of diversity in the state, many non-Hispanics had trouble understanding what it meant to be Hispanic American, often assuming this group was inherently similar to recent first generation immigrants:

I think, especially here in Kentucky, um, where, um, maybe people haven't met someone like me, um, and they expect...they've met a lot of, um, immigrants that it's their...it's the first generation, so maybe, um, English is their second language, which it is for me, but maybe it's not as strong. Um, so they expect everyone to be that way. [...] Um, I think

they have certain expectations of me, and I think I don't meet those...or, I guess meet those expectations, or, or am different than what they thought I was supposed to be—this box that they have, um, of thinking of what a Mexican American person is. Uh, maybe even a Mexican American woman. So, um, yeah, I think it does change what people...or how people think of me when, when they find out I'm Mexican American (Solorza 2015).

She later decided that these expectations were based not on their wielders' actually having met many immigrants themselves but rather on their having heard about migrant workers in the area:

I don't even think they've met [first generation] people. I think they've just, like, maybe, especially a lot of people that come to work here in Kentucky for the work...for the first time is in agriculture. [...] So maybe [they've] heard about it or heard about, like, a community of immigrants working on someone's farm somewhere, or they've heard things on TV or seen things on TV. They've never actually met someone who's either Mexican or Mexican American. [...] So they really don't...they've made those prejudices out of not even meeting someone yet (Solorza 2015).

Perhaps this can provide some insight on Francisco Serrano's frustrations with people assuming that, though he was born and raised in the U.S., he did not speak Spanish:

People look at me, and they're like, "Oh, he's obviously not from here." [Laughs.] And, uh, sometimes, they'd be, like, you know, "Do you speak English?" That would always make me...that still makes me mad, how people just tend to assume that I don't speak English 'cuz of the way I look (Serrano 2014).

That most informants experienced external hostility in some way, shape, or form on the basis of their ethnicity is clear. However, their responses to these stereotypes seem to prove Tanya Golash-Boza's theory both right and wrong: though a few informants, like Francisco, did feel these external forces hindered their desire to identify as American, most felt their sense of "American-ness" was largely unaltered by the

stereotypes. Instead of construing those stereotypes as a reflection of being unwelcome by non-Hispanics more generally to identify as American, they assumed them to be manifestations of the stereotyping individual's own ignorance.

Photojournalist Miguel Acosta's (Cuban) responses to stereotypes proffered by viewers at his TV station were similar to informants' general consensus:

Miguel: I mean, working in news, when the [news about opening of U.S.-Cuba relations] came out, we did...we did this thing where we have "Viewers' Voices," and so the viewers call in and give their opinion, and then we, you know, broadcast their opinion. Hearing some of those things was really offensive. You know, like, "Oh, I don't trust those Cubans," or, you know, "Cubans are terrible," and I was like, "What?" Like I never understood it that way because we've always been received well, but I mean there's, just like every culture, there's the good, the bad, the ugly, and the really nice, so it makes sense.

CEC: So it kind of, like, just bothers you a little bit when you hear those things, but—

Miguel: It does. It always does, yeah, I mean, you know, being pride...proud to be Cuban. I've always been, you know, respectful. You know, we've always been taught that...the fine line of...how do I put this? Ethics. You know? And for...to see others out there that, you know...it's not their fault. They may have not had what I had. You know, their family may not have been strict on things [like respecting other cultures]. But for them to not have that isn't their fault, so I guess you could blame it on, you know, their families for not being how my family was. But they, I mean, like I said, every culture has that (Acosta 2015).

Proving Golash-Boza right, however, most informants also felt those experiences made them more likely to identify as Hispanic. Nearly all informants mentioned seeing these stereotypes as opportunities, if not to educate those individuals wielding them, at least to prove them wrong and, in the process, empower other Hispanics. Francisco Serrano's response to my inquiry if experiencing discrimination had ever made him reluctant to identify as Salvadorian is representative of the opinion held by many informants:

Oh, no. I felt that, quite...quite the opposite. I want to identify as a Salvadorian because, like I feel like I have to defend...like I wanna defend, like, our...like I wanna defend El Salvador. I wanna defend every...like, like I know I've felt [discrimination]. I've been through it, and I don't...I don't like it, and I don't like how it felt, but that doesn't, like, stop me from wanting to say I...like, I'm not...I'm not from El Salvador. That actually makes me wanna say it even more so other people don't feel like they're alone and, um, I don't know. It just makes me wanna speak out more and kinda educate more people about it (Serrano 2014).

Marissa Webb even welcomed people's questions about her background for similar reasons:

I almost like like for people to like, not to be like, "Well, you aren't Hispanic," but to ask me about it, um, if not for like the shock factor but solely because then I feel like it, like, it makes people realize that people aren't...like, people that look Hispanic, um, aren't the only type of Latinos. Because, I mean, we do have the...when we think Latino or Hispanic, we think Mexican, and that's not the only type [of] thing, and a lot of people identify as Hispanic or Latino, and they don't look that way. So I like to like say that, but at the same time, I'm also like...I like to, like, say it. That way people like, kind of realize, "Oh, okay, like, it's not just...um, it's not just like one kind of, like, this is how they all look" (Webb 2014).

One final informant, Ricardo Córdova, had similar ideas but felt that attempts to empower Latinos were often misguided:

Whenever I was growing up, they always talked to us about how, you know, oh, well, this is...like, this Latino went on and became a doctor and became really [famous], and just really well-known, really well-liked. It just really stood out, you know, "You should try to aim for that." I'm just like, well, I'm not trying to aim for that, but I'm just trying to make a name for myself because who's, you know, who's gonna stop me? Who's to say that just because I'm this half of ethnicity, that I can't really do this? [...] It's almost like "one in a million." They made it seem like it's one in a million that Hispanic or, more specifically, me, a Mexican, would be so good at doing something in Mexico, like becoming a doctor or a lawyer or whatever you might wanna say. But it just, I don't know. It really propelled me to, you know, show everybody that we're not all, you know, very dumb, as we're portrayed to be (Córdova 2014).

Though most informants, like Ricardo, indicated a certain degree of frustration with non-Hispanics' tendency to overgeneralize the Hispanic community, the general

sentiment was that this stereotyping at worst had no impact on their desire to identify as Hispanic and in many cases actually strengthened that desire. Some, like Marissa Webb, even indicated at times feeling a stronger aversion to identifying as American than as Hispanic, such as when she and her Hispanic friends were faced with stereotypes from non-Hispanics. In those cases, she felt ashamed not of being associated with the stereotypes propagated about Hispanics but rather of being associated with the culture of the individuals wielding them.

Internal Construction of Identity

Perhaps because their reactions to external factors shaping identity creation ranged from indifference to positivity, many informants felt that internal factors—particularly having access to ethnic raw materials, both American and Hispanic—was more important in their identity-building process than were negative factors such as stereotypes. Indeed, Miguel Acosta, whose mother is from Puerto Rico and father is from Cuba, notes that he identifies primarily as Cuban over Puerto Rican precisely because of his deeper immersion in Cuban culture growing up, as evidenced by his response to my inquiry as to why his Cuban identity was so much stronger:

Miguel: If I had to think about it, it could probably be because I was raised around more Cubans. Um, my grandparents and my aunt, actually, raised me more instead of daycare and things like that, but they were Cuban, and it just made sense.

CEC: [Earlier you said] that your parents were always kind of “stringent about,” like, cultural heritage. [...] What did you mean by that? What does—

Miguel: Um, why...I mean, it didn't...they didn't want us to go throughout our lives without knowing where we came from, the culture. You know, we learned how to cook, learned how to do different things, speak Spanish one of them. Um, I mean, very, uh, very culturalized, and they wanted us to know that. They wanted us to be that, not just,

you know, coming to the States and just being American, you know, not knowing where we came from (Acosta 2015).

Jonny García explains that though he had not had the chance to return to Mexico since emigrating as a child, having vivid memories of his childhood home was very important in his maintaining his sense of Mexican-ness, as was maintaining contact with his life there through his family:

I've not been back since I've been here. So I've been here since I was about five, and I'm 21 now. So about 16 years. And yeah, we...I mean, we have family pictures, and we always get videos from our family there, and we...we call family at least once or twice every two weeks, and I have a very vivid memory of where I grew up before moving here, so I'm definitely, I've not forgotten it, and I remember everything, and then getting pictures just makes me remember even more, and videos. But every time we call back, they always tell us what's different, what's new. We still have a home there with all our things, all my, like, early childhood belongings. My toys and my clothes and everything's still at the house (García 2014).

Similarly, Salvador Hernández, Hector Corcino, and Mateo Sepulveda, who were fortunate enough to make frequent trips back to their home countries with their families, all indicated that these trips were especially important to maintaining their ethnic identities. They say:

Salvador: I feel like maybe if I hadn't gone back [to Mexico] so much, that it would be different. Since I go back, like, once a year, then I...I'm still pretty close with, like, my friends over there or like with my family members. I'm from a small town, so a lot of the people there are my family members (Hernández 2014).

Hector: Well, um, you'll, like, everybody feels a connection with the place they're from, and even though I wasn't born there, I have so much family there, and I go there all the time, and, like, I personally am very proud of, like, my family's heritage and, like, where they're from, and I'm very proud to be Puerto Rican (Corcino 2014).

Mateo: [Getting to go back to Colombia] was extremely important. Looking back, it wasn't as at the time because I would go so regularly to see my family, but at the time...but now, I understand that it's a lot more important that I learned to cherish those moments because it wasn't, my situation was a little bit more different and unique than other people, you know (Sepulveda 2015)?

Susana Solorza reflected on her experience transitioning from El Paso, Texas, where she was in frequent contact with Mexican ethnic materials, to Kentucky, where those materials were less readily available. She relates this to her younger sister's recent experience with ethnic ambiguity after making the same transition:

I guess it made it more obvious, I...I don't know, that I was Mexican. I don't know, how even though I was less surrounded by Mexican culture and, uh, Mexican people, because of that atmosphere...like, for example, with [my younger sister] Emily, she didn't even know what "Mexican" was. [Laughs.] I don't know, that sounds weird, because she herself grew up in Texas, she would go to [the Mexican city] Juárez and everything, too, and but she was like, "Oh, what's being Mexican?" Like, she didn't know what that was, and I...I would assume I went through that same thing, um, when I came over here. I don't remember, like, a moment where, like, this transformation or this internal dialogue changing in my head, it's just...um, but I assume something like that happened (Solorza 2015).

Because she felt so strongly that her experience of being in constant contact with Mexican symbols had formed her own Mexican identity, Susana later spoke of feeling pressure to place extra emphasis on access to similar symbols when raising her future children, who would not have the same immersion experience as she did:

I think because [my husband and I] don't live, especially because we don't live...like, if I was, like, if we were living in El Paso, and we were gonna raise our children there, I feel like I wouldn't have to be this super Mexican mom. Because we're living in Kentucky, and because he's not Mexican, I feel like there has to be even...like, even more Mexican food in the house. There has to be even more Mexican music playing, and, like, because I like both. I mean, I like music in English and music in Spanish, and, but, like I was getting that all the time from my mom. You know what I mean? It was like all Mexican music, all the time from my mom. Nothing in English. I would get the English from my dad. Um, but also a lot of the Mexican from him. So it's just, like, I have to be...I have to pull the double duty with, like, if I'm, like if I...like if I'm gonna buy [my kids] Disney movies, they're all gonna be in Spanish. Um, or like, I guess just put the setting to Spanish when we watch stuff. If I'm gonna buy them books as children, I want them to be in Spanish. Now, I didn't have that when I was little. Like, some of my books were in Spanish. Sometimes we watched movies in Spanish, but I want all of their stuff to be in Spanish. Um, I want them to learn their prayers in Spanish. Um, I want them to...when

they go to my, my mom's house, they can eat whatever she's gonna make, even if it's hot or...does that make any sense? [Laughs] (Solorza 2014).

Meanwhile, Jonny García spoke of the importance of having been schooled in the United States as a determining factor in the development of his American ethnicity:

I would say that I'm just as American as somebody who I went to school with from K through 12 because we've been through the same...like I said, I think education has a lot to do with it once you're already here because you've been through everything together (García 2014).

Phil Fernández, who didn't begin to identify as Hispanic until he was older, reflected on the development of his American ethnicity, explaining that his parents' focus on fostering an American identity in their children was a primary explanation for his initial rejection of the *Cuban* label. Perhaps his experience sheds light on how the *lack* of access to ethnic raw materials—in this case, Hispanic ones—might be as formative a condition as is affirmative access to those materials:

Growing up, I mean, my parents were really good about, um, um, they...I don't, I don't know if the term is Americanize, but when they came over here, like...like, my name's Phillip, right, but there were several before me. My dad's Filipe, and there are Filipes, a whole bunch, you know, and they could've continued to call me Filipe, but they were like, "No, we're in the United States. You're gonna be Phillip." So I was kind of raised to be, I guess, American first, I guess. They really felt that was important, just like with my sister, Lisa, and they, just...that was the way we were raised. And I didn't appreciate my heritage until I got older. Um, I think even, at times, I was almost embarrassed by it. Like when my parents would, like, speak...and my parents rarely did this, uh, but sometimes if they spoke Spanish or, you know, and I had another friend that was also Cuban American, and so if they were out in public and they were talking Spanish, somehow that...we were embarrassed by that. And that was...that was more like a middle school, kind of that age. Uh, but then, later, I...certainly, I, as I learned more about the...the history, and I talked with my family, and, uh, I became very, very proud of my heritage (Fernández 2015).

Allan Moreno, who identifies primarily as Hispanic rather than Honduran, shared a similar experience with his parents, who were also concerned about ensuring his smooth adaptation to American culture after migrating as a child. He considers this influence and his American education determining factors in his identity construction:

When people ask me, I always say I was raised in Nashville, and a lot of my friends who, like, have stronger roots in their countries kind of judge me sometimes. They're like, "Oh, are you not proud?" And it's just like, well, I was eight, so I was [immersed] into [...] the American culture, and when you're eight, you're like a sponge, so you absorb everything that's around you. So sometimes, I do feel guilty because, like, I'm not as excited, like, "Oh my gosh, oh, I'm from Honduras." Um so, like, from other friends who came here when they were 18 or 15 or 16, and they are like, "Oh my gosh, Imma die...for my country. Like, this is like my everything." You know? Uh, so I guess there is guilt in that sometimes. When people ask me, like, "Why don't you identify yourself more into being a Hondurian or more into being this and that," I just say I am Hispanic. [...] My parents were always questioning, like, "Oh my gosh, is he going to adapt himself fast here or not?" And I adapted...I was like, oh, yeah, I don't miss it. Like, I don't miss Honduras. I don't... there's not a desire for me to, oh my gosh, I need to go back. [...] And that's just me. I mean, most [other Hispanic] people would just be like...and it all ties back to, like, I was raised here, so it's just like, I, I mean, like, I obviously learned the history of the United States, you know, and it's not that I'm trying to be, like I would never want to trade my nationality, like, not being Hispanic. I love being Hispanic. [...] I never will ever feel ashamed of being Hispanic at all. It's just that I'm a more realistic person. Like, I feel like I see myself as, if I'm in the United States, and I want to be successful, I need to [immerse myself into] that culture (Moreno 2014).

On the opposite side of the spectrum from Phil was Mateo Sepulveda, who considered his lack of profound interaction with American culture as a child to have contributed to his development of a less American identity. When asked if his non-Hispanic peers in grade school treated him differently because he was Hispanic, he responded:

Mmm, at times. You know, obviously, they would call me Mexican, but it was more like I was isolated, you know? Like, culturally isolated. I did have friends that were from there, but overall, people were just like, oh, he's Hispanic (Sepulveda 2015).

Miguel Acosta relayed the possibility of negative effects of ethnic replenishment on desire to identify with one's place of origin in a given context. He perceived the first-generation Cuban individuals who had recently been migrating to his home region in south Florida as unfairly giving a bad reputation to other Cubans in the area by not personifying the values he associated with his Cuban ethnicity:

There's a lot of Cuban culture here. A lot of Cubans moved up here from Miami. They're finding out it's quiet. Um, it's...it's brought a few things. It's making it easier for people to understand Cuban culture, um, but it's also brought I guess a little shame because, um, you know, a lot of the Cubans that moved up here were involved in the drug trade and things like that, so a lot of these houses...[people] hear about grow houses and things like that. You know, they say, "Oh, who was arrested for it?" and it just so happens to be a couple of Cubans. Um, and there's always like the, you know, the Cuban businesses, or restaurants, at this point. You know, they're...they have their way of doing things, but, like, I've always...I guess I've always looked at us as a prideful culture. You know, we're very prideful of being Hispanic, being Cuban, and quality, you know, things like that. That's taught me a lot. Um, but seeing these, some of these restaurants that are kind of knock off Cuban...Cuban cuisine, or, like, cheap ways of doing things, it's like, you know, it puts a sour taste in others' mouths when it's not good, and then, you know, they look at us like, "Oh, I hate Cuban food." I relate a lot of it to food. [Laughs.] But it's...it's a lot of other things, too (Acosta 2015).

In this case, Miguel's hesitance to associate with others of his ethnicity does not reflect shame of the ethnicity itself; indeed, quite the opposite seems to be true. Because he has so much pride in his Cuban heritage, he is reluctant to attach himself to people he perceives to be corrupting that identity. However, his experience, as we have seen, is an atypical one: most informants felt that having been in consistent contact with the cultural products and active members of an ethnic group, whether Hispanic or non-Hispanic, significantly helped foster their identification with that group's ethnicity, to the extent of even outweighing their aversion to association with stereotypes regarding the group.

It is particularly interesting to consider whether the relative influences of internal construction of and external opposition to identity articulations may be a reflection of shifting norms in mainstream American culture, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, rather than (or in addition to) any natural state of the relationship between the two types of forces or individual reactions thereto. Consider, for example, the case of Phil Fernández, whose experience as the only middle-aged informant was in some ways exceptional. Though Phil is now proud of his Cuban heritage, as I have indicated above, he felt little attachment to his Cuban identity as a child, even expressing several instances of having felt embarrassed by this identity. He noted that this embarrassment was usually the result of being able to “sense other people’s discomfort” with his ethnicity (Fernández). The salience of these experiences was atypical when viewed in the larger group context and stand in stark contrast to Gilberto Martínez’s articulations, outlined in Chapter 3, about feeling more comfortable identifying as American because of that culture’s greater tolerance for diversity as compared with Latino/a cultures.

Perhaps these differences reflect the larger evolution of expectations regarding immigrants in the United States, which I discussed briefly in my introduction. As Alba and Nee explain, “legislative reforms have brought about a watershed change in the formal rules regulating entry into the American mainstream for native-born minorities and immigrants” (279) since the Civil Rights era. This has resulted in a “fundamentally altered...institutional environment” that, they argue, has “re[made] the racial [and ethnic] boundaries” in this country (279). These reconstructed boundaries, in turn, have contributed to a “profound set of changes in the attitudes of Americans toward

ethnicity, race, and visible difference” that have fostered growing acceptance of “racial and ethnic inclusion as a social value” (280). Perhaps Phil’s divergent experience is a reflection of the diminishing prevalence of negative influences on identity construction and the other informants’ relative emphasis on internal factors an indication of their having grown up in a more tolerant era. The future implications of this theory are particularly interesting: if these different experiences with ethnic identity construction are, indeed, a reflection of a significantly evolving culture of tolerance for diversity, how are these trends likely to continue in the future as those values presumably become even more strongly institutionalized?

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have examined the Hispanic American experience through several lenses. I began by providing a contextual overview of the scholarly literature on ethnic boundary formation, arguing that the boundaries dividing ethnic groups, as pliable social constructs, can be shaped and blurred. Individuals' ethnic identity is a reflection of their position relative to the boundary separating groups, and this position, because of its constructed nature, can be influenced by both external and internal forces. Particularly important in the "external" category of influence are both outsider and insider challenges to authenticity, particularly in the form of stereotypes and discrimination, which, as scholars such as Tanya Golash-Boza and David Gutiérrez note, can have both positive and negative impacts on ethnic identity. Whereas many individuals subjected to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity will attempt to minimize the salience of that identity as a means of preventing future discrimination, others will take the opposite approach, finding comfort in the similar experiences of other individuals in the ethnic intragroup. At the same time, internal forces such as prevalence and context of interaction with "ethnic raw materials" accompany and

interact with these external influences, creating a complex dynamic between desired identity and social capacity to live out that identity.

Next, I outlined my understanding of terms commonly used throughout the document and explained the methods I used to gather information, including my heavy reliance on interviews in the data collection process and my decision to quote informants *verbatim* as opposed to removing speech irregularities such as filler words. Because my study focuses on identity, it requires a special emphasis on hearing informants' own voices, as they are the only true experts on their own self-concept. For the same reason, I argued in favor of verbatim quoting so as to provide the most accurate and complete representation of informants' own voices as possible.

In Chapter 3, I began my discussion of informants' identity construction by outlining their perceptions of and relationships to the Hispanic and American social boundaries. In analyzing the categories they preferred to use to label the Hispanic diaspora, I indicated their general preference for the term *Hispanic* over *Latino* on the bases of 1) relative likelihood of the term to be understood by outsiders, 2) frequency of usage of the term on government documents and in social discourse among the intra- and inter-groups alike, and 3) its inclusion of a larger group of cultures with core similarities. I also outlined many informants' preference for the demonym specifically associated with their respective nationalities, both because of pride in that ethnic label and specificity of origin.

I then illustrated how they conceived belonging within the Hispanic group, discussing their particular emphasis on the roles played by shared values such as family,

“warmth” of interpersonal interactions, and Catholicism. Also important were birthplace and nationality: many took a more technical approach to defining belonging, arguing that one’s bloodlines and citizenship status were crucial defining factors. Finally, language played a pivotal role in belonging, although there was some disagreement regarding the limits of that role. While all informants felt that language significantly aided one’s ability to fully participate in *hispanidad*, a few did not consider an inability to speak the language a hindering factor in identity. Others, however, felt strongly that it was, claiming even to be offended by other Hispanics’ inability to speak Spanish as a perceived lack of interest in their own ethnic heritage. For most, language skills were seen as a critical means of being able to fully immerse into Hispanic culture but not so much so as to be defining.

I concluded Chapter 3 by identifying the strength of informants’ overall sense of connection with individuals in each of three ethnic categories: non-Hispanic Americans, non-American Hispanics, and Hispanic Americans of differing nationalities. I showed that most felt some attachment with each of the three groups, the strongest attachment being that to Hispanic Americans of any nationality and the weakest that to non-American Hispanics. Analyzing why this may be the case, I discussed the similar findings of sociologist Tomás Jiménez, who discovered that many Mexican Americans in his own research displayed a strong preference to be seen as their own unique group, both fully Mexican and fully American. Though his informants’ articulations were stronger than those of my own informants, I argued that the groups’ experiences were

interrelated and their differences perhaps a reflection of varying prevalence of immigration issues in the groups' respective communities.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the relative influence on identity of both external factors such as stereotypes and discrimination and internal factors such as contact with important ethnic symbols. I began with the former, judging that whereas few informants had significant experience with direct discrimination, nearly all had experienced varying degrees of stereotypes, which, in turn, had ranging degrees of influence on their identities. The most commonly reported stereotypes were those regarding phenotype, academic performance, and nationality: informants frequently indicated others' expectations that all Hispanics were dark-featured Mexicans prone to low scholarly ambition. Interestingly, few felt that the media was particularly important in propagating these stereotypes, and among those who did, several mentioned the role of the Hispanic media in particular, emphasizing its lack of diversity in terms of nationality and topics treated. However, despite fairly extensive experience with stereotypes and an admitted sense of aggravation with them from time to time, most informants considered those stereotypes only minimally influential to their identity construction. Furthermore, when the stereotypes were relevant to identity, they often had a positive impact—rather than deterring informants from identifying with their Hispanic culture, they motivated them to do so in hopes of reducing prevalence of those stereotypes and encouraging other Hispanics to persevere in spite of them.

My final topic of analysis was the role of internal forces on identity, focusing on the role of opportunities to engage in the practice of ethnicity. This was the area

informants indicated as having the strongest impact on their relationship to their ethnic heritage, with several proclaiming that the Hispanic aspect of their ethnicities would have been significantly less pronounced had they not had those opportunities. Two forms of interaction with ethnic “raw materials” were particularly highlighted: 1) parents’ emphasis on their children’s developing a specific identity, be it American or Hispanic, and 2) informants’ experiences (or lack thereof) having returned to their countries of origin. Many informants felt these were the single most important factors contributing to their identity construction.

These findings are significant for several reasons. First, as I argued in my conclusion to Chapter 4, they may be reflective of a fundamental shift in underlying American cultural norms. Whereas the assimilation literature was as recently as a few decades ago dominated by a resounding assumption that migrants not only *would* assimilate to American culture but furthermore *should* do so, respect for multiculturalism is increasingly the norm in both the scholarly and public discourses. This is particularly important when considered alongside the blurred state of the Hispanic/American boundary: my study seems to suggest that Hispanic Americans as a whole, while both fully Hispanic and fully American, also constitute a “hybrid” group unique in and of itself. I believe that as this group’s relative influence on the various aspects (social, cultural, economic, and political) of American society continues to expand, their multicultural perspectives and ability to integrate the positive features of Hispanic and American societies will reinforce the values of tolerance and diversity that increasingly prevail in the United States.

However, there are still several points of ambiguity regarding this “hybridity” that further research would do well to consider. First of all, while I have focused primarily on the impact of *negative* external forces in the construction of identity, it is also useful to consider that these forces can also be positive in nature. Specifically, further studies might reevaluate how identity may shift according to the relative benefits offered by claiming a particular ethnicity, such as for affirmative action purposes. Though this came up briefly in my own study in the case of one individual who felt especially compelled to engage with her ethnicity to honor her having won a diversity scholarship for college, as my research focused more on interpersonal influences on identity over institutional ones, I did not examine this aspect in any detailed sense.

Another avenue of interest is the discrepancy between articulated and lived identities. As previously mentioned, informants must be “front and center” in identity studies, as they are the only experts on themselves. However, as I noticed throughout the interviewing process, the degree of an individual’s ethnic self-awareness significantly shapes her ability to express her own identity verbally, which, given the almost sole reliance on an individual’s own identity narrative in collecting identity-related data, significantly impacts the research process. Thus, future researchers may consider evaluating what influences an individual’s own ethnic awareness, how her articulations might differ from what she actually lives out in her daily life, and how these factors may impact identity studies more generally.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF INFORMANTS

Name	Age Category	Gender	Birth-place	Age of immigration to USA (if applicable and in years)	Father's country of origin	Mother's country of origin	Occupation	Home State in USA
Miguel Acosta	18-24	Male	USA	--	Cuba	Puerto Rico	Photojournalist	FL
Hector Corcino	18-24	Male	USA	--	Puerto Rico	Puerto Rico	College student	TN
Ricardo Córdova	18-24	Male	Mexico	10	Mexico	Mexico	College student	TX
Adrián Durón	18-24	Male	USA	--	Mexico	Mexico	High school student	IL
Paulina Durón	18-24	Female	USA	--	Mexico	Mexico	Custodian	IL
Carolina Escobar	18-24	Female	USA	--	Guatemala	El Salvador	College student	CA
Phil Fernández	Middle aged	Male	USA	--	Cuba	Cuba	Newspaper editor	FL
Jonny García	18-24	Male	Mexico	5	Mexico	Mexico	College student	TN
Salvador Hernández	18-24	Male	Mexico	7	Mexico	Mexico	College student	TN
Gilberto Martínez	18-24	Male	Mexico	5	Mexico	Mexico	College student	TN
Allan Moreno Lara	18-24	Male	Honduras	8	Honduras	Honduras	College student	TN
Mateo Sepulveda	18-24	Male	Colombia	6	USA	Colombia	College student	KY
Francisco Serrano	18-24	Male	USA	--	El Salvador	El Salvador	College student	KY

Susana Solorza	18-24	Female	USA	--	USA (Second Generation Mexican)	Mexico	Catholic ministry director	TX
Jessica Viñas	18-24	Female	Mexico	1	Mexico	Mexico	College student	TN
Marissa Webb	18-24	Female	USA	--	USA	USA (Second Generation Mexican)	College student	KY

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Tell me a bit about your family—where your parents are from, where you grew up, etc.
- 2) What would you define your ethnicity as? Why have you chosen that label? Are there any labels that you don't like?
- 3) What do you think it means to be (the term identified above)? What are the important symbols, customs, or characteristics that you think define this group?
- 4) Have you ever felt like you were expected to act or be a certain way because of your family heritage or your ethnic identity? [If yes] Who made you feel this way? What was your response?
- 5) Have you ever felt discriminated against, excluded, or out of place on the basis of your ethnicity or other characteristics? [If yes] Who made you feel this way (e.g. other Hispanics, non-Hispanics)? How did you respond?
- 6) Would you say that your ethnic identity is something that you chose for yourself or something that was chosen or created for you? Why do you think this?
- 7) Have you ever felt reluctant or hesitant to identify as Hispanic or Hispanic American? Why or why not? What about as American?
- 8) Who or what do you think has been most important in determining your ethnic identity? Why?
- 9) What role do you think your parents have played in the formation of your identity? Would you say they actively encouraged the development of a specific identity for you? [If yes] How/why?
- 10) Do you think the media and/or pop culture has played a role in your ethnic identity? [If yes] How?
- 11) Do you think that your physical appearance has impacted your identity at all? [If yes] How?

- 12) Would you say that you have more non-Hispanic friends than Hispanic ones, vice versa, or an equal amount? Do you think that your relationships with your Hispanic friends are different than those with your non-Hispanic friends? [If yes] How?
- 13) Do you have a lot of contact with non-American Hispanics (i.e. Mexicans who grew up in Mexico)? Do you think that your interactions with them are at all different than your interactions with Hispanic Americans? [If yes] How?
- 14) What role do you think being able or unable to speak Spanish has played in your identity? Does someone have to speak Spanish to be Hispanic?
- 15) If you have other second-generation family members (i.e. siblings, cousins), do you think that they share the same ethnic identity as you? Why do you think that is?
- 16) Have you had a lot of contact with other Hispanic Americans from a country different than your own? Do you feel like you have a lot in common with them? Does their being from a different country change how well you can relate to them as compared with your friends from the same Hispanic country as you?
- 17) Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX C: Institutional Review Board Project Approval Letter



*INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY*

DATE: October 15, 2014

TO: Caroline Culbreth
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [661908-1] Honors Thesis: Examining Cultural Identity in Second Generation U.S. Hispanics and Latinos/as

REFERENCE #: IRB 15-129

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: October 15, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: May 15, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 15, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.