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**REDEFINING LATINE IDENTITY THROUGH
CONVERSATIONS WITH THOSE WHO LIVE IT**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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April 2023

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Chapter I: Introduction

Identity is one of the most crucial aspects of what it means to be a human being. It is also one of the most complex and profound concepts to explore and understand. As human beings our identities incorporate so many different categories and characteristics that we relate to and that is why our identities are intersectional. Our identities unify us and connect us to others that have similar identities and experiences. At the same time, our identities make us unique and give us the freedom to be who we truly are. Yet, we can't always control everything around us and that includes how our identities are perceived by others in society.

Labels are placed on us everyday by people all around us who for whatever reason, are ignorant, uneducated, or sometimes just discriminatory. Throughout history various groups of people with common identifiers such as their culture, religious beliefs, race, gender, etc., have been stereotyped and misunderstood. As a result, groups of people have been mistreated and discriminated against. The evolution of mass media has only exacerbated the ability to spread stereotypes, false information, and assumptions about groups of people whose identities are far more complex than other people or the media gives them credit for. Only those people who have experienced what it means to embody a certain identity can truly speak on how they identify.

This belief in the importance of self-identification is what sparked the inspiration for my thesis proposal. For my thesis, I studied the important factors and aspects that constitute 21st century Latine identity by 1) reflecting on my own experiences and 2) drawing from conversations with other individuals who live and experience this identity, in order to help readers better understand the complexity of such a unique, diverse, and salient communities in the world. Ultimately the goal of this thesis, through my research, personal experience, and

conversations with other Latines, is to redefine Latine identity from the perspective of Latine people themselves.

You may be wondering why I'm using the term "Latine" as opposed to "Latino." I decided that for this thesis I would use a gender neutral term to describe and talk about this group of people. You likely have seen or heard the term "Latinx" used to express gender neutrality among Latines. However, I chose to use Latine because as one source I read explained, "some people argue that the letter "x" doesn't honor the Spanish pronunciation" (McGee). Basically, many people who speak Spanish find it hard to pronounce "Latinx" and so they prefer to use Latine. Besides, as another article points out, the Spanish language "already uses "e" as a gender-neutral ending to words" (Garcia). In other words, Latine makes more sense to use in Spanish than Latinx because it's easier to pronounce and the letter "e" already serves as a gender neutral ending. I wanted to explain this choice of words before getting started. The only times I'll use "Latino(s)," "Latina(s)," "Hispanic(s)" is when I'm referring to myself because that's how I identify, or when other sources or individuals that I'm quoting, use these terms. In the next chapter, I'll further explain the origins of these broad, pan-ethnic, and homogenous terms.

I believe that studying how Latines self-identify is crucial because this group of people make vital cultural, economic, and educational contributions to the United States, among a lot of other things. Therefore, it is extremely salient that as a society, the United States better understands the complex nature of Latine identities, instead of perceiving them in the stereotypical and derogatory ways they are often depicted in the media, by politicians, and others. By failing to understand and value the rich and diverse universe of Latine identity, society risks ostracizing this important group of people that has so much potential and who provide so much vibrant cultural richness everywhere and anywhere they are.

However, the importance of this thesis extends far beyond the benefits that society gains from better understanding Latine identity. Some may struggle to understand why Latines and other minorities in the U.S. fight so hard to explain how we want to be labeled or identified. I think that Dr. Johanna Fernandez-- a PhD, Associate History Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York-- perfectly explains for non-Latine individuals, why many Latines place such an emphasis and importance on clarifying Latine identity. She tells *Teen Vogue*: “[Non-hispanic] white Americans live in a country where to be American is to be white American by default, so there’s no question about who you are. But if you are on the outside, there’s a quest to find out who you are, so naming — what we call ourselves — is very important.” (Garcia). I truly believe that this is at the core of why many minorities, like Latines, fight to be accurately identified and represented. Minorities in the U.S don’t have the luxury of being the “automatic” image of what an American is. At least not yet, and that is another reason why this thesis is so important.

I know that not everyone-- Latines or not-- will agree with everything that is said in this thesis. I don’t expect everyone to agree, because that is not the goal. The goal is to advance the understanding of the complexity and diversity of Latine identity, as well as the problems that come with this broad, pan-ethnic term. People will agree with some things, disagree with others, but that’s expected because it’s a COMPLEX topic and no one person is necessarily right. This is about learning from people who experience and embody the Latine identity and how differently people live this identity that supposedly defines a vast array of people, nationalities, and cultures.

I want my thesis, my project, to be a chance for people to learn more about how beautifully diverse, interconnected, and intricate Latine identity is. Furthermore, I want my project to be an opportunity for Latine identifying people to have a voice and share about their

experiences, how they self-identify, and why. I'm hoping that through my conversations with other Latines, their narratives and mine can shed a little more light on the problems with understanding Latines only under these pan-ethnic umbrella terms. That being said, I'll now dive into the history of the terms "Latino" and "Hispanics" in relation to how the United States government and other institutions use them to identify people.

Chapter II: History of the Terms

I am sure that everyone reading this has at some point in their life filled out a demographic survey or census, whether it be for a standardized test, medical papers, a job application, or any federal institution. In these surveys, individuals are asked to provide information on how they identify in relation to categories like race and ethnicity and other personal identifiers. The US Census Bureau states that “the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino” (US Census Bureau).

Additionally, the option of “Hispanic or Latino” is broken up further into the following categories and options: “Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano”; “Puerto Rican”; “Cuban”; and “another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” (US Census Bureau). Due to the complex nature of Latine identity, and these simplified/limited categories, Latines have often felt confused and frustrated when it comes to filling out these sections of federal documents and censuses. After all, the terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably even though they mean two different things and can’t always be used in the same situations. The encyclopedia “Britannica” explains that generally speaking, the word “Latino” is “understood as shorthand for the Spanish word *latinoamericano* and refers to (almost) anyone born in or with ancestors from Latin America and living in the U.S., including Brazilians” (Encyclopaedia Britannica). On the other hand, they explain that “Hispanic” is “generally accepted as a narrower term that includes people only from Spanish-speaking Latin America, including those countries/territories of the Caribbean or from Spain itself” (Encyclopaedia Britannica). That might seem simple enough, but it gets interesting and more complex.

By these definitions, people from the Caribbean-- Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans-- should be considered Hispanics, but not Latines. They speak Spanish, but are from the Caribbean, not Latin America. However, I've heard a multitude of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban musical artists refer to themselves as "Latinos" or "Latinas." The confusion doesn't end there. According to these same definitions, people from countries like English-speaking Belize, French-speaking French Guyana, and Dutch-speaking Suriname should technically be called Latines, since those countries are located in Latin America. However, in language and other cultural aspects, these people are very different from their neighboring Spanish-speaking countries, and wouldn't technically be considered Latines. Another gray area when it comes to these umbrella terms are indigenous people of Latin America.

Some countries, like Guatemala, have large indigenous populations. Many Guatemalans are indigenous Maya and still closely attached to that culture, including the various Mayan languages. Guatemala alone has 22 indigenous Mayan dialects. Indigenous Mayans that don't speak Spanish technically aren't Hispanic, and from my experiences of talking with them, most of them don't identify as Latine. People from Spain on the other hand are considered Hispanic, but not Latine since Spain is in Europe and not Latin America. But just like people from some countries should technically only be considered one or the other, some people can be considered both. For example a non-indigenous, Spanish-speaking Colombian can be considered Hispanic and Latine because they come from a Spanish-speaking country in Latin America. By now your head might be spinning, but I hope that you can begin to realize and understand that the identities so simply grouped together by the government as the umbrella terms "Hispanic" and "Latino," are far more complicated than what the words convey.

Journalist and author Yara Simón helps us understand the history of these terms a little more with her article “Latino, Hispanic, Latinx, Chicano: The History Behind the Terms: The effort to coin a term to describe a wildly diverse group of Americans has long stirred controversy.” She does an excellent job of explaining the complex history that appropriately accompanies the complex web of Latine identity. In fact, her introductory paragraph almost perfectly encapsulates what I’m attempting to explain and argue. She says

The terms Latino, Hispanic and Latinx are often used interchangeably to describe a group that makes up about 19 percent of the U.S. population. While it’s now common to use umbrella terms to categorize those with ties to more than 20 Latin American countries, these words haven’t always fostered a sense of community among the people they’re supposed to describe (Simón).

As my thesis begins to unravel, you’ll begin to understand why the use of these umbrella terms can be so problematic when truly trying to understand the identities of people who come from or descend from Latin America-- especially when living in the United States. As Simón suggests, many people including myself aren’t satisfied with the use of these umbrella terms to describe our unique identities-- and again that’s why I’m writing my thesis on this topic. However, it’s important that as we explore, dissect, and ultimately criticize these terms, that we know a bit more about where they come from. Apparently, the first time the federal government used the word Hispanic in a census was 1980 (Simón). However, Simón explains that the term Hispanic didn’t really catch on until the 1990s. According to G. Cristina Mora, a sociologist professor and author of “Making Hispanics; How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American,” Hispanic derived from the word *hispano* which people were already using (Simón). However, Mora explains that bureaucrats and others in the Nixon administration chose

to use the word Hispanic because they thought it was “helpful because it sounded more American” (Simón). Knowing this helps us better understand the creation and use of “Latino.”

As she points out, “the term has been criticized for highlighting Spain, which colonized much of Latin America” (Simón). She continues on by saying that for that reason, many people suggested the alternative term “Latino” which emphasized the people of the region and not the language nor the colonizer country that introduced that language. As a result, by 2002 the term Latino was included in the census in the same question that asked if someone was “Spanish/Hispanic” (Simón). However, discontentment did not end there. Simón explains that even though “Latino deemphasized the connection to Spain, some still rejected the term as it attempted to group several distinct cultures into one” (Simón). In other words, many people were very much opposed to the concept of grouping millions of people, from various distinct nationalities and cultures, into a single pan-ethnic identity term. As you will learn throughout this thesis, these sentiments are still very much alive.

An interesting article I read by David Gonzalez called “What’s the Problem with ‘Hispanic’? Just Ask a ‘Latino,’” is yet another example that highlights the confusion and frustration that these pan-ethnic identity labels cause people like myself. Although the article dates back to 1992, it’s very relevant, and in fact underlines just how big this identity labeling issue has been for so long. The author discusses how some people dislike the use of Hispanic because it “recalls the colonization by Spain and Portugal and ignores the Indian and African roots of many people it describes” (Gonzalez). This goes along the lines of what Simón was explaining, but goes further by saying that some people feel that Latino incorporates people and communities in Latin America that don’t speak Spanish (the colonizer’s language). I do believe that this distinction is important because it’s disrespectful and ignorant to group all Latin

Americans as being Spanish speakers. I would say that the use of “Hispanic” to describe everyone from Latin America is wrong because it completely ignores the significant indigenous cultures and other groups that exist in Latin America that don’t use or speak Spanish.

This article brought up other intriguing points such as the one made by someone called Ms. Cisneros. She grew up in Chicago using “Latino” at home because according to her, the choice of words (Latino or Hispanic) is a sign of ““what side of the line” a person stands on” (Gonzalez). As Gonzalez explains, Hispanic-- in Ms. Cisneros’s case-- “connotes social striving, a desire to be accepted at any cost, even by using an "English" word” (Gonzalez). Another person named Ricardo Salinas has a similar perspective about the word Hispanic when he says “It's the ultimate assimilation, with that word” (Gonzalez). However, the opinion to use Hispanic versus Latino is also not a unanimous decision within the community. The article talks about several other people, such as Raul Yzaguirre-- the president of the National Council of La Raza (a national civil rights organization)-- who say they prefer to use Hispanic instead of Latino. Clearly the homogenous, overarching labels of Hispanic and Latino have for a long time been a point of disagreement both within and outside the “community.” I placed the word “community” in quotation marks on purpose because as this thesis progresses, you will see that despite what institutions, politicians, and others think, Latines are not so much one giant community, but instead several different and distinct communities and cultures that have been grouped (labeled) together, largely, against their will.

I will continue to argue and demonstrate throughout my thesis, that these attitudes against the umbrella terms Latine are very much alive. Gonzalez talks about how there are bumper stickers that say things like “"No soy hispano, soy Cubano" (I am not Hispanic, I am Cuban), a sentiment echoed among other groups who loath to see their achievements and struggles vanish

in the swirl of the melting pot” (Gonzalez). Latines are tired of being perceived as being “the same.” It’s important that people know and acknowledge that Latin American and Caribbean countries are so much more than their shared history of colonization by Spain. They are immensely rich in cultures and customs that deserve to be known and shared. I’ve included these bits of history about the umbrella terms in order to help others understand that the fight and resistance against these homogeneous identity labels is nothing new. People from Latin America have long been fighting to be seen, heard, and understood as more than a glob of people that share a similar colonial history and area of the world they call home.

You may have noted that I have been using the word “technically” in my explanations. That is because I want you to know that when I am explaining these terms and ideas, I am explaining them in accordance with what has been formally accepted by the government and other institutions. Another purpose of my thesis is to expose the problems and flaws of these umbrella terms and try to shed light on how truly convoluted “Latine” identity is. I can’t promise-- and in fact, I can almost guarantee that I won’t come to a definite answer on how we should identify these groups of people. However, I do believe that my conversations with self-identifying Latines will help clarify how we can better understand “Latine” identity and how to approach it when referring to and talking with people of this identity. I expect to receive a plethora of different answers on how Latines self-identify, and why. I believe that the plethora of answers will further prove my point of how difficult it is to try and encompass such a diverse group of people under broad labels. The point of gathering these narratives from Latines is to give them the opportunity to voice the ways they prefer to self-identify. It’s time the world learns how we want to be called, instead of outside groups identifying us by what we “technically” are.

When I use the term “outside” groups, I am referring to individuals, the media, or groups of people that are not themselves Latines. Before I go any further I think that it is important for readers to know that I myself identify as Latino. So when I use words like “we, us, our,” I really am speaking from my experience in relation to my community, identity, and experiences with other people who identify as Latine. That being said, I want to acknowledge that I can only speak on MY experiences. Others who identify as Latine are likely going to have different experiences that have shaped the way they identify themselves and what they understand Latinedad to be. That is why I am focusing on narratives and responses that I get from conversing with other self-identifying Latines. I don’t believe that there is one universal way to explain or define Latinedad, but I do think that it’s important to understand these terms and concepts in certain ways and be able to recognize our community as being much more diverse, heterogenous, and intricate than outside sources perceive and represent us to be.

Chapter III: Misconceptions of Latine Identity

I've mentioned that I think there are several problems with the way that the Latine community is depicted, perceived, and understood. The first issue I want to discuss is the confusion about whether Latines are a race or an ethnicity. To make this distinction, we should first understand what both of these terms mean. An article I read by Amy Morin called "What's the Difference between Race and Ethnicity?" clarifies the contrast between these two concepts. She explains that race is a categorization of people who are "linked with physical characteristics such as hair texture and skin color" (Morin). On the other hand, she explains that ethnicity can be understood as a group of people with "commonalities such as race, national origin, tribal heritage, religion, language, and culture (Morin). In other words, race is a more broad concept that is faultily based on simply looking at the way someone appears physically. Ethnicity is a more complex and specific categorization of people who share more things in common than simply appearance. Ethnic groups are unified by shared culture, history, customs, experiences, language, etc.

Unlike race-- a social construct built around power relationships and the ability to differentiate people solely on the color of their skin-- ethnicity is a bit more complicated because it's not as clear cut as being able to look at someone's skin tone. That's not to discredit the destructive power and evil effects that race has had on history. I'm also not saying that ethnic groups have not been subject to discrimination before, because they certainly have been. What I'm saying is that ethnicity has to be understood in a different way than race, and often it is not. Latine identity is often racialized in the same way that being Black or White is and that's problematic.

However, even the U.S. Census' definition and categorization of Latines being an ethnicity isn't completely accurate. By Morin's definition of ethnicity, the Latines shouldn't be considered an ethnicity, but rather a term that encompasses many different ethnicities. After all, as I will continue to argue throughout this thesis, Latines are heterogeneous, not homogeneous. They aren't one group of people that share the same customs, traditions, national origin, cultures, history, religion, etc. Latines are people of different nationalities, customs, cultures, practices, and lived experiences. The term Latine is ultimately a label that encompasses various distinct ethnicities.

Just recently, someone shared with me an NBC article called "Biden administration proposes to let people choose Hispanic or Latino as a race," written by Suzanne Gamboa. I'm very grateful that they shared this with me because it fits perfectly with my discussion of Latine identity and more specifically with the conversation about issues with the way society views and categorizes. The U.S census and demographic surveys have long been a point of confusion and frustration for Latines because many times people aren't sure what to mark. Currently, there are two questions: one asks you whether you are Hispanic/Latino/Spanish. The second question asks what your race is and gives you options such as White, Black, Asian, etc. Obviously Latines and Hispanics likely mark "yes" for the first question, but many are left confused on what to mark for race because they are neither White, Black, Asian, or any other option. Many Latines have different tones of brown skin and so they're not White-passing, but they're also not Black or any other option.

For this reason, as the author of the article explains, "the Biden administration is proposing to allow people to check off Hispanic or Latino as their race, as well as their ethnicity" (Gamboa). The administration is considering doing this for a couple of reasons. The first is that

“A large and growing share of Latinos have reported either no race or chose some other race on the decennial census and the American Community Survey” (Gamboa). In other words, due to the confusion and not feeling like they “fit” into the race categories, many Latines choose to not mark a race or select races that they don’t really identify with. Gamboa explains that overall this confusion is problematic because “there has long been debate about how Hispanics or Latinos are captured in the census and other government data and whether the two-part question contributes to undercounts of the population” (Gamboa). If there are undercounts of the Latine and Hispanic population, then that means that research studying these populations isn’t getting accurate or reflective representation.

I have two thoughts in response to this proposed change for the census. The first is that I do believe that adding Latine as an option for race would simplify things a lot more for Latines and diminish the confusion they feel when filling out census and demographic sections of surveys. However, my second thought is that this is not good at all because it’s going to further mislead and further feed into the incorrect idea people have that Latine/o/a or Hispanic is a race. I cannot reiterate it enough that Latine and Hispanic are not a race identity. Placing these as options under race will continue to misinform people that these terms identify a race. Latines comprise a variety of races and skin tones and so they will never be considered a race. While I understand that the administration wants to simplify things on the census, I don’t believe “Latino” or “Hispanic” should be an option listed under the question of what race someone is. I’ll be very interested to see if this proposed change goes through and is put into action.

Partly, the confusion around Latine identity, race, and ethnicity stems from stereotypical media depictions of Latines. A stereotypical depiction of a Latine is usually someone who has brown or olive toned skin, brown eyes, dark/black hair, and facial hair. In my experience I’ve

seen so many cartoons, movie/tv characters, logos, etc., of Latines-- especially Mexicans-- depicted as little brown men with mustaches and a sombrero. These stereotypical depictions are ridiculous, yet so prevalent and truly misrepresent and distort people's perceptions of Latines. The Latine community-- even when looking individually at each Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean country-- is immensely diverse. There are so many Latines that are Black, White, and every skin tone in between. However, because of the stereotypical depictions we see in the media all around us, many people really aren't aware of this. Even just within the context of my immediate family, my siblings and I have felt and experienced this stereotyping and racialization of the Latine identity. In order to understand what I'm about to explain, you should know a little bit about my background.

My father is about a 5'9" man with brown skin, brown eyes, black hair, and from Guatemala. My mother is roughly 5'6," has white skin, green eyes, and sandy blonde hair. My siblings and I are therefore pretty diverse in our appearances. I, the oldest child, am a 5'10" man with olive-toned skin, hazel eyes, and brown hair. The second oldest is a 5'8" woman with olive-toned skin, brown eyes, and jet black hair. The third oldest is my other sister who is about 5'4," has tan but lighter skin, brown eyes, and light brown hair. Finally there is my little brother who measures a giant 6'3," has fair white skin, brown eyes, and dark brown hair. I know there are relatively broad and simplistic descriptions, but for the purpose of this point these descriptions should suffice. Although all four of us come from the same two parents, we vary in our physical appearances, and as a result, the ways in which we are perceived has also differed.

My mixed appearance has in turn brought about mixed perceptions from other people. Because of my olive toned skin, dark facial hair, and relatively average stature, some people have assumed upon meeting me that I am Latine. On the other hand, there are also people who have

thought that I am “white” because of my hazel eyes. Of course this also depends on the context. When I’m among Caucasians (White people), they tend to view me as Latine. On the contrary, when I’m around Latines who have dark brown eyes and black hair, I am more often perceived as white or “gringo,” than Latine. The oldest sister with the brown eyes and black hair however, has shared many stories relating to the ways she’s been perceived by outsiders as Latina and treated differently because of that, whereas around other Latines, she has been more easily identified as Latina.

My even younger sister has had the complete opposite experiences. Given her lighter complexion and light brown hair she has more often been perceived as white. She’s recounted many stories where other Latines have spoken Spanish around her assuming that she doesn’t understand-- most likely because they think she’s white-- or times when she’s told Latines that she’s Guatemalan and they act with surprise. I’m guessing you can now maybe imagine how my fair skinned, 6’3,” brown haired brother might be treated. Out of all of us, he most defies the physical stereotype of how Latine “should look.” He’s not short, brown skinned, nor does he have a lot of facial hair. Whenever we go back and visit Guatemala, people gawk at his height because it’s not very common for Guatemalans to be that tall. Still, none of our physical appearances make us any less Latino/a. I hope that this example, although simple, helps you understand a bit better the issue of racializing and stereotyping Latines as looking a certain way. There are Latines of all different races and physical appearances. As you may have noticed, this issue of racializing and stereotyping doesn’t just lie outside of our community. It happens among us too. As I explained, it was other Latines perceiving and assuming things about my siblings and I just based on their experiences and our appearances. This problem is very real and I believe that it’s essential that I bring attention to it if my goal is to help people better understand the

diversity and heterogeneity-- both in appearance and culturally-- of the Latino/Hispanic community as a whole.

While doing research, I came across a concept I hadn't even thought about before. I read an article by Amon Emek and Jody Agius Vallejo called "The "Non-Hispanics with Latin American ancestry: Assimilation, race, and identity among Latin American descendants in the US." I hadn't previously considered that there are people of Latin American descent who actively choose to not identify as Latine. The problem is not that these people don't identify as Latine-- their personal identity is up to every individual. Rather the issue that arises is that these individuals are consistently excluded from studies that focus on Latines. I find this very interesting because throughout this thesis, I will continue to talk about how self-identifying Latines understand their identity and the reasons why. However, after reading this article, I believe it is crucial to also discuss why some people of Latin American descent choose not to identify as Latine as well as the reasons why they don't. After all, in order to truly understand the complex web of Latine identity, we should also try and understand the reasons why some people have drifted away or chosen to cut ties with this identity despite having genetic ties to it.

The article begins by sharing a statistic that "in the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), 6% of respondents with Latin American ancestry answered 'no' when asked whether they were Hispanic themselves (Emek, et al.). In other words, six percent of the respondents to the survey responded "yes" when asked if they were Latin American descendants, but "no" when asked the question of whether they themselves identified as Spanish/Latino/Hispanic. I don't want to go too far into this topic because the point of my thesis is to focus on dissecting and studying Latine identity from the perspective of the people who do identify that way. Still, I want to at least touch on this phenomenon because understanding why some Latin American

descendants don't identify as Latine could help us better understand some of the issues with the United States categorizing race, ethnicity, and Latine identity. In order to do that, I will discuss the three most common characteristics that this study found related to Latin American descendants not identifying as Latine. Those are that non-Hispanic identification is most likely to occur among Latin American descendants who listed both Latin American and non-Latin American ancestry, speak only English, and who identify as White, black, or Asian when asked what their race is (Emek, et al.). As you will see later on, these findings are relevant because these additional identity aspects also affect how self-identifying Latines view and perceive other Latines. Now let's briefly dive more in detail into these three main patterns that Emek and Agius identified.

Before we begin, I should say that the authors very well point out that "we can never know the meanings and motivations respondents draw on when answering survey questions regarding their racial and ethnic identities which tend to be fluid and situational" (Emek, et al). In other words, because census and federal surveys usually don't allow for respondents to explain or expand upon why they answered a certain way, we can only draw assumptions based on the patterns observed. That being said, we'll look into the first observed main phenomena, which is related to race. The authors noted that "some LADs may choose to identify as non-Hispanic because another racial or ethnic identity has become more salient in their daily lives than the fact of their Latin American or Spanish descent" (Emek, et al.). To clarify, when I or the quotes use "LAD" it stands for "Latin American descents." I find this observation very interesting but also very logical in that it makes sense in American society. In a country where race is so emphasized in every setting, institution, and system, it makes sense that someone could drift more to their racial identity, instead of their ethnic background.

The authors continue by explaining that some individuals might “identify simply as White or Black or even Asian” or maybe “come to understand White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic as mutually exclusive categories” and that finally, all this might influence “the likelihood that Latin American descendants express non-Hispanic identities” (Emek, et al.). The second quote is especially important because it’s so true not among these individuals themselves but much of American society. That is that many people don’t seem to understand that identity is intersectional and that race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. Black Latines exist, White Latines exist, Asian Latines exist, and even combinations of all four of these racial/ethnic mixes exist! However, in the United States-- where Latines are stereotypically portrayed as having brown skin, black hair, a mustache, etc. (more on this later)-- people forget that Latine people can be Black, White, Asian, and other races as well. For this reason and for the reason it is such an integral part of people’s identities in the U.S, I can understand why LADs who mark their identity as one of those races, may choose to not identify as Latine. After all, in the United States, there’s a good chance that someone who is Black and Latine will be treated based on the color of their skin (their “race”) and have their Latinidad ignored. Latines who have already lost some of their connection with their ethnicity but mark themselves as Black, White, Asian, etc., may very well choose not to identify as Latine-- especially when their experiences align closely with those of their “race.” Emek and Vallejo give an example of this when they say that “Dominicans of primarily African ancestry may often be seen simply as ‘Black’ and thereby be subjected to traditional patterns of Black exclusion” (Emek, et al.). Essentially, both the widespread misconception that race and ethnicity are mutually exclusive, along with the continued centralization and domination of race in American society, has possibly impacted how

some LADs identity. Racial identity and experiences overriding ethnic identity could potentially be a factor in why some LADs don't choose to identify as Latine on censuses.

Another powerful predictor of which Latin American descendants are more likely to identify as not Latine, is language. Through their study, the authors found that “LADs who speak only English are four times as likely to identify as non-Hispanic as Spanish-speaking LADs” (Emek, et al.). The fact that non-Spanish speaking LADs are four times more likely to not identify as non-Hispanic is a pretty substantial difference, but also one that doesn't surprise me very much. Language is a huge piece of any culture and because the term “Hispanic” is specifically linked to the Spanish language, it doesn't shock me that this study found that LADs who only speak English are more likely to not identify as Latine. They're simply more likely not to be as connected to the culture nor their ancestral countries of origin where Spanish is the dominant language. Does it mean that LADs who speak English exclusively can't identify as Latine? Not necessarily and I personally wouldn't agree with that statement. As I've said many times, these identities are more complicated than that. However, in my chapter titled “Conversations,” this discussion resurfaces and it's quite interesting. Since I'll touch on this theme more in depth later, let's move on to the third main predictor that Emek and Vallejo observed.

The authors explain that another major predictor of non-Hispanic identity they observed is that LADs “with mixed ancestries are more likely to identify as non-Hispanic than those with Spanish or Latin American ancestry only” (Emek, et al.). In other words, individuals with more than just Latin American ancestry, are more likely to not identify as Latine. Given the other two predictors I just discussed, this trend makes sense. If an individual also has ancestry that isn't Latin American, then there's a good chance they're either more or equally as connected to that

identity. Therefore they might not feel as connected to their Latin American identity or culture as much as someone who only has Latin American descent. If they grew up in a household or environment where the non-Latine culture was the dominant one, then they might not speak Spanish or practice other Latine customs. This could contribute to the individual's disengagement from or disconnection from their Latine ancestry and consequently lead to them not identifying as Latine. This is theoretical, but given the patterns from this study, other articles I've read, and my own encounters with people of mixed Latine/non-Latine ancestry, it's a logical process that often seems to happen. Then again, there are people of mixed ancestry like me that do have a very strong connection to their Latine roots and culture. In the end, although identity is certainly molded and shaped by an individual's relationships and surroundings, how they identify is personal and up to them.

Overall, this study was a very interesting one that gave me a unique perspective on Latine identity that I hadn't given much thought. While the three central findings I just discussed were the main predictors that the authors identified, they do mention some other patterns they observed related to individuals and the likelihood of them identifying as non-Latine. They include aspects like where an individual was born, the level of education they reached, their economic standing, their age, nationality, etc. All these and more could also potentially be predictors of how Latin American descendants choose to identify. However, the three I discussed were the most solid, consistent predictors that the authors observed. Again, all this goes to show just how complex identity is, especially identities that are as diverse and heterogeneous as the Latine identity. I'm glad that I was able to read and incorporate this study because I believe that understanding why some LADs don't identify as Latines, will also help me better understand why self-identifying Latines identify the way we do.

Chapter IV: Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up

As I indicated in my introduction, part of my goal throughout this thesis is to bring awareness to the contrast between the way Latines are perceived and understood by outgroups, and the way that Latines themselves are self-identifying and understanding themselves. While outgroups' perceptions of Latines have certainly been hurtful and misleading, ingroup perceptions and depictions have also been harmful to the Latine community. As I discussed when explaining how my sibling and I are perceived by others, a lot of the stereotyping and assumptions about what makes someone Latine actually comes from other Latines (the ingroup). The internalization of outside perceptions and stereotypes is evidence of just how powerful the media and other outside influences are when they frame a group of people in certain ways. It is crucial that we recognize that many of the assumptions and generalizations we despise come from our very own Latine community. There is a study I read about that I believe did a great job of exposing this internal damage that we cause in our own Latine community. The study, titled "Globalization, transnational identities, and conflict talk: The superdiversity and complexity of the Latino identity," was done by Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich. In the study's abstract, Blitvich explains that Latino is a "transnational, top-down identity that was created in the 1970s by the Nixon administration" (Blitvich). In my introduction I mentioned that the demographic identity terms Latine were coined by the government and that they were umbrella terms for a very diverse and heterogeneous population. However, here Blitvich also makes the point to use the term "top-down" identity and this is important to note. Before I move forward and dive into the study, I want to discuss the important difference between "top-down" identities and "bottom-up" identities.

Honestly the terms are pretty straight forward and self-explanatory. “Top-down” identities are identities that are created and implemented by institutions, organizations, and people in power to define, identify, and understand a group of people. Most of the time, these identities are created by people and institutions who aren’t part of the identity that they are attempting to define and categorize. As you can imagine, top-down identity labels are problematic because there is often a huge disconnect between the people who are creating the identities and definitions, and the people they are identifying. Imagine that there is a politician who doesn’t speak your language or know anything about your culture and customs. Now imagine that this politician wants to create a new identity to define and categorize you and millions of other people who live in different countries hundreds and thousands of miles away from each other. Maybe you look similar to some of these people but there are also a lot of people that look vastly different from you and each other. Some of these people might speak the same language as you but many also speak other languages and have cultures and customs that are different from you. It doesn’t seem right that some politician or institution should categorize and define the identities for such a large and diverse group of people, does it?

Bottom-up approaches to identity are salient because they focus on giving power to the people (the masses who aren’t in high positions of power), to self-identify themselves and explain how they understand their identity, culture, etc., in relation to others. My research and observations were done from a bottom-up approach because I collected narratives and read testimonies of Latine identity, from the perspectives of everyday people that identify as Latine. Similarly, in her study, Blitvich brings attention to the various different perspectives that Latines have on the way they self-identify and how they believe they are perceived. As you will see, this

bottom-up study offers a lot more diversity and insight into the complexity of Latine identity than what these top-down umbrella terms convey.

Blitvich's study focuses on the comments made on a CNN discussion forum in response to the question "What did you think about *Latino in America*?" As Blitvich explains, the question was posed by former CNN news anchor Soledad O'Brien who hosted a two-parted documentary series called *Latino in America*. It is important to note that Soledad herself is Latina and the director of the documentary, Alberto Ferreras, is also Latino. The comments-- which highlight Blitvich's study-- were made by self-identifying Latines who, for the part, were disappointed and upset by the documentary as a whole because of the negative depictions of Latines it seemed to focus on (Blitvich). According to Blitvich's study, much of the anger and disappointment from the commentators came from their inability to relate to the depictions of Latines that the film portrayed, as a result of inaccurate representation. Not only that, but many of the commentators felt that the film only emphasized the negative aspects and struggles of the Latino community. These themes were just a couple among many important themes that I want to touch on in order to demonstrate that even a documentary hosted by and directed by Latines, can be filled with assumptions, stereotypes, and inaccurate representations of Latine identities.

In order to best ensure that the comments used for the study were coming from Latines, Blitvich only selected comments in which the author either directly or indirectly stated or alluded to being Latino. Blitvich does note that her strategy "does not guarantee that those self-identifying directly or indirectly as Latines were indeed members of that ethnic group" but also noted that "researchers are never immune to dishonest responses" (Blitvich). While this is very true, I believe it is safe to assume that most if not all of the comments chosen by Blitvich were authentic comments made by Latines and not by other people wasting their time by posting

seemingly genuine comments about the film from the perspective of being Latine. That being said, I want to discuss some of the most prominent themes that arose from the comments in response to *Latino in America*.

The theme that most commonly appeared in the posters' comments were related to education/productivity. Blitvich describes how "selective dissociation was carried out by Latines specifically presenting themselves as educated and productive members of American society, in contrast with what they perceived to be CNN's representation of their ethnic group as uneducated and a burden on American society" (Blitvich). Self-dissociation according to Blitvich is the process by which people (in our case Latines) dissociate themselves from a certain depiction of an identity due to negative perceptions that come with that identity. Blitvich explains how in the case of Latines, many in the comments still identified as Latines but separated and dissociated themselves from the "negative" images of that identity which in our society is often undocumented immigrants (Blitvich). Although illegal immigration is certainly one of the characteristics related to Latines that is negatively portrayed by the media, politicians, and other outgroups, there are many other ways that Latines are inaccurately depicted that leads to them self-dissociating certain portrayals of the identity.

As already mentioned, one of those representations is that of uneducated/unintelligent Latine. Many Latines who watched this documentary felt that they were being portrayed inaccurately because the film depicted Latines as being uneducated people who can only dream of achieving low level jobs such as being janitors, house maids, construction workers, etc. Therefore, they used language related with self-dissociation in which they essentially said things like, "well I am college educated and work as a lawyer so I don't identify with the CNN documentary's definition or representation of "Latinos." The reality is that there are many

educated Latines in the United States who contribute greatly to a variety of academic areas and career fields, and so I definitely feel for these commentators who felt misrepresented by this documentary. Of course I also don't mean to devalue or downplay the roles of Latines that do work jobs as janitors, house maids, construction workers, or similar jobs because they do serve very important roles even though they don't get the credit for it often enough. Not only that but to seek any type of job or employment in a country whose culture and main language you're not familiar with is extremely difficult and respectable in my opinion. Now I'll move on to the second most common theme that Blitvich observed from the comments.

That theme is stereotyping which is a pretty general theme, but certainly is relative to selectively dissociating. Many commentators separated themselves from the Latino identity because CNN's representation of Latines was mostly just negative stereotypes and tropes that the majority of the audience couldn't relate to. By now I'm sure you can begin to understand with context, why top-down approaches are problematic and why it's so crucial to view identity from a bottom-up, ordinary person approach. Clearly CNN's documentary of Latines-- which is even directed by a Latino (Alberto Ferreras)-- is not consistent with how many Latines identify or live their lives. Institutions, corporations, and people of power are so often very disconnected from everyday people, that they simply aren't able to accurately represent a group of people because they don't have any real interactions or relationships with them. So even when people like Soledad O'Brien and Alberto Ferreras-- who are Latines-- attempt to represent "their people," they don't do such a great job. When it comes to any group of people, especially an ethnic group as diverse as Latines, it is vital that they be represented in the variety of ways they live, work, and self-identify. That being said, let's move on to the other ways in which Latines viewers felt this film inaccurately portrayed them.

The third most common theme is migration patterns. About the comments related to this theme Blitvich says “the Latinos participating in the discussion argued that CNN's documentary had focused mostly on immigrants and first-generation Latinos without taking into consideration the many Latinos who have been in the US for generations, as was their case” (Blitvich).

Although I completely agree with the comments my fellow Latines made about the previous two themes, I believe that this third theme is especially important and doesn't get discussed enough. I would say that many, if not the majority of the discussions in the United States about Latines are related to immigration. It's gotten to the point that whenever you hear about Latines on the news, or in other forms of media it's almost always about immigrants crossing the border. Rarely do we see movies, news stories, or read books/articles about Latines that have been here in the US and had success and achieved great things. Don't get me wrong-- stories about immigrants are inspiring, important, and essential-- immigrants are some of the most resilient people in our society. Their stories of hardship, suffering, and triumph should be known. However, not all Latines in the US are immigrants and it's important that the public realizes that. The assumption nowadays is that if someone “looks Latino,” they or their parents crossed the border illegally. That's just not true for a lot of people and it's not fair to assume that every Latino has that story, or that identity.

The fourth theme with the most comments associated with it was heterogeneity. Blitvich summarized the posters' comments on heterogeneity, with the following. “Latinos bemoaned what they saw as CNN's very homogeneous presentation of the Latino ethnic group, a group they believe is highly heterogeneous geographically, culturally, linguistically, racially, etc.” (Blitvich). I believe that this notion that Latines are one giant, very similar group of people is actually one of the biggest and most harmful stereotypes or assumptions that exist when it comes to

understanding our identity. Sure, a lot of Latin American countries have a shared history because most of them were colonized by Spain, and sure many of them have Spanish as the predominant language, but the truth is that Latines are extremely diverse and their identities are multilayered. To assume or consider all Latines as being similar is ignorant and disrespectful to the plethora of national, regional, communal cultures that exist across Latin America and the Caribbean. Although Latines of all nationalities have some overlapping cultural customs and traits-- by and large Latines are a heterogenous group. That is why when the media and popular culture portrays us as or refers to us in stereotypical and homogeneous ways, we get offended.

To emphasize the homogeneity and commonalities between all Latines, over the multiculturalism within the Latino identity, simply glorifies and re-centralizes imperialism. Instead of appreciating and celebrating the differences within the Latine community, people and the media continually shift the focus back to colonialism by focusing only on that one tragic factor that we all have in common. It's often indirect and not purposeful, but by being indifferent to the intersectionality and complexity of the Latine identity, society deprives Latines of being understood as more than a single story, more than a homogenous group of people.

The fifth theme most common in the comments was legality, which Blitvich essentially summarizes as Latines emphasizing their legal status as a response to "CNN's emphasis on Latinos and legality" (Blitvich). This is interesting because it ties closely to the sixth most common theme which was illegality. How does this differ from the previous theme? This theme refers to commentators urging "all Latinos to come to this country legally," while self-dissociating themselves from the perception that all Latinos are pro-illegal immigration (Blitvich). As aforementioned, I agree that immigration and legality/illegality is such a constant and major theme when it comes to Latines. However, when it comes to discussing or presenting

on this topic, mainstream media and society assumes that Latines are always on the side supporting “illegal immigration.” After all, most of the United States’ undocumented immigrants are Latines. This assumption just goes to show and prove how the media and society perceives Latines as one giant homogenous group with identical political views, religious beliefs, values, customs, etc. There are many Latines-- especially those who are a few generations into living in the United States-- that do not support undocumented immigrants crossing the border illegally.

The seventh most prominent theme was language, which is another immensely important identifying factor for people regardless of who you are. Language affects everything and is part of our everyday interactions with people whether our interactions occur in-person or online/electronically. Related to language, Blitvich observed that in the comments, posters “addressed issues of monolingualism. In them, Latines dissociated themselves from Spanish monolingual Latines and urged them to learn English and embrace English and the US culture as they themselves had done” (Blitvich). Now I actually find this very intriguing because in my experience it’s been more of the opposite. The Latines I’ve been around have been more critical towards self-identifying Latines that aren’t bilingual. In a way they dissociate themselves from “those” types of Latines-- or as they’re called in popular culture-- the “no sabo kids.” No sabo is a jab at the kids who speak Spanish, but not very well, or who understand Spanish but can’t really speak it. No sabo is incorrect grammar in Spanish and so the term is used by bilingual people to refer to monolingual Latines that are only fully fluent in English. I see this as a sort of dissociation on the part of the people who are bilingual. Many dissociate themselves from the “fake” or “not fully Latines” who have lost the language aspect of their Latine culture.

That is why I found it so interesting that in Blitvich’s study, the opposite was going on. People who identify as Latino were dissociating themselves from the Latines CNN depicted as

only being able to speak Spanish. Now I suppose that the Latines who were dissociating themselves from the Spanish monolingual Latines could have bilingual and not necessarily English monolingual Latines, but it's still interesting. As I said before, in my personal experience I've never met a Latine or had a discussion with a Latine that's had an issue with Latines that only speak Spanish. The Latines I've interacted with and been around feel like the Spanish language is a strong connector to our culture. However, this again just goes to show how divergent Latines' perspectives and perspectives and opinions can be, even on subjects you would maybe expect the majority of us to agree on.

The eighth and final major theme that Blitvich identifies from the comments is race, which no doubt is a very salient theme universally but also when it comes to talking about Latine identity. Commentators observed "that black Latinos had been left out of the documentary and, therefore, black Latino audiences could not self-identify with the image of Latinos portrayed on the show" (Blitvich). Although it was the eighth most mentioned theme, race is so often misunderstood and misrepresented when it is talked about in relation to Latines. As I discussed earlier in the section labeled "Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality," Latine is not a race. It is an ethnicity and therefore a bit more complicated to understand than race, which is a lot more visible. However, the media and popular culture make this hard to understand because of misconstrued perceptions of what Latines "should look like."

As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, a lot of people in the United States have a stereotypical image in mind when it comes to what Latines look like. Typically what they think of is tan or brown skinned people. If it's a man they have in mind, then usually their mental depiction might have black hair, a mustache, brown eyes, is short in stature, and maybe he has a sombrero on. If it's a woman they have in mind, this woman is typically short in stature, has long

black hair, maybe a curvy boy, and brown eyes. These stereotypical images of Latines that mainstream society often has, stem from movies, cartoon characters, tvs, etc. These images have been ingrained into our society's perception of what a Latine looks like and that is extremely misleading. Latines come in just about every shade of color that exists. In fact, a Pew Research Center study claims that in 2020 there were about 6 million Latines in the United States identified as Afro-Latino. To put that in context, that's about 2 percent of the entire U.S. adult population and 12 percent of the adult Latino population (Gonzalez-Barrera). These may not seem like large numbers, but when considering the expanse of the Latine population, that's a lot of people. Interestingly enough, the Pew Research Study also says that "about one-in-seven Afro-Latinos – or an estimated 800,000 adults – do not identify as Hispanic" (Gonzalez-Barrera). So why is it important to recognize that the Latine identity incorporates people of all races and skin tones? The Pew Research Center helps begin this discussion by stating that "the life experiences of Afro-Latinos are shaped by race, skin tone and other factors, in ways that differ from other Hispanics (Gonzalez-Barrera). As we know in our society, race has historically impacted how people treat each other. The experiences of black people have been drastically different from the experiences of white people. The same goes for black Latines and that is why it is so vital that we understand the relationship between race and Latine identity. Since the Latine community consists of people of various races and skin tones, the community has also experienced vastly different encounters, treatment, and history. That is yet another reason why recognizing the diversity of the Latine community is so salient. More on this later.

The Latine ethnicity group is made up of multiple races and you cannot simply tell if someone is Latino based on their physical make up. Dominicans for example typically have much darker skin tone then Argentinians who are usually much lighter in their skin complexion.

There are many more Dominicans that are descendants from slaves that the Spaniards brought over, while many Argentinians have Italian descent and therefore a lighter skin tone. Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean people have descended from black African slaves, European colonizers, and of course indigenous people of the Americas, therefore resulting in a very diverse array of races and colors. That is why black and brown Latinas are so often frustrated by the lack of representation that people of their race and skin color get in the media. As a result of this lack of representation, many people-- even tan and white Latinas-- forget or are just completely oblivious to the reality that black and dark skinned Latinas exist. The other consequence to this misrepresentation of Latinas in the media is that black Latinas dissociate themselves from those portrayals of what being Latina is, because they simply cannot relate or identify with those depictions.

Chapter V: Heterogeneous Not Homogeneous

One of the main points that I've been stressing is that the Latine community is immensely diverse and complex. I've talked extensively about how the umbrella labels of Latine don't do the various nationalities, cultures, customs, and communities justice. I've argued that Latines need and deserve to be better understood than just a giant homogenous mass of people that are labeled "Latino" or "Hispanic." Now, I can imagine that at this point someone might say something like "alright then, if you have so many problems with them, should we stop using the umbrella terms Latine or Hispanic?" Or someone may be thinking something like "well if Latines are so offended by the use of overarching identity labels like Latine, then how are we supposed to refer to them as a group? If there's a group where there's a Mexican, a Costa Rican, a Dominican, and a Chilean, can we classify them with a group identity or only as individuals?"

Honestly, these are all very valid questions, especially since we live in a country where demographics and grouping people under a common identity is crucial for gathering information around so many areas such as political elections, education, economic factors, etc. However, in response to those questions, I'm not necessarily arguing that we should eliminate or do away with the use of the pan-ethnic labels Latine or Hispanic. As I already mentioned, there is a lot of shared history between the many countries that make up Central America, North America, South America, and the Caribbean. A lot of people from these countries also share similar cultural aspects, such as the Spanish language. People from the various Latin American and Caribbean countries tend to bond over the shared or similar customs, especially when they are in an unfamiliar country like the United States that has a vastly different culture and society.

This phenomenon of grouping together or sticking close to people who are similar to you is something known as homophily, and is something that occurs across cultures and in every

setting. I read a New York Times article titled “Homophily” by Aaron Retica that further explains this concept. Retica first gives a brief history of the term discussing that “homophily” was coined by sociologists in the 1950s and that it essentially means “love of the same” (Retica). He then further explains homophily as “our inexorable tendency to link up with one another in ways that confirm rather than test our core beliefs” (Retica). In other words, human beings like to feel comfortable, safe, and understood-- especially when surrounded by strangers, and so we naturally drift towards people that are “like us” or that share common characteristics. We can use this concept to understand why throughout the history of the United States, Latines have for the most part lived in similar areas, worked similar jobs, and experienced similar things. They find comfort in being around people that understand them, come from comparable backgrounds, and who can relate to their challenges-- especially if the challenge is adapting to and living in a new country.

One of the things I think Latines have experienced the most together is discrimination, especially in relation to national politics in the last decade. As horrible and unacceptable as it is, I believe that discrimination has been one biggest contributor to the creation of a shared sense of identity among people labeled as Latine. Common struggles and experiences of hate and discrimination have for a long time banded Latines of various nationalities together in formation of a sort of transnational community and identity. That is why I believe it’s still important to maintain an overarching identity labels like Latine and Hispanic. However, in doing so, people must also understand the diversity and heterogeneity of this group of people.

Society and the media needs to be able to say things like “alright, these people might all be Latines by ethnicity and origin, but they all have their own separate cultural identities that differentiate them from others in that same group.” In other words, I believe our society must

recognize that yes, Latines share some history, customs, culture, and language with each other, but also that this identity group has a plethora of diversity and cultural layers that differ in important ways from country to country, and region to region. It is then crucial that understanding is applied to all areas of society such as politics, economics, education, etc. People must understand that Guatemalans have had different experiences than Cubans, that Peruvians have had different customs from Argentinians, that Chileans tend to have differing political views from Venezuelans, etc. The point is that when politicians, institutions, organizations try to target or appeal to Latines, they have to go beyond the surface level, beyond the broad identity of Latine if they want to achieve anything because viewing all Latines as sharing the same views, perspectives, and values won't get them very far. Instead they truly need to understand the type of Latines they are attempting to appeal to, by understanding and getting to know their specific experiences and culture. People who identify as Latine deserve to be understood beyond those overarching labels. For example, I am very proud to be Latino but I am equally as proud-- if not more proud-- to be Guatemalan. You see, being Latine is great in my opinion, but being Guatemalan adds so many more layers of depth to my identity.

Being Guatemalan means being from a country where over half of the population is Mayan or of Mayan descent. It means having a father that lived through a violent and civil war that raged in the country from the 1960s through the 1990s. It means eating tamales wrapped in banana leaves and listening and dancing to marimba during festivities. Being Guatemalan means seeing people make beautiful and intricate *alfombras* (colorful sawdust carpets) during Holy Week. It means driving through lush rainforests and forest covered mountains. Being Guatemalan means being kind to your neighbors and greeting every person you walk by or encounter during your day. It means lighting fireworks at midnight on Christmas Eve, making a

nativity scene on fresh cut moss, and covering the floors of your living room with aromatic pine needles for the Christmas season. Being Guatemalan means working hard and enjoying a giant, delicious meal with your family in the afternoon. There are a million of other examples I could give but the point is that being Guatemalan is special and unique. It means something and it's different than being Columbian, Peruvian, Mexican, Dominican, Chilean or any other nationality that is boxed underneath the Latine umbrella label. Sure we share with most of those countries a common language, and the fact that we were colonized by Spain, but there's so much more uniqueness to all of our identities. Even the different regions have their very distinct history. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica all had variations of civil wars or armed conflict between the 60s and 90s. However, in my "Central American Revolutions" class we're learning that even though those five neighboring countries had similar struggles going on, the nature of their conflict was different because each country had a different economy, political set up, different demographics, and therefore different outcomes and history. Every Latine country and region has its unique culture, history, people, and identity that deserves to be understood on its own, separate from the homogeneous Latine label.

No person is simply ONLY Latino or Hispanic. We all have layers of identity, history, and culture that go beyond the homogeneous Latine umbrella identity. Failure to recognize the intersectionality and complexity of Latine identity is harmful because it simply boxes a large group of diverse people into a broad and homogenous label that doesn't allow people to know their individual and unique cultures, customs, traditions, values, etc. Our identity becomes morphed into one giant stereotypical story that is largely inaccurate and misrepresentative of most people that identify as Latine. That's the danger and harm that a singular "top-down" narrative so often imposed on Latines and so many other minorities regardless of race, ethnicity,

or any other identifying factor. Top-down narratives are especially dangerous because they're told from the perspective of outsiders and not people who are actually part of the particular culture or group they're talking about or depicting.

In fact, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has a phenomenal TedTalk where she discusses how the issue of “a singular story” is so extremely detrimental to our society. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TedTalk titled “The dangers of a singular story,” she recounts her own experiences with people having negative stereotypes towards her, as well the times that she has even been guilty of making harmful assumptions about groups of people. Although Adichie is not Latine, I believe that her testimonies and experiences are very relevant and relatable to issues that the Latine community has faced in terms of being grouped together and stereotyped as a big homogenous group.

Adichie shares how one of the first times she experienced and struggled through the single story trope, was when she came to the United States from Nigeria, for college. When she arrived and began meeting her roommate, Adichie learned that her roommate and much of America had a very simplistic and stereotypical view of Africans. She says her roommate was shocked by her. Adichie shares that in one of her first conversations with her roommate, “she asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language” (Adichie). Not only that but her roommate was dissatisfied when Adichie played her Mariah Carey tape after she had asked Adichie if she could listen to her tribal music (Adichie). She expressed that what had surprised her most was that her roommate had already formed an image of her before she even met her, and it was a very inaccurate one.

Adichie explained, “her default position toward me, as an African, was one of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe” (Adichie). Obviously Adichie's roommate didn't wake up one day and have these perceptions or views about Africans she'd never met. Throughout her life she had to have been exposed to films, tv shows, books, and other things that influenced her and shaped her view of Africa as a poor, uncivilized place. Latines also find themselves being negatively generalized in the media and associated with various negative stereotypes and tropes. I would say that Latines have several “single stories” that box them into stereotypes. I say several single stories because since the Latine community is so large, there are multiple negative stereotypes used to “represent” them. However, they essentially all have the same goal of a single story which is to reduce a complex and diverse group of people into a simple, stereotypical, and negative image which can then be easily spread and represented in the media and beyond. For example, the media and politicians often focus on the single story of Latines as poor, suffering immigrants desperate to start a new life in the United States. Other single narratives used to represent Latines are the gangster, the oversexual and exotic Latina, the house cleaner who doesn't speak English, and many more that I will discuss later in another chapter. Consequently, these are the images that many people in society tend to see when they hear the term Latine. In fact, Adichie admits that even she has been guilty of making negative and generalized assumptions about Latines.

She remembers a time when there were many ongoing heated political debates on the topic of immigration. Adichie then said that “as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans” (Adichie). In other words, immigration and Mexicans essentially came to be interchangeable, and that became the single stories for Mexcians. All that the news and politicians would talk about when it came to Mexicans was that they were cheating the

health care system, crossing the border illegally, and causing problems in this country. That's what Adichie saw in the media and heard on the news and so that became her image of Mexicans: illegal immigrants that came to cause trouble and commit crimes in America. She then speaks about how she traveled from the U.S to Guadalajara, Mexico and was shocked at what she saw there. She was surprised to see people laughing, going to work, and doing things that most people anywhere in the world do everyday.

Adichie explains how she was so ashamed that she "bought into the single story of Mexicans" as the "abject immigrant" (Adichie). This story is a powerful testimony that shows that every single one of us is susceptible to buying into single stories. All of us-- no matter if we ourselves have been victims of negative assumptions-- will likely stereotype and create inaccurate images of other people and groups in our heads before we even meet or interact with them. It's very difficult not to, especially in this day and age when the media is constantly feeding us content and images that impact the way we see certain events, places, cultures, groups of people etc. Society and popular culture perpetuates the issue of only seeing a single story. It is crucial that as scholars and human beings we go beyond what we see on television, read in books, and hear on the news. In order to understand anyone's identity we must look at all the factors, from as many angles and as many perspectives as we can. Latines and any group of people deserves to be understood as more than a single story because there's always more than a single story, and always more than a single identity. I talked above about how being Guatemalan is special and it means something different than being any other nationality. However, even as a group, the Latine community is more than a single story and if we don't understand that, we risk not discovering unique and incredible stories and getting to know the potential of so many

individuals. In the next chapter, I go more in detail about how single stories surrounding stereotypes are harmful on multiple levels.

As I've mentioned numerous times, the pan-ethnic umbrella identity term Latine does not do Latines justice. Adichie shares that she "gets quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country" (Adichie). Africa is an enormous continent with over 50 countries, and immense amount of ethnic and cultural diversity, even within each and every country alone. I certainly understand Adichie's frustration when people refer to Africa as a country because not only is it inaccurate, but it's also extremely ignorant to consolidate millions of people across an entire continent into one singular geographical identity. It's simply ridiculous to summarize thousands of different cultures, tribes, and languages under one identity that a lot of people mistake for a country. What this does is add to the singular story that all the people in Africa are similar and share the same lifestyles and customs. When people think of Africa, they don't even bother to think about the different countries, traditions, cultures, or history they have. The African people simply become one big homogenous group of poor people who were colonized and made slaves for a long time. The same thing happens with the Latine identity.

When people disregard the Latine community's diversity, they play into the same issue that Adichie speaks about in regards to people referring to Africa as a country. In doing this, people take power away from the people who identify as Latine because they box them into a giant, homogenous group and leave it at that. After they've mentally categorized Latines as a singular group, they can stereotype and make assumptions about them without even considering the depth and complexity of Latine community's identity. After all, the origins of these broad categorizations really do stem back to power. As Adichie intelligently states in her TedTalk that "it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power" (Adichie). She then

goes on to explain that whenever she thinks about power structures, she thinks of a word in the language Igbo. The word is “nkali” and Adichie says that “it’s a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another”” (Adichie). History has taught that this mentality, this ethnocentrism-like concept, is extremely dangerous and has the potential to extinguish people, groups, cultures, and has even led to World Wars.

As soon as a group of people begins to label themselves or even think of themselves as better than or greater than another group of people and their identities, there is a serious threat. However the threat isn’t always direct or inherently violent (I’ll talk more about in a later chapter). In fact, as time has gone on, we’ve seen discrimination, racism, and hate evolve into more subtle ways of being shown. Discrimination, racism, and hate are all variations and results of the Igbo word *nkali* that Adichie shared. While it’s good that there isn’t as much direct violence towards minorities and people of color, the evolution of discrete racism, hate, and discrimination has made it harder to combat them. As I learned in one of my sociology classes, racism and discrimination have never gone away, they've just become more elusive. With each law and policy change, they find ways to blend in with the system, which makes it harder to fight. You may be thinking “well what does the ignorance or misunderstanding of Latine identity have to do with power and discrimination?”

Well, like I spoke about before, the single story of Latines certainly ties back to power. If you recall back to the introduction, I also gave a brief history on the creation of the demographic identity labels Latino and Hispanic. The terms were created by primarily white institutions, or in other words from a top-down perspective-- which, as we’ve learned, matters. Adichie puts it perfectly when she in regards stories she says “how they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power” (Adichie). In other words power

is crucial when it comes to storytelling and storytelling is vital to identity and perception.

Adichie follows up her previous line by saying “power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Adichie). I love this quote from her TedTalk because it is so powerful and holds so much truth. Power has the ability to write narratives and therefore write history, which consequently influences society's perceptions of certain groups of people and identities. That is exactly what the media, politicians, and other groups of people in power do in relation to the Latine identity. They impact the masses with their power. What they say and how they portray the Latine community and our identity influences how others view us and treat us. The danger of a single story is real, and we don't even realize it until we hear about “our single story” that people associate with us.

Adichie says a very interesting comment that I think is very relatable to many Latines when it comes to our identities. She states “I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me” (Adichie). In other words, Adichie didn't really consciously identify as African until she was exposed to people who viewed her as drastically different from them. Of course I can only speak on the experiences I've had, but I and many Latines I know would agree with me when I say that I am most conscious of my Latino identity when I'm around people that aren't Latine. The same way that Adichie didn't consciously identify as African until she was in the U.S, I don't feel conscious about being Latine unless I'm in the U.S.

The way I've come to understand the Latine identity, as used by Latines, is that it is very circumstantial. Let me elaborate. I travel back to Guatemala usually once a year to visit family, and whenever I'm there I don't consciously identify as Latino. Instead I simply identify as “Chapín” (what we Guatemaltecos refer to ourselves as) or Guatemalan. The same happens

when I'm around other Latines-- we identify with and distinguish ourselves with our nationalities. Of course it's different for everyone, but in my experiences I've found that amongst each other Latines typically choose to identify themselves and each other with the countries they or their families come from. For me that's the most logical because each country has distinct cultures and customs and so that's how we understand each other. On the other hand we also recognize that we share many things in common and those are things we bond over as Latines. However, when I am around other people who aren't Latine, I consciously identify as Latino because I don't expect them to know, understand, or appreciate the variations between different nationalities. It's not entirely their fault because I've discussed, the media and society have depicted Latines as all being a big group of similar people. They've written a single story that says our differences are either A, non-existent or B, not important. I'm sure that Chimamanda and other Africans feel a similar struggle when it comes to the homogeneous "African" identity and their unique national, regional, or tribal identities.

Before I continue I also want to reiterate that the umbrella identity terms aren't the real issue. Rather the real issue Latines and other groups face is the ignorance and unwillingness to go beyond the homogenous, umbrella identity terms that only scratch the surface of many people's full identities. For example, as someone living in the U.S, which is a very diverse country, I do find appreciation for the term Latine, and the purpose it serves. That purpose-- I think-- is to unify a group of marginalized people that in many settings is a minority. For example, I have attended private Catholic schools all my life and as a Latino I was a minority at all those schools. Especially now at a private university, I am certainly part of the minority population. But the minority status isn't solely limited to the private school setting. At most of the sporting events, parties, and extracurriculars I've been to or participated in, I and other

Latines have been minorities. In these settings white, caucasian culture is typically what everything is built around. On campus, the food we eat, music we hear, and customs we are encouraged to practice are primarily eurocentric or “American.” Therefore, when I encounter or interact with other Latines on campus, at parties, or other social events, I feel a connection to them. That is when the Latine identity labels become important to me and many other Latines I know.

It is in these types of situations-- when we are the minorities-- that the all encompassing, umbrella identity terms become valuable. They serve as a sort of comfort because in identifying with these homogeneous identity terms, I am able to feel a sort of comradery and connection with other Latines in otherwise “hostile” environments that are catered towards white caucasians. Hostile is a strong word, but what I mean is that when I’m able to bond with other people under the identity label Latine, it makes it easier to endure environments that aren’t culturally similar to the ones we are used to or feel the most comfortable in. It is in instances like that when the homogenous Latine identity becomes very important because it unifies us. When we are able to relate to other Latines and find commonality under a broad identity, it makes it easier to withstand environments that have been historically discriminatory and not meant for us. However, it is still of utmost importance that society understands the Latine identity from more than one perspective and story.

If society continues to view Latines as a homogenous group of people who all have the single story of being poor, “illegal,” and uneducated immigrants, then dehumanization will continue to happen. In many cases, this is the goal of some politicians, media outlets, and organizations. When they’re able to generalize and group together a huge number of people, under one common identifier such as “Latine,” then they’re able to dehumanize them.

Dehumanization in instances like this occur when masses of people become simply a statistic. When their individual stories and identities are no longer told or heard, dehumanization occurs. All of sudden that person, their experiences, their culture, etc., no longer matter because they are just like everyone else labeled Latine. They're just one of the millions of people who crossed the border illegally and are "taking jobs" from "good hard working Americans." That is often the goal of politicians, the media, and organizations who have agendas against Latines. That is why it is so crucial that Latines are understood as a heterogenous group, as individuals, as people. It is the reason why I believe this thesis is so important and why bottom-up perspectives matter. I want to restore power to the Latines that don't often get a chance to voice their experiences. It may seem small, but I believe that giving my fellow Latines the opportunity to share how they self-identify, is significant because it focuses attention on the roots of the Latino community.

Chapter VI: Media Tropes and Stereotypes

As a Communication major and scholar, I cannot emphasize enough the significance that Latine portrayals in media has on the ways Latines view themselves and also how others perceive them. Media such as films, TV series, and the news have the power to impact how we view ourselves and even the limits and goals we set for ourselves. In a world and society that is ever impacted by all types of media, this can either be something really great, or something very destructive. Unfortunately, the media industry has historically been more harmful than helpful to the Latine community when it comes to portraying them in the media. In this chapter, I will explore various ways in which the media depicts Latine people through stereotypes and tropes and how these depictions negatively affect the Latine community and ways we identify and view ourselves. If you can remember, one of the biggest complaints about the *Latino in America* documentary was that it perpetuated common stereotypes about Latines, and most of those aren't exactly positive. In this chapter I'll explore more concrete examples, beginning with a section from the book *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*.

This book is a compilation of entries from different authors writing about ways in which gender, race, and class are represented in the media. I want to begin with a section written by Debra Merskin called "Three Faces of Eva: Perpetuation of the Hot-Latina Stereotype in *Desperate Housewives*." Here Merskin presents and discusses the stereotypical ways in which Latinas are typically portrayed in movies and TV shows, especially by focusing on the character Gabrielle Solis in *Desperate Housewives*. Gabrielle's part is played by actress Eva Longoria. The author begins by describing Longoria's character in *Desperate Housewives* as "prominent, oversexed, under-dressed, divisive" (Merskin 327). She then speaks about how other successful Latina actors such as Carmen Miranda have also embodied characters that project a sense of "not

only exotic, inviting, and flamboyant sexuality, but also a particular social class look derived from a perceived ethnicity” (Merskin 328). In other words, the idea of Latinas having success began to become associated with possessing these characteristics of being oversexual, exotic, cunning, and other virtues that aren’t typically seen as respectable in society. What then happens is that young, aspiring Latinas see those “negative” sorts of facades as the only opportunity or path for being successful. Worse yet, society and out-groups begin to view Latinas as only having worth as sexual objects to look at, admire, and even conquer. As Merskin mentions, Latinas not only become objectified, but they become symbols for an entire social class and community-- and it's not a very positive symbol. When Latinas are portrayed in these oversexual, divisive, naive, powerless, or exotic ways, those are the ways in which many people begin to view Latinas in real life, which is harmful to their value and self worth is certainly undermined. When these are the only type of portrayals of Latinas that people, society misses out and fails to acknowledge that they can be any other sort of way. These prominent media depictions make it hard for people to see Latinas as possessing characteristics such as intelligence, leadership, perseverance, humor, and other traits that are more valued in our society.

Merskin also discusses how the physical portrayal of Latinas in media distorts the reality of diversity within and throughout the Latine community. She explains that “Latina tropicalism erases differences between specific Latino groups and conflates characteristics of people from African, Caribbean, and Latin American cultures into a single pan-Latino/a identity” (Merskin 328). This argument falls right in line with the conversation I presented earlier in the chapter about the homogenization of the Latine identity which is actually much more heterogeneous. Again, the stereotypical overrepresentation of Latinas as being one way-- in this case “tropical”-- is harmful because it excludes all the other variations, skin tones, personalities, and cultures that

Latinas embody. Consequently, when little Latina girls who don't fit those stereotypical media representations, look at themselves and don't see similarities, they can possibly struggle to understand their identity and how they fit into their Latine community. Not only that but there's a possibility that they don't value themselves as much when they don't fit those media representations, which are largely unrealistic.

Now, I do think it is important to acknowledge that the role or portrayal of "sexy" or "oversexual" Latina is not inherently bad. I certainly don't condone "slut shaming" or the idea that Latina actors portraying such "exotic" or "seductive" roles are any less human than any other person. Obviously stereotypes exist for a reason, and that is because there is some truth to them. However, stereotypes take small truths, and exaggerate/overuse them to the point that they are harmful and destructive because they are used to represent an entire and very large group of people. Merskin says it well when she explains that "the Hot Latina stereotype takes on the appearance of naturalness" (Merskin 332). The point she's attempting to make is that stereotypes are an illusion that make people think that a certain trope-- in this case the Hot Latina trope-- is natural for the majority of people that share the Latina identity. So while yes, some Latinas do embody the hot, seductive, romantic trope-- that trope does not nearly represent all or even most Latinas. For example, in response to criticism about her role in perpetuating Latina stereotypes, Eva Longoria said "I don't think they're detrimental. It's great to be represented in any way" (Merskin 332). Longoria compared her comments to when Ricardo Montalban said "What's wrong with being a Latin Lover? Why is that a bad stereotype?" (Merskin 332). The thing is that it really isn't a "bad" stereotype in and of itself. However, when those sort of Latine stereotypes are the only or dominant depictions of Latines in media, that's a problem. The problem isn't necessarily those portrayals, but the lack of any other representations of Latines.

When the media depicts Latines or any people of color through negative stereotypes, it continues the cycle of dehumanization because they're seen only as the stereotypes associated with their ethnic or racial identity. Instead of understanding Latines as a diverse community with people of various backgrounds, professions, experiences, and skills, people begin to associate us only with the stereotypes shown in the media. That's the power of the media. It has the potential to expand our understanding of different groups of people, cultures, practices, etc., or it can also hold us back by casting people of color in the same types of roles and characters that have been around for ages. In order to truly understand people, we have to understand and acknowledge their intersectionality. Jeniffer Lopez said it perfectly when she expressed that she is an actress who is Latin-- not a Latin actress (Merskin 331). I love that Lopez said this because it emphasizes her intersectionality as a person, instead of zeroing in on one aspect of her identity (being Latina). That's exactly what the media does when using negative stereotypes about Latine people. The media takes that one aspect of their identity and then exaggerates all the stereotypes that come with that identity. People that are Latine are more than just a stereotypical side character or friend. We too are leaders, intellectuals, innovators, and people who lead complex and interesting lives. Unfortunately mainstream media doesn't often represent us in those ways.

Although stereotypes about Latines are harmful in and of themselves, they can lead to more aggressive and even hateful types of sentiments towards the Latine community. Another article in the book *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, discusses how negative stereotypes and false information about the Latine community are more easily created and spread than ever before. The article, called "The Latino Cyber-Moral Panic Process in the United States," is written by Nadia Yamel Flores-Yeffal, Guadalupe Vidales, and April Plemons. This article is great because it encompasses and expresses the more severe consequences that can

result from being ignorant and nonchalant about cultural stereotypes in our society about Latines. This article opens the conversation to the possible real-life dilemmas that come from perpetuating stereotypes and negative sentiments towards Latines. The “next step”--after perpetuating and condoning stereotypes-- is the exponential spread of hate, false information, and even violence. At this level, divisive language no longer just harms and affects an individual or small community, but an entire ethnic group in a society.

According to criminologist Stanley Cohen, moral panic is “the reaction of a society against a specific social group based on beliefs that the subgroup represents a major threat to society” (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 657). Essentially what happens is that individuals from the dominant group in society create stereotypes, assumptions, and negative misconceptions about a minority group, and use them as rhetoric to make them seem like a dangerous threat to society. Sociologist Howard Becker uses the term “moral entrepreneurs” to describe these individuals and/or groups that spark moral panics and try to influence others to join them. The authors add that moral entrepreneurs “create a threatening situation with inflated rhetoric and develop a sense of fear against the subgroup” (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 657). This is when the media becomes especially powerful because it gives moral entrepreneurs the ability to spread information extremely easily and practically instantaneously. We have seen this with one of the United States’ most recent examples of moral panic, which has targeted Latines-- especially immigrants.

I’ve discussed some of the most popular stereotypes and tropes that exist to “represent” Latines. Those include the hot/oversexual/exotic Latina, the unintelligent Latine maid/janitor, the gangster, and the immigrant. Out of all the existing stereotypes and tropes, I can't think of any that have been more abused or overused in U.S mainstream media and culture than the “immigrant.” Along with the immigrant stereotype comes many characteristics, with some of

those being that they can't speak English, that they're "job stealers," criminals, rapists, etc.

While the other stereotypes used to portray Latines are harmful and negatively impact the Latine community they don't usually pass the threshold to cause moral panic. They're damaging in that they don't accurately represent the Latine community and in turn the ways in which they influence young Latines who are consumers of media. However, "the immigrant" stereotype is specifically used by moral entrepreneurs to paint a picture of the Latine community as being threatening to society as a whole.

What then happens is that not only are the stereotypes, tropes, and misrepresentations of the Latine community internalized, but the community as a whole becomes something to fear. The authors mention how another scholar, Chavez, argues that "immigrant Latinos are labeled 'illegal aliens' to emphasize their criminal status, which presents them as a group of criminal outsiders unworthy of social services, educational support, and legalization" (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 658). Moral entrepreneurs use such horrible and degrading language like "illegal aliens" to paint a picture of "us" and "them." They then incite moral panic against a group to make the public choose between the supposed "us" and "them," with them being the threatening minority group. And because the minority group is dehumanized and depicted as nothing to hate, avoid, and fear, of course the uneducated public is going to choose the "us," because that's the culture and people that they're familiar with. That is why it is so important to tear down negative stereotypes and media tropes about Latines. The more someone or a group is understood, the harder it is to spread misinformation and hate against them.

The article about the Latino moral panic continues to explain how misrepresentation and inflammatory rhetoric create a situation where people are taught and encouraged to fear or be wary of Latines. It discusses how someone named Huntington published an article or study

called “The Hispanic Challenge” in which he discusses how Latines are represented as dangerous because of reasons like “their failure to assimilate, failure to learn English, and failure to adopt the Protestant values” (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 658). Again, the characteristics that the media, politicians, and other moral entrepreneurs associate with Latines are all negative. Very rarely do you see rhetoric, stories, or media that emphasizes or focuses on all the accomplishments that Latines have achieved in a new country, despite all the challenges they’ve faced. When we do see those few positive examples, they’re most often produced by Latines themselves which continues to suggest that the perspective on Latines from other groups is still very much negative.

Something I found very interesting in this article was the mention of the 2006 anti-immigrant marches that took place in many U.S cities in protest of proposed immigration reform. This happened around the time that the US Census Bureau announced in major newspapers that “the total US Hispanic population was expected to double from 15 to 30 percent by the year 2050; thus, one in three US residents would be Hispanic” (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 658-659). I find it very intriguing that the release of statistics like this would cause people to protest and have marches, because after all, they’re just demographic statistics. To me it seems like people panicked and were afraid or upset because they had negative connotations and characteristics attached to their ideas of Latines. Why else would people react so strongly to statistics saying that Latines will eventually become a large portion of the US population? Once again, the moral panic created by moral entrepreneurs was doing its job of creating fear and hostility towards Latines.

Furthermore, the authors argue that “cyber technology has provided a dangerous platform in which the already existent anti-immigrant movement has become more dangerous”

(Flores-Yaffal, et al. 659). Negative stereotypes, exaggerated and/or false statistics, and anti-Latine rhetoric has now become so much easier to spread and the extent to which these can be spread has expanded exponentially. Another dangerous aspect of today's cyber space is that false news, statistics, and disciplinary content knows no limits because of the ability for anyone to spread it. The authors explain how "social power online is no longer simply at the hands of the few or the elite," now "the audience is equally as active in creating, reproducing, and influencing content" (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 660). Of course this could be a positive thing if people use their power and freedom to spread information responsibly by using facts and not just anything they see or read. Unfortunately a lot of people abuse this power and that is when negative stereotypes and false information gets spread, and in turn moral panic is created.

In the online ethnographic research study that Flores-Yaffal, Vidales, and Plemon conducted they were able to identify some ways in which moral entrepreneurs and their supporters contributed to the moral panic against the Latine community. For example, by studying anti-immigrant websites, they found that one of the main strategies used to attack the "subgroup"-- in this case Latines-- was the creation of degrading and exaggerated images and metaphors which essentially went towards "presenting the immigrants as inhumane and inferior to Americans" (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 660). They then went on to discuss more specifically how negative and exaggerated stereotypes of Latines on the websites included portraying them as lazy, murderers, dirty, drug addicts, and many more horrible images. Not only that but some content creators on these websites used the rhetoric of immigrants being a burden on society to advance their argument. They blamed them for "not paying taxes, stealing identities, utilizing medical facilities, asking for welfare financial benefits" (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 661) and much more. These strategies-- the blaming, negative images, fear tactics-- are believed by the public

because of dehumanization tactics that the moral entrepreneurs and their followers use. The painting of immigrants as “aliens” and “invaders” strips them of any humanity they have, thus making it easier to attack and blame them for anything.

What’s even scarier is that moral entrepreneurs have used legitimate sources to try and back their claims and present them as more believable. For example, the authors discuss how they found a hoax about immigrant statistics that was circulating online, that was supposedly published by the renowned *Los Angeles Times*. “The statistics stated that ‘95% of warrants for murder in Los Angeles are for illegal aliens’, and that ‘Over 300,000 illegal aliens in Los Angeles County are living in garages’” (Flores-Yaffal, et al. 661). Again here we see the use of the terms “illegal” and “alien” to dehumanize undocumented immigrants. Not only that but the claims and statistics this website was using were clearly outrageous and horrifying. Anyone would be scared if they heard or read those types of statistics. The *Los Angeles Times* did eventually publish a disclaimer letting the public know that they had published that false information but the damage was already done. The authors shared that on major search engines such as Yahoo, the phrase ‘Over 300,000 illegal aliens in Los Angeles County are living in garages’ had over a million hits and the phrase ‘of warrants for murder in Los Angeles are for illegal aliens’ had over nine million results (Flores-Yaffal et al. 661-662). In other words, many people took the information they saw and spread the horrible and scary statistics without verifying the truth, and that’s exactly the danger that the internet presents when it comes to moral panic. So then what are the real life implications and consequences that result from the spread of negative stereotypes and fear towards Latines or any minority ethnic group?

As I explained prior, the use of exaggerated images and metaphors leads to the dehumanization of a group of people. Once a group of people is dehumanized, then it becomes

much easier for people to mistreat them, even to the point of using violence. After all, who in society is going to care-- if the people being attacked are thought of as aliens threatening foreigners? Earlier I discussed how forms of hate and discrimination against Latines has become more elusive and subtle, making it harder to combat. Unfortunately, physical and explicit hate against Latines has not completely disappeared either. In an article titled "Rise in reports of hate crimes against Latinos pushes overall number to 11-year high," Suzanne Gamboa and The Associated Press discuss how violence against Latines has actually been steadily increasing in recent years. The article focuses on the tragic mass shooting in El Paso that happened in 2019. Authorities that were involved say that "the gunman was targeting Hispanics when he drove hundreds of miles to El Paso and shot multiple people at a Walmart" (Gamboa). However, this shooting was sadly part of a pattern that points to the observation that hate crimes against Latines are on the rise. According to an FBI report, the "overall number of reports of hate-motivated killings hit its highest level since data began being collected in the early 1990s" (Gamboa). This is extremely concerning and I'm sure it's probably related to increased use of social media and the internet since the early 2000s.

The previous article I discussed clearly presents how the dominant existence of cyberspace has allowed for the dispersion of any type of information to be easy, quick, and expansive. After all, the authorities involved said that "before the attack, the gunman had posted a hate-filled racist statement decrying the "invasion" of Mexican immigrants in the United States" (Gamboa). This is again another example of how the moral panic has truly horrific and grave consequences. In his post the gunman used the word "invasion" to describe the actions and "threat" of Latines before proceeding to act on his hate towards them. He certainly isn't the first person to use that type of rhetoric against Latines and this example goes to show just how

harmful and dangerous the use of derogatory metaphors, dehumanizing language, and negative stereotypes can be.

I acknowledge that the El Paso shooter example is an extreme case of how negative stereotypes, generalizations, and depictions are harmful to Latines. Of course not everyone who views Latino stereotypes in media, on social media networks, or elsewhere is going to act violently towards Latines or harbor hate against. However, the active spreading and continued production of such stereotypes can have serious consequences because unfortunately there are people who will see and take in that information, and then act violently against Latines in response to their anti-Latino sentiments. However, violent racists aren't the only reason that society should not spread or produce stereotypes about Latines. The overwhelming use of such degrading stereotypes has other serious consequences. Internally, it can affect how Latines view themselves, their identity, and their potential. Externally, these stereotypes affect how others view Latines in relation to their competencies, skills, and overall worth. If the media, politicians, and others continue to view and treat Latines according to the stereotypes they consume and reproduce, then they'll never understand the incredible potential that Latines have, nor the amazingly rich and diverse culture that each and every Latino nation, region, and community consists of. That's exactly what I want to reveal in the next chapter, which discusses and analyzes the valuable conversations I had with fellow Latines about how they view and understand our identity, as well as how they believe we are perceived as a community.

Chapter VII: Conversations

In my introduction I explained that the purpose of my thesis is to further enhance the knowledge of Latine identity from a bottom-up perspective. To do this I'm complementing all the research and reading I've done by adding input I learned from conversations with fellow Latines. Since I had conversations instead of interviews, the discussions were much more personal and casual than they likely would have been if I had done the individual interviews I was originally planning to. I really felt like the discussions flowed smoothly and I think part of that was because they were two-way conversations. Although I was the one to integrate the topics of conversation, I didn't just ask questions and leave it up for the other people to respond.

Throughout the conversations I would share what I thought about the specific topic or what I had learned about it through my research or personal experiences. It's important to mention that while I shared my opinions and thoughts in the conversation, I also didn't want to push my thoughts onto others too aggressively. My approach was to have some general topics and questions surrounding Latine identity in mind, and then work them into the conversations. Although I shared my experiences and thoughts on various topics, my part in the conversation was more as a prompter that sparked the discussion topics so that I could learn and understand what other Latines thought about those topics. As you should know by now, Latine identity is extremely complex and there aren't necessarily right or wrong answers, so I wasn't trying to impose my will. I gave my opinion, but certainly was not attempting to influence them or persuade them one way or another with their answers. My goal for this thesis has been to unpack and expand on the discussion of Latine identity by exploring it from a bottom-up perspective, and that is why I thought that input from everyday global citizens who are Latine was crucial to my project.

Before I discuss more about what the conversations were like, it's important that you know a little bit about the people I spoke with. In the end, I had conversations about my thesis and its various topics with 16 people who self-identified as Latine. These individuals were all people that I knew personally. Their ages ranged, with the youngest being 15 years old and the oldest being 35 years old. Of the nationalities represented there were Americans, Mexicans, Guatemalans, a Dominican, and a Venezuelan. I asked every individual beforehand if I could take notes of the conversation, to which they all said I could. I gave them all a summary of what my thesis was about and then also asked for their permission to use their responses and ideas as part of my thesis, and told them that their names would remain anonymous in my thesis. I am very grateful that they all generously gave their time to have a conversation with me and also gave me permission to include their opinions and experiences in my thesis.

I wasn't able to fully incorporate every question or discussion topic that I originally wanted to ask when I was wanting to conduct interviews. However, I was still able to gather important and intriguing information from the conversations I had with other self-identifying Latines. Also, given the more casual nature of my conversations, they weren't always one-on-one. There were times when I was talking about my thesis and conversation topics with up to three people at a time. The conversations with multiple people changed the dynamic a bit because individuals would agree with each other, add to each other's opinions, and also counter-argue each other's opinions. This different dynamic gave those conversations an interesting aspect.

Overall, I'm grateful to have had a mix of different conversation styles because although they varied, they were all very fluid, and insightful. Also because they were casual discussions, I wasn't able to exactly replicate each conversation-- nor was that my goal. I did my best to evenly

incorporate the following discussion topics into each conversation. However, since conversations can diverge in a multitude of directions, and because every individual is different, not every topic was discussed at the same length or profundity throughout every conversation. Given their varying interests and experience, individuals chose to discuss some topics more than the others. I can say that every topic was at least commented on or responded to by each individual I talked with. The analysis, length, and depth of their responses to each question differed, but that just proves how complex and diverse the Latine community and our identity is. We've all had distinct experiences and therefore our perspectives about how we self-identify, understand, and define Latine identity is going to differ.

As you will see, along with the uniqueness of responses I got, I also noted a lot of common sentiments and ideas about certain topics. I can say without a doubt that of this entire thesis process, the conversations I had were my favorite part because they were so intriguing. That is why I am so very excited to present to you, readers, the fascinating information and insights I learned from the discussions I had with the amazing people I was blessed to be able to speak with. Now, without further ado, I present to you the conversation topics followed by the analysis of the conversations.

General Conversation Topics:

1. Nationality
2. Preferred identity labels in terms of ethnicity/nationality
3. Differentiating and/or expressing unity within the Latine community
4. What makes someone Latine?
5. What aspects of the Latine community are most important?
6. The importance of being able to speak Spanish in relation to identifying as Latine

7. The impact of physical appearance on people's Latine identity
8. Characteristics attributed to the Latines by mainstream media, politicians, and institutions

Conversation Topic 1: Nationality

I started the conversations off by talking about the topic of nationality. I was curious to know from the individuals how they went about thinking about their own nationality. That may seem like a stupid and straightforward question with an obvious answer, but if you've paid attention up to this point you should now know that Latine identity is anything but that. Especially in the context of Latines living in America, the concept of nationality is a lot more cloudy and complex. There's a specific incident that happened, related to nationality, which actually sparked my interest in exploring Latine identity as my thesis topic. It happened last year when I called a pair of my Latine friends "American." After all, they had been born in the U.S and lived there their whole lives besides visiting family in Mexico every once in a while. However, they got very offended when I referred to them as "American" and said they identified as "Mexican." I found this interesting and wanted to know more about what caused them to identify more with the nationality of their family's country of origin, than with the nationality of their birth and home country.

When I brought this topic up in conversation, I asked the individuals how they would respond to the question of what their nationality is. I also asked them if their response would depend on who was asking, because I was curious to see if it mattered who was asking. For the people born and raised in other countries, the answer was straightforward and easy. Their nationality was whatever country they were born in. For example, four of the individuals were born in Guatemala and have lived there all their lives. They answered that their nationality is *Guatemalteco* (Guatemalan). The individual born and raised in the Dominican Republic

answered that they identified as Dominican. Same type of answer for the person who was born and raised in Mexico. Their answers were all simple and straightforward, essentially revolving around the fact that they were born in that country and that was their origin. On the flip side, when conversing with the individuals who were born in the U.S. or born in another country and raised in the U.S, their connection to nationality was not as straightforward as being born within a country's borders.

There were three individuals who were born in Guatemala and raised in the U.S. When asked about how they understand their nationality, they responded that in a formal setting they identified as "Guatemalan-American." However, they all said that when asked "where are you from" by friends or peers, that they answer "Guatemala." In other words, in a more formal setting these individuals identified with both the nationality of where they were born and where they grew up, whereas in a more casual setting they identified with their nationality of birth.

There were seven respondents who were born in the U.S but of those seven, only one actually said they identify as American. Their answers varied, but all centered around the sentiment of feelings closer to the nationality of their parents or their family's country of origin. One individual who was born in the U.S but grew up mostly in Mexico said his nationality is "Mexican" because that's the culture he grew up in and felt more connected to. Additionally, they said "the US was just a geographical area where I was born" (Persons S). Two other people born in the U.S explained that when asked about their nationality they say something along the lines of "I was born in the U.S but my family is from _____," again emphasizing the ties to their family's heritage. In other words, they acknowledge that they were born in the U.S but then make it clear that they're from another country or culturally distinct from the U.S. This trend

followed as other individuals born in the U.S expressed very clearly that they're Mexican and feel little connection to American nationality or culture.

These trends are interesting given what the authors of the non-Hispanic identifying LADs article said about LADs assimilating to American culture and moving away from their Latine identity. When discussing why some LADs choose to identify as non-Hispanic they say that some of them “make *conscious* efforts to distance themselves from identities and cultures associated with their (parents’) home countries to avoid stigmatization or out of a sense of US nationalism or patriotism” (Emek, et al.). I find it really interesting because in the conversations I had it seemed like the individuals had completely opposite attitudes in terms of the relationship between their identities, their parents’ cultures/nationalities, and U.S nationalism. The respondents were very much still attached to their parents’ countries origin and the cultures that are part of that.

I must admit that these responses and sentiments about their nationality weren't entirely surprising to me. Growing up, most of the Latine people I knew were still very much attached to culture from their parent's or grandparent's country of origin. It didn't matter whether they were born in Latin America or the U.S, most youth and people I knew felt very strongly connected to their family's culture of origin that was not American. There were really two main takeaways and findings from the discussions about nationality. The first was that nationality seems to be pretty straightforward for people living in Latin America and the Caribbean. Meaning, Latine individuals born in a Latin American or Caribbean country seem to be very likely to identify with that particular nationality. However, nationality appears to be a much more complicated, murky concept for Latine individuals living in a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse country like the U.S, and especially when their parents come from a different country and

culture. They seem to be more inclined to still often identify with the nationality of their family's country of origin.

Conversation Topic 2: Preferred identity labels in terms of ethnicity/nationality

The previous topic on nationality flowed smoothly into the second topic from my discussions, which was about discovering what identity labels the individuals preferred to use when referring to themselves. To clarify, when I was talking to the individuals I asked them if they prefer using Latine/o/a, Hispanic, their nationality, or some other identifying label to describe their ethnic identity. Those were the types of labels I was referring to and again, I also wanted to know if their responses depended on the circumstances or who was asking. To help them better understand what I meant and wanted to discuss, I gave them an example of my own preferred label.

I began by sharing that for me personally, the label I use depends on the circumstance. If I'm around other Latines or people who speak Spanish, then I use my nationality as my identifying label; I say that I'm Guatemalan. However, if I'm around people who aren't Latine, then I use the term "Latine" or "Latino" (since I identify as a man). The reason I do this is because from my experience, I typically get two types of responses from me saying I'm Guatemalan. One, people say something along the lines of "what's that," or two they say something like "oh isn't that the same thing as being Mexican." That is why often around non-Latine people I don't even bother specifying my nationality, because they either don't really care or don't know the difference between different Latine nationalities. This issue is a result of the homogenization of Latines that I spoke about previously. People don't know that a plethora of different cultures exist within the Latine community. That is partly why I use Latino as my main identifying label when it comes to institutions, organizations, and people that aren't Latine.

Otherwise I identify as Guatemalan because I know my Latine colleagues will understand and appreciate that specification.

I loved discussing this topic in my conversations because I got a very wide array of answers and opinions. First, all the people I spoke with who were born, raised, and are currently living in a Latin American country talked about how they don't use the umbrella terms "Latine" or Hispanic." Instead they use their nationality as their main and preferred identity label. However a couple of these same individuals (who are from Guatemala) said that when traveling to the U.S they did use the identity label Latine because they were in a majority white context. Basically, when they're surrounded by other people from Latin America and are the majority, they use their nationality, but in a foreign country or setting where they're the minority, they use the term Latine. This goes along with my own line of thinking and experiences because like I said, when I'm around other Latin Americans, I use my nationality.

One individual, who grew up in Mexico, commented something related to this that I found interesting. They said "I was never exposed to the term 'Latino' until I came to college" (Person S). This supports the suggestion that the umbrella term Latine is not used in Latin America, the Caribbean, or really any environment where the majority of people are Latine, in which case people use their nationality as their main identity label. However, this trend was not only limited to people who were born and raised in Latin America. Almost everyone I conversed with expressed their discontent with the pan-ethnic term Latine, while sharing that they preferred to use their nationality as their main identity label. Even those who said they used Latine to identify themselves in certain circumstances like me, explained that they mostly do it forcefully, or in a way as to not complicate things more for others.

For example, one participant mentioned that their preferred identity label is Mexican and that the few times that they use Latine to identify themselves is if they're part of an affinity group (such as a 'Latino Student Association') at their school or elsewhere. One of the people I spoke with had a very strong statement that resonated with me and this whole idea of umbrella identity terms. In reference to the term Latine they said that it's widely used because "most people aren't interested in detail, they just want to know if you're not white" (Person C). I think that this individual makes a very good point, by saying very clearly that many people really don't care whether someone is Peruvian, Honduran, Bolivian, Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian, etc., because in their perspective, all those people are the same-- they only care about if you're different than them. We've seen this homogenous mindset and view of Latines for so long. In fact, another individual made a comment related to this that really just puts the cherry on top and emphasizes this issue. This individual said that their preferred identity label is Venezuelan because when they say they're Latine, "people assume that I'm Mexican" (Person K). Again just another example of how the giant generalization and grouping of a diverse group of people leads to others perceiving them as all being one group of people that's the same. For those of you that don't know, there are MANY differences especially between Mexican and Venezuelan culture.

One of the most unique comments from the conversations came when I was talking with the Dominican person about their preferred identity label. I was surprised when they didn't say Latine, Hispanic, or even their nationality. Instead they said that their favorite identity label is "Caribbean" because they feel very connected to their island roots and the Caribbean culture that distinguishes them from other Hispanic cultures. (Person B). I thought this was fascinating because I hadn't thought about the Caribbean being a big identity label, yet it made so much sense. Caribbean culture, although they share the common language of Spanish, is vastly

different from mainland Latin American culture. I'm very grateful to this individual for opening up my perspective and knowledge about this other identity label of "Caribbean." That is exactly why I wanted to talk to people from as many different Latine countries and regions as possible. So I could learn more and represent the vast array and diversity of Latine cultures and identities.

Throughout my conversations it became pretty apparent that the majority of people preferred using their nationality as their identity label and that most of them also tolerated and sometimes used Latine in certain situations. However, the term Hispanic was another story. Only one individual of the 16 people I talked with actually said they used Hispanic as their preferred identity label. Other than that, most of the people had negative feelings towards the term. One individual expressed that did not like being called or referred to as Hispanic because they don't like being associated with Spaniards (Person H). This is actually a pretty common theme I've heard before and it makes sense due to the colonialist history of Spain in Latin America. Also one individual used "mixed" as their most used identity label, focusing on the fact that they're half white non-Latine and half Latine (Person O). I found it interesting but also logical that this person would use that identity term because it is a big part of their identity.

I want to end the discussion around this topic with a comment that especially struck me during one of my conversations. This particular individual said they prefer to use their nationality "Mexican" as their identity label because they feel like "the umbrella terms Latine and Hispanic 'erase' the unique relations, cultures, and even issues that each Latin American country has" (Person W). I loved how they used the word "erase" to describe what these umbrella identity terms do to the Latine identity and culture as a whole. These terms erase the diverse, rich, and complex history and culture that every single Latin American and Caribbean nation has. Not only do they erase the great things of every nationality, but also the political,

social, economic issues that come with every nation. This is problematic because you begin trying to understand a diverse group of people's various cultures, issues, politics, etc., as one thing and one story, which isn't right. You simply won't be able to truly understand people or be able to effectively work with them if you don't recognize them as unique individuals. This idea of being able to differentiate people within a large group transitions us perfectly into the next topic.

Conversation Topic 3: Differentiating and/or expressing unity within the Latine community

The next topic of conversation I discussed with everyone is the importance of expressing diversity and/or unity within the Latine community. Once again, I began the discussion by explaining a little bit about what I thought in relation to this topic. First of all, I shared that I absolutely think emphasizing diversity when it comes to Latines is crucial. That's essentially what a lot of my thesis is about; helping people understand that Latine is a term that encompasses a plethora of important, beautiful, and distinct cultures and nationalities. I believe that increasing awareness and understanding of this diversity is extremely salient. On the other hand, I also shared in my conversations that I do also find value in expressing unity among Latines. Attending a predominantly white high school really opened my eyes to the importance of bonding and relating with other Latines. Although the other Latines at my school were of different nationalities like Mexican, Columbina, etc., we were able to lean on each other for support and bond over some shared culture such as language, food, and similar experiences. In situations where Latines are in an environment or place where they're minorities, I think it's important to be able to bond over some similarities we have. Still, above all-- especially in this country-- it's most important that people understand Latines as being different from each other

and not all the same. Piggy-backing off the last conversation and this introduction, people really dove into this topic with passion and great comments.

The discussions around this topic were different than the previous two in that this was the first topic that all the individuals-- regardless of where they were born or grew up-- had similar feelings towards. The overall consensus from the people I conversed with seemed to be that although promoting unity within the Latine community is important, emphasizing the diversity of nationalities and cultures is substantially more important. In other words, many of them stated that they understood that the umbrella term Latine could have value but they all agreed that differences within the Latine community need to be more prioritized. While everyone I spoke to shared these common sentiments, it's important to share some of their insightful comments that give reason to their support for more awareness of the Latine's community's diversity.

One individual expressed that they think it's highly important to differentiate and show the differences between different Latine cultures because doing so "takes the focus away from colonization" (Person J). To add on to that, someone else said that "diversity makes us stronger" and that it helps us go "beyond the commonality of colonization" (Person C). Again we're continually seeing throughout the research I did and these conversations I had, that the umbrella terms-- especially Hispanic-- are being associated with colonization. Many Latines, like the ones I talked to, feel like these umbrella terms categorize and label them by their history of being colonized by Spain and make that the main focus of their identity, and ignore everything else.

The individual who mentioned the "erasure effect" that I introduced in the last section has another brilliant comment that further expresses these sentiments. They explain that in their opinion, "the term Latino has been overused to the point where it has become more of an erasing term than a unifying term" (Person W). So again, this person and others feel that umbrella terms

like Latine “erase” the various cultural boundaries and nationalities that exist with the all encompassing Latine term. The following example of another individual’s experience proves this point. They share the following statement: “my friends all assume that I’m Mexican, even after I’ve told them I’m not. They’ll ask me stuff about Mexican culture and I don’t know the answer to those questions” (Person Y). This assumption that all Latines are Mexican is so incredibly common and it’s something I’ve experienced too. People will automatically assume that if I speak Spanish, that I’m Mexican. This erasure that happens has serious consequences because others fail to understand and realize that so many other amazing cultures and nationalities exist. One person points out that “not even the Spanish we speak is the same” (Person U). It’s true, many people I’ve interacted with don’t even realize that there are different forms of Spanish spoken through Latin America and the Caribbean, and it can vary a lot between countries and even regions within countries. Travel throughout Mexico and I guarantee that you’ll notice the Spanish changes drastically between different regions and the people are very proud of their accents and colloquialisms. Those sorts of things and much more get erased by umbrella terms and how people perceive Latine culture as a result of them.

On the other hand, many of the people I conversed with also acknowledged that expressing unity between Latine of different nationalities is important. One person commented that they saw the division between the different Latine nationalities, within their high school Latine affinity group, and in a situation like that they do believe unity is important between Latines (Person R). Unity in this sense is more associated with a mutual understanding that no nationality is “better” than the other and that they should work together instead of being competitive or exclusive. Someone else made an interesting statement saying that the homogeneous label Latine “is an important unifier in America” (Person E). Basically, they felt

like in a country like the U.S where there has historically and contemporarily been a lot of discrimination against Latines, unifying together against and in response to discrimination is important. Along those lines someone shared that when they came into college they didn't speak english well and so "finding someone freshman year who spoke the same language was important and helpful and comforting" (Person S). This example also speaks to the importance of unity by providing support to other Latines in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). This was actually expressed by a few different people I spoke with who attended PWIs. Another individual said that umbrella terms serve as a support and bonding point in which we can "lean on each other" (Person K). Bonding over being Latine in PWIs is definitely something I've experienced personally and it's something that has without a doubt made my experiences at those types of institutions substantially better. Finally, I want to end with something beautiful that an individual said in our conversation. In reference to the bond that Latines share they said "it's not simply the fact of being Latine-- every person that speaks Spanish is a brother or sister" (Person B). I love this because it really encompasses and expresses the care that Latines tend to have for each other regardless of nationality.

In summary, I observed a pattern in the comments and discussions I had about unity. That pattern was that most people believed that unity is something that Latines themselves need to express more *within* the broader Latine community. However, when it comes to society and the world outside the Latine community, people need to better understand and acknowledge the diversity of culture and people that make up the all-encompassing Latine term. I, along with the people I spoke with feel like acknowledgement of Latine differentiation and diversity is without a doubt one of the most important things we need to start seeing in the way Latines are

represented in the media, politics, and other places where Latine culture is portrayed. I'll talk much more about Latine representation in these areas in a later section.

Conversation Topic 4: What makes someone Latine?

Now we move on to one of those most difficult topics I discussed with people during our conversations. That topic was essentially about defining what makes someone Latine. As you can imagine, it's a difficult topic because as I've been explaining throughout this entire thesis, Latine identity is incredibly complex and diverse. Additionally, it was a challenging discussion because there isn't necessarily a right answer. However, after having these conversations, I will say that I did come to my own semi-conclusion to what makes someone Latine. I'll explain this at the end after sharing the comments and themes observed from the conversations.

In the discussions I had about this topic there were a few common themes that individuals shared surrounding the idea of what makes someone Latine. The first and perhaps most obvious was that many individuals described someone who is Latine as being from-- or having family/roots from-- Latin America. Pretty obvious right? Maybe not. It was brought up in some discussions that indigenous people of Latin America likely wouldn't identify as Latine. For example, people who are Mayan, Incan, or of some other indigenous group would probably identify under that identity and not associate themselves as Latine.

There were a few individuals who said they don't really have a definition or description for what makes someone Latine because it's a term that includes a wide and diverse array of races, nationalities and cultures. Such an all encompassing term can be overwhelming when trying to consider all the possibilities and scenarios for someone who might identify as Latine. For example, let's say that an individual's parents immigrated from Germany to Nicaragua for business reasons and had a few kids who were all born in Nicaragua. Those kids then grow up in

Nicaraguan, go to school there, speak Spanish (as well as German), eat Nicaraguan food, and practice the culture. Their nationality is Nicaraguan because they were born there, but are those “German-Nicaraguan kids” also Latine? They were born in Latin America, speak Spanish, and grew up living in Nicaraguan culture, but ethnically they’re German, at home they still often speak German, and still practice some German traditions. I’ll share with you my personal thoughts on this but first I’ll give another hypothetical scenario.

Let’s say someone is a third generation Bolivian, meaning their great grandparents came to the U.S from Bolivia. This individual has one parent that speaks Spanish and one that doesn’t. They also don’t speak Spanish, have mostly white and Asian friends, and have never been to Bolivia. They’ve gone on vacation to Cancun, Mexico once but other than that really doesn’t have many ties to Latin America. This person has Latin American descent, but they don’t really practice any aspects of Bolivian culture besides some dishes one of their parents cooks. Should they be labeled Latine? I ask if they should be “labeled” Latine because how someone personally identifies is up to them. If you’ll recall back to the chapter called “Misconceptions of Latine Identity,” I shared an article that discussed how some Latin American descendents choose not to identify as Latine due to various factors. This could possibly also be the case for this hypothetical “Bolivian” individual who clearly has Latin American heritage but doesn’t really connect with that culture. That brings me to the other most agreed upon and common theme among the individuals related to “classifying” someone as Latine. It will also help answer the questions posed by these scenarios.

Multiple individuals shared that they believed being Latine is essentially two things. One person explained that being Latine is a mix of having been born in or having familial ties to Latin America/the Caribbean *and* actively practicing Latine culture (Person D). Another individual

emphasized the importance of appreciating and actively practicing your specific cultural background is a very important part of identifying as Latine (Person W). These sentiments were shared by many of the people I conversed with. In other words, they felt that it's not enough that someone has Latin American or Caribbean ancestry or family. They felt-- and I agree-- that additionally you should be practicing some aspects of that culture in the way you live or at the bare minimum have interest in learning more about that culture to be able to put it into practice. For example, it's not always someone's fault that they don't speak Spanish or that they didn't grow up learning their parents' or grandparents' culture. It wasn't up to them how they were raised. However, many of the people I spoke with felt that if someone like this wants to identify as Latine, they should at least be trying to learn Spanish or become more connected with the culture. If not, the identity becomes something anyone can use for whatever reason.

Someone expressed that they believed that “people who identify as Latine should be actively trying to stay in touch with their roots and not just use it to gain advantage in jobs” (Person D). I completely agree with them and think they have a valid point. Latine identity is not a token to use in order to try and gain something. Latine identity and all the nationalities that fall under it are something to be proud of and celebrate, which is why I and others agree that people who choose to identify as Latine (or a nationality under the umbrella term) should have a genetical/familial connection to Latin America/Caribbean (or said nationality) *and* additionally be practicing some aspects of that culture or making an active effort to learn more about it, to be able to put it into practice later on. That should tell you how I would go about answering the hypothetical scenarios I presented. I would say yes, the German-Nicaraguans can be considered Latine because they were born in Nicaragua, now have their lives there, and practice the culture. On the other hand, I would say no, the third generation Bolivian is not really Latine because they

really only have a distant familial connection to the country and the individual doesn't really practice any Bolivian culture nor do anything to learn more about it or engage with it. Some may disagree with me, but from my conversations, I would infer that a lot of people would agree with me.

The final common theme that I noted when talking about this topic is interesting because I really wasn't expecting it. When talking about what makes someone Latine, I was expecting people to talk about things like ancestry, culture, physical make up, customs, etc. However, there were a few individuals who jumped ahead to my next topic and started talking about characteristics and values of Latines that they believe makes Latines, Latines. For example, one individual said that what makes a person Latine is "having a community mindset and a readiness to help" (Person S). Someone else said that what makes a person Latine is that they're pleasant and good people (Person M). Again, I really didn't expect people to use personality characteristics like these when we were talking about what makes someone Latine. Still, I didn't want to shut them or their opinions down. Also I honestly appreciate what they said because it just goes to show how we all interpret things differently and I thought their ideas and perspective on defining Latine identity was beautiful. Not only that but these ideas about Latine identity help us transition perfectly into the next topic which revolves around the individuals' favorite characteristics of the Latine community.

Conversation Topic 5: What aspects of the Latine community are most important?

This topic was undoubtedly my favorite topic from my conversations because I was able to enthusiastically discuss the array of incredible characteristics that Latines encompass in our identities. Ultimately, *this* is what my thesis is about: displaying, sharing, and celebrating the amazing values and aspects that make us Latines. More importantly the values and

characteristics I'll be sharing, are coming directly from the perspectives and experiences of everyday Latine people who live the identity. Too often we rely on outside sources like the media, politicians, and institutions for information about things, people, and cultures of which we don't know a lot about. These testimonies in this section matter because they differ vastly from how many outside sources depict us. Throughout this thesis I've been sharing what we as Latines feel and experience, and in turn how we understand our identity. I believe this is one of the most powerful sections of the entire thesis because it uncovers some of the greatest, most beautiful aspects of our identity, culture, and people.

The most common thing the individuals mentioned that they value about the Latine community is culture, but more importantly the continuation of it. In fact, of the 16 people I spoke with, 11 individuals mentioned that cultural traditions were one of the most important aspects of the Latine community. Now this might seem insignificant or obvious because of course every group of people has their culture, practices, and customs. However, what I noted specifically throughout the conversations was the comment that Latine culture is *transcendent* and that's not an everyday word most people use. As one individual states, Latine cultures are "transcendent because they've been ongoing for centuries" (J). When you think about it in the context of the Western Hemisphere which has been affected by globalism, fast fashion, fast food, etc., it really is significant that many Latine cultures have continued strongly and transcended time.

Not only have they transcended time, they've also transcended borders and Latines living in the U.S are examples of that. As one individual puts it, "Latine history and culture have transcended borders and been brought and maintained here in the US" (Person E). This is true for most of the Latines I've met in the U.S, because they continue practicing traditions from their

countries of origin-- even if they've been here for many generations. Other people mentioned more specifically what aspects of the culture was most important for them. One person said that "language is the most important" (Person R). Someone else said that food and music are their favorite aspect of their Latine community (Person K). I would definitely agree that the variety and quality of food and music in Latin America is incredible and definitely something to be proud of. One individual shared that one of the most important aspects of Latin America to them is the presence and influence of indigenous cultures, such as the Mayan cultures (Person M). I'm really glad that someone mentioned this because the various indigenous groups of Latin America were the first inhabitants of the land and therefore they were-- and still are-- absolutely vital contributors to the vibrant culture, customs, and traditions that exist in Latin America today. Their resilience despite conquest, discrimination, and even genocide is why their culture is alive and still so prominent today throughout Latin America. They set an example for other cultures in Latin America which is why people admire the transcendent nature of different Latine cultures that continue to exist proudly, expanding beyond time and borders.

While culture was the most common important Latine community aspect discussed by the people I spoke with, there was another theme that was also very popular and recurrent throughout the discussions. That theme is that Latine people are joyous, and I use this word to describe three specific characteristics that were mentioned by people. The three characteristics many individuals used to describe Latines were loving, caring, and happy. One person said that what they value most about the Latine community is that they "center their actions around love and the mentality of helping their neighbors" (Person C). Additionally, they expressed that Latines have "such a strong value of helping their neighbor without asking for, or expecting anything in return" (Person C). I absolutely agree with this because in my experiences, Latines

highly prioritize being a community and helping each other out. There's always that small town mentality that, even if you don't know someone, you lend a hand if you see they need help.

One individual stated that what they love about the Latine community is that "caring for each other is an essential part" (Person S). In other words, this person agrees with Person C that caring for and loving each other as a community is a big aspect of being Latine. Another person adds onto this idea by stating that in the Latine community "people are prioritized over things" (Person O). I completely agree with this simple but perfect statement because it really encapsulates the kind of communal culture many Latines foster in their homes and communities. Latine households, families, and communities are some of the most generous and welcoming people I've ever been around. Whenever I visit my dad's side of the family in Guatemala, they accommodate almost everything in their lives in order to make us feel welcome and loved. Latine love is really something else and the amazing part is that they don't just act loving and welcoming towards family. They usually love welcoming foreigners/strangers into their home and showing them their culture and lifestyle. As one individual puts it, Latines are "happy people that love each other a lot" (Person V). Overall Latines are very much expressive of happiness, care, love, and joy which takes us to one of my favorite comments from the conversations.

When I was talking with one of the individuals, I asked them "what do you value most about being Latine? Or what do you value most about the Latine community?" They said "Happiness. Latine want to dance, laugh, and move; we're very joyful" (Person B). After that they added on by saying "Americans are more reserved, we love to hug each other and greet each other by kissing one another on the cheek" (Person B). Listening to some of the comments they used to describe the Latine community made me smile because not only were they beautiful descriptions, but they also really resonated with me and my experiences. Obviously there are

many cultural differences between Americans and various Latine nationalities, but this form of greeting is a reflection of differences in cultural values. From my experiences, Latines-- especially those in Latin America-- are much more warm, outgoing, welcoming to each other and that's evident in the way we greet each other. In Guatemala, when I'm introduced to someone I've never met before, we greet each other by exchanging kisses on the cheek. Most non-Latine Americans would be appalled by that and/or be uncomfortable by touching cheeks with a stranger. Again, there's a difference in culture but it reflects how loving, welcoming, joyous, and communal Latines typically are. So yes, I do very much agree that Latines value people over things and that also stems from Latines really prioritizing family, which was the next most common theme in this topic section.

One individual shared that their favorite aspect of the Latine community is our familial life, and more specifically the big emphasis on the importance of it (Person J). Several other people also mentioned that they appreciated how important family is in the Latine community. This has also been one of my favorite aspects of the Latine community because Latine families are so connected, supportive, and always doing things together. Of course this isn't the case for everyone, but as someone commented, there are certainly different dynamics in American family relationships than Latin American families or Latine families in the U.S. I think some of it has to do with the proximity in which families in Latin America live to each other. In Guatemala, my three aunts literally live right next to each other and so the cousins grew up very close, practically living with each other. Many Latines have also told me that their families are similar in that the different family units live very close to each other, in the same town or area.

I especially value Latine family closeness because I don't get to see my Guatemalan side of the family too often (we usually visit just once a year). Still I find it amazing to think about

how close I am to my grandpa, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members that live in Guatemala. We are still very connected and that's a testimony to how strong Latine family ties are. If you want proof of the importance of family in Latine cultures, just look at the example of immigrants. So many leave everything they've ever known behind, sacrificing and risking many things including their very lives, all for a chance to find better opportunities to support their families. That's pretty powerful if you ask me.

Finally, I will share one more comment that was an outlier in the conversation, but certainly important and worth mentioning. One individual discussed how for them, an important aspect of the Latine community is "the struggle of being oppressed generationally" (Person W). This person believes that a major part of the Latine experience is fighting against the ongoing oppression and view against "western eyes," as they described it (Person W). I'm glad they brought this up because it is very important to recognize because it's been ongoing for centuries. Latines have always been fighting to be understood, to gain equal rights (especially in the U.S), to be seen as worthy, intelligent, and at the end of the day to be seen simply as human. The struggle against western eyes will be one of the central themes of the last section where I talk about Latine representation in the media.

Conversation Topic 6: The importance of being able to speak Spanish in relation to identifying as Latine

As I and many people have expressed throughout this thesis, language is an extremely salient aspect of the Latine community. It's interesting because Spanish also ties us back to Spain and some might wonder if that's contradictory to sentiments that some people have against Spain. First of all, yes, we did get Spanish from Spain and it's a lasting connection to the history of colonization. However, it's now the language that is part of Latin American or Caribbean unless

someone is indigenous and speaks their group's distinct language. Also, the Spanish in each Latin American and Caribbean country has evolved into its own unique forms. If you compare Spain's Spanish to Mexico's Spanish to Paraguay's Spanish to the Dominican Republic's Spanish, you'll find out they all sound very different from each other. And really that's the case for the Spanish spoken in each Latin American and Caribbean country-- it's very distinct. So although yes, we got Spanish from Spain, each country's Spanish has different rhythms, accents, colloquialisms, etc., that make them unique. Spanish is the colonizer's language but it's evolved and been modified by each country and region to be something different from Spain's form of speaking Spanish. It's like comparing American English to English (England's) English to Australian English to Jamaican English. They're all English, but they're distinct from one another and you can notice the different accent and colloquialisms. That being said, I was very curious to know what people thought about the importance of being able to speak Spanish in relation to identifying as Latine. Is it a necessary aspect to have in order to consider yourself Latine or is it not that important?

Every single person I had a conversation with expressed that speaking Spanish is a very important part of the Latine identity, for various reasons. Two people thought that's an absolutely essential, non-negotiable aspect of identifying as Latine. One of them stated that "if someone is to consider themselves Latine they have to speak Spanish (Person J). However, the large majority of people I spoke with-- 14 of the 16-- shared that although they believe Spanish is a salient aspect of Latine identity, it's not essential that someone speaks Spanish in order to identify as Latine. In relation to identifying as Latine and being able to speak Spanish, Person Y expressed that it's important, but not essential because it's not always someone's fault that they don't speak Spanish (Person Y). I agree with this and several other people also expressed this sympathy

because many of them acknowledged that some people's parents or grandparents chose not to teach their children Spanish for fear of them being discriminated against in the U.S. Obviously that decision wasn't up to the children and so they can't be blamed for not knowing Spanish. For this reason many people shared that they didn't think the ability to speak Spanish is a requirement for identifying as Latine. However, as I discussed earlier, many people and myself do think that people who don't speak Spanish but want to identify as Latine should at least have an interest in learning Spanish because after all it does have many benefits. That was also one of the main findings from the conversations around this topic. Although almost all of the individuals conveyed that speaking Spanish isn't an essential to identify as Latine, many of them did share that they believe speaking Spanish has various benefits.

Someone stated that they believe being able to speak Spanish is "important because it keeps the culture alive" (Person E). Language is a crucial part of someone's culture and so I absolutely agree that speaking Spanish is very important for continuing traditions and culture. Person C expressed that we should continue to preserve Spanish because "it's a unifying factor" especially "because it connects generations" (Person C). I think this is an excellent point and it supports the idea that Spanish keeps the culture alive. If generations aren't able to communicate with each other, that makes it very difficult to pass on traditions and customs. Not only that but as this person mentions, Spanish helps keep families connected. When children can't speak Spanish and that's the only language their grandparents or other family members speak, it's challenging for them to communicate and maintain a strong relationship. This of course is situational and that's what Person W specifically pointed out. They mention that "for people who have no ties to the "homeland," Spanish isn't going to be as important" (Person W). In other words, people who are maybe third or fourth generation Latines in the U.S and who don't really

have connections to Mexico, Panama, or whichever country of origin their family comes from, Spanish isn't going to be as important for them.

Someone else expressed that “people that speak Spanish may have a stronger connection to their Latino identity” (Person O). I think this is definitely true in most cases because Latines who speak Spanish are able to communicate with family they may still have in Latin America, as well as better appreciate and understand cultural things like Spanish music and media. If you'll recall, back in the “Misconceptions of Latine Identity” chapter, I shared an article called “The “Non-Hispanics with Latin American ancestry: Assimilation, race, and identity among Latin American descendants in the US.” The authors, Amon Emek and Jody Agius Vallejo, discussed how Latin American descendants who only speak English are more likely to not identify as Latine. So again, while I also don't think Spanish is necessary in order to identify as Latine, I definitely agree that being able to speak Spanish serves as a strong connector to Latine cultures and family.

Also, Person M pointed out that speaking Spanish makes it easier to communicate with other Latines, so that if you travel to other Latin American countries you can feel comfortable navigating and being able to speak with the people there (Person M). Truly, the ability to speak Spanish opens up new worlds while also connecting people to their family and origins, and that's a beautiful and advantageous thing.

Conversation Topic 7: The impact of physical appearance on people's Latine identity

We move on to another one of the most important topics I discussed with people which is the impact of physical appearance on their Latine identity. It was also one of the topics that individuals were most excited to talk about because they had a lot to say. In fact, when I asked if

they had ever felt like their physical appearance influenced how they or others perceived them and their Latine identity, many of them said something along the lines of “oh most definitely” (Person D). In other words, yes, physical appearance has been a big factor and aspect of their Latine identity or how others view them because of how they look. As I have discussed in previous chapters physical appearance has always been a huge influencer on how people perceive and understand Latines. I hope these individuals' testimonies open your eyes to see how problematic assumptions related to physical appearance and identity are.

The conversations were very diverse which is a reflection of the diversity of the people I spoke with. First I'll begin and share the comments of people who've experienced judgment and specific sorts of treatment because they have dark skin and look like “typical” Latines. One person shared that because they have darker skin and have attended primarily white institutions, people in their schools identified them as different (Person R). Someone else shared that because they also have black hair, brown eyes, and other features that are often associated with Latines, that they've experienced people saying discriminatory things to them. In turn this has made this individual more consciously aware of their Latine identity (Person Y). A third person had similar experiences sharing that they've never passed as white and always navigated the world as a person of color. They continued by saying that they always knew that people were wondering things like “I wonder where they're from,” and as a result of these things this individual said “my ethnicity is always in the forefront of my mind” (Person C). There were several other people who shared testimonies like this where they felt like they were specifically set apart as “different” because of their darker skin tones. These three individuals' comments and others like them essentially tell us that because they have darker skin and features that are clearly not white, they've been treated differently in various settings, and as a result their Latine identity has

always been very much consciously present to them. I think it's important to mention that these three individuals were all born and have grown up in the U.S where they are part of minority populations.

On the other hand, there were several individuals who, because of their lighter skin complexions and features, have experienced people perceiving them as not Latine because they don't "appear" Latine. Person E shared that they have definitely experienced their physical appearance affecting how others perceive them because people always act so surprised when they say that they're Latine or Guatemalan (Person E). As a result of their lighter skin tone and hair color, people perceive them as being white or at least non-Latine. This person shares that as a result, they feel like they have to compensate in other ways for other people to recognize or realize that they're Latine (Person E). This includes doing things like speaking Spanish in public, showing Latine culture through their art, and even feeding into stereotypes in order to feel included (Person E). I found this testimony incredibly fascinating because it displays the extra effort that this individual makes just to make others realize they're Latine. Even more interesting, they said "in order to feel more included," which is a reference to the Latine community itself making assumptions that this individual isn't Latine just because they look a certain way. This shows that stereotypical depictions and understanding of what Latines "should look like" not only affect outsiders' perceptions of us, but even ourselves in our own community. The Latine community has internalized stereotypes to the point where some of its members feel like they have to feed into those stereotypes to be seen. That's pretty crazy.

Other people with lighter skin tones shared similar experiences. Someone said that having white skin in the US makes most people assume that the individual is not Mexican even though they are (Person V). Person K shared that they're very conscious that they're white

passing because many white Americans perceive this individual as “one of them,” but Person K doesn’t identify with them or their culture. On the contrary, they have also experienced people back in Venezuela (their parent’s country of origin) not fully accepting them as Venezuelan because of their light skin (Person K). Again, we can observe that because these individuals have lighter features, they’re often perceived as being white or non-Latine. A few other people I spoke with experienced similar experiences and sentiments.

There were also a few individuals who have had very mixed experiences. One individual, who is from Guatemala, expressed that in their country they haven’t really experienced that their physical appearance has impacted their identity or how others perceive them. However, they shared that when they were in the U.S they felt that they were “different” and that made them conscious of their Latine identity (Person U). It’s interesting but not surprising that when in Latin America this individual felt unaffected by their physical appearance, but that being in the U.S made them feel more conscious of their Latine identity, because they were standing out.

One of the most important testimonies around this topic of physical appearance in relation to Latine identity came from an individual who has had very mixed experiences. They shared that they went to a very diverse elementary school that had Latines of a variety of nationalities and backgrounds. There, they were often called “pretty” for having a lighter skin tone (Person W). However, they said that when they switched to a primarily white middle school and eventually high school, things changed drastically. They said at the primarily white intuitions, they became very self-conscious about their appearance (Person W). This individual explained that they became so self-conscious, being one of very few Latines among so many “pretty white people,” that they began to think that they were ugly (Person W). I don't know what else to say other than that’s absolutely horrible and terribly wrong. Unfortunately, this

concept called “*colorismo*,” or colorism in English, is very common. This individual explains this issue perfectly. They said “when you’re surrounded by white people you experience racism, when you’re surrounded by your own people you experience colorism” (Person W). What this individual means by this is that while white people are institutionally racist towards black people and other people of color, discrimination based on skin tone still happens among people of color.

This is certainly true in the Latine community where far too often people of darker skin tones are discriminated against and considered ugly, dumb, lesser, etc. by Latines who have lighter skin complexions. *Colorismo* is a terrible thing because it happens internally with Latines discriminating against other Latines, making them feel as though they are “less.” It’s an issue that gets ignored far too often especially because Latines are already a group that are discriminated against in mainstream American society. Still, more awareness needs to be brought to the *colorismo* issue because it happens everywhere, especially in Latin America.

In the end physical appearance affects almost everyone and their identity. Surely it affects some in harsher ways than others. The issue of making assumptions and treating people better or worse based on their skin tone is a problem not reserved to only outside perceptions. Assuming the identity of others is an internal Latine community problem as much as it is an outside problem. However, individuals cannot be solely blamed. We have all been guilty of consuming social media, the news, films, TV shows, and other forms of media-- and applying what we see to real life people, groups, and situations. Whether it was conscious or not, we’ve all made assumptions of other people, cultures, and customs, but we must try to be aware of what we are doing, because it causes other people harm and alters our perception and ultimately our reality.

There was a comment from one of the conversations that really made me think about how influenced our perception and perspectives are by the media. I was talking to an individual about

the topic of physical appearance and its effect on how Latines identify. I asked the person, “has your physical appearance had an effect on how others perceive you?” They responded saying “Yeah, obviously I don’t look Mexican” (Person H). That really struck me because I began to think “well why would they “obviously” not look Mexican? As far as I know there’s no “guide, “rulebook,” “or document” that specifies how a Mexican “should look,” yet people already have mental images and assumptions about how a Mexican “obviously” looks. And this individual isn’t alone.

This was a very common discussion I had in my conversations and something I’ve thought about in my own life. Why do some people assume I don’t speak Spanish or that I’m not Latine? Heck, I’ve done the same thing myself. I’ve gone up to people thinking they speak Spanish and they don’t, or spoken English to someone I didn’t think spoke Spanish and they did. It happens all the time to all of us and it’s largely because the media has force-fed us an image of what a Latine “should look like.” That’s how powerful stereotypes and media representation is. It affects all of us no matter our race or ethnicity. The Latine community is incredibly diverse in race, skin tones, etc. There is no one way that someone “should look” in order to be perceived as Latine. But the media, politicians, and institutions haven’t just influenced people’s perception of Latines physically. They’ve been shaping the public's opinion and view of Latine people and Latine identity for a long time and-- for the most part-- they are not at all accurate. If you haven’t yet already realized that, you soon will.

Conversation Topic 8: Characteristics attributed to Latines by mainstream media, politicians, and institution

The last topic I discussed with individuals was about the characteristics attributed to Latine people or the Latine community by the mainstream media, politicians, and institutions.

During this part of the conversation we talked about the various common stereotypes and portrayals that we see used to represent Latines. I wanted to see what the most common types of depictions of Latine people were seeing and more specifically, the characteristics or attributes that were directly or indirectly associated with Latines through those portrayals. As you read this section I ask you to think back to the section where I was talking with the individuals about our favorite aspects of the Latine community. Then think about how those comments compare to how these same individuals are seeing themselves, and people like them, portrayed in the media.

When discussing this topic, Person J talked about how when they see Latines portrayed in American media, they're almost always depicted as poor, immigrants, delinquents, gangsters, narcos, etc. (Person J). They mentioned that mainstream media often represents indigenous people from Latin America as "savages, even though civilizations like the Mayans were very advanced and intelligent" (Person J). This individual brings up a lot of good points, especially the comment about indigenous Latines being represented as savages which is typical of most media depictions of indigenous people regardless of where they're from. The other comment about Latines being painted as immigrants, gangsters, etc., is so typical it really shouldn't surprise anyone. They're stereotypes used over and over to the point where now that's how Latines are thought about, which is so problematic. This person even pointed out that "most media representations of white people aren't negative even though the majority of mass shootings have been caused by white people" (Person J). Yet they depict brown indigenous Latines as savages.

Another individual shared that a common stereotype they've seen attached to Latine representation is the "oversexualized Latina" (Person E). I discussed this stereotype back in the "stereotypes and media tropes" chapter, and I'll reiterate that it's harmful because it boxes

Latinas into this role that makes them appear like sexual objects that they will throw themselves at any man because they're so thirsty with sexual desires. Apart from that this person also said that when it comes to people talking about Latinas (especially in politics) they hear the use of language such as "illegals, aliens, and other inflammatory language" (Person E). This individual then explained that these words criminalize communities and paint images that create fear (Person E), which is also something else I discussed back in the "Stereotypes and Media Tropes" chapter. The use of this type of language has very real consequences because people begin to see Latine people and communities as a threat.

One of the most interesting comments I had during a conversation around this topic was related to Latinas and labor. The individual expressed that the most common thing they see attributed to the Latine community is their labor (Person C). They continued by explaining that Latinas are so often either seen as very hard workers, lazy, or job stealers (Person C). They summed up their commentary by expressing that as a Latine you are constantly "reduced your labor and not your humanity" (Person C). I think this individual brilliantly expresses and explains this phenomenon we see and hear so often in the media and in politics. I love how they expose the irony of politicians and the media depicting Latinas as lazy people, yet also very hard workers who are "job stealers." It's wrong that Latinas are so often valued based on their quality of work or what they are able to contribute manually, instead of their humanity. It's truly ridiculous that so often people decide to support immigration or not depending on whether they think Latinas can contribute with their labor skills or not. Rather than considering the humanitarian crises that often drive Latine immigrants from their countries of origin, many people focus on analyzing whether or not Latinas will be contributors to the U.S economy. Too often Latinas' humanity is lost or disregarded in place of what they're able to provide.

One individual discussed that when they see a Latine person on television it's an "Americanized" Latine. They expanded on that by saying that the Latines they see in the media have light skin, and are not people of color (Person B). This person said they were very proud to see that the 2022 Miss Dominican Republic was black and that there needs to be more diverse representation like her to break stereotypes (Person B). This individual is absolutely right that Latine representation in the media is made to be so white. In fact there are many Latine roles in major films or TV series that are played by people who aren't even Latine, which is outrageous! There is a serious need for a more diverse representation of Latines in the film and media industry. In addition to that comment, this individual also talked about how they've seen Latines most often represented in the media as being gangsters, violent, deceitful, and that they don't know how to speak well. Once again, all the characteristics they've seen attributed to Latines in the media are negative. Don't worry there's more.

Another individual also brought up how Latinas are portrayed as very fiery, passionate, quick tempered, very sexual, and that they tend to be represented by people with whiter complexions (Person D). Again we have another person who has observed that Latine women are often depicted in hypersexual roles and represented by people with lighter skin. Person D continued on to discuss how on the other hand men are usually depicted as minimum wage workers who have jobs such as mowing lawns and working blue collar jobs (Person D). Also, I know that I mentioned this back in the "Stereotypes and Media Tropes" chapter, but I just wanted to clarify again that none of these roles or jobs are inherently bad. There is nothing wrong with having these jobs or doing manual labor. The problem lies in that these are overwhelmingly the most common types of roles that Latines have in the media. This is an issue because then people begin to associate Latines with only serving as manual laborers who are "dumb" and incapable

of having or achieving more intellectual jobs. When people only see Latinas presented in these types of roles, their bars or expectations for them stay at that level and that's wrong because there are plenty of Latinas who have reached higher education and gotten high status jobs, but they're not represented. This individual also commented that they've seen Latinas portrayed commonly as "the butt of the joke because they don't speak English" (Person D). These sort of representations of Latinas also express to society that Latinas aren't smart, can't be taken seriously, and only serve as comic relief.

I loved one individual's comment about the irony of depicting Latinas as dumb. They said "It's ironic that they portray Latinos as dumb even though a lot of Latinos speak two languages and the average American doesn't" (Person H). This comment exposes exactly why Latine representation in the media is so inaccurate. Sure, there are Latinas who don't know how to speak English but 1) that doesn't make them dumb or uneducated and 2) there are so many Latinas who do speak English and Spanish. If people want to apply the standard that only speaking one language makes you stupid the majority of Americans should be considered stupid because most only speak one language. Yet you don't see them being portrayed in lesser intelligent roles nearly as much as Latinas.

A couple people also mentioned that representations of Latinas depict that "don't go to school because they get pregnant" (Person H) or that they "have a lot of children and at young ages" (Persons K). These representations can also be associated with or traced back to the stereotype that Latinas are hypersexual. Several individuals also mentioned that Latinas aren't represented as having positions in power and that they are cast as having "caretaker roles and house jobs" (Person K). So not only is it Latine men who are portrayed as having lower status jobs, but also Latine women.

Another comment someone said in reference to Latine representation in the media is that they depict Latines as being homogenous. The individual talked about how most Latines in the media “are Mexican” or “immigrants” (Person K). Another individual said that if there is a Mexican character in a tv series or film “they have to have a mustache” and they’re always cooking the same things” (Person S). Once again, more evidence that Latines are usually viewed as all being the same and having the same food and culture. There is little representation of the diversity and array of Latine culture beyond the typical and stereotypical use of “Mexican culture.”

Honestly most of the discussions I had about the topic of Latine representation in the media revolved around the same stereotypes and their corresponding characteristics. The above comments I shared were just some of the ones that stood out. Other than that over half of the people I spoke with mentioned similar stereotypes and characteristics that they have seen associated with Latines in the media. The most popular (common) characteristic that the individuals identified as being associated with Latine representation in the media was “criminal.” The second most common was “violent.” Other common characteristics individuals said they see most often used to represent Latines in the media are dumb, immigrants, lazy, gangsters, and rapists. Obviously none of these attributes are positive. The fact that most people were discussing the same or similar stereotypes and characteristics associated with Latine representation in mainstream media tells us that clearly, representation of Latines is not diverse. Furthermore, all these characteristics mentioned are horrible traits that paint Latines as dangerous and something to hate, fear, and avoid.

Now don’t get me wrong, not all Latine representation has been bad. There are some good examples of Latine representation, and as one individual expressed “it’s starting to change

over time” (Person V). For example, I think that Disney’s *Coco* and *McFarland, USA* do a pretty adequate job of representing Latine cultures. Still, films with good Latine representation are few and far between. It is still an exception and it must become the standard. Also I would point out that when there is good or even great Latine representation in film, it’s almost always of Mexican culture and traditions. Don’t get me wrong, it’s great that more accurate representations of Mexican are being produced-- that’s certainly progress. However, as I’ve explained before, when only one type of Latine culture is represented, then that sends a message that all Latines are the same. So when only Mexican culture, traditions, customs, are represented in the media, that feeds into society’s thinking that Mexican culture represents all Latines. There’s a great need for more variety and diversity of Latine cultures represented in the media.

The problem of course goes beyond the lack of diverse Latine representation. The overwhelming amount of Latine representation is still very much negative, problematic, and reliant on stereotypes. In order to have Latine representation be more accurate, directors and producers must begin to listen to and hire Latine writers. Better yet, Latines must be given better chances to become directors, producers, and be able to share their stories and experiences because clearly Latine representation has been surrounding the same negative stereotypes for so long and that’s harmful.

Think about the characteristics and roles these Latine individuals I spoke with said they most often saw Latines playing in the films, TV series, and other forms of media. They’ve mostly commonly seen Latines portrayed as being violent, criminals, lazy, immigrants, blue collar workers, unintelligent, gangsters, rapists etc. Now consider the characteristics and values that these same individuals expressed they most valued about their Latine communities. They valued that Latines are loving, caring, always looking to help others, that they preserve their

customs and traditions, that they emphasize family, that they laugh, dance, and are happy. Do you notice a difference between the values that Latines actually embody and experience versus the characteristics and roles that Latines supposedly possess according to media representation? Exactly. There's a gigantic gap between the reality of what Latine communities and people are actually like and how the media represents them. Not only that but there's a gigantic gap between the reality of what Latine communities and people are actually like versus how people understand them and that's because they're influenced by the media. Obviously not everyone takes exactly what they see in the media and apply it to real life or the way they view other people. However, the media's influence is still extremely powerful and can impact people's conscious or unconscious ideas of a group of people through the way the media represents them. It's crucial that Latines are better represented in the media so that people better understand the expanse and array of diversity within the Latine community.

Chapter VIII: Conclusions

The conversations I had were a vital part of this thesis because they allowed me to have discussions with other Latines about the various aspects of Latine identity I've experienced, read about, and thought about. I didn't want this thesis to revolve solely around the research I did or things I've experienced, because what I've lived and thought about in relation to my Latine identity is equivalent to a grain of sand on a vast beach. Meaning, I knew that my experiences and thoughts were going to have some similarities with other Latines, but also differ in a lot of ways. Since the Latine community is so rich in diversity, I wanted to include the comments, ideas, and opinions of other Latine people. Still, even though I was able to talk to quite a few people (considering the little time and resources I had), there were obviously many limitations to my conversations, which I want to acknowledge.

First of all, I want to recognize that because I had conversations with only 16 people, I was not nearly able to include or represent as much of the Latine population as I would have wanted to. Of the 20 plus Latin American and Caribbean nationalities, I was only able to include four of them. However, even if I would have been able to include 30 people of each Latine nationality, their narratives still wouldn't have been close to representative of all Latines. As I've said numerous times, the Latine community and identity is so diverse that I would have needed to have talked with hundreds or thousands of individuals of each nationality to have gotten even a little close to truly representing a majority of the Latine community. Even then, I would've needed to include people of various races, socioeconomic backgrounds, indigenous people, individuals of mixed nationalities and races, etc. However, although I wasn't able to represent even a minuscule fraction of our Latine community, I still learned many valuable things in relation to how Latines identify. Because even though these individuals are tiny grains of sand in

an entire desert of sand that is the Latine community, their experiences and options matter. How they feel and what they've lived, in relation to their Latine identity, is important to consider in the grand conversation of Latine identity. So yes, there are so many other opinions, experiences, and understandings of Latine I wasn't able to represent. But also yes, the conversations I had with these individuals were tremendously important and crucial in helping me redefine Latine identity from the bottom-up.

Besides, the almost impossibility of being able to accurately represent the entire Latine community proves part of what I'm arguing in this thesis. That is, that the Latine community and identity is so immense, diverse, and intersectional that the simple umbrella term Latine/o/a doesn't do the people or cultures within it justice. The conversations I had confirmed that many Latines aren't particularly fond of or satisfied with the umbrella terms Latine/o/a or Hispanic. Throughout my conversations, it became evident that many people felt like these terms didn't do their diverse identities justice. As Person W pointed out, these terms do more erasing than unifying. They strip people of their individuality, their nationalities, cultures, traditions, histories, experiences, language, and many other aspects that set them apart from other groups of Latines.

In the conversations I had with people about the preferred identity labels they like to use, many shared that they preferred to be identified and distinguished by their nationality. These discussions, comments, and testimonies support the idea that Latines typically don't like to use the terms Latine/o/a or Hispanic. This was furthermore evident when comparing the responses and comments from Latines that live in Latin America or the Caribbean. Individuals in these regions and countries more often go by their nationality and not by these umbrella terms. These pan-ethnic, homogeneous terms are most often used in the U.S where Latines are minorities, commonly face similar discrimination, and are frequently perceived as all being the same.

Otherwise, in Latin America and the Caribbean, Latines identify/label ourselves and others according to their nationalities, because we understand the differences between each other.

I began this thesis by stating that my goal was to advance the understanding of the complexity and diversity of Latine identity through conversations with people who live and experience this identity. Although by my thesis title I suggest that I'm "redefining" Latine identity, I'm really not redefining it in any new or monumental way. What I've tried to do throughout this thesis is give Latine individuals the opportunity to voice how they feel about the umbrella terms that are used to label them. Additionally, I wanted them to express how they have experienced their identity and in turn share how they feel they are perceived by others based on how they see other Latines represented in the media, politics, and elsewhere. I simply gave everyday Latines the stage, and moved the spotlight to shine on them. Because at the end of the day, I believe that if we truly want to get to know someone, their identity, their culture, and their experiences, you have to learn from them.

Institutions, politicians, and the media have always been attempting to shape the public's opinions and perspective about various groups of people, especially minorities. There were several examples throughout my thesis that explicated just how harmful and prominent the use of inflammatory language, dramatic images, and negative stereotypes of Latines are. Perhaps the source that most explicitly discussed the dangers of using and perpetuating negative Latine stereotypes and using inflammatory language is the article written by Nadia Yamel Flores-Yeffal, Guadalupe Vidales, and April Plemons called "The Latino Cyber-Moral Panic Process in the United States." This article puts into perspective the dangers that can arise from the use of false information, derogatory images, and inflammatory language that are often used to describe Latines, especially immigrants. These things, along with stereotypes allow people to create

narratives of Latines as something to fear and be wary of. That's another danger of depicting people in narrow and shallow ways-- people become "something" rather than individuals with distinct lives and backgrounds.

Another example that exemplifies the dangers of using inflammatory language and stereotypes is the article written by Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, titled "Globalization, transnational identities, and conflict talk: The superdiversity and complexity of the Latino identity." In this article she discusses the study she did on the responses to the CNN documentary called "Latino in America." In that article she breaks down the various issues that Latines had with the film. A plethora of individuals critiqued the documentary commenting things like it was a very negative depiction of Latines and that the representation of Latines was not diverse in many ways. Individuals expressed that the documentary relied on so many old and common stereotypes which infuriated them because Latines have a variety of different lived experiences and that isn't reflected in the media, even though this particular document was directed by a Latino.

Another source that demonstrated the issue that latino representation is both negative and homogeneous was the piece by Debra Merskin called "Three Faces of Eva: Perpetuation of the Hot-Latina Stereotype in *Desperate Housewives*." If you'll recall, this piece discussed the very shallow and narrow roles given to Latinas in the media industry that essentially diminish Latinas to sexual objects that aren't capable of being more than something to desire erotically or be seduced by. The perpetuation of stereotypical roles assigned to Latines is unjust because they give the notion that Latines are only cut out for certain jobs and or personalities and that's just extremely inaccurate. Latines come in every shape, size, color, economic status, social class, career position, religious belief, etc., but they aren't portrayed that way. This issue wasn't only

evident in Merkin's piece or "Latino in America" but also in the conversations I had. I drew the drastic comparison between how the individuals I spoke with viewed their own Latine identity/community and how they saw themselves depicted in the media. Clearly there's a giant gap between reality and the way people understand Latine identity and communities.

As individuals we must go beyond what we are fed by the media, politicians, and institutions and formulate our own thoughts and opinions. Why? Because historically America's institutions, governments, and people in power have been White and so their perceptions and understandings of other cultures and other people are severely distorted. Therefore, when media outlets are controlled or headed by people of one race (White), the representation of other races, cultures, and ethnicities is going to be grossly inaccurate. However, the problems go beyond media representation. That is why I began this thesis by talking about how the very labels (Latine and Hispanic) that are meant to define us, do such a poor job of doing that.

These homogeneous, umbrella labels created by White institutions are inadequate in expressing our identity. They simply "make the job easy" for politicians, institutions, and government officials to shove an enormous group of heterogeneous, diverse people into one category and label it as one "ethnicity." Latine people's discontent with these broad identity labels is nothing new, I just wanted to bring to light this issue again, in hopes of expanding other people's understanding of true Latine identity. While my goal was to redefine Latine identity, I was also not trying to create a whole new identity label to represent this vastly unique group of people. The truth is that after all the reading I've done, conversations I've had, and thinking I've done, I don't think anyone can justifiably group all Latin Americans, Caribbeans, and Spanish speakers under one term.

Essentially what my main argument developed to be is that we Latines are very much heterogeneous and distinct and therefore we must be understood that way. As Latines we're proud of our different nationalities and the various cultures, history, customs, etc., that come with them. Shoving us into a homogenous umbrella identity label strips us of our diversity and erases the differences that we celebrate and are proud of. There are really only three main things most Latine countries and cultures share: history of colonization by Spain, Spanish being the dominant language, and being situated in Central or South America and the Caribbean, which by the way all have contrasting climates and topography. In reality, Latine people and nationalities have more distinctions between their cultures than they have things in common and that's what a lot of people don't realize. Can you imagine if Germany or some other foreign country decided to group Americans, Canadians, British, and Jamaicans under one identity label? Why not? Most of the people of these nationalities speak English as their primary language and the countries have a shared history that's similar enough. Imagine how outraged the ultra patriotic Americans would be if a foreign government did this. Even Americans, British, Jamaicans, and Canadians that aren't patriotic would probably be offended by this. After all, they all have their customs and traditions that are different from each other. Even their English is different. Well, maybe now you can understand a little better why Latines are so frustrated that their nationalities and cultures are erased under one giant identity label.

Our differences and heterogeneity should be something that is celebrated, not erased or ignored. That's what happens in the media, in the history kids learn in school, and in systems all over the U.S and almost anywhere that's not Latin America or the Caribbean. Don't get me wrong, I have and still do share special bonds with the Latines at my university, Latine leadership programs I've attended, my soccer team, and elsewhere. There are real connections

between Latines of all nationalities, especially in the U.S where in most private institutions we're the minority. I cherish those relationships and the fact that we're able to speak Spanish with each other, make jokes that we understand related to our upbringing or cultures, etc. Unity exists between Latines, but it can't be taken by other people as "all Latines are the same." It's essential that people, institutions, and the media understand Latine identity as being immensely diverse.

If it helps, people should look at Latine identity as layered, with the term Latine being the broadest, outermost layer. For example, let's say we are looking at my identity. My broadest, outermost identity layer is that I identify as Latino. Go deeper, and my next identity layer is that I'm Guatemalan. That's where I was born, it's the culture I've embraced, and nationality I identify with most. Go a bit deeper and you'll find out I identify as mixed, meaning I'm half white because of my mom and half mestizo (mix of Spanish and indigenous) because of my dad. If we look past that to another layer, you can find out that I also have Tourette's Syndrome, which is another aspect of my identity. I could go on, but I think you get the point, which is that in order to truly understand people and their identities, we have to go beyond the surface level of people's identities. I would say this is the case in general for any person that you want to get to know. Viewing identity as layered and diverse is even more necessary when you're studying, referring, or representing, or simply trying to understand Latines as a community and as individuals.

Before I began writing this thesis, I didn't have a set definition for Latine identity or an idea of how Latines should be categorized in a census. To be honest until this point I still hadn't come up with an answer to these types of questions. However, I think the answer has been evident throughout my thesis and that is that Latines shouldn't be grouped under one homogenous identity label. Doing so erases the diversity of cultures, customs, traditions,

language, indigenous groups, languages, ethnic groups, etc., that exist individually-- under the Latine umbrella. We saw this evident in the comments and responses from individuals, especially surrounding discussion topic about the importance of both differentiating and expressing unity within the Latine community. Individuals were much more concerned about prioritizing and expressing the differences between different nationalities and cultures, than they were about expressing unity. Because we're already constantly grouped together as homogeneous, many of us Latines value celebrating the aspects of our nationalities, cultures, histories, and lived experiences that distinguish us. Respondents to the "Latino in America" documentary were also very expressive of the need to emphasize and represent the many differences that exist between Latines of different nationalities, ethnicities, races, and backgrounds.

As Flores-Yaffal and Plemons demonstrate in their article about Latine moral panic, using homogeneous terms like Latine and Hispanic allows people like politicians-- or really anyone on the internet-- to minimize a giant group of people down to whatever narrow, negative stereotypes and narratives they choose. That is also why it's so important that media representation of Latines improves to show the array of differences that exist between distinct Latine nationalities and cultures. Through improved media representation people can begin to see and understand that not all Latines are the same. However, the salience of better media representation for Latines goes beyond breaking the notion that Latines are a homogenous group of people.

The media's representation of Latines must begin to move beyond the classic "single story" stereotypes of the immigrant, the criminal, the gangster, the dumb friend, the blue collar worker, the maid, the hypersexual exotic Latina, the savage, the narco, etc. These single stories of Latines are not representative of the other qualities, aspects, and experiences that Latines live. Furthermore, they feed into dangerous anti-Latine sentiments and rhetoric that arise especially

around politics, as “The Latino Cyber-Moral Panic Process in the United States” article explains. Flores-Yaffal and Plemons talk about how stereotypes are not only offensive but dangerous because they can lead to the creation of rhetoric that can then lead to hate and even acts of violence against Latines. This was shown by Suzanne Gamboa’s article “Rise in reports of hate crimes against Latinos pushes overall number to 11-year high,” which talks about how Latines were targeted in an El Paso shooting. Clearly hate crimes have not gone away or even diminished and that is in part due to the continued negative representation and rhetoric of Latines in the media and politics. Improving Latine representation in the media will help people better understand us as people and individuals who live as diverse and unique lives as anyone else, and in turn start to tear down some of the negative perceptions and stereotypes of Latines as an enormous, homogeneous group.

Still, the implications and benefits of better understanding Latine identity go beyond the Latine community. Latines are such an integral part of the U.S and our numbers will only continue to expand. Failure to accurately represent and understand the diversity and complexity of our identity simply limits the reach that organizations, politicians, institutions, the media, and other systems have on our populations. If people and organizations want to truly integrate Latines into U.S. society, they have to stop being so presumptuous, discriminatory, and treating us according to the stereotypes they see and hear. We’re more than the people who were colonized by Spain, more than the people who speak Spanish, and more than the people who live in Latin America and the Caribbean. We’re more than just Latine. We’re Guatemalan, Bolivian, Puerto Rican, Honduran, Venezuelan, etc.

However, regardless of if people’s perceptions or understanding of us change, we’ll continue marching on and persevering as we always have, because that’s what Latines do. Our

parents, grandparents, and others before us set examples of how to be resilient and push forward despite the obstacles in front of us. Best of all, regardless of how society perceives us, Latines will continue to dance, laugh, love, care, help each other out, greet each other with kisses on the cheek, cherish our families, and celebrate our beautiful cultures and differences between us-- because as I hope you've learned, that's the reality of who Latines are.

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