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Internalized oppression: Latino narratives on educational experience

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INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION:
LATINO NARRATIVES ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

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by Carolina Avalos

A qualitative study investigated the lived experiences and impact of internalized oppression within educational contexts. Six Latino-identified people—ages 22-38—who are current or former college students were interviewed about their early and adult educational experiences. A constant comparative methodology was used to identify commonalities found in participant narratives. Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed to organize data into themes. Emergent themes included: (a) identity formation, (b) experience of racial micro-aggression in school, and (c) the value of acquiring an occupation being valued higher, in the household, than educational attainment. Findings provided insight into participant experiences with internalized oppression and educational practices. Results demonstrated that some participants did, in fact, experience internalized oppression which affected their educational experiences.

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This thesis project is dedicated to Jazmin, Carlos, and Serv. I would like to express my gratitude to my advising committee—Dr. Jason Laker, Dr. Dolores Mena, and Dr. Rebeca Burciaga—for their dedication in providing me support. Along the way, I have learned a lot about myself and achieved perseverance. This experience has made a difference in my life, and I appreciate it.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I was not aware that I was retelling a story. I did not know why I felt flattered when people asked me about my ethnicity. Oftentimes, I was asked if my ethnicity was Asian, South American, or biracial, but never Mexican. Once I told people I was Mexican, they seemed surprised and stated I did not look or act Mexican to them.

I found that people often questioned my ethnicity when I was in Caucasian-dominant environments. For example, I played soccer for Menlo-Atherton High School, I was involved in gymnastics, I had a summer job in Palo Alto, California, and I worked in a major retail store at Valley Fair Mall. I became used to being one of the few Mexicans in many of those environments. I felt that I was somehow better than other Mexicans because I did not fit the stereotype.

A colleague of mine suggested that what I was experiencing might be a phenomenon called *internalized oppression*, which is the name for situations where people subconsciously believe inaccurate negative stereotypes about their culture (Padilla, 2004). In many instances, people may act out those stereotypes unwillingly. He explained that I could be internalizing an aversion to being Latina as a way to reject negative stereotypes. I became overwhelmed with the idea of internalized oppression. I wanted to learn more about it, what it looked like, how it made people feel, and how it manifested itself.

I realized that internalized oppression has affected my self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy, and educational experiences. I had convinced myself that I was not good enough to do many things in life that I wished I could have accomplished. For example, I have turned down managerial positions and felt incompetent to apply to the private college I aspired to attend. In addition, I did not feel comfortable in my advanced placement courses during high school. I thought it was somehow an administrative error that I was placed there. I did not feel like I belonged in a classroom with Caucasian students. Upon learning more about the concepts of internalized oppression, I realized there were depths of personal and intellectual sides that I wanted to further investigate.

I interchangeably identify using the terms Mexican American and Latino/a in honor of my family's nationality and for what it signifies to me. My family infused a sense of pride in my cultural heritage by instilling values of hard work, integrity, and respect. These lessons were affirmed through my extended family and in my visits to Mexico. In contrast, the media in the U.S. portrays Latinos in a negative light including positioning them as lazy, uneducated, and involved in gangs (Yosso, 2002).

I grew up in East Menlo Park where the criminalization of Latinos in my neighborhood was a common occurrence, particularly with close friends and family who were males. After graduating from high school, I was determined to leave my home town, because I did not want to be associated with negative stereotypes. I learned that there are some people who turn these messages around and use them as a motivation to break stereotypes, while others misuse the images in the media and enact what they see.

I grew up watching movies like *American Me*, *Mi Familia*, and *Blood In and Blood Out*. The characters in these movies portray Mexicans in gangs, dropping out of school, and involved in domestic violence—feeding various stereotypes about Mexicans. In time, I began to understand how the media has the power to retell pervasive images about my culture. These messages were so powerful that when I was a teenager, the stereotypical lifestyles of Mexicans I saw in these films were what I envisioned for my future self. I came to the conclusion that my experiences were the reason I allowed myself to be consumed with flattery when viewed as being another race because I was well aware of the negative stereotypes associated with being Mexican.

Latinos: Identity

In the present day, various ethnonyms and exonyms are applied to Latinos. The term *Latino* most commonly describes people united by the Spanish language and Latin American culture (Costantini, 2012). When interviewed, Elizabeth Martinez (1996) stated that some terms are not just a matter of identification, but a political stance. For example, the term *Hispanic* is often associated with an identity more assimilated with Western culture and tending to have more conservative views (Martinez, 1996). Hispanics are more likely to be second generation (or more) and less likely to speak Spanish. The term Latino is used for those who are reported to be more liberal, older, and radical. Even though the term may take on different meanings to different people, for the purpose of this thesis, I chose to use Latino to generalize the population researched.

Position: Feminist Standpoint Theory

I used feminist standpoint theory to position myself as part of the narratives in Chapter 4. Feminist theories seek to better understand the standpoint of women's roles in society. Feminism is one mindset and movement to end the oppression women, as groups, face (Mikkola, 2008). According to Hekman (1997), women and the roles they play in society have largely been absent in the work of most sociologists. Their absence is not by coincidence but rather a purposeful exclusion in academia. The use of a feminist approach for this thesis allows for the inclusion of my lived choices, values, and feelings that would otherwise be excluded and allows others to see my worldview as a Mexican American woman.

Background

In a recent study, a group of African American students were asked to identify their race before taking an exam (Axner, 2013). These African American students consistently scored lower than other African American students who were not asked to specify their race. The results of this particular study can be also applied to Latino students. It is apparent that identification is a factor in determining educational attainment for marginalized groups. According to Steele (2010), what these African American students experienced is called *stereotype threat*. Stereotype threat is a situation in which people are aware of stereotypes associated with their ethnicity and as a result underperform. "The internalization of these stereotypes damages a person's character by causing low self-esteem, low expectations, low motivation, and self-doubt" (Steele, 2010,

p. 44). Research has shown that internalized oppression—carrying the feeling of inferiority—can be added to the list of adversities Latino students may encounter in a school setting (Padilla, 1999).

Historical events have contributed to the varying levels of marginalization and oppression faced by Latinos. For example, the indigenous people of the Americas, who are ancestors to many modern-day Latinos, suffered more than 500 years of varying oppression—including genocide, rape, and replacement of ancestral beliefs—that has disabled their cultural practices (Rodriguez & Gonzalez, 2005). The legacies of this cultural genocide include social, political, and economic disparities. Latinos have been viewed in the past and have continued to be viewed as a marginalized group in American society; subsequently, this has contributed to an internalization of oppressive beliefs among many Latinos (Steele, 2010). Examining internalized oppression allows for the possibility of helping others to overcome this barrier to achievement.

Problem Statement

Latinos comprise a growing population in many schools in California (Williams, 2013). There are multiple studies that seek to understand unequal education outcomes and achievement gaps between White and Latino students. It has been recognized that Latinos' educational attainment depends highly on the level of their parents' education, family income, autonomy, ethnic and language minority status, and access to learning materials in the home (Arias, 1986; Rumberger, 1983 & 1987; Steinberg, Blinde, &

Chan, 1984). Compelling evidence has shown how internalized oppression affects Latinos in a cognitive and educational context.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to provide further research on internalized oppression and its effect on Latinos' scholarly achievement. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, six Latino participants were interviewed about their understanding and educational experiences with internalized oppression.

Research Questions

The following research questions were identified:

1. Why is there a lack of educational achievement among Latino students?
2. What is internalized oppression?
3. What are the theories associated with internalized oppression?
4. How has internalized oppression affected the Latinos, interviewed for this study, in their educational experience?

Definition of Terms

The following list of definitions was used for the purpose of carrying out the research.

Chicano/a. It is a term used to describe Mexican Americans. The term originated during the "1960s and 1970s Brown pride political activist movement. The designation of the term was to bring pride for many poor, rural, and indigenous Mexicans who came to the United States as seasonal migrant workers. The term is controversial to those who

view it as offensive because the term Chicano is used by activist who seek to create a new identity for their culture rather than to subsume it under the mainstream culture" (Comas-Diaz, 2011, p. 118).

Hegemony. Best described as "an invisible form of social control, whereby people learn to accept—without question—social order. Social structures are embraced as common sense and there is, therefore, no need for the state to employ coercive forms of control—heavy policing, curfews, torture, assassination squads—to maintain social order. Instead of people opposing and fighting unjust structures and dominant beliefs, they learn to regard them as preordained, part of the cultural air they breathe." (Brookfield, 2005, p. 43).

Hispanic. The generic term was officially created in 1970 by the United States Bureau of the Census to designate people of Spanish origin into the same category (Comas-Diaz, 2011). The term refers to people from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central, and South America. The term suggests cultural heritage to Spain. Therefore, to many politically conservative groups regard this European ancestry as being superior. On the other hand, leaving others rejecting the term for being offensive and inaccurate for all Spanish speakers because not all Latin American countries speak the Spanish language or claim Spanish heritage from Spain (e.g., Native Americans and Brazilians).

Historical trauma. This term is defined as the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from

massive group trauma" (Brave Heart, Yellow Horse, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011, p. 282).

Latino/a. The term recognizes diversity within this large ethnic group. It is used to refer to people originating from or living a heritage related to Latin America (Comas-Diaz, 2011). The term Latino is preferred by many over the term Hispanic because it excludes Europeans such as the Spaniards from being identified as minorities in the United States. The term is not applied to persons such as Brazilians and Native Americans who inhabit the Americas.

Member checking. This methodology allows the interviewer to revisit the interviewee for a continued discussion. The purpose of member checking was to review interpretations and conclusions found in data—even after the interviews are completed—to ensure accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Mexican. This term is defined as "relating to the nationality of the inhabitants of Mexico. Mexican is the term used appropriately for Mexican citizens who visit or work in the United States. The term is ineffective for Mexicans who are born citizens of United States and live in the United States" (Comas-Diaz, 2011, p. 118).

Mexican American. This is a complex term. It is defined as being neither completely Mexican nor American, but instead revealing contrasting attraction and pressures between both cultures (Sanchez, 1993). Identifying as Mexican American is to be bicultural in Mexican and United States culture. It is to be an ordered synthesis of old

and new cultures in which certain Mexican traditions disappear with the passage of time and generations. It is being in the cultural position of adopting multiple identities.

Assumptions

In order to conduct this research, the following assumptions were made. Some Latinos have experienced internalized oppression subconsciously. Research on internalized oppression stated that Latinos subconsciously agree to their own oppression (Padilla, 2004). Therefore, I am assuming that many Latinos do not know they have contributed to their own feelings of inferiority.

Limitations

It was accepted that the following limitations were beyond the control of the research design. Participants may not be honest during interviews. Participants may not have a complete recollection of events in their lives. I am a female interviewing several male participants who may feel uncomfortable revealing their feelings about these issues. The one-hour duration of the interviews may have been insufficient, thus creating a limitation to gather sufficient voice recordings. Lastly, participants may not be available for member checking or may be unwilling to participate in member checking.

Delimitations

The research design imposed the following delimitations. Although historical trauma affects people of all ages, this study interviewed only adults age 18 and older. Many participants were not familiar with internalized oppression. There are few

established quantitative and qualitative methods on internalized oppression on Latinos. In summary, not all Latinos have the same experience with internalized oppression.

Significance Statement

The present study is important to the educational system because internalized oppression must be acknowledged in order to increase Latinos' educational attainment. Educators should be aware that Latino students may subconsciously carry some level of internalized oppression. This awareness could provide a more effective pedagogy in classrooms. Whether at work, in the classroom, or in society, internalized oppression causes people to subconsciously attack, criticize, and have low expectations of themselves (Padilla, 1999). This negative belief system is being retold—on a daily basis—by society and has shown its presence in schools. Internalized oppression can further undermine Latino students' self-esteem, academic achievement, and social success. Internalized oppression is a key factor that will be further deconstructed in the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A large portion of Latinos in the United States are at a greater risk of struggling academically than are their non-Latino peers. Several socioeconomic factors (e.g., being labeled at-risk students in school, immigration status, language barriers, poverty, and students' parents having low educational attainment) have been linked to this disparity (Estrada, 2009). In addition to these factors, internalized oppression may be a reason why Latinos underperform. The following literature review consists of data on Latinos in education, theory of historical trauma, and a description of how internalized oppression affects Latinos at an individual, psychological, and social level.

Data on Latinos in Education

Latinos are becoming less of a minority group and consist of a growing majority of the U.S. population (Gándara, 2010). They are among the fastest growing group of Latino-identified students in schools in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), the Latino population doubled between 1987 and 2007. By 2021, it is predicted that one in four students attending school in the U.S. will identify as Latino.

According to Nevarez and Rico (2007), it is during children's early school years that their social and cognitive development is shaped. Yet, the ability to obtain proper K-12 education keeps diminishing for many Latinos. Latino students in elementary schools have scored far below the national average in reading, science, and mathematics.

Statistics have shown that Latino high school graduates are less likely to go to college (Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). In high schools, there has been an increase in students taking advanced placement courses, scholastic assessment tests, and American college tests. These academic measurements illustrate the reliance on standardized exams as a measure of merit achievement for college applications (Contreras, 2005). Latinos' standardized exam scores have failed to keep pace with their White peers' scores. This is apparent when only 50% of Latinos in the United States have graduated from high school compared to 73% of Whites (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, 2007).

Statistical data show similar trends with Latinos and college education completion. Approximately 1.3 million Latinos enrolled in college, compared to 11 million Whites and two million African Americans (Fry, 2002). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006, 2007), 54% of Latinos enrolled in higher education, of which the majority of these students enrolled in community college. Out of the 54%, only about 7% of Latinos received a bachelor's degree.

Latinos continue to be documented as the least educated of all major ethnic groups and have shown a flat improvement (Gándara, 2010). These data show how crucial it is for educators to help improve Latinos' educational attainment for all levels of schooling. According to a report in the *San Jose Mercury News* (Noguchi, 2013), schools in the Silicon Valley of California are still failing Latino students today. The report noted

that although the Silicon Valley does serve several successful school districts, it also serves the worst failure rates for Latinos.

Closing the academic achievement gap requires educators, political leaders, and community members to recognize the severity of Latinos' lack of educational attainment. The following sections discuss the definition of historical trauma, review a brief history of the Americas, and identify characteristics of internalized oppression.

Historical Trauma Theory

Jameson (1981) argued that a person's history is what can hurt that individual. Traces of physical and emotional pain follow each generation that passes. The formations of cultural identity are experiences and/or knowledge about one's historical events (Helmling, 2000). By analyzing historical events, one can understand how certain occurrences helped shape the development of historical trauma theory. Although there are different terms (e.g., *cultural trauma, survivors' guilt, post-traumatic stress disorder*, and *slave syndrome*), they share similar meanings with historical trauma theory (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Cook, Withy, & Tarallo-Jensen, 2003; Danieli, 1998; Kellerman, 2001; Krieger, 2001; Leary & Robinson, 2005).

To many scholars, historical trauma focuses on compounding discrimination, racism, and oppression of indigenous people of the Americas. While it has been argued that historical trauma is not applicable to Latinos, Estrada (2009) argued that they, in fact, have experienced the same or similar oppressive historical events.

Rodriguez and Gonzalez (2005) identified the following events in history as contributory to historical trauma: (a) people of North and South America being subjugated for more than 500 years, (b) sacred land being taken by force, (c) genocide of ancestors, (d) forced social, political, and religious conversion to European customs, and (e) forced assimilation and dismissal of traditional ways of governance, languages, culture, and spiritual teaching.

Internalized Oppression

Many scholars found a key characteristic of historical trauma theory to be internalized oppression within Latinos. As a result, the birth of internalized oppression came into existence.

According to Rodriguez and Gonzalez (2005), internalized oppression is an assemblage of the following:

1. An individual's self-hatred
2. Belief that power comes from oppressing others
3. Judgment and criticism of their own people
4. Using victimization to make excuses for inappropriate actions
5. The need to create crisis and enjoy the rush of crisis or feeling that this is the normal state of life
6. Having fear-based reactions
7. The notion that someone in their environment needs to pay for wronging them
8. Feeling detached from their feelings and detached from others

9. Denial or embarrassment of family, culture, or heritage, when aware of dysfunction in their own community
10. Often blaming themselves for their life condition
11. Unconsciously allowing hegemonic ideations of inferiority
12. Acting out these beliefs about their culture in their school environment

As internalized oppression becomes a normal part of society, some Latinos are conditioned to their own oppression by enacting popular narratives unconsciously.

According to Feagin and Cobas (2008), Latinos were represented as being lower or inferior to other races in the United States. This mental imagery is a persistent message that is overwhelmingly dominant in many Latino frameworks. The acceptance of self-stereotyping is a hegemonic cognition where minorities consent to various ways of oppression. This message may distort the belief in being able to achieve educational attainment. Given the research on internalized oppression and Latinos, it is possible that some Latinos feel inferior to non-minority labeled students in school. This may be an additional factor as to why many Latinos are not excelling in academia.

Throughout history, we can see how internalized oppression began to take action. Chasteen (2001) wrote a concise history of Latin America exploring the historical context of internalized oppression. His research began with details about European colonization of the Americas. By the 1500s, Spanish and Portuguese colonizers imposed their language, religion, and social institutions on the indigenous Americans. They also enslaved them for their own purpose. In addition, there were forcible methods used to

modernize indigenous groups so they could keep up with society's demands. Chasten also described caste paintings of the 1700s that were given to Spanish officials to classify the indigenous population as a new species of animal. The indigenous people became known for having animalistic characteristics.

By the late 1800s, the hegemonic idea of European superiority was in place. It was considered prestigious in the Americas to wear European clothing and to have one's heritage from Spain (Chasteen, 2001). Even the famous Mexican revolutionary Benito Juarez was a victim of internalized oppression. He was most famous for being an advocate for the indigenous people. However, when he was elected to be a state legislator and then governor of Oaxaca, he began to put rice powder on his face to lighten his skin so he would look less indigenous.

In the 1920s, U.S. congressmen described Latinos as an undesirable and mongrelized mixture of Spanish and low-grade Indians (Feagin, 2010). By the 1930s, indigenous people were portrayed as lazy, backwards individuals, and peasants (Chasteen, 2001). This image continues to be passed down to each new generation, adding more derogatory terms to the already arduous list.

A Lighter Shade of Brown

Oppression begins with a circle of lies—assumptions and prejudices that have been passed down from generation to generation. One such lie is when people retell the message that it is better to have light skin over dark skin. As a result, there is a great deal of self-loathing tied to the darkness of one's skin within the Latino community (Padilla,

2004). It is a general consensus that at the top of the social class ladder is the color white and at the bottom of the social class ladder is the color black. Given our historical contexts, we have been condition for many years to subconsciously believe that lighter skin is more profitable in acquiring greater economic, political and social security. Being labeled White, therefore constitutes as the privileged identity in our society. When people continue to contribute to this notion, people succumb to the idea that Eurocentric characteristics are more valuable than Latinos' indigenous dark skinned roots.

Mental Health

Hipolito-Delgado (2010) described internalized oppression as a disease that infects communities of color and is damaging to one's mental health. Carter (2007) asserted that the effects of racism cause more stress on an individual. Brave Heart et al. (2011) found that racism negatively affected Native American people. Many times, if left unnoticed, internalized oppression can lead to substance and alcohol abuse (Estrada, 2009). Although there have been long-term goals to create intervention practices to reduce the emotional suffering of indigenous people and their family members, this group has faced emotional distress, depression, substance abuse, collective trauma exposure, interpersonal losses, and unresolved grief related to their historical context (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Indigenous people ranked higher in health disparities than any other racial group in the U.S. There is a relationship between health concerns and their historical past. Internalized oppression was a major finding in their study.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was one of the more severe consequences identified as directly correlated with historical trauma; PTSD was due to severe trauma exposure and cultural manifestations of trauma. According to Harris (2013), racism could be a cause of PTSD. Researchers (Rose & Cheung, 2012; Young & Johnson, 2010) recommended additions to the DSM-5 to better serve older, more culturally diverse groups of people. The DSM-5 is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is a clinical reference assessment tool used in the psychological process with patients (Young & Johnson, 2010).

The described psychological stressors have been found to cause negative physical effects on the human body. According to Estrada (2009), like the Native Americans, many generations of Latinos have begun to show an increased rate of substance abuse, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, antisocial personality disorder, and type 2 diabetes. These diseases and disorders are directly influenced by the history of anti-Mexican sentiment, discrimination, and racism that Latinos have experienced. Narrating these stressors has been found to help externalize the problem. If the response to the narration is negative, it can lead people to greater problems in their personal, work, and parenting life (Carter, 2007).

Psychological Effects of Racism in School and Stereotyping

The psychological effects of racism have been documented as being physical and mental, regardless of a person's economic status (Carter, 2007). There have been several studies that have shown the relationship between life stressors and lack of academic

achievement within the Latino community. Trueba (1983) conducted an ethnographic study of Mexican American elementary school students. He found that many students were experiencing significant levels of problems adjusting to the school. Some of the manifestations described were frustration, sadness, fatigue, lack of concentration, aggression, loneliness, acting out, stomach problems, and general anxiety.

Another study by Yamamoto and Byrnes (1984) found that Latino students in junior high school reported a higher incidence of school-related stressors as compared to other students. Many of the reported stressors included emotional stressors for events (e.g., academic detainment, poor report cards, and being sent to the principal's office). Alva and Padilla (1995) added that being labeled a minority, having low socioeconomic status, explicit cultural difference, and language differences are stressors Latinos faced. Ogbu (1992) argued that minority students may fail in school, given their teacher-student interactions. Teachers may treat minority students differently by stereotyping. As a result, Latino children may succumb to believing these narratives about their culture and continue to be affected throughout their adulthood.

Overt racism is not socially acceptable, but somehow racism is being expressed in a more disguised manner (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Stereotyping is like a cloud of smoke that hangs dark and heavy over one’s autonomy. Latinos who do succeed in K-12 grades, graduate from college, and maintain successful lives are breaking through hegemonic ideologies about their culture. However, negative ideological belief systems

(e.g., Latinos doing poorly in math and the sciences, dropping out of high school, and not being able to afford college) can affect students' educational attainment.

As described by Steele (2010), stereotype threat "is when people are in an environment where a bad stereotype about their identity could be applied to them and know it" (p. 15). *Identity contingencies* are present when people must deal with their stereotype according to their social identity. In this case, Latinos have to deal with the stereotypes that are associated with being Latino. Stereotype threat and identity contingency have been identified as an explanation for lack of student academic achievement among Latino students. They also apply to the trend in underperforming Latino students in higher education. These given stereotypes are a pattern of society that negatively affects their overall well-being.

Stereotypes are costly to students and their development toward personal and academic success. Even scholastic expectations for some Latino students are limited—by their teachers—due to these negative stereotypes. As a result, students who are labeled minorities often feel as if their historical experiences, culture, and language are devalued, misunderstood, or omitted within a formal educational setting (Bernal, 2002). As reported, negative stereotypes can be internalized, resulting in disengagement from school, adopting deviant behaviors, having fewer opportunities in life, and experiencing difficulty earning a living wage (Goodman &West-Olatunji, 2010).

Historical Social-Political Effects on Latino Rights

Internalized oppression at the macro level can be seen throughout history as Latinos have been politically oppressed for more than 500 years. There are sociocultural, socio-environmental, and socioeconomic influences which affect Latinos' cultural identity, ethnic pride, family life, and spirituality. Estrada (2009) described the negative perceptions held by institutions that were discriminatory against Latinos. In 1848, there was a militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border. The U.S. perceived the Mexican military to be inferior, have weak technology and considered Mexicans as half-breeds. This created a stereotype, projected to the world, that Mexicans were stupid and inferior. Since the 1930s anti-Mexican sediment led to various government programs such as Operation Wet-back, Operation Hold the Line, and Operation Safe Guard. These programs were created to physically stop immigration and to keep the U.S. safe.

Barrera (1979) examined the Internal Colonial Model, which occurred in the southwest. This model involved the exploitation of Latinos in their own land, repression of political and economic rights, and treating them as conquered or colonized people. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo illustrates this blasphemy. It was created initially as a friendly treaty of peace, but the U.S. breached its agreement when it seized more territory than was actually agreed upon. The Mexicans who were left in the U.S. after the treaty was breached were forced to attend segregated schools, live in segregated neighborhoods, give up property rightfully owned, and were viewed as inferior to Euro-Americans

(Estrada, 2009). The U.S. government made it easier to force their way into indigenous territory by implementing the notion that Mexico was a subordinate and inferior country.

In 2010, a bill was signed by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer to eliminate the ethnic studies department in Arizona high schools. O'Leary and Romero (2011) conducted a study on Chicano student's response to Arizona's Anti-Ethnic Studies Bill SB 1108. A total of 326 students participated by filling out a survey. The survey hypothesized that stress from the SB1108 was associated with more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem. The second hypothesis was to find out if the negative effects of SB1108 would be moderated by civic engagement and result in a more positive ethnic identity. The results indicated that students were more stressed due to SB 1108 and identified as having more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem.

Summary

This review of literature brings forth the complex psychosocial and political effects of internalized oppression of Latinos. It is important to mention that not all Latinos experience internalized oppression. If one is a member of a community that historically has been oppressed, it does not mean ipso facto that they will experience similar experiences of internalized oppression. In addition, not all Latinos agree with the existence of the concept of internalized oppression (Axner, 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine internalized oppression and cultural trauma within educational contexts. Employing qualitative methods to conduct research on human experiences and behaviors is a growing trend. It is seen most commonly in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and education (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This method analyzes participants' words, actions, the language used, and their behaviors. Qualitative inquiry is a social constructivist in nature, transparently and critically employing the point of view of the observer's knowledge about social life (Warren & Karner, 2005). It seeks to collect data through observations, conducting in-depth interviews, and transcribing interviews for analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It also looks to explore both the macro level of social structure and the micro level of social interaction (Warren & Karner, 2005). For some researchers, the attraction of qualitative research is that there are no numerical interpretations, which some argue would undermine or oversimplify the issues being studied. In qualitative research, the social world is inter-subjective, and the study is based on the understandings of the people and perspectives observed from the perspective of the individual who is conducting the study.

This research design included the use of member checking. Member checking is a strategy that continually confirms with participants that the interpretations and conclusions found in data after the interviews are completed are consistent with their own understanding and experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When interviews and field notes

are collected, one might misinterpret interviewee's statements. Thus, the use of member checking is valuable to have the opportunity to revisit particular details in the data. This strategy increases the likelihood of accurate interpretations, but there is no guarantee that the interviewer will have a definite translation of interviewee's viewpoints.

Participants' words and nonverbal expressions may convey their ideas and share their feelings with others. By using the constant comparative method, the researcher can decipher patterns in a variety of stories and generate commonalities or themes among them (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Mish (1990) used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope when describing this approach. Just as in the kaleidoscope, with each turn, bits and pieces change position with a variety of patterns revealed. Akin to analyzing transcripts, data are refined and organized into categories and even subcategories to create a theme (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). When analyzing data, the challenge is to uncover meaningful patterns in transcriptions and to carefully categorize them. This becomes an artful and creative process. After comparing each transcription, there can be a tedious task of looking for similarities, differences, and variations in each interviewee's transcriptions. Similarities do not have to be exactly alike but just enough alike to find a relationship between them.

Participants

Six individuals who identify as Mexican American, Mexican, Hispanic, and/or Latino volunteered to participate in this study. There were three females and three males between the ages of 22-38. One participant grew up in a small suburban neighborhood.

Three participants grew up in a large urban city, and two are from a rural agricultural area.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by using convenience sampling. A Call for Participants email was generated for the purpose of recruiting participants electronically (see **Appendix A**). The email was received by several academic departments at a large urban university. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to recruitment. An addendum was later granted to have a volunteer assist with transcribing interviews. Each participant signed a letter of consent and received a copy of it (see **Appendix B**). Furthermore, each participant chose his or her own pseudonym to provide anonymity. These fictitious names were used in the study to ensure confidentiality.

Instruments

An audio recorder instrument was used for each interview. Interviews were followed up by a verbatim transcription onto a word document to ensure accurate narratives. The interview questions consisted of the general topics and themes that the research questions addressed (see **Appendix C**). The interview questions were not asked verbatim but rather were used to guide the direction of the interview. Participants answered questions freely, which created a natural conversation. Lastly, after each interview was recorded, participants were given a list of local resources to utilize if they experienced any distress or needed mental or physical health services arising from the interview session (see **Appendix D**).

Using the constant comparison methodology for this study, six interviews were conducted in order to elicit salient themes. Open coding was used to divide data into segments and to be analyzed. Open coding consists of asking several questions, making comparisons, and sifting through narratives to reveal similarities and differences between participants (Boeije, 2002). In order to cross-analyze, each interview transcription was scanned for reoccurring terms. Results of scanning included reoccurring terms such as work, school, parents, stereotypes about Latinos, identity, language, low-income, poor, bad experience, self-conscious, I don't know why, being of Mexican descent, being first generation, experience with teachers, college experience, high school teacher, and lack of mentors. As I noted these key words, I sought to understand the context within which these terms were used. Many of the participants discussed these terms within a similar personal context. Namely, a number of participants were first generation, low-income students who were aware of negative stereotypes about their culture. Some felt that they did not know why they believed negative stereotypes about their culture, but they "just" did. Additionally, as I listened to the participants' voice recordings, I often read certain transcripts out loud in order to capture the nuances and inflections in their voices. At times they spoke in a high-pitched tone and at other times it sounded like they were nervous and their voice cracked. Their facial expressions reflect the tone of the stories they shared.

Chapter 4: Data Results

The purpose of this study was to examine how a small cohort of Latino participants viewed internalized oppression and to discuss their experiences with it. It was expected that participants would reveal some level of experience with internalized oppression in their educational experiences. The results revealed several participants whose life experiences resonated with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. The following themes were identified: identity formation, micro-aggression in school, the value of working after high school rather than attend a higher education, and manifestations of internalized oppression. I was struck to find that these participants' experiences were similar to my own personal experiences. This suggests a validation of our lived experiences as important factors that can influence educational attainment. By not discussing these incidents that happened in our educational experience, is par to why it continues to happen. Educators should encourage their students to understand that they are not alone in these kinds of experiences.

Participants described how personal life experiences helped shape their identity. Many participants described experiencing micro-aggressions in school where they received insults from their teachers. The majority of the participants also described how cultural traditions in their household shaped their motivation for pursuing a higher education. Themes are organized in the following order: cultural identity, micro-aggressions in school, value of work versus education, and manifestations of internalized oppression.

Participants' narratives unfolded like the Russian stackable dolls. Upon meeting each participant, I felt like we began with the largest shell of a Russian doll. I realized that there were layers upon layers of emotions and experiences to unstack. Each participant allowed me to "unstack" them (*i.e.,* reveal their inner layers) but only to a certain depth.

Cultural Identity

A person's identity is important because it maintains social ties, gives meaning to how others view themselves, and sends a message to others about their values, culture, behaviors, and language (Bernal & Knight, 1993). Since Latinos are a heterogeneous group, differences in identity formation was a theme discovered. Currently, there are many terms to identify Latinos, and I was interested to find out how participants chose to identify him/herself.

Two participants identified themselves as *Mexican American*. Even though these two participants identified with the same term, they each had different reasoning as to why they chose that term. One participant identified with being *Mexican,* even though he was born in the United States. The term is typically used if someone is born in Mexico. Another participant identified herself as *Latina*. The next participant identified as being *Hispanic*. The last participant did not have a definite answer as to how to identify himself but later described himself as *Chicano*. I found it interesting that all the participants identified with different terms, yet all were either from or had family origins

in Mexico. I concluded that participants' social infrastructure had an influence on the way they self-identified. The following narratives describe their thought process.

Sara is a graduate student at a large urban state university. Sara is third generation in the U.S., works on campus, and is from a rural city. She described herself as Latina. She said that out of all the terms, she identifies more with Latina and stated that she is "somewhat Mexican American and kind of Chicano, but not as much, and [does not] like the word Hispanic." She stated she did not like the term Hispanic because she, "feels like it's a social [construct]. The government set it up so they can group us all together." I asked Sara why she slightly identified with Chicano.

> I feel like it's more of a movement, a social movement, and I haven't necessarily been a part of that. When I'm trying to be specific I'll say like Mexican American, but when I'm like talking to someone in a more broad general setting I'll say Latina (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

Sara described how she would like to be more involved in her culture by learning the language and passing it down to her children. Her narrative reminded me of a study by Reyes (2010); he stated that there are people of Mexican descent, who are of second generation or more, no longer speaking Spanish, speak mostly English exclusively, and practice ethnic customs sparsely.

Amelia is first generation Mexican American. She is currently working towards her bachelor's degree at a large urban state university. She is a full-time student, comes from a large city, and volunteers with middle school students. I asked Amelia how she identified herself.

> I'm Mexican, because before I took that [Mexican American history] class I thought of myself as Hispanic, but then going into it, I was like no, I'm Mexican American. California was Mexican territory, culturally I'm both. I practice both cultures (A. Juarez, personal communication, January 18, 2013).

When I asked her where the term Hispanic came from, she replied that "it was a term given to us; there were so many people who spoke Spanish." Amelia is a participant who chose to enroll in a Mexican history studies class, which enabled her to learn about important historical events. This knowledge helped contribute to the formation of her identity.

Iko is a first generation student who identifies as Mexican American. He completed an Associate of Arts degree and works as a recreation leader at a youth center. He comes from a large city, served in the military for 4 years, and enrolled at a 4 year university. After his first semester he dropped out of the state university. When I asked him how he identifies himself given that there are so many terms one can use, he stated, "I am Mexican American because I was born in the United States and I am of Mexican descent." I asked him if he knew the history of the different terms which people call themselves. He stated, "there is a difference between Mexicans and every other Latino. So they [society] shouldn't categorize us, but they do." When I asked him what he thought of the term Chicano, he said, "Chicano refers to the people in the [1950s and 1960s], doesn't refer to people like me now these days." I asked Iko who people like him are.

> I am like people who are descendants from first or second generation Mexican families, and Chicanos are descendants from farmers that come work the fields

> and then they would stay in the United States (I. Sanchez, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

I asked him if that is how he made his decision to call himself Mexican American.

> I am a Mexican American. Mexicans don't speak English very well, they work all the time, and they have different values than I do. Mexican people are called wetback and it's a derogatory term (I. Sanchez, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

It seemed as if Iko preferred to be identified as Mexican American because he has received the message that the term Mexican may be viewed as demeaning. In addition, Reyes (2010) stated that being Mexican American can be ambiguous and may be received negatively depending on the social context.

Mary grew up in Mexico and came to the U.S. during her teenage years. She is attending a large state university to earn her bachelor's degree. She works for a large grocery chain in human resources and she settled in a large urban city with her family. Mary described how she identifies as Mexican but prefers to identify with being Hispanic. "I was born in Mexico and I grew up there and my parents are also from there. I came here around seven years ago. I wouldn't consider myself Mexican American." She went on to say "I'd rather say Hispanic or Latino rather than Mexican, because perhaps in an application they might discriminate against you for being Mexicans. There are negative stereotypes about Mexicans, at least in California."

Mary understood the consequences of identifying herself with certain terms. She favored the term Hispanic so that in certain social situations she would not face

discrimination. Several Latinos are aware of the social penalties associated with their ethnic background, and have accented an ethnic persona as a coping strategy (Feagin, 2010).

Frank is a graduate student attending a state university and works on campus. He has a background in Latin American studies, is first generation in the U.S., and came from a rural city. He is creating a group on campus to promote unity amongst *brown people*. Frank described his identity as the following,

> I've heard Chicano, I like it, but I don't feel like I would identify myself as Chicano, it would possibly be one. I am told I am Mexican American. There are different views about it. Like in the Spanish department, they say we are Hispanic because we are from Spain. Hispanic is another political term given to us by this country. They say I'm Mexican American in the Mexican American studies department because that person loses his roots living in the U.S (F. Martinez, personal communication, November 16, 2012).

I asked Alejandro which term he identifies with more.

> I just say I'm Mexicano. Why, because my family was over there, I am really attached to my roots. I feel like I'm really proud of it and the Chicano thing, I hate the injustice with in school and politically and we always read about the African American suffrage in textbooks but we don't hear about our people only when we take this Mexican American studies class (F. Martinez, personal communication, November 16, 2012).

Frank is another participant who developed a deeper awareness of his history by taking the Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses. He has an understanding of his cultural background and despite what his departments classify him as.

Alejandro is a first generation Mexican American. He is enrolled in a graduate program at a large state university. He also has a background in Latin American studies.

He works three part-time jobs, two of which are working with high school students and the other is a technical position. He comes from a suburban city and has a military background. He described how he was having a hard time identifying himself.

> It's a difficult thing to say. Culturally I would say I am from a Mexican household, first generation. I grew up here; I'm not as Mexican as them [referring to his parents who grew up in Mexico]. I would say Chicano, for lack of a better term right now. I struggle to find, where I do fit? I'm still exploring my identity. There are a number of factors that kinda influence my formation of identity. It would be difficult to answer a question other than a Mexican American kid or I'm struggling to figure out how I choose to identify (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

Why is he having a hard time identifying himself? Since he is enrolled in a MAS program, it's likely that he has become more aware of his culture and is aware that he has the option to figure out for himself what fits best.

> How do I know where I come from, if I am a part of the 'cosmic race,' a blend of Black, indigenous, Asian, and Spanish blood? I can only go by what I look like the most. I am told I have a lot more Spanish features, and I can't negate that side of me even though I know what they did to other countries, they obliterated the natives and that is not something that I am proud of (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

Alejandro engaged deeply into his cultural background acknowledged all the different cultures of which he could be a part.

Reflections on My Own Identity

The first time I remember thinking critically about my ethnicity was when I enrolled in a French class in high school. I was surprised to learn similar cultural characteristics between the French and Spanish country. When I translated words from

French to Spanish, I was surprised to see how they carried similar sentence structures and gender nouns. Another similarity that I noticed is the religion; Christianity and Catholicism are a large part of the culture in France as it is in my country of origin Mexico. When I visited Mexico and compared it to pictures of churches and houses in Europe, I saw drastic similarities. After taking a Mexican American studies course in college, I learned the true meaning of colonialism. I began to do research on my cultural roots and came to appreciate how I share ancestry with the indigenous people of the Americas.

Before reading material on Mexican American studies, I was guilty of not knowing the history of my ancestors. However, I was aware of the stigma that being Mexican carried. I knew the derogatory terms and negative stereotypes for being Mexican, like dirty, uneducated, illegal, gangsters, poor, the dominated race, and the compliant race. In high school, when I did not pass an exam or when I was not heading in the right direction, I told myself that it was "because I'm Mexican." Yet it was really a matter of my ignorance and not taking responsibility for my actions. Mostly, I did not want to call myself Mexican so that people would not associate me with negative stereotypes. My mother often told me that it was not pretty to part my hair down the middle and wear braided pigtails because it made me look too India (native). As a result, I internalized the negative messages about my culture and I felt ashamed of being Mexican. I have learned that Mexicans and other Latinos are not what the dominant narratives about culture say we are. Every human being is capable of earning an

education, getting a good job, and being good citizens. Unless we understand our cultural history, we can begin to break down stereotypes.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), Latinos are a growing population in the U.S. Most recently, there has been an increase of Mexican American or Chicano studies classes offered in high schools. These kinds of courses are important to undertake so that Latino students can learn about their social, political, cultural, and economic history. Some may see this as Latino solidarity that threatens the U.S., like when Arizona banned ethnic studies in 2010 (O'Leary & Romero, 2011). According to Fernandez (1998), if you have people who have been on this continent for hundreds of years and who have contributed greatly, with their own culture and people, they should have the right to have their history and their people be studied. Many participants felt a sense of empowerment by enrolling in the MAS course. By understanding ethnic identity, one can develop a sense of where one might fit in society.

Micro-aggressions in School

Micro-aggressions are subtle, verbal or nonverbal insults made towards people of color to communicate a message that they are undervalued, not respected, and inferior (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1977). Yosso, Smith, Ceja and Solorzano (2009), paint an analogy of how certain colleges do not advertise what the campus climate is like. For example, in some colleges Whites enjoy a sense of entitlement while minority students are confronted with feelings of inferiority. Scholars have found micro-aggression to be present in the classrooms, resulting in anger, hostility, misunderstanding,

blockages of learning, repressed opportunity for growth, and a decrease in communication (Sue & Constantine, 2007). Pizarro (2005) validated this notion by conducting a qualitative study in which he interviewed several Latino students and examined their school experiences. He found that many of the students identified "overt negative messages they received from school teachers and administrators tied to their race, some of the messages resulted in school failure and others were resilient in striving to prove others wrong" (p. 61). When I think of an ideal classroom setting, I imagine a teacher who genuinely cares about their students, wants them to succeed, and helps by encouraging them and providing resources to them. However, this is clearly not true for three participants. They described the administrators and teachers at their schools as the perpetrators who made them feel unwanted in the classroom.

For Alejandro, the micro-aggressions he experienced in school were more subtle and nonverbal. Alejandro stated that in elementary and junior high school he knew that he was a good student.

> I loved school, I did well in school. I was excited to start on my first day of high school until I noticed that I was placed in a reading support class for third period. After sitting through the first day of high school, I felt like I didn't belong there because I was a good reader and I wanted a more challenging class. I decided to see my counselor after school and told her that I would like to get switched out of that class into a more advanced class. I told her that I did not want to be in a reading support class, because it was very basic and more for people who really did not know how to read. But when I talked to the counselor, she said that I should stay in the class and see how it goes I told her that I don't need to be in a reading class, I'd like to be in AP English class. I think [the counselor] said "that's a really hard class for you." The counselor said that maybe next year, I could be placed in English class. After that, I think that shaped my whole high school experience. I felt like talking to the counselor would get me nowhere and

> they would not allow me to take the classes that I wanted to take. I felt like, why I should even bother with the counselors. I remember doing the bare minimum after that, I did not feel like I was not wanted at the high school and felt like I was tolerated in class. I did not feel like I was properly motivated (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

This statement implied that the counselor did not think Alejandro could do well in a more advanced class. Many unknown factors may have caused her to not let him switch class, such as his test scores from middle school or possibly not enough room in the advanced classes. Nonetheless, Alejandro was left with the feeling like he was not capable of succeeding in an advanced class. Where is the encouragement for Alejandro that is supposed to be given to him by his counselor? His experience with a counselor on his first day of school shaped how he felt about his place at his high school. According to Alva and Padilla (1995), school climate may affect the way students perceive school. For Alejandro, this interactions decreased his amount of effort he exerted in school. Alejandro did not seem to have reached his full potential in high school.

Frank's high school experience included more verbal and direct micro-aggressions from his teachers.

> A White teacher told us [that] he doesn't understand why brown people don't just take a class to be certified for being a mechanic after high school and he was serious. And I was like, damn. I also remember one teacher, we stood by her door and she told us "move you thugs" and we were like wow, those eyes of racism and disgust (F. Martinez, personal communication, November 16, 2012).

As Frank described his experiences, these kinds of events can further polarize the relationship between students and administrators causing further disconnection with

school (Sue & Constantine, 2007). The school climate seemed to contain ethnic hostility and prejudice for Frank.

Iko stated that he had good relationships with his teachers until he had a negative experience with his math teacher in elementary school.

> There was this one teacher, actually my math teacher; he told my mom that I wasn't a smart person, yeah because I wasn't doing well in my math class. I had a hard time with fractions. This happened at a parent teacher conference. I remember stuff like that, of course you're not going to forget the negative stuff like that, you always remember the people who hurt you (I. Sanchez, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

For Iko, the person who hurt him was a teacher. It seems that Iko may have carried this weight on his shoulders through the rest of his educational journey.

Personal Experience with Micro-aggression

I, too, have experienced micro-aggressions during my educational experience. After analyzing the participants' micro-aggressions, I remembered an instance in my Advanced Placement English class during my freshman year of high school. I was one of only a few Latinos in this course and the teacher was a White. After a few failing test scores, I realized that I had to learn how to study. However, materials such as flash cards and highlighters were not tools with which I was familiar using. I felt even worse when my teacher held me back after class to talk to me. He suggested that I switch out of his class because he could tell the material was too hard for me. The teacher did not offer any ways to help me improve in his class or suggest I get tutoring. As a result, I used a

voice recorder to memorize my spelling words which helped me pass my tests. I was able to relate to Iko from this personal experience in school.

Values: Work vs. Education

The third theme found in this research was the value of work being valued more than education. The concept of obtaining a higher education was not present in the household for many of the participants. Many of the participants' parents did not have an education higher than a high school degree. One of the participants did have parents that reached post-secondary education. It was important for many of the participants' parents to work and support their families. I asked what higher education meant for Iko's family.

> My mom told me that I was wasting my time. I know she was full of shit. Because you see other people moving up and that sucks when you are still living in the same place and getting the same old money and the same old same old. In Mexican families or Mexican American families, you want to make money by working two or three jobs. Which is different because some cultures you have to go to school first to get the good job and make the money, but you are saying to make good money you have to work two or three jobs (I. Sanchez, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

I was interested to find out how he felt on his first day at community college. Iko stated, "It was 1995, and I guess I had to do something after high school. So yeah, I was kinda rolling with the school thing and yeah it really wasn't that important." It surprised me to see the difference in how he felt about what his mother said about going to work instead of school. Yet on his first day of community college, given his own rationale about school, he did not show much interest in higher education. Iko stated that he worked

while going to community college but then dropped out when he transferred to a state university. I asked if he had to drop out to work to help support his family, but he stated that it "got too boring." Could the message from his family affected his pursuit of acquiring a higher education? It is clear that he knows this stereotype and even though he did not agree with it, he acted out in the way that was expected of him.

In Alejandro's family, it was important to bring income into the family to help support his family members. He described learning the message at an early age that working was more important than education.

> My family was poor; I used to eat tacos de sal (salt) y limon (lemon). It was a good day when we had cream (sour cream). So I worked every day after school at the movie theater serving popcorn and making coffee. But it was fun; I got all my friends a job there. So I had fun going to work. No one supervised us, I was their manager. My mom didn't stop me from working, shit; she needed us to work to help out. So when I graduated from high school, it wasn't a big deal that I did not go to college. I wanted to work to make money (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

The messages of work being more important than school was important in Alejandro's household due to his economic situation.

Amelia began to describe her educational experience growing up as something that took her a few years to realize on her own.

> I did not know about furthering my education. I did not receive information about college or anything. The first thing I did when I graduated is work. I didn't feel smart, I was working at Wal-Mart and it's the worst job I had. I didn't know that Wal-Mart workers had people who just got of out of jail. I was there for three years and the people were rude. I was then like, I don't deserve to be treated like this and then I decided to go to a community college. I didn't know what the process was; my parents didn't go to elementary school so it was hard. I wanted to

> go to a university college, but in the application process it asked what I did for extracurricular activities, there was nothing I could put because I was just working or attending school so that was a big factor in attending schools because when you don't have the time to do that because you are working and you don't have things to put down. I wanted to apply to "Teach for America" but that is something that it asks you in the application too, and I just worked and went to school. I can't go and lead a girls' scout and participate in volleyball and hockey I had to pay for my own education so that was hard (A. Juarez, personal communication, January 18, 2013).

After experiencing this, Amelia realized on her own that her education was important. I could hear the frustration in her voice. Amelia's story resonates with many students who go through high school and not experience teachers or counselors to help them think about their college future.

Personal Reflection

My parents did not go to school beyond the 8th grade. When they grew up in Mexico, it was important to tend to their farms. My mother was one of the eldest daughters of eight children, and her mother passed away when she was thirteen years old. She and her older sister inherited the responsibilities of taking care of the rest of the children and executing the household chores. My father was one of the youngest of six children, and was sent to work to help provide for his family. Growing up, I adopted the message that work was more important than going to school. I was assigned to do chores before I went to school and after school before I played. I had several gymnastics, volleyball, and soccer games to tend to as an adolescent. But, my parents would often instruct me to pick twenty green tomatoes from the back yard or wash the dishes before I did any school related activities. As a senior in high school, college was not the most

important thing to talk about. I feel that I, too, received the message that obtaining labor types of jobs was more important than my educational future.

There is, to some degree, a lack of understanding among Latino parents about the importance of pursuing an education in the United States. Many Latino immigrant parents lack a familiarity with the U.S. education system. They may be unable to guide their children to complete high school and to help them with higher education decisions because of their own cultural values being passed down to their children (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003).

Manifestations of Internalized Oppression

As presented in the literature review, internalized oppression affects Latinos at an individual, psychological, and social level (Cúellar, Nyberg, & Maldonado, 1997; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; O'Leary & Romero, 2011). The purpose of the interviews was to speak to Latino students face-to-face and ask them if they were aware of historical trauma and the effects of internalized oppression. I asked if they agreed with the current research that internalized oppression may be another cause of why there is a lack of educational attainment. In addition, I wanted to discuss if they had any personal experiences with internalized oppression. If they did not have experience with this phenomenon, I wanted to find out if they had ever heard about it and what their thoughts on the subject were. I briefly explained to all participants what the literature revealed about historical trauma and internalized oppression. Two participants described learning about historical trauma and internalized oppression in their Mexican American studies

courses in college. The same two participants stated experiencing some level of internalized oppression. The rest of the participants did not state explicitly that they experienced internalized oppression; however, some of their stories resonated with what the literature review describes as internalized oppression.

Iko was one participant who did not agree that historical trauma is a cause of internalized oppression.

> I find myself that I disagree with it, because color should never put you in a place that you cannot get a good education, yes, you may be living in the east side, but you can still get scholarships or the armed services to help you out and have a better life, because they will pay for your school when you get out. It's your choice (I. Sanchez, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

When I asked him to describe his academic experience, he said he was not "book smart" and did not make an effort in school. Iko stated that "at his age" he felt that he had not "amounted to much," of what he had hoped to accomplish. One of his goals was to graduate from a four year college. However, he described being "lazy and bored" in school. I noticed that Iko is acting out the stereotype of Latinos being lazy. Iko had stated that each person has a choice to do what they want but, in looking at his own life, he feels disappointed. It was surprising to learn how different Iko's views on education was compared to his actions. In the previous narratives on micro-aggressions in school, and values at home, it is possible that Iko unconsciously believed the negative stereotypes about his culture and internalized these messages throughout his own educational journey.

I explained to Mary the concepts of historical trauma and internalized oppression. She stated that she was not familiar with the terms and had not personally experienced internalized oppression. However, she could see how Latinos could internalize the message that lighter skin Latinos are better than darker skin Latinos. Mary described attending school in Mexico and "noticed that in Mexico there were a lot of stereotypes about different colors of skin and [she] sees it here [United States] too." I asked where she has seen this manifest itself. She stated that her professor from middle school [in Mexico] was of high status. She feels that it is because he was light skinned and did not have to work in the fields. Mary stated that it was common for "people who made the money [to be] the professors, doctors, nurses so everyone who was a teacher were perceived as smarter because they didn't have to get their hands dirty." I asked her where she felt the message of being light skinned is superior to dark skin.

> [It comes from] the people in Spain, they conquered us, they want more Spanish blood and the darker you are, the more Indian blood you had. Something that contributed to this stereotype is that Indians were dark and used as slaves and that is why we perceive dark people as inferior (M. Salazar, personal communication, December 17, 2012).

Padilla's (2004) research also found that the majority of Latinos favored light skin over dark skin. Mary stated that she noticed her teachers in Mexico, "treated light skinned students better [than dark skin students] and would give them more help." What sets Mary apart from others is that she is aware of this socially constructed message.

Frank was another participant who was familiar with historical trauma and internalizing social norms about his culture, and I asked him how he learned about it. He

stated that he learned about this topic during a MAS class as an undergraduate student. Frank described his parents and grandparents as having stereotypical views. “My grandma and grandpa, from what I know they were really hard on [their] children, strict and old school. My dad was the same way. He definitely didn’t show any feelings there.” Frank continued with describing his father as having “temper problems and [experiencing] feelings of jealousy and who got mad easily.” He stated that his father’s learned behaviors come from his upbringing and imposed the same parenting style towards Frank.

> If I would do the smallest thing, he would get in a rage and get mad. He would tell me *eres pendejo* (stupid), *eres igual que tu madre* (you are like your mother). I would start to cry and he would hit me, and say men don’t cry. I guess I started to do it too with girlfriends that I would have. The whole not showing your feelings, and my dad taught me not to show feelings. The only way I knew is how to hurt. My dad would hurt my mom back and I would notice that little by little I ended up being like him (F. Martinez, personal communication, November 16, 2012).

Frank described how men in his culture portrayed themselves with *machismo*. Frank ended with “I came to the conclusion that machismo came from Spain and they passed it down; because indigenous people viewed women equal. When the Europeans came, the new view of men and women began.” Frank’s story reminded me of the work by Carillo and Tello (2008) when they explained how oppression moves in a circular motion. With multigenerational distortion, this misinformation serves as justification for their mistreatment and the cycle of oppression continues to get passed down each generation. In Frank’s case, the role of how to be a man was passed down to him by his father. As

Frank became aware of historical trauma in his MAS courses, he was able to make the conscious decision to rebel against this stereotype about his culture.

Amelia did not state that she had experienced internalized oppression, but stated that she agreed that people could subconsciously believe negative stereotypes about their culture and internalize it. Amelia said she did not go to college because she did not know any better.

> Working after high school was the next step. I wasn't aware I had the opportunity to go to school. It didn't seem reachable because I didn't know about the college application process or anything. I received no encouragement from my family members to attend school. The paperwork was intimidating; I had no idea how to fill out the forms (A. Juarez, personal communication, January 18, 2013).

I asked if she felt like she was good enough to attend school or she felt like she belonged there. She stated that she did, it was just that she didn't know how to go about applying to college. Amelia persisted despite her lack of knowledge about how to get into college, and once she did apply three years later after high school she stated that she adapted well to school by using their resources and asking for help. The discussion shifted when I asked her to describe something that is hard about her culture.

> I think it's the whole feeling of inferiority, even though I love my culture, if I go to high-class social setting restaurants, I always see like the servers and waiters are Mexican people, or Latino people. It's mostly like brown people (A. Juarez, personal communication, January 18, 2013).

I asked her what made her uncomfortable.

> They [the Latinos who work there] are like family, I have a sense of empathy and I feel like I should help them wash the dishes, or I try to not make a big mess and

> try to make it easy for them to clean up (A. Juarez, personal communication, January 18, 2013).

I asked Amelia what was it about the high class social setting that made her feel so unequal. She stated that there were a lot more White people. Amelia received the message that only rich White people can go to this social setting and if you are Latino, you somehow only belonged there if you worked there. Amelia stated that she did not know where she received this message but knew she was right in her assumption. I was able to see how internalized oppression was working to create self-doubt and question Amelia' own feeling of belonging.

Sara stated that she has not experienced internalized oppression, but she could see how historical trauma and internalized oppression may affect other Latinos.

> Yeah I do think so as a whole people, I can definitely see that, I feel like maybe I wasn't as affected as much personally because my parents provided for us and got us in to college or not, but helped us through college so maybe I was shielded from that because maybe I wasn't as connected to my culture, but I do feel that it's definitely a factor over time generationally, I could see how that is an issue like on a larger scale (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

Although Sara stated that she was not directly affected by internalized oppression she continued to describe her parent's educational experience.

> My dad actually also was accepted to a university on a scholarship. But he was only there for a semester. He got home sick so he came back and started working. My mom went to the same community college that I did (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

I was interested in finding out what shaped Sara's decision to go to community college.

> I had originally planned to go to a university and got accepted and I made my down payment on my dorms. Last minute I just like backed down; I just didn't

> want to do it. I think I was scared to go and also I wasn't sure if I wanted to do what I was going there for, I originally wanted to do biology, but I was kinda like back peddling on that, I don't know there were boy issues so I kinda stopped myself from going (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

I asked Sara if she could centralize a reason for stopping herself form attending the university.

> I didn't feel like I was going to fit in, I felt like I was scared to leave home, that would be my first time moving away that was right after high school, I had kinda like a really shy personality so I was scared that I wasn't going to make any friends and that I was going to be by myself (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

Sara's story sounded familiar to what many high school students would be experiencing when moving away from home for the first time. I wanted to discuss this further with Sara and see if she could share more extensively. Sara described how when she went to orientation and saw that a majority of the students there "were mostly White people and Asians during orientation." I asked Sara how would someone fit in at the university she was accepted to and what was it about her that she felt didn't fit in with other people?

> I guess I didn't really think about it but now that I think about it I think it was because I was Mexican, like I never really sat down and put an idea on it. Yeah I did actually but I don't know why I felt like that (S. Herrera, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

I cannot make a certain conclusion about Sara, but her story was meaningful. Sara understood negative stereotypes about her ethnicity and may have internalized them. Internalized oppression may have manifested when she went to college.

Alejandro agreed that historical trauma is a cause of internalized oppression, and was able to reflect back on how internalized oppression has affected him directly. He

described how he knew at a young age the negative stereotypes about his culture. So when it was time for him to attend a predominantly White high school in a suburban community, he felt intimidated.

> I felt like these kids were better than me, I don't know why but I just did. I didn't go to elementary school or junior high school with any White kids. I had not prior interaction with them whatsoever (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

I wondered about the origin of that feeling of inferiority. It reminded me of Padilla (2004), who stated that internalized oppression can be seen in patterns-these patterns are when a person has self-doubt, self invalidation, feelings of powerlessness, and despair. Where did Alejandro get the message that he was "inferior to White kids?" Who told him that he would not be good enough? Was the "I don't know" in his statement a clue of internalized oppression? He then began to tell me a story from when he was younger. His dad signed him up to play little league. "I had never been confronted with White people who were not teachers, until my dad tried to sign me up for little league. Why did Alejandro use the term *confronted*? It made me feel as if Alejandro's interactions with White people were significantly different than when he interacted with other races?

> I had always loved baseball and my dad taught me how to play at an early age, he suggested that I should get on a little league team and I excitedly agreed. When he drove me to the park, on the west side of where I lived, I looked out the window I saw that every kid was White. I refused to get out of the van. I did not want to play with White kids (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

What was it about them being White that made a difference to them? Alejandro stated that his "dad screamed [at him] to get out of the van [and] asked if it is because they were White [kids]." Why did his dad mention the fact that they were White? I believe this suggests that his dad understood the feeling of racial inferiority.

> He asked me if I thought they were better than me, I did not answer him, he slammed the door and drove off angry and I sat in the back of the van in silence. I think I even cried. By this age I knew what a White person was, I knew that they had better schools, better cars and in some way I may have felt inadequate, they were alien to me. They were like Bigfoot to me, I never left my hometown and interacted with people who were different from me. Any contacts that I had with White people were as an authority figure (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

As Alejandro stated, internalized oppression contributed to him not wanting to get out of his father's van that day. Alejandro did not recall anyone telling him these messages, and addresses how he internalized them.

> My high school experience was shaped by these stories [stereotypes about his culture]. I felt like I was not given every opportunity to success that I should have. I don't know what it was that made me feel I guess I stopped believing in the American dream for myself. I kinda felt like my future was picked out for me. I didn't feel like that it was worth me trying really hard because White folk weren't gonna let me have anything. I remember thinking I'd work at Home Depot and make a living there (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

The connection that Alejandro made himself between negative messages about his culture and how he internalized the messages was clear.

> After taking a Mexican American studies class as an undergraduate student I realized that my education was important that this was a big deal because I know

> that people don't expect me to have a degree and actually doing something (A. Orozco, personal communication, November 14, 2012).

It is important to highlight that internalized oppression is not anyone's fault. It is a phenomenon that has occurred for the last several hundred years and is embedded in our society to look as if it is "normal." Internalized oppression can leave communities with serious negative consequences. Examples seen here from participants' narratives and from my own experiences show that internalized oppression has reached all levels of the educational system and affects many of our educational accomplishments.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

I came to realize that internalized oppression is deeply embedded in society, as if it lives, eats, and breathes with us. When I recruited participants, my email inbox was filled with people showing great interest in participating in this study. Although many people were interested, once they received an emailed copy of the interview questions, some backed out after I contacted them to follow up. I was interested to find out what shaped their decision. I asked one of the females who had initially agreed to be interviewed, and she stated that she was not sure how to answer my questions about education. In particular, she felt she would be unable to answer the question that asked her to describe her higher educational experiences. I knew that the participant was a high school graduate who attended community college but instead graduated from a vocational program in medical billing. This potential participant had a good-paying job, was never truant through her K-12 grade schooling, and had a strong family support system. I had hoped to further explore what really made her change her mind, but she declined to further discuss my thesis.

After conducting the interviews, transcribing them, and analyzing the data, I felt accomplished in the work I had completed thus far. However, when I conducted *member checking*, by emailing participants' their scripts in my thesis, I asked for their feedback to ensure their stories were accurate and to approve or not, of my interpretations of their stories. One of the participants described being confused about his transcription. I asked the participant to set up a time to meet in person or over the phone to further discuss this.

I was unable to get a hold of him, but he eventually replied by stating that after rereading his section, it was in fact accurate. He apologized for not getting back to me sooner and even gave me some tips on how to relax because he had sensed that this was a stressful time for me. With this new piece of information, there were many things about this situation that stood out to me. For instance, his masculinity came forth. He made me feel like he took care of me. He let me know that everything was fine and told me not to stress out anymore. In thinking back to his narratives, he mentioned how he learned masculinity from his father, who had learned it from his father. In his narratives he described misusing his masculinity in a negative and stereotypical way towards females. I viewed this situation as his masculinity still being present but being used in a positive manner.

I have also noticed a change in myself. It has been about a year since I first began this thesis, and I feel a new hypersensitivity to racial micro-aggressions. When people describe their skin color as being *fair skin*, I cannot help but notice that fair skin to me, means light or whiter skin. According to the English dictionary, fair means just, honorable, and legit. The antonym of fair is unfavorable, which to me, nonverbally makes the connotation that if you are not fair skin, this is somehow wrong. Another example is when I visited the farmer's market at a community college; in an area of predominantly higher socioeconomic communities. I brought my partner along, with our two pit bull dogs. Upon entering the venue we were told that dogs were not allowed at the farmer's market and we were asked to leave our dogs elsewhere. I had my partner

wait for me outside with the dogs while I continued to shop. I did not expect to see other dogs there, but I noticed an array of dogs present. There was also a vendor selling homemade doggie treats, with customers and their pets hovering over their products. I asked the vendor that I thought dogs were not allowed and I informed the vendor that I was asked to leave my dogs outside. The vendor stated that she did not know why I was asked to leave my dogs outside because in fact, dogs were allowed. I held back showing my frustration when I learned this. Upset about the situation, I wrote an email to the director of the farmer's market, expressing how stereotypes may have played a role in the way I was treated. I wrote to the director, that I recognized how their reaction towards me is embedded in their sub-consciousness, that it is not their fault, and that I just wanted to make them aware of this. Since then, I have been more open on social forums about micro-aggressions and internationalized oppression. For instance, there is a popular online blog where people share their confessions. I have seen countless posts where people confess how unhappy they feel being of Latino descent because of the discrimination they face. Many say they are unhappy about their skin color and some ask if others think it is a good idea to bleach their skin. I have reached out to many of these people to bring some insight.

Themes emerged during the study such as identity formation, micro-aggression in school, and differences in values of work and school. Given that many participants were not familiar with the topic, it gives me reason to believe that much more research on this topic needs to be done. As was stated in the literature review, internalized oppression has

become integrated into society and viewed as if nothing is wrong. Furthermore, educators can offer Latino students encouragement to understand their cultural history. Additional work needs to be done with Latinos-at any age to deter them from adopting negative stereotypes. If not, the cycle of oppression will continue. Nonetheless, I can attest to the fact that all participants are resilient in many ways and each shared anecdotes about how they overcame adversity. Sara is currently in a graduate program and is working at her internship as a college counselor. Frank is also enrolled in a graduate program and works with Latino college students. Alejandro is in a graduate program and volunteers at the local juvenile hall. Mary is obtaining her bachelor's degree and aspires to pursue graduate school and become a social worker. Amelia is currently working as a substitute teacher while working on her teaching credential. The only participant who did not complete a four year degree is Iko. During our interview I was unable to fully confront him on why he dropped out of a state university during his first semester. I wondered how his path differed from the rest. Despite this, Iko is still very resilient. He received an associate's degree from community college and successfully transferred to a state university. He works at a youth center where he operates an after-school homework and recreation club. Overall, many of the participants had experienced some level of internalized oppression which contributed to how they viewed and valued education.

The purpose of this project was to explore historical trauma and analyze its relationship to internalized oppression among a group of six Latino participants. It is important to explore how internalized oppression may have played a role in their feelings

about educational success. It is apparent that internalized oppression causes sociopolitical and psychological effects on the Latino population. Many of the participants experienced some level of difficulty, unfamiliarity, or insecurity throughout their educational experience. Although many of the participants did not explicitly identify with experiencing internalized oppression, their personal stories reflected components of internalized oppression.

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Appendix A. Call for Participants

Dear Colleagues:

My name is Carolina Avalos. I am currently earning my Masters in the Counselor Education Program at San Jose State University. I am writing to ask for your assistance in recruiting individuals who will be willing to participate in my research assignment.

This research project pertains to: Latinos and their educational attainment. This research seeks to gain a better understanding of individual's cultural self -concept and its relationship to educational experiences. My topic focuses on Historical Trauma and the effects of internalized oppression on Latinos in education. Participants do not have to have direct experiences with this topic, the interview is to gain understanding of how other Latinos themselves view this topic.

Individuals who fit the following criteria will be eligible to participate.

- Identify as Latino, Hispanic, Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano.
- Age ranging from 18 and above.

This research pertains to the completion of my thesis project required for my Masters in Counselor Education.

I, the researcher will make arrangement to meet with participants, voice record and transcribe interviews for data collecting purposes.

I, the researcher will send interested participants a copy of the interview questions before the interview is scheduled.

Participant's identities will be confidential and all identifying information will be protected. If you know of someone with the above listed criteria, please contact me for more information.

Appendix B. Consent Form

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Lurie College of Education
Department of Counselor Education
Sweeney Hall 404

One Washington Square
San José, California 95192-0073
408-924-3634
408-924-4137 FAX
www.sjsu.edu

Agreement to Participate in Research. Responsible Investigator(s): Carolina Avalos SJSU MA Candidate

Title of Study: HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND THE EFFECTS ON LATINOS IN EDUCATION **Duration: Approximately 1hour**

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating historical trauma. Historical Trauma is defined by many scholars as social events that have caused "intergenerational stress." Currently, Historical Trauma has been linked to having psychosocial affects on people of Latino descent. These effects manifest itself in school when uncovering why Latino students lack self efficacy. This phenomenon can become adopted unconsciously into stereotypes about Latinos which in turn can be a result in Latinos lack of educational attainment and an underrepresented marginalized group. Interviews will be conducted to gain a better understanding of how Latino students view this topic.

2. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your educational and cultural experiences. A voice recorder will be used for transcribing purposes.

3. If at any time you feel the subject material is presenting emotional discomfort you can stop the interview and/or withdraw from participating.

4. Some benefits to this interview might include increasing cultural and personal awareness.

6. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. Only I will know your pseudonym, and will not disclose that information. I request your permission to allow for a third party to have access to your transcriptions. This third party is a volunteer who has agreed to assist me in transcribing recorded interviews only. Transcribing means that they will only be allowed to listen to the voice recording and type it on my computer. They will not analyze nor share your interview with others, nor will they have access to your real names.

7. There is no compensation for participation.

8. Questions and/or complaints about this research may be addressed to my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Jason Laker and Pamela C. Stacks. His contacts: email jlaker.sjsu@gmail.com, office (Sweeney 405) phone: 408-924-3654. Pamela C. Stack is the AVP for the Graduate Studies and Research her contact email is pamela.stacks@sjsu.edu and phone is 408 924-2488.

9. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.

10. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right to not answer questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University.

11. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator. The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study. The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C. Interview Protocol

DEAR PARTICIPANTS, Thank you for participating in my research project. I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time.

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS
NAME (REAL NAME WILL NOT BE USED):
PSEUDONYM:
AGE:
CURRENT JOB TITLE:
LEVEL IN SCHOOL:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

School Related Questions:

-What was your first year in college like?

-What was that like for your family going to college?(If applicable)

-What did you like / dislike about school.

-Were you enrolled in any extracurricular activities/ sports / organizations after school?

-Do you have any mentors? Or groups you are a part of on or off campus?

Cultural Related Questions:

-How do you identify yourself culturally? For what reason?

-Do you know where that term came from? Please describe how and when you started identifying yourself or thinking of yourself using these words? What does it mean for you to describe yourself in this way?

-What do you love about your culture? What is hard about your culture?

-The media/politics create stereotypes about our culture. How have you been impacted by these stereotypes? What do you make of these messages?

- Have you heard of historical trauma? Do you know if it has affected anyone you know? In what ways?

- What do you think about when scholars of Historical Trauma say that Historical Trauma is a reason for lack of educational attainment amongst Latinos? Do you agree/ disagree?

Appendix D. Resources

After Hours Advice Nurse San Jose State University Health Center
1-866-935-6347

Counseling Services
Administration Bldg., Rm. 201 One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192-0035
Phone: (408) 924-5910Fax: (408) 924-5933 Email: counseling.services@sjsu.edu

Crisis/Suicide
Hotline Phone #:1-855-278-4204 (Toll-free) (All Santa Clara County) Phone: (650) 494-8420 (North County - Toll Free)Phone: (408) 683-2482 (South County - Toll Free)

Regional Medical Center
225 North Jackson Avenue
San Jose, CA
(408) 259-5000 (hospital operator)

University Police Department
9-1-1 from any campus phone
(408) 924-2222 from any other phone