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# The reflexivity of pain and privilege: An autoethnography of (Mestizo) identity and other Mestizo voices

Ellis Hurd  
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THE REFLEXIVITY OF PAIN AND PRIVILEGE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF  
(MESTIZO) IDENTITY AND OTHER MESTIZO VOICES

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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December 2008

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THE REFLEXIVITY OF PAIN AND PRIVILEGE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF  
(MESTIZO) IDENTITY AND OTHER MESTIZO VOICES

An Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. John K. Smith, Committee Chair

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December 2008

## ABSTRACT

Approximately 20 million Latinos living in the United States identify as Mestizos. A Mestizo is a person of mixed heritage. Almost half of these Mestizos racially or culturally identify as White, while the other half identify as Hispanic or racially mixed. These racial and cultural identifications have vast effects on educational performance: those identifying themselves as Hispanic or mixed experience lower academic achievement whereas those identifying as White do not. Many communities have experienced an influx of Mestizo-Latinos, but are ill prepared for the educational challenges due to the language and cultural differences Mestizos bring. This researcher himself has experienced the racial and cultural jerks between identity and society. It is through an autoethnographic journey that Latino and non-Latino voices are elucidated. Additional perspectives are gathered from the Marshalltown area to better situate the context of the research and complex yet integral culture of Mestizo-Latinos. Self-reflexive narratives, observational field-work, and intensive interviews are conducted to show those additional voices and perspectives. The interplay between the autoethnographic journey and that of interviews and observations is the crux of the study, where observational and interviewing layers inform the researcher of his own affective identity history. A holistic poststructuralist perspective is used to show this research as highly unique, and interrelated characteristics allow for embedded interpretations. Although limited to the researcher and his participants, this research is rich enough to frame the issues for other communities having Mestizo-Latinos.

## DEDICATION

*“Soli Deo gloria”*

To Mandy Lee Hurd, for her patience, her faith, and her understanding

To Luz Marina Peña Polo Hurd, who never saw this but always knew I could

To Franklin Thomas Hurd, Jr., who rose above adversity to help me become who I am

To those called “Mestizo” or Mixed, who have gone before me and those who come after

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Acknowledgements can be curious things. They give the impression of offering so much to so many with so few words and space. A truly good acknowledgement, it seems, should recognize all the efforts of those who had an impact—or at least influence—in the culmination of an end product, revealing that a process, method, or practice has been learned. To do this, some write lengthy accounts, recognizing countless people; others write more modestly. It is my attempt, then, to offer something different, not in the traditional fashion of how these acknowledgements may go. Thus, I begin at the end.

I would like to acknowledge the interviewing committee and Department of Curriculum and Instruction Chair, Dr. Phyllis Metcalf-Turner, at Illinois State University, for appointing me as an assistant professor while knowing at the time I did not have this dissertation complete. It is my hope that their risk and faith in me will prove very valuable.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Epigram

It was 1988 in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago. I was in middle school, a time when life was supposedly easier, cleaner, better. Well, easier it was not, at least not as it concerned the rite of passage for boys in adolescence. When I first heard the comments I was shocked. I did not know what to think. Surprisingly, they came from classmates in school and at church. I thought I would be safe at these two conventional institutions, but I quickly found I was in the throws of a monumental challenge.

“Spic! Beaner. Wetback. Taco eater. Nacho. Border Nigger!”

“No one likes you. You do not belong here.....”

I heard all these things growing up: the slang and crude terms used in reference to my race, my culture....to me. The words rolled off tongues as if they were used daily. I heard them in school, in the community, even at church.

I faced the daily challenge of proving who I was not: an immigrant—or any other stereotype—that happened to be forced upon me. Although I have not crossed a border to enter the United States, I have crossed a more insurmountable barrier: a cultural border. Nonetheless, the boorish words still hurt, affected my whole being. They did not bounce off my skin, as I was told they would. Instead, they bore into my core, my inner soul. This reminded me—perhaps more times than I wanted—who I actually was.

Soy Colombiano y Amerindio, con partes de Ingles en mí también. I am Colombian and American Indian, with portions of English in me as well. My larger Colombian culture comes from my mother. They called her by her nickname, resembling her favorite old sitcom character from *I Love Lucy*. And like the sitcom actors Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, my mother and father were an interracial couple. For understanding myself better, I must return to that context.

Born in Barranquilla, Colombia, a small town across from Cartagena on the Caribbean Sea, my mother grew up a tough kid involved in many physical fights. She was invited to come live in the United States with her sister and brother-in-law, who were in their residency and needed someone to care for their daughter. Looking after her niece was a good fit for my mom as she had watched many of her brothers and sisters.

During her courtship with my father, my mother contracted a disease quite common for immigrants: Tuberculosis. Her worst fears came true when my aunt asked her to leave for risk of exposure to their daughter, even though her presence with the

family was daily and the lung-spot had been controlled by invasive medicine. However, she was offered my aunt's customary hospital room as a temporary quarantine until she and my father could marry. I was born after a long line of children: two adopted cousins from my deceased uncle and three older sisters.

My father is the contributor of the American Indian and European in me. He has portions of Mescalero (Apache Nation) and Osage (Sioux Nation) Indian in him along with English. He carries the identity of his father: Mestizo. A Mestizo carries both European and American Indian culture and blood. His father left the reservation and eventually had my dad. As my father grew, his family did not want him to learn the Mescalero language. They wished him to be "normal" and blend in with other white people.

On broader levels, this upbringing destined him for facing the social stigmas of strong anti-racial and oppressive sentiments. Society looked down upon mixed marriages, specifically between Whites and Blacks, Indians, or Hispanics. These same oppressions made it impossible for my father to speak Mescalero with the family's belief he would avoid the racism they had felt. He never did.

The atrocities committed against him during his adolescence may have been just grisly enough to add insult to injury. Verbal, physical, and emotional abuse eventually led to his parents abandoning him in a Texas orphanage.

His refuge there was short lived as he encountered several other traumatic experiences after orphanage life: the Great Depression, service in the Korean War, and a violent attack from hate crime. He also experienced a failed marriage which ended in abandonment, his children suddenly taken and their names changed. The only remaining message was that he was a no good, deadbeat father.

Finally, he met my mother. In a lot of ways, my parents were perfect for each other: both had grueling social experiences, both much in need of love and compassion, both were rejected by society and family for fearful exposure, and both were abandoned. These incidents strengthened their love and life together. But they also strengthened me for the times I would go through it, too.

This is the context from which I begin my own understanding, my autoethnography. I am a person of mixed heritage and culture. I am Colombian and Amerindian, or a Mestizo. My strong culture is Latino, with the traits, language, habits, and food of the Colombianos. Yet I see the influence of Amerindian in me, too. But to non-Hispanics or Anglos, I am Mexican or something other than White. And with this over generalization, I do not identify.



### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate my affective identity. I use an autoethnographic design (see methodology) to research how and why I got to where I am today. I identified as a Mestizo.<sup>1</sup> That is, I identified as one who had Indian (Native-American), European (English), and Spanish (Colombian) roots. But these identifiers by themselves, without my experiences, do not mean much. Thus, my purpose is to investigate both how and why I arrived at this racial, cultural, and social designation for myself.

The guiding research questions in the study are interrelated. They are situated as mutually supporting stages within the study to deepen my understandings of my own journey. They are:

1. How and why did I arrive at the racial, cultural, and social identity I have today?
2. What societal and personal forces influenced my journey?
3. What role did my schooling experiences, if any, play in this history?
4. How do these findings resonate with the journeys of others?
5. Is there a new perspective for understanding the identity journeys of Mestizos from these findings? If so, does this perspective elucidate the racial, cultural, and social identity complexities of Mestizos?

Investigating how and why I arrived at this identity is important. It is empowering to know factors influencing how I see myself and why society perceives me a certain way. These factors are both ethnographical and phenomenological. There are also

---

<sup>1</sup> Mestizo is a term of Spanish origin created to designate the peoples of mixed European and Native American ancestry, typically having a Spanish father and an Indian mother. They occupied the areas of the Americas, from Canada in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south (Bruhl et al., n.d.; see Chapter 2: Review of the Literature).

societal forces influencing my identity as there are personal forces (Purkey, 1970). Being cognizant of these is vital. As Geertz (1973) states, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun” (as reported in Eisner, 1998). Just how these “webs” have been woven is the anchor and investigation of the study.

This investigation begins by reconstructing influences I had in my life and throughout my schooling. Schooling is an important component because it plays a leading role in my academic achievement and how my identity is formed (Herman, 2002). This necessitates an in-depth look at how the process took place for other Mestizo-Latinos. For example, an imposed identity—loaded with societal expectations—is thrust upon Mestizo-Latinos during their transition from school to school. The identity they chose may not be the same one they believed they had (Ogbu, 1991).

I carry out this investigation by writing self-reflexive narratives of my family, schooling, and social experiences while centering on attitudes towards race, culture, and social class (Coleman et al., 1966; Ellis & Bochner, 1999). These writings allow me to dig-deep into the thoughts and patterns that constructed who I am today. The data is then freely analyzed and categorized for connections of an informed understanding of the Mestizo-Latino identity experience, and for contributions to research on constructed identities.

However, this is a novel study given that the limited research available on Mestizo-Latinos does not utilize autoethnography. Consequently, I do not validate my findings against the research. Rather, I reconstruct my story to understand my designation as a Mestizo-Latino, while offering a new perspective on the grounded research for

racial, cultural, and societal groups. These are groups (i.e. Black, White, Hispanic, etc.) we have socially constructed and assume are “real” groups (see Chapter 2: Review of the Literature and Chapter 4: Analysis and Interpretation).

Thus, another layer of this research investigates how and why some identify as Mestizo-Latinos. As an underrepresented group, Mestizo-Latinos suffer from “distortion” to their identities (Taylor, 1994). Understanding their identity representations enhances links between these distortions and their underrepresentation. I collect data from others’ perceptions of their own identity journeys. This investigation takes place on two interrelated levels: (1) observational field-work; and (2) participant interviews. I will now briefly discuss each of these levels.

Observational field work is the essence of ethnography. Using this method, I observe a family of Mestizo-Latinos in the target community. They are observed in their natural environment, their home, and other places within their community. I gather thick descriptions and dialogues on their identity experiences to construct reportable knowledge for distinguishable factors leading to their journeys. These field notes allow me to “gain an understanding of the complexities of a particular, intact culture” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). I also elucidate their identity journeys, whose complex racial, cultural, and social representations result in a loss of identity within the dominant cultural milieu.

Conducting participant interviews is another way I gather data for investigating the identities of Mestizo-Latinos. I conduct these with a variety of participants to glean many perspectives. These interviews are transcribed and focus on critical factors of participant’s identity journeys. They do not portray the entire identities of participants but

serve as an ethnographical “sketch” of identity. In this way, I reconstruct the process of how it happens for them as a form of inquiry (Creswell, 1998) to gain an informed understanding of the Mestizo-Latino identity experience.

I conduct additional interviews with both residents and educators. This balance of the data offers a mixture of participant perspectives. The interviews are transcribed and focus on participant’s interactions with Mestizo-Latinos and others they see differently than themselves. I structure reportable data through their personal and historical memories (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970), to reconstruct how Mestizo-Latinos identify.

With the observational and interviewing layers I return to the initial purpose of the study: to investigate my affective identity. That is, I look at how the process of researching the lives of others informs my own identity. This writing stage empowers me to use reportable data from observations and interviews to more fully inform my own identity history by deconstructing noticeable factors from their lives to interpret my own. Currently, I have arranged my identity against the Mestizo construct. However, my identity continues to be an unfolding story, one that continues beyond the study itself.

#### Autoethnography

An autoethnographic design is used in the research. This design is one of the best to use for several reasons. First, various disciplines have studied how minority identities are constructed but have produced little in terms of autoethnography. Also, autoethnography has received less attention than deserved in researching identities among Mestizo-Latinos. Moreover, ethnography is a cross-disciplined approach from cultural

anthropology now used in sociology, psychology, and education (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Simply put, this design is the combination of autobiographic and ethnographic research. But autoethnography has been neglected, with the possible exception of a few literary works (such as O'Connor, 1983; Simmons-Bonnin, 1899) in these same areas. Thus, for prolonged research in the natural setting of Mestizo-Latino culture, autoethnography is used.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Epigram

I have been told my features do not resemble those of Mexicans, even though I do not look White. Why then do some people think I am Mexican? I just do not understand how some can make such crude and obvious over generalizations. I suppose it happens a lot, but growing up I heard it more than I wanted. Am I simply a racial product?

It seems others may recognize I am not White, but do they know me? Perhaps people are only making comments about my café-colored skin. But why the presumption? If I am asked whether I am from the United States, why do some equate the U.S. with those who are White instead of Native Americans, my ancestry? They are judging by the outside, the color of skin? After all, many people look light skinned but are from various places other than the U.S., like England, Scotland, Australia, and so on.

“Hey, Fidel! Burrito. Chili eater. Berry picker. Brown nigger!”

The words themselves did not hurt as much as the after thought. They remind me of a famous children’s rhyme:

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me...”

Well, that sure was not true for me. If anything, sticks and stone broke my bones, but names hurt worse. In fact, they stuck around longer and left permanent, emotional scars. I knew—or at least thought—that I was unique. I was Colombian and Amerindian. Why did people use different words to describe me? Why did they see me as one who arrived in their country? I was here...born here...and had a claim to this land by my Native American roots. They were the foreigners.

Is this how it is to be an outcast? Why is it I do not belong? I mean, I know I am not pure Colombian, like my mother, and not pure Mescalero-Apache like my great grandmother, Rita, but does proximity to purity make one feel any better? Will I ever completely belong? Should I belong...and if so, to what? Why do people impose an identity and, thus, a way of life upon others? Am I truly just a marginal man?

I found the mirror showing that these things I thought originated in me. I had been the one saying them, the one whom I hated, instead of the over generalizing White man....

### A Mestizo-Latino Description

The history and review of those who are called Mestizo is complex and controversial. While some researchers have exclusively studied Mestizos' genetics or racial identities statistically (see Bowman, 1974; Brookover, LePere, Hamachek, Thomas, & Erikson, 1965; Capelli et al., 2001; Crawford, 1979; Healey, 1969; Wang et al., 2008), many others argue that Mestizos must be studied from a socio-cultural context, as constructions or designations of power and culture (Bruhl, Henderson, Marvin, & Morgan, n.d.; Forbes, 2005; Rodriguez, 1999). Nonetheless, both methodological approaches show that the descriptor Mestizo is derived from Spanish Colonialism, a construction that has since had enormous influence on humanity. A brief revisit to this historical colonial period is necessary for understanding the journeys surrounding Mestizos.

#### The Spanish Conquest

During the sixteenth century, European Spaniards sought to colonize territories Columbus claimed to have discovered. Under establishment of the European "policy of divide and conquer" (Forbes, p. 3), elite Spanish rulers sought to control and weaken existing native groups. They did this by constructing race. Speaking to this and the idea of race as a social construction, Bruhl et al. (n.d.) state:

Simply stated, biology is an excuse for racial division. So, it was beneficial for the Spanish conquistadors to create racial distinctions within their new society. The concept of a mestizo, a person of mixed blood, displays the arbitrary divisions placed between different segments of the population in order for the Spanish to maintain their power. The flexible nature of the term mestizo during the Spanish colonial period of 1530-1750, along with the varying treatment toward these people, defends the idea that race is not biological. Instead, it is a socially constructed concept developed by those who wish to maintain power and

organization... Thus, assumptions about the Indians' ignorance or barbarity gave the Spanish an excuse to abuse the native people. The Spanish were able to develop their own racial superiority based upon these assumptions (p. 1).

By constructing a new Mestizo race, Spaniards were able to “disregard the rights of another group for the sake of its own selfish goals” (Bruhl et al., n.d., p. 1). Instead of focusing on their own mistreatment and genocide through foreign diseases (Burns, 1994, p. 16), the Spaniards shifted the focus from the Mestizos onto themselves. This left the Mestizos in “isolation from Spanish and Indian society along with the lack of their own culture... often [feeling] pushed and pulled by different segments of society” (p. 6).

Sometimes they were pushed away by Indians who felt betrayed by the Mestizos trying to become part of the Spaniard society. These Mestizos dropped just enough cultural characteristics which labeled them as Indian. At other times, they were pulled in by the Spanish, welcomed illegitimately for selfish gains. However, Mestizos never became fully accepted into the Spanish society as it “was too beneficial to the Spanish elite... [in order] to differentiate between those with Spanish blood and the Indians... to maintain a certain distance and socially superior status over the mestizos” (p. 10).

#### The Minor Caste System and Mestizo Variations

Using these socially created racial and class descriptors, Spaniards were thus able to maintain the power they needed for controlling the inhabitants. Forbes (2005) adds that Spaniards attached privileges to the “minor caste” system “in order that the native leadership would prevent their people from rebelling” (p. 3). Some had menial jobs of collecting taxes and enforcing laws while others were afforded positions in armies or



wore special clothes. Tribes and groups were pitted against each other in this system, always jealous, “divided and distrustful of each other” (p. 4).

Over time, many Spaniards mingled and intermarried with the native groups. Those groups eventually adopted terms more indicative of their particular dialects and geographical areas. In Canada, for example, people of European and “Anishinabe” (or Native American) blood are called Métis, or mixed people. In the U.S., terms such as “half-breed, half-blood and quarter-blood” are used, with “mustee” and “mulatto” down in the South. Many other variations exist in Mexico and Brazil, too, including: “mixed, cholo, ladino, coyote, caboclo, mameluco” (Forbes, 2005, p. 1; for a detailed chart of Mestizo variations, see Appendix).

By the 1920’s, Mexico actually created three categories for race, and could boast 14 million inhabitants due to its large “*mestisaje*.”<sup>2</sup> These categories consisted of: 60% “*raza mezclada*” (mixed-Mestizo race); 30% “*raza indígena*” (indigenous-native race); and 10% “*raza blanca*” (white race; Foley, 2005, p. 57). Even with these built in variations, “*raza mezclada*” were oppressed. This is because “Mestizos had occupied an awkward position in this racial hierarchy, often hated by the Spanish for being part Indian and shunned by the Indians for being part Spanish” (p. 58).

#### Mestizo as Socio-cultural Designations

Was there any significance to the terms, especially since many mixed people travelled between different class stratifications? Also, since many Indians pretended to be

---

<sup>2</sup> Mestisaje is a term referring to racial mixing (see Foley, 2005, p. 57; Forbes, 2005, p. 4).

Mestizos or Criollos,<sup>3</sup> in order to enjoy the privileges of other groups, was there any authenticity to the terms? Interpreting these issues, Forbes (2005) states:

The concepts of mestizo, coyote, lobo, cholo, pardo, color quebrado, and many others, were invented by the Spaniards, and Spanish policy kept these categories alive throughout the colonial epoch. Were those concepts of any real objective value, apart from being useful to the ruling class? It is extremely doubtful if the differences between a coyote (three-quarters Anishinabe), a mestizo (one-half Anishinabe), a lobo (Anishinabe-African), a pardo (Anishinabe-African-European), and so on were at all significant except in so far as the Spanish rulers sought to make them significant. It is true that there may have been cultural differences between natives and mixed-bloods speaking a native language and living in a native village, on the one hand, and Spanish-speaking person (of whatever ancestry) on the other hand. But those differences relate to political loyalty and culture and not directly to mestisaje as such (p. 4).

Thus the Mestizo terms became socio-political and cultural descriptors for position and power rather than those of race or ancestry. In this same way, we can more easily understand Mestizo challenges as compared with the historical struggles between the United States and Native Americans. Just as Native Americans fought against U.S. colonialization, only to eventually lose their land to reservations (Rodriguez, 1999), so, too, have Mestizos struggled with the over generalizations and controlling tactics of the Spaniards. Even today, this *mêlée* continues for those people who racially, socially, or culturally see themselves as mixed.

### Immigrant Minorities

Within the designation Mestizo, there are still several distinct layers. Ogbu (1991) designates two separate terms for minorities, both of which Mestizo is part. The first is

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<sup>3</sup> Criollos referred to the controlling landlords of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico. They were Whites with Spanish blood, instead of the others who were mixed Indians and Mexicans, also called Mestizos (see Zinn, 1995).

what he calls “Immigrant Minorities” (as reported in Finn, 1999, p. 41). An immigrant minority is someone who has chosen to migrate to America “for improved economic, political, and/or social opportunities” (p. 41). Immigrant minorities admit they feel the sting of discrimination, and their children may struggle adapting, but overall “they view these conditions as temporary situations that will improve probably over a single generation” (p. 41).

#### Involuntary Minorities

Conversely, “involuntary minorities are people who became Americans through slavery, conquest, or colonization and who were relegated to an inferior position and denied assimilation” (Ogbu, 1991, p. 41). Involuntary minorities continue to struggle with discrimination, and their children struggle adapting because of their distinct perspectives. They hold to an “oppositional identity” which causes them to see America as an enemy. Assimilating is like “surrendering to the enemy” (p. 42). For example, Native Americans struggle with the notion of becoming “the white man” due to their deeply rooted oppressions from when their land was taken by deceit and conquest.

#### Mestizo (non) Acceptance in “Anishinabe-waki” (The Americas)

“The concept of mestizo has also been introduced into the United States scholarly literature and is becoming accepted among anthropologists and sociologists as a technical term replacing half-breed and similar words” (Forbes, 2005, p. 1). In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau in the 2000 census added designations separating Hispanic from other races. They now recognize the term Hispanic is not the same as seeing oneself as racially Hispanic. In other words, a respondent can mark they are Hispanic by origin but also

mark racially as White, or up to six other races (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). Thus, the term Mestizo refers not merely to racial designations but to cultural ones as well, regardless of ancestry.

However, caution must be exercised when we consider Mestizos becoming accepted without direct ties to ancestry or nationality. Historically, the acceptance of the term Mestizo and all its variations has been to the power elite's gain and people's loss (Forbes, 2005). For example, Indians, whether from North, Central or South America, have always experienced the removal of their collective tribal affiliations. Accordingly, Forbes says:

Throughout the Americas a strange phenomena exists. Almost every country in the hemisphere is doing away with Indians, either by genocide (as in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador) or by legislation and custom. The computers of the minds who dominate Anishinabe-waki have decided that the Anishinabe is programmed to disappear, but, of course, this disappearance is completely imaginary and exists only in the minds of the European-oriented ruling class.

The plan to liquidate the native people originated with the Spanish, English, and Portuguese imperialists.

....This European colonial policy, so vicious and one-sided, has had the effect of making it literally impossible, in most of Anishinabe-waki, for an Indian to be anything other than a rural peasant or inhabitant of some remote region. By definition, no Indian can be a professor, a doctor, an engineer, a statesman, or even an industrial worker, a sailor, a miner, a cowboy, or a truck driver. Since Indians are defined as rural peasants (or jungle dwellers), they cannot be a part of modern society. As soon as Indians become part of society they are given the "courtesy" of being regarded as cholos, ladinos, mestizos, caboclos, or Peruanos, Bolivianos, Brasilenos, Mexicanos, Chilenos, or Guatemaltecos, or campesinos, trabajadores, and so on. This is true to some degree even in the United States, where tourists and white children want to see "real" Indians in war bonnets and feathers and where anthropology has stereotyped Indian culture, such as the pre-white contact period.

European imperialists [*sic*] thinking has denied Anishinabeg the right to possess large (mass) nationalities (p. 6-8).

This same caution extends for the U.S. Census Bureau as well. Even though the 2000 census questionnaire allows for a multi-categorization of race (up to six different combinations), there are still undertones of racism because no tribal categorizations are offered. They must be hand-written in on forms as if tribal names are not legitimate for automation. Moreover, one simply marks yes or no for “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” and then marks their race as “White, Black, Indian,” or other less dominant options. There are no categories for nationalities, possibly leading some to mark erroneously (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001).

In fact, approximately 40 million people in the United States “self-identified” as “Hispanic” when responding to the “question on race” in the 2000 U.S. Census (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 1, 10). And “nearly half (48 percent) of Hispanics reported only White, while approximately 42 percent reported only Some [*sic*] other race, when responding to the question on race” (p. 10). This means at least 48% of Hispanic participants racially or culturally identify as White, while virtually an equal amount (42%) identify as “some other race.” Thus, about half of the United States’ Hispanics do not consider themselves Hispanic or mixed racially despite their roots.

These identifications of “only White” or “Some other race” have vast effects on school performance: those identifying as Hispanic or racially mixed experience lower achievement than those from similar backgrounds who identify as White (Herman, 2002). Thus, peeling back the layers of race and culture, especially as they occur within schooling, is important because constructed identities eventually become one’s “self-identity” and “academic performance” (p. 9).

### Mestizos and Schooling

Educational researchers who have begun to investigate the lives of minorities in rural areas have seen different educational challenges. A few of these challenges may be addressed by returning to data comprised of Mestizo and Mulatto<sup>4</sup> experience.

Recalculating the overall Immigrant drop-out rate is one such example researched by Fry (2003), who found hidden agendas and poor calculation methods used by census officials. These aggregate drop-out figures include foreign born Latinos who never reenter and enroll in U.S. schools. Like wise, the figures include those foreign born immigrants who arrived and then left the U.S. school system (p. 6, 7). For example, the overall 2000 drop-out rate drops significantly, from “39 % for all Immigrant Mexicans to approximately 15% for U.S.-educated Mexicans” when these key factors are removed (p. 7). Fry further argues that educational reforms must use more than labor market values and foreign statistics when addressing challenges (p. 13). Thus, these hidden agendas and poor calculations must be reformed if education is truly for the “common good,” not primarily a commodity or “personal good” (Haberman, 2005).

Formative research has also begun from those such as: Cooter (2004); Herman (2002); Pachon, Tornatzky, and Torres (2003) and Snow and Biancarosa (2003). They show how separating rudiments to which minorities struggle, such as literacy and performance, is self-defeating. These matters must be considered together. They are inseparable in the lives of minorities, and thus should be addressed. They also advocate

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<sup>4</sup> Mulatto (also Mulato) is a term used to designate “the first general offspring of a Black and White parent; or, an individual with both White and Black ancestors (see Pilgrim, 2000).

for teaching to the whole culture of children by addressing literacy and schooling as socially and culturally constructive ideologies. Then the challenges are not in the way minorities are taught but where minorities are taught. It lies with more minorities arriving and schools continuing to reinforce the achievement gaps they otherwise claim to fix. A brief revisit to past research may help frame this issue better.

### Social Class and Schooling

Rapid growth of any immigrant or ethnic population should be of no surprise to America. According to Tozer, Violas, & Senese (2002), the main immigrant influx to the U.S. occurred during 1820 to 1850, with the arrival of Chinese, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants. The results are easily traceable in historical achievement differences between those ethnic groups. Even today, such epitomes of educational and social class difference can be seen between Italians and Jews (p. 51).

How social class and schooling practices are strongly related is a highly valuable place to begin looking at disparities surrounding Mestizo identities. Coleman et al. (1966) found that between social class and classroom achievement, "achievement [is] highly correlated with individual social class" (as reported in Rist, 1970, p. 415). The longer children stay in school, the longer schools serve to widen the gap between the academic performance of disadvantaged children and national norms of advantaged children (441). This gap is exhaustively discussed by Apple (1990); Hurn (1993); Karabel and Halsey (1977); Young and Whitty (1977), who found schools reproduce and reinforce unequal cultural and social class structures. Schools serve as the perpetuating force for such inequalities, despite long historical claims to the contrary. Moreover, schools are strong

caste systems, self-defeating in the pursuit to shorten gaps they actually create and sustain. This confirms social class and schooling experience are key components for investigating Mestizo identity constructions.

### Identity and Schooling

Of course, the influence of social class on identity assumes Mestizos are represented truthfully, even though negative. Immigrants are told to simply rethink their outlooks, albeit negatively influenced by schools and social class. Moreover, if immigrants work harder and change their outlooks, they will overcome educational differences. However, Taylor (1994) candidly articulates this is not possible. He shares: “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if a group of people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (p. 25).

One can easily see distortion in the film and music industry, where “demeaning” and “contemptible” images of race and culture are portrayed (Dyer, 2005, p. 10-12). This may be why many Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans have been characterized stereotypically and negatively in films. Taylor (1994) further adds this “Nonrecognition or misconception can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (p. 25). So why does it still happen? These are the images that some impose or further perpetuate within minority groups. The images eventually become as Rist (1970) states: a “resultant differential educational experience for children from dissimilar social-class backgrounds” (p. 416). Differential



experiences within education grow to where education itself can represent a “basically white, middle-class, value-oriented institution” (Apple, 1990; Bourdieu, 1960; Hurn, 1993; Rist, 1970; Turner, 1960).

Thus, the identities of minorities have been widely misunderstood and misrepresented. This is in part due to earlier roots in the misguided ideology called “balanced reciprocity” (Taylor, 1994, p. 47). Balanced reciprocity “underpins” our modern term equal rights (p. 49, 51). Mestizos find it near impossible to gain the respect and equal rights to which the schooling system aspires. This is because equal rights is rooted in the Rousseauian philosophy of “positional good.” Positional good comes from ancient Greek Olympian competitions and stems from one esteeming him/herself to another’s positional good and preference. It is “characterized by hierarchy and other-dependence” (p. 44).

Taylor describes the problem with balanced reciprocity’s roots in positional good and competitive social hierarchy:

In contrast, in a system of hierarchy, we are in competition; one person’s glory must be another’s shame, or at least obscurity. Our unity of purpose is shattered, and in this context attempting to win the favor of another, who by hypothesis has goals distinct from mine, must be alienating. Paradoxically, the bad other-dependence goes along with separation and isolation... (p. 48).

While people in the dominant group proselytize equal rights and respect, the opposite surreptitiously takes place. A highly competitive social force guides the images of what dominant groups desire for minorities. Minorities then find themselves in constant battle with social traits and customs of dominant groups.

For example, if minority groups seek equal rights, one could expect to see equal status, pay, and representation as an outcome. This is far from what actually takes place. Minorities still experience unequal status in the work place, lower pay for similar work across fields of study, and experience under representation (O'Brien, 1993; Turner, 2007). Minorities also experience under representation in schools. For example, history books record unbalanced and one-sided accounts of the Native American plight, while other literature is either augmented or left out entirely (Wise, 2005, p. 122). This can also be seen in how any woman of color has yet to be president of the United States. It is the continuation of a false hope in positional good, fixed in unbalanced social hierarchies and competitive natures. It eventually ends in isolation rather than equal rights and status.

Mestizos suffer from a lack of balanced reciprocity from distortion to their identities. Taylor (1994) shows how indigenous groups suffer distorted conceptions and identities due to the "nonrecognition or misconception" that others inflict through social hierarchies. Balanced reciprocity then becomes the accepted norm by which people live and judge themselves and others. As said earlier, "equal rights" is the most commonly used term for this idea. For centuries, people "have projected an image of such [indigenous] people as somehow inferior, 'uncivilized,' and through the forces of conquest have often been able to impose this image of the conquered" (p. 26).

#### The Uncivilized and Inferior

Zinn (1995) states how current sentiments between Mestizos and Whites are mainly due to historical attitudes created during the 19th century war between Mexico and the United States. This came after Mexico's victory over Spain in 1821 when Mexico

received their land and independence. This was very important to the mixed races of Mexico, making up 1 million Criollos, 2 million Mestizos, and 3 million pure-bred Indians.

The land was the northern territory of Mexico and southern territory of the Louisiana Purchase and Amerindian land, including: Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, and parts of Colorado. Due to purchase limitations, the U.S. selfishly wanted the remaining territories. Thus, the government forced feelings upon Americans by projecting images of Mexicans and Amerindians as “inferior” and “uncivilized” to conquer and gain more land (Zinn, 1995). As with the Spaniards, the U.S. said “Being Western, white, and Christian were characteristics considered ‘natural’ and ‘universal’ ... [but] it seems that the Indians were unable to become “white” enough to achieve this level of sophistication” (Bruhl et al., n.d., p. 2).

The generated feelings for Americans to see Mexico as worthy of being conquered were evident from many places. For example, The New York Herald, a 1845 newspaper claiming to be the voice of the people, reports, “The multitude cry aloud for war” (Zinn, 1995, p. 156). Similarly, The New York Journal of Commerce stated: “Let us go to war. The world has become stale and insipid, the ships out to be all captured, and the cities battered down, and the world burned up, so that we can start again” (p. 156). These imposed feelings were not exclusive to just newspapers. Smith (1919) mentioned how the U.S. needed a “remedy” to the “long list of Mexican sins against the United States” (as reported in Zinn, 1995, p. 156). Both President Polk and the Democratic Party had also spoken of U.S. motives in gaining more territory:

Let the great measure of annexation be accomplished, and with it the questions of boundaries and claims. For who can arrest the torrent that will pour onward to the West? The road to California will be open to us. Who will stay the march of our western people? (p. 156).

Zinn (1995) shows how these comments did not truly represent the feelings of the Americans living then. Many churches and communities either fought against the idea of war with Mexico or remained silent from fear. Some groups, such as the Irish, were disgusted with this new governmental approach to gaining land (specifically Texas), and during various demonstrations, “many Irish...asked for the withdrawal of American troops from the disputed territory” (p. 157). Similarly, Unitarian minister Reverend Theodore Parker spoke out against the imposed image of Mexicans by governmental elite and newspapers. He said:

Let it be infamous for a New England man to enlist; for a New England Merchant to loan his dollars, or to let his ships in aid of this wicked war; let it be infamous for a manufacturer to make a cannon, a sword, or a kernel of powder to kill our brother...(p. 154).

These sentiments reached far into the schools, into the hearts of descendents of late 19th century minority groups. They also reach into the hearts of those same groups today. Just as poverty can be generational (Payne, 2001), so can the sentiments attached to prior dealings and war experiences between nations. The dispute finally ended when the main northern territories of what once belonged to Mexico were eventually annexed to the United States, those being Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, and parts of Colorado (Zinn, 1995, p. 147).

### The Marginality of Mestizo-Latinos

A plethora of research done in areas related to identity deals with African and Native-Americans. For example, autobiographical works by mixed Native Americans and Africans, such as O'Connor (1983) and Simmons-Bonnin (1899), show the complex dichotomy between what a person wants to be and what a person is forced to be. The women in these stories share their experiences as Mestizas who find themselves torn between either one race or culture and another. They are never completely White or Native American/African. They are always caught in the middle, no matter how much they identify with one side or another. They are never fully the race or culture to which they identify. They are forever characterized into a middle race and culture.

The similar experiences and affiliations of postmodernists as boundary-people—described as pagan, migrant, and mestiza—is briefly discussed by Stronach and MacLure (1997). They show how the philosophical paradigm of “postmodernism” is difficult to “pin down” and, as such, is usually described with “shifting if not shifty metaphors” (p. 19). The reason for their use of certain terms, such as “mestiza,” is because postmodernists are concerned with movement, not grounded as other forms of philosophical discourse may be. Thus, a postmodernist is like a Mestizo due to his/her traveling and multi-intellectual nature, much like Mestizos of their own various identities.

The fact that different people still attempt to get along is reason enough to look for accommodating the separateness. Hall (1976) adds unique perspectives on diverse cultures assimilating in dominant and sub-dominant cultures. They are saturated with particular groups' feelings. He shows how despite a group's oppression—what Hall

refers to as a sub-dominant culture—they still attempt to identify with the dominant group. This is to their own detriment because dissonance always exists, usually expressed as internal jealousy or hatred. This dissonance then truncates the minority group's ability to function. Feeling as if their characteristics and traits are illegitimate or unworthy, the minority group faces self-deprecating images. The dominant traits are regarded as superior, always disallowing minorities to fully assimilate within the dominant culture.

The different perceptions of "time" are a good illustration of this oppressive cycle. Hall (1976) shows how time is regarded very differently between groups. North Americans and other highly individualized cultures tend to view time as a commodity that can be wasted. Someone's tardiness to a social gathering is considered a waste of time and rude. Conversely, minority groups view time as a means to an end, not an entity or commodity. They tend to arrive late and also finish one task before starting another, even if it means arriving a little late. Thus, dominant cultures impose certain feelings of time used by minorities as illegitimate or inferior. And the cyclical nature of the oppressive dominant concept goes on and on.

Despite all these views of past research on identity in race, culture, and social class, researchers have still neglected an in-depth focus upon Mestizo identities, especially as it concerns autoethnography. Even more, the research does not specifically look at the connections between one's own race or culture and that of others. This is where I begin in this investigation.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Epigram

“...the Mexican invasion will be the death of our civilization that our ancestors built....I will not succumb to the death you preach for my people.” (Matt, 2005).

This was a quote given from an online racial-realist as a defense to an earlier comment I submitted on immigration and illegal aliens. It was an unexpected response. Instead of challenging others' ideas, or setting a different tone, he became hostile. I simply stated they neglected the perspective of Native Americans, who had historical claims to U.S. lands. To a fault, he told readers the U.S. belonged to Nordic Whites from Germany who had settled it. I had mentioned their roots were probably immigrant in nature, too. This was another's rebuttal:

“Your people are turning our country into a sewer. That is why we do not want you here. It is really that simple. In a free country, citizens are supposed to have a say in something so fundamental as the kind of nation they are going to have. We are angry because our country is being transformed into a third-world pesthole. We will protest this and take any legal action we like, whether it hurts your precious feelings or not” (Cassiodorus, 2005).

So much has been accomplished for immigrants. It would be a shame to work backwards on progress made. Yet, has there really been as much accomplished as alleged? There is still much to do. Perhaps advancements already accomplished are nothing more than travesties by the power elite.

#### Research Design

The interplay between my autoethnographic journey and that of interviews and observations is the crux of my study. This is developed by reconstructing my own experiences, with interviews and observations providing even more reportable knowledge to the process. Peshkin (1986) mentions how this type of research is not “two unrelated things—reportable knowledge and personal adventure” (p. 16). On the contrary, reportable knowledge and personal adventure exist inseparably, and offer me a negotiated identity and balanced sense of research. This interplay takes place on several levels.

The research is framed within a contextualized approach. It is qualitative in nature and is situated within the methods, philosophies, and epistemologies of a qualitative position. Although this approach is both methodological and philosophical, particular attention is drawn to the connectedness that contextualizes it. A brief revisit to this connectedness is warranted prior to the methods of data collection and phase procedures.

Data collection through personal and reflexive narratives is an anchor in my study. Indicative of the social sciences, some who are unfamiliar with it experience unease. Some researchers have even labeled qualitative research as a “soft” social science, as if it were not up to par with the rest of the “hard” social sciences available (Berliner, 2002). Thus, a methodology is used to reduce apprehension among the less familiar. It is an Interpretivist process. It is the only approach which allows me to construct deeper meanings of the patterns within my narratives and observations. Berliner (2002) argues that educational research is “the hardest-to-do science of them all” because it actually deals with those epistemological and philosophical “generalizations and theory building-problems” that the “hard” sciences do not always face (p. 18). This is ideal in my study given that schooling is a component of my research.

Ellis and Bochner (1999) also recognize this emotional turmoil as it relates to reflexivity and qualitative social science. They state:

Oh, it's amazingly difficult. It's certainly not something that most people can do well. Most social scientists don't write well enough to carry it off. Or they're not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives, or the contradictions they experience. Ironically, many aren't observant enough about the world around them. The self-questioning autoethnography demands are extremely difficult. So is confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering. Believe me, honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts—and emotional pain (p. 738).



Ellis and Bochner's comments relate to my journey as a Mestizo-Latino. I am reflexive and analytical on my ethnic identity through my narratives. This is a difficult process to undergo. Reflexivity is in fact one of the most difficult procedures to carry out. It requires peeling back layers on my past which include hurt, anger, and failure, things I am not easily inclined to examine. It is a painful yet introspective journey that many who write avoid because the process brings up aspects of one's life that are not the best qualities. But this self reflexivity provides change, for me and for the study. This is the journey I take, and qualitative research is the best way I understand it. This is also how I characterize the data collection and analysis of methodology.

#### Data Collection and Phase Procedures

Data collection procedures for the research questions are accomplished through three interrelated, autoethnographic phases over many months. They are: (1) personal and reflexive narratives; (2) site-based observations and field notes; and (3) intensive interviews. This design, aligned with qualitative methodologies and philosophies, follows a criteria-driven process. I first briefly discuss how the process takes place. Then, each interrelated phase is explored.

I collect data simultaneously, not conducting research in one area exclusively but layering the data by writing and working endlessly. As the instrument of the study, I journey through the genres of research, giving no privilege to any particular phase yet embracing each as they surface in the course of the writing and work. At times, I write from sacred locations during ungodly hours of dark morning. At others, I engage in writing and conversations at peoples' homes, on the street, in markets, or by myself on a

sofa. Almost obsessively, I write and write and even write about writing. As St. Pierre (2005) states of her work, I use writing as thinking and as an inquiry method for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970). It is during these thought-provoking trips I construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct my way.

### Personal Narratives

For the primary phase, I conduct a self-reflexive inquiry of identity by writing narratives of my family, social, and schooling experiences, while centering on race, culture, and social class. During several months, I record significant events in the three aforementioned areas from as early as I could remember to high school and into college. I write accounts of the significant events, why they were significant, and when they occurred. I also converse with family members to draw comparisons to what I remember, that is my stories of my history, versus what they recall. These family parallels allow me to leave my “world of thought” to achieve a fresh perspective in writing.

After the writing is finished but certainly not done, I leave it alone, subconsciously thinking about the events I wrote. I ask myself: “What have I forgotten to add? What have I inadvertently left out?” I then return to the entire work, to gain another perspective from the months prior. I rewrite the events, this time focusing on race, culture, and social class. I rewrite about my marginal notes and connect events and thoughts and dreams I have concerning the work. In this sense, my “angle of repose” is a process of crystallization (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963), where my writing is both in unit form and in unconnected, unequal parts. I return and also write analyses and

interpretations of the writing, the rewriting, and about the process itself. All of them represent my self-reflexive inquiry, my narratives.

### Observations

During the second phase, extensive site-based field notes are constructed over several months on a Honduran-American family in the target community. This consists of weekly visiting the home environment of the family of 4—a single father and 3 children—where I collect descriptions and dialogues over their identity experiences. The children range in ages, from 9, 11, and 15. The single father, Luis, is 45 year old. These observations total to over 10 visits of considerable length. Most are 3 to 4 hours long, adding to approximately 40 hours or more of observational time. In turn, the recorded data serves as reportable knowledge containing distinguishable factors leading to their journeys.

I do this by gaining consent for observing and participating in their lives. This phase “is the *sine qua non*—the essence—of any ethnography” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 137). I know of the family from town. After consent is given, I arrive and record data instantly. Being of the same ethnicity, I am able to quickly gain access and learn I have information of both a personal and public nature. At times, I am reminded of my own ethnic experiences growing up, the foods I ate at home, and games my family and I would play. And during other times, I learn just how different we all can be in this world. I see these things through the discussions, descriptions, and interactions we all have, which I record by writing and rewriting. Thick dialogues occur with family members, individually and collectively.

Many researchers desire to be a fly-on-the-wall, to objectively record cultural nuances without letting their presence be known so as to bias or corrupt the data. Nothing could be further from my intentions or experiences with this family. I relate, influence, and engage in life with them. I eat dinner with them, we exchange cooking ideas and techniques, watch television, compare Spanish terminology from the different locales from whence we came, and travel with them to community areas. It is multi-layered research, where both researcher and research benefit. Perhaps the hardest thing of all during this phase is tearing away from them after our weekly encounters to begin writing.

#### Mestizo-Latino Interviews

The third phase of the autoethnography includes transcribed intensive interviews. I gather data from the same Honduran-American family of 4 that I previously observed. The children are interviewed separately from their father and from each other. Interviews are conducted over a period of 5 weeks. Generally, the interview sessions for each family member cover 2 to 3 questions and last about an hour. They center on critical factors of identity journeys. The data provides “sketches” of their identity that I use to reconstruct the identity process as a form of inquiry (Creswell, 1998). Categories of inquiry are obtained by the guiding research questions and items that naturally occur during interviews. Reciprocal interviews are also held with the family from initial encounters to determine whether or not transcribed categories are coherent and represent their intended thoughts and comments. This ensures ethnographic data categorizes reflect “rigorous subjectivity” (Wolcott, 1994) and cohesiveness for Mestizos. It is a negotiated process, which engages a dialectical discourse between me and each family member.

The interviews are openly conducted with the father and include the following types of questions:

1. How did you develop/create/come to your identity?
2. Do you see yourself as a Latino/Mestizo based on your mixed racial, cultural, or social class?
3. What social/economic/personal experiences influenced your decision?
4. Do you feel your identity or how you see yourself has helped or hurt your school performance/schools?
5. What are some suggestions for schools/educators working with Mestizo-Latinos based on your story?
6. Do all these stories give any insight into how Mestizo-Latinos develop their identities and how they may better develop who they are while living in oppressive situations where they lose their identity/are segregated/oppressed/ignored etc.?

The interviews are also openly conducted with each child and include the following types of questions:

1. How do you see yourself? For example, are you a Hispanic, Black, White, etc.? How do your dad/friends/brother(s)/sister see you? Why? How do you see yourself? How did this happen?
2. What experiences did you have: with groups/moving and/or living here/in Honduras/personally that made you who you are today?
3. Do you feel your schooling history has helped or hurt your identity/how you see yourself?
4. How do you think you will affect the town/schools in the past/present/future?
5. Do you think there are ways we can help all Mestizo-Latinos as they live and work and go to school? How?

### Educator Interviews

I establish a balance to the three phases by interviewing 4 diverse educators with experience of Mestizo-Latinos. During interviews, I focus on their interactions with Mestizo-Latinos. They range in age and experience from 27 to 88 years old. They are interviewed for about 3 to 4 hours each. The participants include male and female, single adults, new and established parents, and empty nesters. The data draws parallels between their views and those of Mestizos. The reciprocal interviewing process is also used. The data is analyzed and classified according to the aforementioned writing as thinking and inquiry process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), described in the narratives and interviews.

The interviews are openly conducted and include the following types of questions:

1. How does someone become who they are? What are the influences? Racially, socially and culturally? What of personal influences?
2. Who or what is a Latino(a)/Mestizo?
3. How do the schooling experiences of Mestizo-Latinos either help or hurt them figure out who they are?
4. Do schools help Latino kids, from what you know?
5. What new perspectives may exist for the local and global communities having Mestizo-Latinos? Is there a way this information can help all educators working with Mestizo-Latinos?

### Resident Interviews

I also have productive conversations with 2 residents of Marshalltown. One is a young male adult, approximately 28 years old, who works for the local newspaper.

Having done so, he brings a wealth of perspective to the interview. The interview lasts 3 hours and includes questions pertaining to his experiences and interactions with Mestizo-Latinos in Marshalltown and elsewhere.

My other resident participant is a 91 year old woman living out of the town's retirement community. She is lively and interactive with neighbors and community members. Unlike many her age, she is able to leave the secured stuffiness of the retirement community and journey down into town for various reasons. Our interview lasts almost 3 hours and takes place in her condo. She provides much information on her experiences having been a previous business owner and resident for many, many years. She had also been a medical nurse. Thus, Ester was alive to witness almost all of the cultural changes Marshalltown went through over recent decades. Pictures of her family are shared, and dialogues over her life's experiences only add to the interview. It is certainly a journey back through time to share a lifetime of perspective and reflection.

The interviews are openly conducted and include the following types of questions:

1. What is identity?
2. Who or what is a Latino(a)/Mestizo?
3. How do you see those who live in your town from Central America? How do you see those already here, born here, that consider themselves mixed racially, culturally, or socially?
4. Does the way in which we or the town see(s) Latino(a)s make a difference? What about in how they see themselves? How so?
5. Is your town better or worse with the Hispanics?
6. Have you noticed any acts of hatred or racial prejudice against Mestizo-Latinos?

7. Is their identity the same or different from others? Form yours? How so?
8. How have their stories helped you or someone you know? How can their stories help others? The town?

### Reflexivity

Having synthesized observational and interviewing data, I return to the initial purpose of the study: to investigate my affective identity. That is, I use the data collected on how others identify to reflect and inform my own identity experience. I construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct reportable data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to more fully inform my own identity process. I do this analysis using a poststructuralist, language-embedded perspective—linking “language, subjectivity, social organization, and power”—which allow me to construct meaning naturally and freely (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). I do not carry out this task through a hypermodernized tool, such as a computer program with analytic capabilities. In other words, I sort and resort, analyze and reanalyze. I am the instrument that organizes data into categories—releasing preconceived topics waiting to become section headings in the final chapters of the research. Thus, analysis is naturalistic.

Concern over achieving exact accuracy from my reflexivity is not a problem. According to Richardson (1994), accuracy or truth “ ‘is not the issue; rather narratives of the self seek to meet literary criteria, coherence, verisimilitude, and interest’ ” (as reported in Sparkes, 1996, p. 467). In this way, many new perspectives occur in data collection and analysis. These are rich, thematic “crystallizations,” where my narrative



research, with its observations and interviews, is endlessly connected to my identity (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963).

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### Introduction

Geertz (1973) strongly encourages those in the field of ethnography to consider the “construction of meaning” as central to the task of research. This is especially important given that ethnography is part of cultural anthropology (as reported in Eisner, 1998, p. 15). I illustrate this in my reference to Geertz and his statement concerning man being caught in webs of significance that he himself has spun (see Chapter 1: Introduction). What I did not realize at the time was the heavy importance Geertz placed on the treatment of method and the intentions of why I even conducted ethnography. I indeed had thick descriptions, but as I pursued meaning in my research, or meaning of a culture and its way of life, I had no guiding principle or heuristic on which to situate the descriptions. Thus, I was endangered by the positivist notion that my data was somehow a tangible and discovered truth, something measurable and outside of myself, objectively and logically irrefutable.

My oversight on the construction of meaning caused my descriptions to endlessly float without any significant grounding on which to rest. I certainly collected much data, and all past research perspectives on the issues I possibly knew, but I had no place to situate the new data collected. Then I came to understand what Eisner (1998) said of Geertz: “This thick description is an effort aimed at interpretation, at getting below the surface to that most enigmatic aspect of the human condition: the construction of meaning” (p. 15). I also remembered analysis and interpretation of autoethnographic

work happens simultaneously (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 138; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971).

Thus, for the purposes of meaning and readability, I need not separate the thick data descriptions from the analyses, but to separate the interpretation of the descriptions from the descriptions themselves. This does not remove the enriched writing or context in which it takes place. On the contrary, I provide two milieus to situate the descriptions I gathered. These give the contexts a voice. In ethnography, this voice is vital, not to “gussy up language” as if to present it figuratively, but as Eisner (1998) states, “it is to serve epistemological interests” (p. 4). These contexts—and the way in which they are written—provide the stylistic voice that conveys the impressions and feelings of actually being there.

I also provide an ethnographic sketch of each family member to demonstrate the meaning within their lives and identities. This allows their stories, their journeys, to reemerge highly sensitive (Wolcott, 1994) and relevant against the backdrop of the Mestizo-Latino experience. These stories, told through the view of a personal aspect and voice, are a sketch of their identity journey and include elements of race, culture, and social class. These three-tiered sketches give analytic insight into their world and how and why they identify.

Following these sketches, I provide two themes that naturally unfold in the writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). They are: pain and privilege. Each theme—within the sketches and personal aspects—is used to interpret each member and the family as a whole against available Mestizo literature.

I begin with a description of two milieus in which the research takes place. These milieus—Marshalltown and La Familia—offer a context for the research, immersing the reader into the background of the study. Following the milieus, I reconstruct for each family member, through the lenses of a personal aspect and voice, a sketch of their identity journey. These focus on race, culture, and social class. I conclude by revisiting each family member, and the family as a whole, to interpret their identity journeys.

### The Milieus

#### Marshalltown

Marshalltown was once a booming conservative railroad-town of steel, coal, and lumber. This changed with industrialization and Marshalltown is now an engineering town surrounded with meat-packing plants (“Historical Society of Marshall County,” n.d.). Its disparities are apparent on several levels. Almost half of the 38,000 residents are Latino or immigrant. Back in 1990, this town was only 5.1% Latino, but that population rapidly increased to 24.2% in 2000 (Walker, 2004, p. 1). These figures are among the highest in the state of Iowa, indicating the possibility of significant challenges.

The disparity also extends to environmental stratifications. On one side, the town has beautiful condos and more affluent homes situated on or near the country-club golf course, well built schools, and local churches. The other side—separated by the railroad tracks—is less appealing, with abandoned old schools converted to warehouses and run-down homes and apartments used as low-income housing. The residents of this side are mingled not with affluence but with the town’s meat, engineering, and power-plants. These “waste facility sites” are concentrated among the town’s low-income residents and

imply an “environmental racism” because polluting structures are only located on this side (Bullard, 2006, p. 189; Lipsitz, 2005, p. 73).

Sentiments between traditional residents and Latinos are also a point of difference. While any visitor is told of the blending cultures, it is apparent a divide exists. Conventional social classes are safe-guarded from outsiders by closed hierarchies. This starts as a belonging issue. If one eventually becomes a U.S. citizen or town resident, years of indifference may still be experienced. Penetrating established clichés and cultures is very difficult. Traditional residents act unapproachable even though outsiders may not act cautious or guarded with them.

“Cultures are blending, and there is access to good jobs and economic prosperity.” Although pronouncements like this are made or implied, residents rarely discuss the town’s hardships. For example, “ICE Raids” by federal and local law enforcements recently took place to remove immigrants committing identity-theft. However, only a marginal number of arrests resulted from the charges of hundreds that were removed (Talhelm, 2006). This had a great impact on the meat packing plant. Also seldom discussed is the meat packing plant’s advertisements for workers placed down in Mexico, inviting many immigrants into town, contrary to what the town aspires.

The schools reflect and produce some of these disparities and sentiments as well. They struggle with the ethnic and cultural changes despite district-wide attempts. Examples can be seen in poverty ratios within schools. Many are trying to help, but town boundaries place many poverty stricken students within the same school (“Annual Progress Report to the Community [APR]: MCSD,” 2005). Even the free and reduced

meal program, which is meant to alleviate economic strains, places most qualifying students (87.54%) within one elementary school (“APR: MCSD,” 2005).

English as a Second Language, or ESL, is also offered in the schools. Racial and socio-economic status data indicate that approximately 20% of the 24.2% ESL populace in 1999 attended only one school rather than split among others (Walker, 2004, p. 1). This number increased to more than 50% of local ESL students attending that same school. These concentrated efforts produce little academic results (“APR: MCSD,” 2005). This town is weakly providing basic educative, economic, and environmental justice for Mestizos developing their identities.

#### La Familia (The Family)

“Paradise lost”<sup>5</sup> is perhaps the best way to characterize what the family once had and moved away from in Honduras. The Honduran infrastructure is mainly tropical and economic. The family’s previous Central American home sat on a communal street, other homes directly attached in opposite directions. The homes looked a lot like the homes in Versaille, Italy. Rich colors splashed the tightly connected, marginal living conditions, but the roofs’ verandas allowed escapes to the backdrop of tropical rainforests and mountains, which were all within walking distance. The beach and rainforest were a day’s walk, teeming with life and freshness. The family would just as easily walk entire downtown areas in a day. As Nick described, “Honduras is green and blue and blue” (green for the landscape, sandwiched between a blue ocean and blue sky).

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<sup>5</sup> Paradise Lost refers to John Milton’s 12 epic poems, describing a Judeo-Christian ideology found in Biblical accounts of the utopian Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve enjoying a paradise of unlimitedness only to eventually lose all of it in the “Fall of Man,” thus the loss of physical, relational, and spiritual paradise (see Milton, 2003).

Neighbors adorned the streets in celebration while fresh food was daily sold by private solicitors and boys and girls. A variety of foods were sold, such as: breads, tortillas, fish, ice cream, cuajada (a young cheese, like Ricotta), frescos (sodas), vanilla liquids, and cotton candy. On their heads, people wore baskets of fruits and vegetables. In addition, cobblers, shoe shiners, celosias (window blind replacements), and shampoo and juice sellers occupied streets. Community life and activity was very centralized in this way, with towns avoiding crime because of community presence.

As Luis was cooking lasagna for dinner he discussed these things with me. He also stated,

Meat was reserved for the rich. We are not big meat eaters. Food is a real issue here because the kids want old Honduran foods, but it's hard to find or create. Red beans, for example, aren't as fresh here as in Honduras. The beans are too dry, and you can tell when you eat them. You know, beans, rice, onions, cilantro, tomatoes, these were all fresh in Honduras daily. Isabella [daughter] really misses all the food from Honduras. Our main staple was beans, eggs, tortillas, and a little meat for most meals, like chicken, with side dishes of tomatoes, cumin, and onion. Little market places had the most traditional food there was, and the cheapest food. They had rice, beans, meat, and salads, like spaghetti but unlike the spaghetti here in the states.

Inside their previous home, Luis had constructed all of the furnishings. Pictures demonstrated how the marginal Honduran homes were bought rather raw, so that people could finish them with their own items. The doors, windows, and security measures—in the form of bars—were all added after the initial purchase. Steps led to front doorways, and each had a distinct color but still uniform. Many homes looked as if the builders had not finished the work before they left. Luis explained that Hondurans bought these homes and then spent a considerable amount of time renovating them throughout their lives.

Another picture showed a sidewalk that circled the entire block. In front, homes opened to a paved street. As I was looking at this picture, he shared,

I actually bought some trees once to plant outside the home, around the corner, in what was a grassy area near the sidewalk. I took both Nick and Andre out to watch their growth and explain how the trees would adapt, but to my surprise, someone kept digging them up. We realized someone else did not want trees planted along the sidewalk. I once saw who was doing it, and asked. He said the trees allowed criminals to hide whereas no trees discourage this behavior.

The economic structure followed this pattern. Public transportation for middle and affluent Hondurans meant cars. The working class took the transit system. Most people had maids to do household jobs, which involved washing clothes in large square cement tubs called Pilas. Clothes were then line-dried. If one could not afford a pila, then a thick blue-plastic barrel was used. The school system was based on choice and included several options. One option was the public schools, which included very common one-room school houses for the working class. The other option was the private language schools, where kids learned in both Spanish and English. Parents also chose to home school their children but this seemed the least popular option due to resources and time. Many schools were within walking distance. All three kids in la familia attended private immersion-style bilingual schools. The boys, Nick and Andre, studied at DelCampo International School, whereas Isabella joined them later, after studying at the Mayan School through first grade.

The family's current home is located in Marshalltown, in a less affluent and more tightly packed area. They live in a three bedroom flat with an attached garage. It is actually a single-level duplex, with another home directly attached to the east. The north driveway sits on an incline of about 30 degrees, making it extremely dangerous and



difficult for parking and walking. Beyond that, medium rise apartments can be seen winding away toward the intersection. The view from the south is immediately met by a large sloping hill set right against the back of the home's windows. The range of sight is limited to a few feet because of the blocking hill. The east is blocked by their connected duplex unit. To the west there is another duplex. The street is lined with cars on both sides, creating a maze in which one must maneuver to escape.

Beyond the connected home, there is a man-made pond and park where people can enjoy the over-populated geese on sidewalks. The park is surrounded by single-family homes on the left, and high rise condos to the right. Further down, one can find the rear parking lot to the town's small mall and several struggling businesses. Of their new community, Luis states,

Police constantly cruise through streets. They ticket illegally parked cars and attend to domestic violence. The streets here are vacant and neighbors do not spend time with each other, especially children. This is starkly different from how we lived in Honduras.

Inside the home, things brighten comparatively. Food is always cooking on the comal,<sup>6</sup> mixed with the aroma of freshly brewed Honduran coffee. The home, although not new, has been greatly renovated. Newer carpets, tile, doors, and paint offer some solace from the outside staleness. Several pictures, a bookshelf, and a television with a small coffee table fill the living room, which is also part of a larger room holding the kitchen. The back bedrooms are small and mainly bare. Some of this emptiness is due to

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<sup>6</sup> A comal is a Honduran pan much like a round, short-sided skillet. Hondurans can buy these at local markets. Unfortunately, the more impoverished residents resort to making these from almost anything they can get their hands on, like the bottom of large packing drums, used for a variety of shipping purposes.

the family's recent mobility, having lived in a different country without the frills of the United States. Each room somehow reflects this fact.

The boys share a room. It is directly across from the front door. I eventually muster enough courage to travel as far back into the home as I can, but upon arrival I could not enter. A sign on the door forbid me from entering. It is clearly hand written by Nick because it bears his name. It says: (1) do not enter unless you knock; (2) use your name when requesting entry; (3) ask before you enter; and (4) leave if no one answers. I call out and requested entry, unsure whether to say, "It's Ellis," or "It's Mr. Hurd," or "It's me." I settle on "It's me, Ellis."

A nice and rather large bunk bed is where I find them, Andre on bottom and Nick on top. I notice the room is smaller than average, no dresser and with bare walls. The only item is a picture of a cute girl, of whom Nick denies interest and immediately says is put there by Isabella. A cardboard toy box occupies space in the corner of the room, holding walkie-talkies without batteries, uneaten candies, and other simple, electronic toys given to them from their Uncle Diego during Christmas. Besides this, a miniature couch and two plastic shopping bags contain their Honduran school artifacts.

Their closet holds as much clothes for the both of them as does my son's. Socks are neatly placed on the floor, and jeans with a few shirts are folded on a shelf. Andre longingly admits that he wishes he could sleep in the closet to escape from Nick and have his own room. At this point, I ask Andre if he likes the U.S. "It's good. Because I have friends and I like the school and our home. [I also feel] sad because I like Honduras," he said. While I become lost in my own childhood reminiscence, thinking of some

suggestions to help Andre achieve his dream, Nick and Andre engage in a wrestling match. "TRÉBULCA!" It means dog-pile in Spanish, and the boys jump on top of each other, involved in mankind's most primal, most historical fights: survival of the fittest.

Isabella's room is around the corner. I make my way to it while the boys continue their battle. Her room is simplistically elegant. Although bare like the boys', Isabella's room is clearly feminine. She has a bed, a dresser, and a guitar. The guitar is a gift from someone, leaning against the wall across from a pink bed and pink clothes. The closet, like the boy's, is on the lighter side. Where the boys have jeans and shirts, she meticulously places her make-up, jewelry, cosmetics, and accessories. The south wall has three pictures of boy actors, cut-out from magazines. "I love to decorate," she exclaims. I notice what she means by looking at the room's west wall. It has paper-maché stars on it. All of this seems common place until I catch sight of her dresser.

On top are many pictures of what appears to be friends. As we walk to the dresser, she casually mentions the window, as if to distract me from the pictures. I take the bait and listen. "I like big windows, not small ones. My window in Honduras was smaller. The view is not as good [here] but it's bigger." I ask her how she likes the United States and what she misses from Honduras. She says,

I don't like it very much. It's boring. In Honduras, I always played with my neighbors outside. Not here. We were more friendly with the neighbors there. I miss the beach, the food, the culture in general.

I ask her what she means by "culture in general." She says,

The people, music, language and dances. Christmas dances. People I know dance differently than [people dance] here. I miss the climate. It was dry and wet. It was warm, but not as warm as Marshalltown. Pulperias, or mini stores, were all around. A woman on the block invited people in her home. She had products for

sale, like shampoos, churros and other things. I also miss the mountains, the people walking, people in taxis, and in trains. It's boring [here] because you don't see different people. I don't understand the American money. It has more colors.

I gently return to the previous pictures and ask if they are of friends from Honduras. With some difficulty, she stares out the window and explains that they are friends from Honduras. She then carefully points out each one, saying, "He is, I mean, she is Maria. She is Sofia." She goes on like this for about a minute or so until Luis calls, saying the Lasagna is ready for dinner.

On my way back to the kitchen, my eye catches his room. I wish to explore it, just as I have of the children's rooms, but I sadly realize it would have to wait for another time, another day.

Despite the renovations and replicated Honduran foods, the family—particularly the children—seems somewhat unhappy. Even finding their popular Honduran Mantequilla Crema, a buttery cream-cheese spread, does not help. Their general feelings are such because the children have no one to play with in the streets, no related foods, and the economic and socio political structure is dissimilar to Honduras. Luis explains,

Much of these are the sentiments typically seen in an aspired Democratic system that favors the rich but hurts the working class. Capitalism favors out-sourcing to the point where competitiveness with foreign countries does us [the U.S.] in and our products aren't as valuable or as good or lasting.

### Ethnographical Sketches

#### Luis

Hondurans call it shot (as in "I was shot"), or "Baleada" in Spanish. It is dinner: fried beef tips, refried red beans, deep-fried yucca, flour tortillas, and the Mantequilla Crema the family recently found. He is sautéing the beef tip in the family comal until

they become slightly charred, but not to the point of burnt discoloration or taste. They are simmering on the side burner while the rest of the meal is done. Meanwhile, he slices the Yucatán plant into one-inch chucks, almost perfect bit-size morsels. He explains how one can best pick yucca, looking for a white inside and firm outside, not allowing the white meat of the plant to become brown-tinted as an indication of aging. He then places the yucca carefully into the boiling olive oil. It cooks until it is soft and golden brown. The refried beans strangely come from a can, from the local grocery store. He then grabs the flour tortillas, also store bought. The store items confuse me and do not seem to match the overall sense of homemade foods. When he goes to the fridge for a bag of butter colored cream—Mantequilla Crema—he proudly explains that they found some after going without it for almost a year. It is not exactly the same as the Honduran butter-cream but very close. Finally, the dinner is ready.

I still consider how the mixture of homemade foods with store bought items seems rather odd. I do not feel right asking about it, but Luis, noticing my confusion, explains,

I can't always find the ingredients I need to make traditional Honduran foods. In fact, many of the Mexican stores, which are scarce around Marshalltown, don't carry the specific items we need to make the food. So we substitute, which is just as well because corn tortillas, much better tasting than flour, are extremely difficult to make. Sonia [girl friend from Honduras] can do it well.

Luis offers me a spot at the table to eat, but I respectfully say no. I do not want him to think he needs to feed me since I am visiting. After all, I have not planned on it, and there are many more visits to make. I eat. This is a typical occurrence among Latinos: cooks, especially mothers, ask and ask until you finally comply.

The dinner smells wonderful. I could easily see that Luis is quite an accomplished cook, so I am glad he asked more than once. I place my sautéed beef tips on top of the refried beans which are now spread onto a warm flour tortilla, and cover all of it with Mantequilla Crema. Yucca is our entrée. Dinner tastes delicioso (delicious)!

Similar to the culinary mixing of homemade and store bought foods for gastronomic purposes, Luis is a blending of several racial, cultural, and social features. We are at the kitchen table, and I ask him what he knew of Latinos and Mestizos. He displays a tremendous awareness of some differences. He tells me that Mestizos represent eight different ethnic groups throughout Honduras. He recalls,

There are a lot of different groups. The Creole Whites and Mestizos. Hondurans don't consider themselves Mestizos. Verbally on the street but not academically. But the definitions are clearly made in texts: Mestizos; Creoles; and six different Indian groups. They are sort of African-Honduran groups and have a flood of specialties. They were all leftovers from the Mayans. The Cortis: decedents of the Mayans living in Copan; the Benka: also Mayan related bunch (like Aztecs); the Tulupanes: speech unique Indian population; the Pech or Paya: which is also a North American group; the Miskitos (or Mesquites): where the movie Mosquito Coast took place. They are a Creole mixed people. They have visible African features but closer with the Mestizo side as Mestizo mixed freely with these groups; the Garfuna: they're a combination of Carub (from St. Vincent Island) and Indian mix; and the Los Ingleses: an English speaking group from the Cayman Islands of the Belize area.

Although Luis says he is not a traditional Mestizo, he admits he sees himself this way when he considers his religion and ethnicities. He clarifies,

If my Roman Catholic and French-Canadian background carries over, yes [I am Mestizo]. I attended Catholic school at St. Mary's in Waterloo. The nuns didn't want to be teachers. Religion was their calling, not teaching. It has poor resources. My kids are now pushing the French [kids want to speak French, like Luis], but the table turned and we still speak a foreign language, and neighbors around us don't speak it. I have some familiarity with strangers who speak Spanish [in this way].

Thus, Luis is a mixed father raising three kids. He divorced his Honduran wife, Jessica, over heated issues and her eventual abandonment of the family. He kept the kids because she left him and the family for a younger Mexican-Honduran man, supposedly in a gang, who could get her to the U.S. for a job. They have kept in minimal contact over the years, but Luis has since assumed complete maternal and fraternal care for his family. However, this is more than simple fatherhood or fraternal responsibility. It is “transnational motherhood” (Sotelo & Avila, 2004). Luis transcended barriers of culture and class because he had little choice being a single father. As Sotelo and Avila (p. 229) point out:

Being a transnational mother means more than being the mother to children raised in another country. It means forsaking deeply felt beliefs that biological mothers should raise their own children, and replacing that belief with new definitions of motherhood. The ideal of biological mothers raising their own children is widely held but is also widely broken at both ends of the spectrum. Wealthy elites have always relied on others—nannies, governesses, and boarding schools—to raise their children (Wrigley, 1995), while poor, urban families often rely on kin and “other mothers” (Collins, 1991).

In this way, Luis redefines motherhood for his children by his role as their father-mother. He has become their father and nanny, governor, or non biological mother all at the same time. The family knows of this shift, and they all get along without a biological mother.

The fact that Luis can act as father-mother certainly goes against his upbringing. He was born in Waterloo, Iowa but after attending schools and college, he eventually moved to teach and live in Honduras. He stayed there for 18 years. “Living in Honduras, my Peace Corp experiences, and the unusual experience to ‘go native’ in the Honduran culture by traveling through ganicas” are the major factors he says shaped his Mestizo

identity. In fact, he feels Marshalltown administrators may have hired him under the assumption he was full blooded Latino, expecting someone else. Neither would his French surname have been a clue at his more Anglo-Saxon or Caucasian appearance.

Just as he is father-mother, Luis racially aspires as a White, French-Canadian but feels neither fully characterize him. He was born French-Canadian, a mixture of two dominant ethnicities from Canada. More than anything, Luis sees himself as Honduran, as culturally mixed. In this way, I begin to see Luis' Mestizo qualities: a man born into two ethnicities, raised in separate socio-cultural practices, eventually continuing a mixed American-Honduran cultural heritage. He explains this mixed journey to me after I ask him how he developed or created his identity. He claims,

I feel odd. My race is French-Canadian, but culturally I'm Honduran. I eat Spanish foods, have Spanish children, and the fact that I speak Spanish fluently doesn't help me find solace in one identity versus another. While most Iowans don't recognize me as White, they also don't see me as Mexican, either. They don't know where to situate me. In fact, when I first came I dressed casually and shaved my head. This is a common practice in Honduras because of head lice.

That Luis sees himself as mostly Honduran might mislead some to think he has situated himself culturally, holding a fixed identity and not, in fact, a traditional Mestizo. This is not the case. Luis also behaves in ways that are dominantly American, or at the very least not Honduran, though he aspires to a Honduran identity. First, socio-political issues seem to drive him. Most of our encounters are in the kitchen, with excellent food he cooks, while listening to NPR (National Public Radio) on his short wave transmitter. He prefers network news channels, but radio over TV. As he puts it, "It's less special interest than TV." This is just one source for Luis' strong opinions about the socio-



political economy from an American perspective. After briefly describing a trip to Green Castle to witness nature and bison, he recalls,

Dogs roam freely in Honduras. They are simply scared away by stones. Here it's different. Dogs are overly protected; overly protected in society. It's gone up [protection of animals]. It was a rarity, but now everyone here treats their dogs and cats as humans, even better than humans. Like Gods. But they treat people like shit. Hondurans are full and active and live relatively short lives. Old Donna Arminda [cranky old woman he describes] lives among the young to stay young. The U.S. is different. The old live alone (rather selfishly), alone and then after, they're lonely in death.

Most Central American families are Roman Catholic, but I'm like an Apostate Catholic. My family [French-Canadians] is still heavily involved in the Catholic religion, but I don't hold to the values of it. Technologies drive our religions, like a cow or fire. We have developed the religions to sustain the technologies.

Luis is also a great cook, not a common thing among traditional Honduran men.

Honduran men typically want a wife or maid to handle the cooking, cleaning, and raising of children. But Luis prefers to remain single as it is easier to have one person and one set of rules to enforce. With his children, he walks to parks and watches TV at night. These ideals are more American in nature, according to Luis. I listen to him finish his comment as I stuff the last papusa in my mouth, a Salvadorian meal, compliments of a mother whose daughter attends his class at school. There are extravagant.

At another time, I am invited to Luis' bedroom. I thought to myself, "At last! I get to explore the inner nuances, the trappings of the father." Instead of a hands-on experience, I enter a cloister, Luis' area of religious seclusion. I suddenly find myself sitting on his bed, surrounded by heaps of books and papers teeming with stories of a past life. I feel like I am preparing for what seems like a serious reprimand from my own father. Luis sits next to me and begins showing me pictures. The researcher in me finally

wakes up. I am not completely satisfied nor understand how Luis developed his identity while away from the U.S., despite being born here.

Thus, I ask more questions. I start with his past and how he was raised. I want to know the factors that may have led him to his identity and his Honduran preference. After all, why did he not say he is Honduran-American or American trekker or simply Mestizo? He takes a great deal of time and tells me,

My family had lived in three different cities: in Portsmouth, Rhode Island; Taunton, Massachusetts; but I grew up in Iowa, on the East side of Waterloo. Wherever they [parents] lived, we always were in ethnically mixed neighborhoods, probably an economic decision. In Waterloo, we lived in a mixed Black and White neighborhood. We weren't like a lot of Whites. My sexual interests were for Africans. My dad encouraged me to date Black girls. I wanted to be a black kid because of that. I even tried holding my face to a desk to make my nose flat. I always felt outside of my identity. My friends spoke German. We had a different religion. We spoke French at home. He [father] really hyped-up our French heritage and forced French on us. We hated it! He used the French thing quite a bit. We spoke English with mom (who spoke French) when he was gone. She had a community feel to her heritage. She wasn't preoccupied with identity, whereas father became a Francophile to identify beyond Canada. Maybe he hid because he didn't fit in anywhere he went.

I ask, "How did this background influence your schooling performance? Did it help or hurt you? And how did your schooling help or hurt, if at all, your identity?" Luis says,

Well, I don't perceive that my identity hurt me, but my brother was held back in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. He's now a successful lawyer, but he claims to this day it was because we were forced to speak French at home. Back then, we lived in the country and didn't have friends close by, so there is some possibility of a lack of language development. I was different because when I was born, we lived in Waterloo, Iowa and I was social. I also spoke to my mom in English when my dad was gone for work at the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture].

I was extremely good in language, art, and music. Teachers knew I was a problem kid, hyperactive; but a school psychologist talked with me. I would always talk about horrible things with my dad and French. It wasn't his ethnicity but his

Asperger's<sup>7</sup> that was a problem for me. I became introverted. Grade school was fun, middle a pain, and in high school I was missing the basic skills in all but religion and music and art. My senior year, I went to France, but my dad was pissed because I didn't trace our ancestry like he wanted me to. It was also painful at home because my dad retired and was always home afterwards. I stayed in my room and read classics from college classes from my brother. I learned a lot. I was successful at writing and used it to enter the university.

Ethnicity interacts with school and family, and it's difficult to separate them out. I blame my dad and his ethnic qualities of forced French more than anything. When I went to France, I felt at home. I feel any bicultural environment feels more natural to me than a monolingual one.

"Tell me more about that," I ask Luis.

Before I studied my French-Canadian heritage, I wouldn't have included the Honduran part [of my heritage] in defining myself, but now the Canadian-Catholic part [mother's side] gives me a Latin line, connecting me with Latino Catholics (but I'm not Catholic). I'm not really Honduran-American, but I've always been disaffected with U.S. power, economy, and politics. A disaffection with authority not from disagreement but because of my father. As with most radicals, I had a general disrespect [of him]. It has a psychological element that grew out of a spin away for patriotism to the U.S.

My inclination is Canadian-American-Honduran. It gives me another direction from enmity or disaffection. As a young man, I didn't feel comfortable with the French [father] thing. The Canadian was more real. But I wasn't real comfortable with the Canadian thing, either.

A few seconds later, he begins,

I always feel like I'm viewing a culture from outside. So, all those eighteen years [in Honduras] I did my best to assimilate, not hide in the U.S. cultural bubble. There were a lot of gringos there, but I did my best to minimize this, to not live with other gringos. Now, I deeply miss Honduras. My roots were in Honduras. In Honduras, I was the Gringo in that niche, and now I feel the full force of that change. Spanish feels more right to me than English in certain contexts. I've almost been creolized. I've met this culture [Honduran] half way, and it became who I am.

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<sup>7</sup> Asperger Syndrome, or Asperger's Disorder, is a neurobiological disorder in young children with normal intelligence and language development who display autistic-like behaviors and marked deficiencies in social and communication skills and have difficulties with transitions or changes, reading nonverbal cues (body language), and difficulty determining proper body space (Kirby, 2005, p. 1).

Silence.

After a great deal of time, he finished. I needed coffee. We headed back to the kitchen, away from the haven of privacy and disclosure. I was just given a profound glimpse into the workings of how and why Luis identifies; I just did not know what it all meant. But now there is no time to think; only write. I have my coffee, and I begin to write again.

In the U.S., many may think Central and South Americans have unlimited access to great coffee simply because of their location to it. Luis tells me this is not true. "Good coffee is only accessible to the middle class. The lower classes get the leftovers. One urban myth is that coffee is cut and roasted with avocado seeds. Everyone drinks it sweet, no cream with coffee."

As coffee stories are spun and lend themselves to different urban myths, so Luis' tale of socio-cultural acceptance and non acceptance characterize him. He has experienced these myths first hand. Two included: leaving the states for a better tropical life; and finding everything cheaper and easier in the tropics. He eventually faced the harsh transactions that awaited him, as many Mestizos find (Morial, 2006, p. 164). He feels he did not completely belong in the states. He also found he was not completely accepted in Honduras, either. He explained,

I feel a strong sense of personhood. I'm unique. My cultural identity is far less important [than it was to my father]. I don't feel a sense of nationhood. I feel I'm Iowan but very different from Iowans. When I was in Honduras, my gringo-hood became important. I had to be gringo. Because of lousy U.S. foreign policy, I became the apologist for my race, my people. It became harder and harder [in Honduras]. Even here I feel out of place. I don't fit in anywhere...In Honduras, I

was the token gringo; in the U.S., I'm the token Honduran. I'm like Graham Green's *Quite American*.<sup>8</sup>

According to Purkey (1970) the "self" is the vantage point of all life's experiences. It is the framework and perception of an individual (p. 10). In this way, it is our filter and interpreter. We cannot separate ourselves from our experiences. As Rollo May (1961) asserts: "We cannot stand outside of our own skin" (as reported in Purkey, 1970, p. 10).

Thus, all of Luis' experiences—however "significant or insignificant, important or unimportant, attractive or unattractive, valuable or worthless"—define who he is. They become the conscious and subconscious elements in his pathway, for how he identifies. He thus assigns meaning to all things around him based on how he sees himself (p. 10). He demonstrates this by claiming, "I didn't feel comfortable with the French thing. The Canadian was more real." However, the Canadian identity was no more "real" than any other identity construction. He chooses to create or highlight his Canadian side. Luis does this because he wants to see himself this way, and because of his father. Thus, his decision makes it more real for himself. Luis alludes to this and says, "But I wasn't real comfortable with the Canadian thing, either."

In terms of his identity and schooling, he may have experienced hard times because he did not see education as significant. This is because of his learning at home, namely French, and how he expected to learn and be received at school. Our behaviors

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<sup>8</sup> The *Quite American* is the name of Graham Greene's novel, a superb rendition of what it is to be a quiet foreigner. Pyle, one of three main characters, appears innocent, but his actions all have consequences in this novel set during the Vietnam War. His presence proves he just does not belong in Vietnam (Greene, 1955).

inform our self concept and our self concept informs our behavior. "To put it another way, people are constantly trying to behave in a manner which is consistent with the way they view themselves" (Purkey, 1970, p. 12). The possible distortion of Luis' reality or identity was reinforced by how he saw himself. He felt marginalized because of his home experiences; he knew of his "horrible things with [his] dad and French." He expected nothing less in school and in society back then. And so he experienced no distress, until later when he realized things could be different.

Likewise, Gordon (1968) asserts: "Race, class, and family structure are assumed to interact, each in its own way, to shape such dimensions of self-conception as basic self-acceptance, self-perceived mental capacity and academic ability, the sense of general competence and of self-esteem" (p. 5). He further hypothesizes that race and social class simultaneously influence: (1) family structure; (2) parental aspirations; (3) verbal ability; (4) self-concept; and (5) an adolescent's aspirations (p. 5). These areas represent what Luis experiences regarding his identity due to the overall influences on his life. His French-Canadian race, his socio-cultural class, and his experiences with his French father all shape who he is and will eventually become. It makes me also think of my own father and my struggles to identify because of his upbringing and how his father was not close to him, thus making it very difficult for him to raise me. It shaped who I am today, just as Luis' shaped him and his academic abilities and ability to socialize. His self-concept is derived from these situations.

I begin to realize our prior coffee discussion matches Luis' social status. He describes himself, and his family, as part of the working class. He is both American and

Honduran yet belongs to neither one fully. He is an American because he understands the workings and nuances of the dominant, white society. He was born in Waterloo, Iowa. He speaks and reads English fluently. He is an instructor in the local school district, a respectable middle class profession. Yet socially he feels like an irresponsible teenager. He even describes himself as an “expatriate” with all the morays and underpinnings of that term. He says he does not fit into the U.S. culture and would not join the elite embassy Americans while living in Honduras. He is the kind of expatriate that aligns with those ideals in spirit. That is, he does not establish himself around a community of expatriates or his “own kind.”

Luis is also Honduran, especially at home. His girlfriend—from Honduras—and his children keep him “grounded in Honduran culture.” He also tells me he enjoys spending time with Spanish people. He was Don Luis in Honduras, a professor at Universidad Pedagógica (Pedagogical University) in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras; an upstanding member of the neighborhood. However, because Luis was seen as a gringo (White guy) living in Honduras, he was never fully accepted by the elite community. Of this situation, he shared,

The Turks [lighter skinned middle easterners] control most of Honduran capitalism and commerce. Hondurans don't like the Turks, and everyone thinks you're FBI if you're American. I lived that down even until the day I left Honduras. They thought I was there to take over. I discovered the much loathed U.S. influence that most other countries feel.

When Luis arrived two years ago to the U.S., he had “nearly nothing.” He left his girlfriend, car, and house. His girlfriend helped him tie up loose ends, and then he had to leave because of money. The switch for him was very difficult because of socio-

cultural differences, the selfish attitudes of Americans, greed, and phobias of the community. As far as fitting in today, he candidly shares,

I have a difficult time transcending the barriers in place by the work environment. I often make mistakes in communication, not because of language but because of implications set by hidden work rules. For example, I send out e-mails to colleagues with theoretical information not necessarily pertinent to teachers. I also work from a Honduran perspective rather than an American concept of time. I like to speak to others one-on-one rather than in large groups, and I don't venture too far from my room. I also let my children [students] naturally emerge as learners, not so uptight in special identifications or rooted in "getting kids out" into the mainstream.<sup>9</sup> I wonder about my work ethic and while I'm concerned about what others think of it, I'm not consumed with it.

### Isabella

I walk in ready, two different notebooks in hand. I plan to observe and interview her first, but then I notice Isabella looks ready to leave. She is walking around the house, talking on the telephone with one friend after another, it seems; then—almost as quickly as I arrive—she vanishes. She received a phone call from a friend who asked her over for dinner. They are having pizza, and she will return later this evening. I am slightly disappointed by this occurrence, but I know there will be other times to talk with her.

Perhaps sensing my frustration, Luis begins to share his impressions of Isabella. He says she is a good daughter, good grades but "slower on the boy uptake." This is indeed an unusual observation because Isabella is a sophomore at the high school. It is normal for Isabella to have a boyfriend (she does not), but I certainly do not expect to see boys calling all hours of the day. Even developmentally, she has just entered the dating

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<sup>9</sup> "Getting kids out" refers to the nature of Luis's job as an ELL instructor, where there is a high emphasis placed on teachers to get students, limited in English proficiency, into the general classroom setting with native speaking peers (Baker, 2000).



arena. I wonder what gives Luis the impression she is “slower” on the boy part besides the fact she does not have a boyfriend. He tells me,

Friend issues aren't as big an issue as with others her age. She's quieter but certainly has her adolescent moments, her rises and falls. I actually prefer it that way rather than having her act like a lot of the teenagers who are friend or boy crazy.

These observations by Isabella's father are especially interesting to me because they are impressions of Isabella others may not have, or that Isabella has of herself (see page 43). In fact, Taylor (1994) reminds us our identity is shaped by others' impressions or the absence thereof (see Section 2: Review of the Literature, p. 13). Thus, Isabella may nominally suffer from an artificial or inferior identity, if indeed Luis mirrors back to her an image untrue to herself. Some parents tend to force their own wishes on their teenagers in order to maintain a sense of control. Accordingly, Taylor (1994) tells us of how indigenous people suffer distorted identities because of the “nonrecognition or misconception” by others through social hierarchies (p. 16). Thus, Luis must exhibit caution with the impressions or identities he may inadvertently impose on his daughter—regardless of how innocent or altruistic they may be.

The brief encounter I had with Isabella before she left gave me some impressions, too. She prefers Spanish and rarely uses English. In fact, some of our observations and interviews began in Spanish. Isabella is average height, perhaps a little taller than some Hondurans but not tall by any means. She has jet black hair and large chestnut-brown eyes. Of everyone in the family, she is perhaps the darkest. She looks most like her father, another layer in the possible meaning behind Luis' impressions of her. In fact, when I saw a picture of Isabella prior to meeting her, I mentioned she looked like her

mother, and I was quickly corrected. Luis said, “No, she looks more like me. She doesn’t look anything like her mother.” Meeting her face to face, I see how I may have been misguided in my first impression.

Isabella is also very quiet, not unusual for a teenager who, at this stage in life, reveals more to friends. Isabella just loves to spend time with friends at night. Her routine is typical: dinner, homework, and TV or friends. But the most significant impression is her demeanor. Isabella has a presence about her that communicates power. She is unlike girls her age in this way. Boys are usually the ones who “understand their privileged status and the ways in which male privilege equates to power” (Adams & Coltrane, 2004, pp. 190-191). It is this power that made our initial encounters complex, that is, until I built my method of reaching her.

An example of this power was displayed during a conversation she had with her dad on one of my Saturday visits. She boldly spoke to him in the kitchen. I happened to be near the boys’ room, talking with Andre. I overheard a rather odd discussion over clothing. Breakfast this morning was pancakes, and she was the last to eat because of her shower. The boys already ate, and Nick was stationed in the living room playing his Game Boy, while Andre and I were in the back hallway, informally talking. It all began when she appeared in the kitchen.

“Where were you? Breakfast was almost half an hour ago,” Luis exclaimed.

“I couldn’t find anything to wear. My clothes are all too tight,” Isabella responds, going right to her food and not bothering to look back at Luis. It was at this point I became very interested and inched my way closer, further from Andre’s location.

“I just bought those for you, Isabella,” Luis stated with a mixture of frustration and shock.

“Well, they’re too tight already. I need money to buy more,” she said.

You were with me when we bought them! If they’re too tight, you need to pick your clothes better, then. I don’t know your size, Isabella, as well as you do. Only you know your size,” Luis said, now making the room quieter and colder than it just was.

“Give me some money so I can go buy my own,” Isabella torts convincingly.

Attempting to end the conversation, Luis said, “There is no money. We just went shopping. You’ll have to wait until next time.”

“But my clothes are too tight. I need some new clothes right now,” she counters.

“Well, if you want more clothes sooner, you’re going to need a job, then, to pay for them yourself.”

Their quarrel ended at this point, but I was not sure if it was because Luis and Isabella settled the issue, if they remembered they had as guest, or if they both noticed the back hallway conversation was suddenly a lot quieter than before. Of course, Andre was chatting, but my responses were not offered in return. I never gave the encounter another thought until a week later, when I saw an entirely new outfit on Isabella. She certainly wielded her power successfully.

I situated myself at the Honduran household about a week later, during the early morning hour to change things up a bit. We all sat on the couch watching TV, except Luis who had gone out to buy sweet rolls at a local bakery for breakfast. I ask Isabella what it was like coming to the U.S., as a conversation starter. I figure this will close the

gap between us as we have not had too much time together because of her trip out. She replies,

Depressing. It was Christmas. It wasn't green here. It was dull and different.

"What do you like to do, then? What are some of your favorite things you can do here, even though it is not Honduras?" I asked.

I listen to the radio, to music. I listen to all different types of music, in Spanish and English. In Honduras, I listened to Honduran music because [it was] American and Spanish there. Here I listen to American music. They [U.S.] don't have Honduran music. I like Avril Lavigne<sup>10</sup> and other pop stars.

Now I feel like we're getting somewhere. She's starting to open up. Okay. I need to keep asking about music and friends. Ah, that's right! Her friends were a sensitive subject when I saw them in her room. This is good, I think to myself. I continue, "So, tell me about the music, the activities..."

In Honduras, many people didn't understand the songs because they were too fast. But you still listened to them. The dances here are more American. Not many Hispanics go to American dances. They go to the Hispanic dances.

I like to watch the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, MTV [Music Television], HBO [Home Box Office], TNT [Turner Network Television], ABC Family, and Telemundo [Spanish Television station]. There are lots of Latino channels [on cable] but no Spanish videos.

Isabella also starts telling me about channels and shows in Honduras she likes, but then Luis returns with the sweet rolls. I happily eat the scrumptious treats, feeling a deep sense of emotional pride in my small accomplishment. I feel like Nicholas Cage in

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<sup>10</sup> Avril Lavigne is a teen pop star, with record sales in the millions (see Koston, 2008).

*National Treasure*.<sup>11</sup> I just unlocked some deep, embedded secret of Isabella's personal culture or interest. And for the first time during my discussions with her, I feel empowered. I got through to her—I got through to myself. I finally understand Isabella's personal aspect and voice.

Luis returns from the bakery. He states something in Spanish, and Isabella corrects him. She does that from time to time, helping Luis use certain aspects of Spanish more properly. Although Isabella occasionally mixes her expressions in English, she also grasps a popular knowledge of American language and culture, indicative of her interests. While playing with Nick and Andre, she uses the phrases, "Just kidding," and "Ya think?" I realize these phrases come from the popular TV show, *Hannah Montana*.<sup>12</sup> These encounters helped me see how she interacts with everyone in the family but also what may drive her: digital communication and connection.

I catch a glimpse of this aspect and voice when I ask about her friends from the dresser in her room. She immediately comes to life and stands up. She asks if she can show me her friends on internet. I say yes, very interested. That is, each time she opens up, technology is the vehicle for communication and connection: her music, TV stations, the popular expressions, and now the computer and internet.

I quickly get up and go over to the coffee table on the side wall of the family room to watch. Isabella is extremely quick and adept at using the computer, as also her understanding of music and TV stations. She effortlessly navigates her way to a personal

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<sup>11</sup> *National Treasure* is a major motion picture, grossing hundreds of millions of dollars. It had a sequel in 2007 (see Bruckheimer & Turteltaub, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> *Hannah Montana* is a popular teen TV show, displaying many nuances of popular American language and culture in every episode. Miley Cyrus is the star of the show (see King, 2006).

Spanish web site database, structured like MySpace,<sup>13</sup> where there are hundreds of pictures of her old friends from Honduras. She also has pictures of her old life: her school, community, and family. She not only knows the backdoor into each web site, but she knows the names of each girl writing her. I see she is excited to receive messages since the last time she was on the web site.

As we are navigating, I ask what her identity is, and what a Latina or Mestizo(a) is. She says,

[It's] who you are [and] like other people think you are. They mark you as someone from an area, who has to do something from that place. Latina, um people from Central and South America. Mestiza, I think like a combination of Spanish blood (Spain) and someone else (from Mexico or Honduras or Guatemala).

“How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a Latina or Mestiza?” I ask.

Yes.

“How do you see yourself specifically: Hispanic, White, Black, or another race?”

What about culturally? I continue to ask.

Everything because we all originated from the same person in Africa or China. We are all immigrants. We are all the same. Mostly [I see myself as] Honduran. I also have my dad's blood, French-Canadian. From my mom's side, El Salvador or someone else. I think I'm half and half, but mostly Honduran because I was born there. [My] blood half and half because my mom's side was there and my dad's side from here. For my culture, Honduran but now more American. Sometimes we eat the same [food from here] but [sometimes] Honduran. My dad sees me as both, but my brothers see me [as] more Honduran than American.

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<sup>13</sup> MySpace is a popular networking website with an online community of interactive friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos for teenagers and adults internationally (see Anderson & DeWolfe, 2003).

This conversation quickly ends when Luis sees we are on the internet. Almost as excited as Isabella, he practically runs over and asks if I want to see pictures of his old school, girlfriend, and home. I say yes. He waits for Isabella to move. She does not seem too happy with this juncture. But a problem arises. Luis can not open a link he saved containing the work he did at the university. He electronically published it. When he clicks on it, smiley faces appear. He asks Isabella,

“Isabella (stressing the “ah” sound in her name), where’s my file? Did you move anything here?”

“No,” She replied.

“Where’s my file....it was just here.....did you move anything when you were on earlier,” he asked again.

“No, I just opened the database for pictures,” she rebutted.

“No you didn’t! Isabella, my stuff was right here. Why are there smiling faces here? Where’s the file, Isabella,” he said heatedly. “I could kill you! I could kill you Isabella. This is MY stuff. I could literally kill you.” He said again.

Isabella did not answer. She sat safe, quiet...powerful. I looked from Luis to Isabella to Luis again. I remained silent; not wishing to intrude for fear my interjections would cost me their confidence, jeopardizing what I accomplished. Yet, I felt that Luis was being rather harsh, and there really was no proof Isabella did anything to the file. The conversation continues.

Vince silently nodded in disagreement. "That file was important. Oh! Here it is! Why didn't it open the first time? Did you change something," he asked for the third and final time.

"I only accessed it for something else I needed. I was saving pictures," she declared. "I saved the file as something else, a new name."

"I don't want you in here moving things," He said, ending the conversation.

Apparently, Isabella saved the file as a new name and left a shadow file in its place. This is a file that gives the appearance of an older one but cannot be accessed the same way. One has to recreate the shortcut or file extension to re-access the original. Not only does their tiff cause for sweaty brows and tense moments, but it again showed me Isabella's interest with communication and connections through technology. I also realized I would need to finish our discussion another time.

Buckingham (2006) argues there is indeed a digital generation. That is, a generation of young people who have an entire "rhetoric" and culture belonging solely to "digital computer technology" (p. 1). In this sense, Isabella is a digital child, a product of the age of technological advancement. Her social identity is constantly being played to and shaped as a result of this media and technology (p. 4). While the world has always had younger generations exclude others, namely adults, from themselves through a technology (i.e. a different music, fashion, etc.), a digital generation is different. It is exclusively defined by the actual technology itself. In other words, it is no longer music and age, or fashion and age, but simply a particular technology (pp. 5-6).



Tapscott (1998) cites several examples of how these specific digital identities can be viewed. He uses two generations familiar to most: “Baby boomers (1946 to 1964)” with TV; and “Baby Echo (1977 to 1997)” with the internet (as reported in Buckingham, 2006, p. 6). Both generations have been defined by their technologies versus their ages. They are referred to as the “TV generation,” or the “Net generation,” versus how we have defined or referred to other past generations; for example, the WWI or WWII generations, or the Industrial generation (p. 6). TV stands contrary to the internet, “[just as] the TV generation is the antithesis of the net generation” (p. 6). It is uncanny the stark contrast between the nightly news generation, relaxing in their recliners and watching TV, and the gaming generation, surfing the net on their laptops with Wi-Fi in some coffee shop, tirelessly and endlessly searching and clicking, searching and clicking.

With Isabella’s identity, her power comes from the fact that she can and will communicate in various forms all the time. As Buckingham (2006) states:

By contrast, the N-Geners are “hungry for expression, discovery and their own self-development”: They are savvy, self-reliant; analytical, articulate, creative, inquisitive, accepting of diversity, and socially conscious. These generational differences are seen to be produced by technology, rather than being a result of other social, historical, or cultural forces (pp. 6-7).

Thus, besides already feeling mixed racial, culturally, and socially because of her experiences, Isabella is an “N-Gener.” According to Davies (2006), she is multi-faceted and handles life and identity in “multiple layers” (p. 211), diverse in her outlook and more ready to tackle issues than perhaps any generation prior. This finding reminds me of when I was growing up, feeling I could transcend either of my cultures because of my

cultural awareness. I, too, grew up with technology changing, offering me a set of skills no one else in my family had at my age.

I finally receive another opportunity to talk with Isabella. This time, we continue the conversation in her bedroom. With the door left open, I sit on the floor, Isabella on the bed, and we begin.

“Where do you feel you are Honduran most: at home, school, or with other Hispanics.” I ask. She answers,

At home, I talk Spanish not English, but on TV, I watch a lot of American programs. There aren't many Spanish programs. Books I have to read in English because those are the books [at school], and the food I eat is more American food. It depends on the place. If you are in America, you are more American because there is more American stuff.

At school I feel Mexican because people who don't know me think I'm Mexican because I'm brown. Those I tell know I'm Honduran but others think I'm Mexican or something.

With other Hispanics, [I feel] more Honduran because most of my friends are Mexican. I still talk in Spanish, do Spanish stuff. I now go to the school dances and go to the basketball games. We mostly play soccer. The dances, [are] more American [in nature] for me.

“When you are at home, school, or with other Hispanics, is this Honduran Identity based on your race, culture, or social groups” I ask her. She says,

Mixed, I think, because I practice everything. I do American, Mexican, and Honduran stuff.

“Well, then how does anyone become who they are, and what personal experiences influenced your identity” I expand.

It's what you do. Over there [in Honduras], me and my friends decided what we wanted to do, something we all liked, and we did it.

Isabella's response of feeling "mixed" because she "practiced everything" making her all races and cultures is perfectly normal for Mestizos. Past research (Lambert, 1974, 1980) illustrates how learning a second language means adopting additional socio-economic and socio-linguistic values through "additive bilingualism." In this way, it will mean Isabella may experience a change in attitude and self concept.

I move to Isabella's schooling experiences. Remembering her savvy abilities with communication and technology, I am curious of the influences of schooling on her identity and her identity on her schooling. Based on our discussion, Isabella feels her schooling experiences from Honduras help her identity, giving her more leverage than others. "It helps me become more Honduran because we had an anthem [of Honduras], a test, to study its history. I didn't know all of it, but I learned it," she describes. She also feels her identity positively influences her schooling performance. She proudly tells me, "Because I knew English when I came here, I already knew some English [terminology] so it was easier, and I could understand them [the teachers] better. I didn't have a person translating or anything. It was normal."

I ask her if she feels her identity may have hurt her schooling, or that schooling has hurt her identity. I want to check if any negative experiences took place for Isabella. She shares that Americans who do not know her think she is Mexican. I ask why. She replies, "Because we [Hondurans and Mexicans] have the same color hands and face. Even though we both speak Spanish, we are different. My Mexican friends know that I am different because I speak different."

## Nick

Each line emerges as if the very fabrics of thought are somehow lifted from his mind and then placed on paper. I watch as the shapes take form into what appears as a new creature, an invention of some sort. It is fascinating how well Nick can draw for his age. His artistry resembles Japanese Animation, also called “anime” (Kim, 1996; Lamothe, 2006a).

A technique mostly borrowing from “manga,” meaning comic, anime (animation) art originates from Japanese film and still-life comics (Izawa, 2005). Anime has been part of the United States media for over three decades (Ito, 2006). More recently, it has become part of the U.S. “mainstream,” drawing billion-dollar profits for many companies (Leonard, 2003), thus creating a multigenerational and transnational phenomenon (Ito, 2006). Besides the countless web sites and networks dealing with anime regularly, prominent universities have even established entire databases and student run programs for the advancement of anime (see Harvard Anime Society, 2008; Massachusetts Institute of Technology Anime Club, 2008).

DeLorme (2008) and Lamothe (2006b) cite several genres involved with anime. These genres include but are not limited to: action adventure; drama; fantasy; game-based; horror; science fiction; school life; super power; and progressive. Nick’s art closely follows a combination of genres and emerges as fantasy-horror. As he continues to draw, his anime creature looks as if it can spring to life. It has razor-like scales on its back. Its arms are large, and its wrists have blades protruding from them, like science-fiction samurais with destructive knives embedded in their armor. He knows what he is

doing and how the creature should materialize. It is only a matter of producing that mental image on paper.

As I watch this transformation, I begin to notice Nick somewhat resembles typical anime art. Like anime, his eyes are large and round, and his hair is full bodied or disheveled (Izawa, 2005). Like owners of their specific canine breeds, Nick bears a resemblance to his own art form. He is unique and has his own taste; much like anime is of the animation art world. He does not try to mimic Luis' art form, nor does he simply reinforce Andre's tendency to copy his work. He has his own emerging artistic and adolescent voice in the family.

Besides these aspects, Nick's appearance more closely follows his mother's. He has a solid and stocky build for an eleven year old. His hair, eyes, and skin tone all have the simple yet subtle hues of a pre-Inca "Moche," or ancient Peruvian, from Peru during the 400s A.D. (Donnan, 1990). This observation fascinates me even more, leaving me wondering how he might identify because of his strong resemblance to his mother, or how he thinks others might identify.

When I ask him about it, he shares that a Latino is somebody from a Spanish country and that a Mestizo is one from two countries at the same time. I do not think this gets to the point, so I ask him how he sees himself. He states:

I am both. I am American and Honduran because of my parents, I guess. One is from here [United States] and the other is from there [Honduras]. I feel like I'm both because I'm from both countries and because Mestizo means the same. It's [my identity] cultural and racial: cultural because of what we did there. We played different games; we were more like doing stuff instead of watching TV. When we ate, it's different, too. The language you use is Spanish most of the time, but English right now. When I'm in one country that uses a language, I use that

language. When I'm in another, I use that language. When I'm in Honduras, I speak Spanish. When I'm in America, I speak English.

"Do you feel more Honduran or American when you are home, at school, or with other Hispanics? I ask.

Neither. Well, like the language, I feel more American when I'm in the USA; I feel more Honduran when I'm in Honduras.

"How does your dad, brother, and sister or friends see you? What do they say you are?" I continue to ask.

My dad says I'm both, too, because he talks to me in Spanish, too. Most of the time it's half and half. He talks to me in English, too. My brother says the same. My sister says I'm Honduran because she talks to me in Spanish most of the time. With my friends I feel both because most of my classmates are Mexican,<sup>14</sup> so I feel Hispanic. Most of the school is half and half [half White, half Latino]. There are Americans, too, so I feel both. I speak English with most of them.

Nick also demonstrates a Mestizo identity in terms of his socio-cultural habits. He has a strong knowledge of both countries and mixes the popular cultures. For instance, he watches TV shows in English every night. They are popular cable programs, such as one I watched with him and his siblings. Nick recalls the different episodes he has seen over previous months. There are other shows, too, which Nick knows. For example, Pokémon and other Japanese shows Nick watches and explains to me.

Besides TV shows, Nick equally remembers information from various cultural practices. He recalls the names of teachers at his bilingual school in Marshalltown and from Honduras as effortlessly as he recalls football teams and statistics, from both

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<sup>14</sup> Mexican: Nick is referring to the larger concentration of Mexicans or Hispanics enrolled in the Dual language program in Marshalltown. The program was created with the help of a federal grant to increase student achievement while using a dual language model among native English speakers and English Language Learners, ELLs (Walker, 2004).

Honduras and America. Our discussions over teachers' names and football instantly change him into an academic student, even though it is Saturday. He begins to share with me his likes and dislikes of school but suddenly runs to the only bookshelf in the living room (and perhaps the whole house), grabs several reference materials, and pushes them my way. He excitedly explains his interests in reading about animals from Honduras, especially those he no longer sees, and his personal adventures with turtles and other rescued friends of the animal kingdom.

This pattern of Mestizo identity can be seen in his language usage as well. Although Nick speaks both Spanish and English fluently, not an uncommon capability for bilingual and bicultural Mestizos, he prefers English. The fact he mostly chooses one language is completely normal among those who speak two languages or have knowledge of two cultures. Speaking directly to this phenomenon, Baker (2000) states,

It is often the case that the strengths of a person's two languages tend to vary across time. As there is more or less exposure to one language, as different people such as brothers and sisters enter the family situation, as schooling starts and peer group relationships grow, so does the language dominance and preference of children for one of their two languages (p. 75).

Since Nick is involved in relationships with both bilingual and monolingual<sup>15</sup> boys and girls from his bilingual school and from his community, it is perfectly normal that he chooses English. It is the language he will most dominantly hear in the United States. This fact alone encourages him to use Spanish more among family and friends, as he does with Andre and Isabella, and only English in public places among monolinguals. I recall how I did this very thing myself, using only English at school like our mother told

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<sup>15</sup> Monolingual is a term used for one who knows and/or uses only one language (Baker, 2000, p. 209).

us, but I used Spanish at home and with relatives we visited regularly. It naturally made me curious to learn more about Nick.

During one particular evening, I witness the combination of Nick's Mestizo culture and language identity. Talking in the kitchen with Luis, Andre and Nick walk by our table. Luis asks them to sing me a comical song about mothers from Honduras they sang almost every morning. As Luis begins to lead them in song, Andre brightens up and immediately joins in with his dad. Nick, on the other hand, stood by watching. I notice he does not look comfortable and appears as if he forgot the words in Spanish or how to sing. After another moment, he finally joins in but seems nonplused over the whole ordeal. Here Nick negotiates his Mestizo identity between what he wants to remember and what he chooses to participate in concerning his old and new culture and language.

After thinking these things over, I return the next day to find that Nick completed his anime creature. I have come to understand that anime art closely follows the lifecycle. That is, there are spiritual and philosophical elements within anime art and its story lines (Izawa, 2005). Anime elements deal specifically with "the fact that things end" (p. 2). Nick's artwork suggests this as he transforms his mental and physical representations into complete creatures on a sketch-pad. Accordingly, Izawa writes,

And finally, like all good stories and all real stories, manga and anime have a tendency to end. Heroes and heroines die, or get married, or disappear. The anime series are especially good about this. They tend to have one of three endings: the hero wins (the throne, the person of the opposite sex, whatever), the hero dies (usually after winning), the hero sort of wins (but at a great loss). Of course, the anime or manga is often carefully crafted to either jerk tears out of your eyes, or make you stare in wide-eyed absorption to the very, very last line of the credits. I can't describe it here, but think of the ending to any truly good movie, and you probably have it (pp. 2-3).



In this way, his art follows the lifecycle typical of anime. Nick's personal experiences can also be situated and understood through the anime lifecycle. He is in a developmental transition towards a childhood end. In other words, he is eleven years old, on the brink of a wonderful yet difficult journey: adolescence. He is no longer a child that is coddled by his mother or father. Neither is he old enough to live alone, to tend to his own needs, as an adult. As Farrell (2004) stresses, "What we do know with certainty about children is that they need adult care for a very long period of time—longer than the young of any other species—if they are to survive to adulthood and develop with full physical, social, cognitive, and emotional capabilities" (p. 181). Thus, Nick is caught in the middle, more or less dead to his childhood but reborn into adolescence. He is now striving towards adulthood.

Nick's adolescence is exemplified in his protective-layered life. He navigates between two worlds, not only as an adolescent but as a Mestizo. As an adolescent, he goes between worlds of sexuality and gender-roles. His family will be his largest influence to this journey. To this Adams and Coltrane (2004) state:

All societies thus socialize children to internalize the shared rules and norms that drive collective behavior,...Part of this process involves gender socialization; that is, learning society's gender rules and regulations (typically dichotomized as either masculine or feminine) and becoming adept at behaving in accordance with the socially accepted gender patterns associated with our sex (male or female). Gender, that is to say, is not the same thing as sex, which generally groups people into categories based on their biological given reproductive equipment. Gender on the other hand is a social construction,...The family is typically considered the main institution for both production and reproduction of polarized gender values...It is also in the family that children get their first look at what gender means (p. 190).

Similarly, he navigates between two worlds of Mestizo race, culture, and class. This is previously demonstrated in his mixed ethnicity and language usage. In these ways, Nick is very guarded with outsiders and only presents certain layers he wishes to expose from his life. I see this again when I question him about his experiences coming to the U.S. two years ago. He says,

I remember pain in my ears. I cried for five minutes. I then chewed gum.

“How do you like the U.S. now that you are here, and what do you miss about Honduras?” I ask.

Um, okay. What else could I say? Pretty well... good because I've visited a lot of people and I know them for the first time and cities and stuff. I would like to go to a lot of places. From here, I could travel to Canada. I've always wanted to go. I don't know why. I miss the [Honduran] mountains, the poisonous snakes, and the dangerous cougars and jaguars.

How his answer changes and how he becomes more open as he dialogues is indicative of how he slowly peels back layers of his adolescence and Mestizo identity.

Another layer to Nick's guarded identity can be seen in his interest for anime. He is like an “Otaku,” or an affluent college student, with complete cultural awareness and affiliation to anime (Ito, 2006, pp. 53-54), aligning himself with anime media, social groups, activities, genre, and style; yet he belongs to none of these. He is not affluent, not a college student, nor is he Japanese. He simply likes anime but has not officially declared interest through travel to Japan or anime conventions. In this same way, his ethnic and social groups can be understood. He attends a bilingual school in town, as he did in Hondurans. Now his school is in the dominant language country of English rather

than Spanish. He tells me how he feels attending a bilingual school in the U.S. versus a general school. He says,

Here I feel like I'm not at school. We used uniforms at school [in Honduras], but there are no uniforms here. I feel naked. In class, we have to speak Spanish in Spanish classes. When we go to the other class, we have to speak English, half and half.<sup>16</sup> Some of the groups have a different language, new words. I didn't know some Mexican words or English words, like "cancer." I learned some new words, too. There [Honduras] we didn't use "vos" for teachers, only friends. Here we use "tú" for teachers and friends. There I used "vos" for Andre but dad was "usted."

I ask Nick how his schooling experiences may have influenced his identity, and how the way he sees himself may have influenced his schooling performance. Overall he feels his experiences and identity help his schooling and that his schooling helps his identity. He admits he learns more about America in America, especially when he visits places he read about in Honduras. We discuss this topic for a little longer, and I also learn about the influence of his friends on this matter. He shares,

When I came here, I didn't know where I was. My friends needed to help me. Now I know my way. It [my identity] helped me understand English and Spanish, how they [Mexicans] speak.

"How has your schooling background from Honduras helped your identity or the way you see yourself here?" I ask.

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<sup>16</sup> Half and Half: Nick is referring to the 50-50 model Marshalltown uses in their Dual Language programs. Half of the day, children are taught in English, and the other half, they are taught in Spanish. Some schools, like the middle school, use a 4 week-block, where children are taught in English for 4 weeks in Language Arts, and later switch to Spanish for 4 more continuous weeks (Baker, 2000; Walker, 2004).

[It's] easier because I hang out with people that talk both languages. This helps my pronunciation. When we have Spanish quizzes, and my teacher is Mexican, I need to use Mexican words,<sup>17</sup> too. So hanging out with Mexicans makes me better.

### Andre

I arrived during the mummification process for ensuring immortality in the afterlife. The sarcophagus was ceremonially buried with appropriate linens and goods, and the body was previously prepared according to strict Egyptian standards. It was only a matter of time before I would witness the resurrection. As I waited in eager anticipation, the sheets, scarves, and blankets suddenly moved to reveal Andre, reanimated into this life. A few seconds later, this new soul occupied the body of a young boy, age 9, who danced around with his "gansta" hat turned sideways.

His features resemble that of his mom and dad. In this way, as well as his personality, language, and actions, Andre is mixed. Being French-Canadian by Luis and Honduran by his mom, Andre appears to be a typical Mestizo-Latino: a mixture of racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. After dialoguing very briefly with how he sees himself, Andre admits,

My dad says I'm half Honduran, half American. My brother says the same. My sister, she never talks about that.

I ask him why his dad and brother say he is half and half. He responds, "Because my dad is from here [U.S.] and mom's from there [Honduras]." I then peel back another layer by asking him what he thinks he is. He tells me,

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<sup>17</sup> Mexican words refers to the local dialects that differ among indigenous Central and South American Latinos. There are different words for similar topics or items among Latinos based upon their local community and language usage and diversification.

The same, but a little more Honduran because I was born in Honduras and I grew up in Honduras. Yeah, I feel more Honduran. At home I feel [I am] both. We do things that are American, like eat chips while you are on the couch seeing TV. At school, more American [than Honduran] because we are in America. In Honduras, they gave us more everyday homework. And here, one day a year... I'm just kidding. We study more and we do more things in Honduras.

Andre then moves to the couch to play Rampage, one of his favorite games on his Game Boy. He looks forward to video game time, which is limited to 30 minutes every night. He also owns an assortment of games. Rampage is an older game, with a choice to play as one of three scientists who transform into monsters and go on a rampage after lab experiments go awry. They destroy buildings, planes, and people while eating residents who emerge from windows in buildings about to collapse. They must avoid lakes, firing helicopters, grabbing electricity, and eating poisons set out by radical residents. Andre explains all this to me while I sit next to him and watch him navigate one screen after another. Luis announces in the background that the end of his and Nick's game time is quickly approaching. Nick gets up and leaves for the kitchen. Andre keeps playing.

Besides electronic games, Andre engages his brother very often in atypical games. I eventually come to recognize these as inventive games, which many American boys his age are not apt to create due to the sheer energy and imagination required. I did not recognize this at first because inventive play among children has diminished over the last 30 years. The rise of technology and the video gaming world has easily removed much of this play from the minds of boys, to replace it with the beeps and clicks of virtual reality. As Almon (2005) states:

The demise of play will certainly have serious consequences for children and for the future of childhood itself. Children no longer have the freedom to explore woods and fields and find their own special places. Informal neighborhood ball

games are a thing of the past, as children are herded into athletic leagues at increasingly younger ages. Add to this mixture the hours spent sitting still in front of screens—television, video game, and computer—absorbing other people's stories and imaginations, and the result is a steady decline in children's play (pp. 1-2).

Almon also warns that "imitation" and "the art of invention" has suffered because computer abstractions, void of facial expressions and feelings, render children tense and untrusting. These are road blocks to the "raw materials and physical gestures necessary to inspire focused, creative play" (p. 32). Andre, however, has clung to this type of play better than most boys, if for no other reason except that he was encouraged toward inventive play while living in Honduras. He also plays Spanish games, that is, games specific of Honduran culture. One particular game involves crawling around on the floor like an animal, complete with sound and action, only to metamorphose into Careta. This is a Honduran game where a person behind picks up the legs of another in front and both walk together. Both he and Nick are playing these on the floor after video time concludes.

On the way to dinner, which I have been graciously invited to, I ask Andre what it was like coming to the U.S. two years ago. He replies, "It hurt.....my ears on the airplane. But it was really cool looking out the window. I saw little roads and squares. The window was cold. I was excited, too, because I was going to meet someone here: my grandma, my uncles, Ivan and Diego, my aunt, Evelyn, a lot of people." My attention is quickly stolen by the fact that Andre code switches, just like the rest of the family, and struggles with certain verb conjugations. In mid sentence, all of them can switch from English to Spanish or from Spanish to English. For example, when speaking to his dad,

he will say, “¿Dad remember esos cosas de Honduras?” (¿Papí recuerda those things from Honduras?). These are normal occurrences of second language acquisition, actually indicative of skill transference from one language to another (Collier, 1995; Garcia & Ortiz, 1994; Roseberry-McKibbin, Brice, & O'Hanlon, 2005).

Indeed, the transference also means a higher level of learning is taking place for Andre; he is able to transcend language itself and travel between both vehicles of communication (Baker, 2001). It is possible Andre is neither aware nor attempting to code switch, that his switching is involuntary; if so, this shows he is still navigating his way in English while maintaining his Spanish. I notice this takes place with Luis; whereas with Nick he uses either Spanish or English exclusively. Baker (2000) also speaks to this phenomenon: “It is not uncommon that older children will use both languages with the same person...children are amazingly adroit at knowing when to switch languages” (p. 48).

His ability to code switch may be one reason he attends the bilingual school in Marshalltown. I ask how this characterizes his Mestizo identity. That is, I want to know how the school influences his identity and how his identity may influence his schooling. He mentions certain factors that influence his identity beyond the racial or cultural designation, such as moving, friends, and personal feelings about the climate. He really misses friends, Sonia (Luis's girlfriend from Honduras), and his bigger house and school. As he stares off into the room, he enters into a brief discussion with me over his identity and schooling experiences. I learn that being Honduran has both helped and hurt Andre's identity and schooling.

Even though he is Latino, many Mexican friends are fascinated with Andre because he is from another country. They have never seen a Honduran before or his drawings. Yet his friends also make fun of him because he is different and not Mexican, like they are. Of this situation he remarks, "I am better at my grades because I am a little smarter because of the school, because they [Honduran teachers] teach me." This self recognition will in turn have an influence on Andre's decisions and navigation within the school environment. Mead (1943) argues this point and believes the concept of self is developed through "environmental transactions" rather than through biological variables. It is social-psychological (as reported in Purkey, 1970, p. 5).

Thus, schools create socio-cultural and socio-psychological structures, thereby creating the identities children believe they have of themselves. Some of these identities are power-elite created, oppressive and hegemonous (Apple, 1990). Others may be less oppressive and controlling. As Purkey (1970) asserts:

Traditionally the child is expected to adjust to the school, rather than the school adjust to the child. To ensure this process, the school is prepared to dispense rewards and punishments, successes and failures, on a massive scale (p. 40).

In Andre's case, he may reject his rewards to fit in with friends, pretending he is not as smart as they all believe and thus hurting his performance. But he may instead accept the successes and navigate between social situations well enough to maintain rich friendships and his intellect.

When my attention returns to the present, I realize Andre is gone. He no longer stands by me or in the kitchen. I assume he left for the back rooms. Luis quickly starts calling out his name, "Andre? Andre.....Andreee.....ANDRE! Where are you?" He



walks out of the kitchen into the living room, calling out once more. Andre situates himself comfortably behind the couch on the floor, out of sight and away from everyone else. He has in hand his Game Boy and wants to get a few extra minutes of play time while everyone is talking in the kitchen. No one is aware he quietly left a few minutes ago. Finally, he hears his dad and responds, "Here I am! I was hiding here." Luis says, "I was calling you. Dinner's ready." Luis overlooks the fact play time is now over the 30 minute time limit.

Saturday mornings are routine for *la familia*, but for me it means new adventures and learning. I witness this in Andre's grooming. Luis is guiding him through the socio-cultural rituals of self preservation in bathing and cleaning. This activity in Honduras is usually left to extended family or local villagers while urban mothers either work within middle class homes as live-in housekeepers, or rural mothers work day-to-day by selling goods out of their homes or by traveling in fields a month at a time to provide for field workers. Luis, transcending barriers of culture and class, carries out this "transnational motherhood" (Sotelo & Avila, 2004) for Andre. This is especially the case as Andre is the youngest.

He shows Andre how to bath and assists in the ritual; he demonstrates the procedures for clipping his nails, and he provides limited guidance with clothing selection. The development of these practices we take for granted in the U.S. simply because we choose not to be cognizant of them, or we assume "our women" will take care of these things; and if not them, then someone else. In Honduras, the structure is

somewhat different. These transnational women provide for their families even in transcontinental ways, with whatever means they can (Sotelo & Avila, 2004).

Andre accepts this shift, and so does the rest of the family. Of course, I instantly think of my own experiences with this detail: my mother willing to come to the U.S. from Colombia to raise her niece; my grandmother brought from Colombia to raise her grandchildren while my aunt and uncle practiced medicine; and a collection of others arriving to replace my grandmother after her death. The cycle continues today for Luis and his family—as it once did for mine.

Our last day together went by quickly. I arrive early. No one seems to be awake. Even the street out front was vacant; cars are not coming or going. I start to think that I will not get in this morning until I see Andre hobble out of the back hallway bathroom. He lets me in the house. I feel bad that he had to remove himself just to answer the door. I say good morning, but then he runs off again. I quietly make my way to the couch confused. I wonder where he went. Ah, he went to the bathroom. I sit waiting again. I know Andre will soon emerge, not as a sarcophagus, but this time as a boy who has been occupying the bathroom for a rather lengthy amount of time. I learn that Luis left to buy breakfast for the family. Nick finally has access to the bathroom because Andre's sojourn there is over. I am anxious to begin the research this morning. I want to ask Andre some more questions. They pertain to his identity and possible influencing social, economic, and personal experiences.

I finally get to ask Andre how his experiences with groups of friends may have changed him or made him into who he is today. He does not understand the question. He

is confused, and says so. I quickly realize my question may have been too abstract, lacking context; so I reword it for him. I ask, “You spent time with friends or groups of friends, here and in Honduras. Did that change you, or change how you think about yourself? He says,

I’ve experienced a lot of things. I’ve done a lot of things in Honduras. I lived in Honduras a long time. My friends here are friendly, sometimes, and when they’re not going somewhere, they lend me something to use when I am coming.

I ask him, “What about moving, Andre? What experience did you have with moving here or in Honduras that made you who you are or changed how you think today?” His answer revealed no fresh information that he had not already shared in other parts of our discussions, but this time—for some reason—I take notice of something. Andre’s answers are rather ideological. That is, he has a tendency to be very optimistic with his responses. He is a happy boy in general, but his responses appear on the happy side often. I especially see this in his response to my question about his identity and the influence of his personal experiences. He states,

It’s kind of the same. I have friends here; I have family in Honduras. I have a good school here; I have a good school there. But there are some new things: there is snow here [U.S.], but there are mountains there. It never snowed there. It’s never that hot here.

“Is it easier being a Honduran or an American here?” I ask.

It’s better being American because we are in America.

“Can you feel the same in both places?” I ask. Andre simply nods yes.

Andre’s overly optimistic responses can be situated within the framework of what Ogbu (1991) stated for “Immigrant Minorities” (see Chapter 2: Review of the Literature, pp. 10-11). He sees himself not as Involuntary Minorities do, as “either, or,” but he sees

himself as “also, and.” In other words, his family came to the U.S. from Honduras of their own volition, for a better life. Though Andre experiences some taunting at school for being a Honduran, he recognizes that this sting of discrimination is “temporary,” as part of coming to America (p. 41). Thus, Andre responds in his optimistic ways because he can call both the U.S. and Honduras home. He can return anytime to Honduras, or he can stay here. Either way, he will likely adapt quite well because of how he sees the changes.

### Pain and Privilege: The Interpretation of Four Mestizo Identities

Two unpredicted discourses naturally emerge during the research on la familia. They emerge through what Creswell (1998) calls “ethnographic analysis,” or where I highlight specific responses from interviews and eventually witness “patterned regularities in the data” (p. 152). I use these patterned responses and construct comparisons between each family member, and the family as a cultural group, with those in historic groups (p. 152). The two discourses are pain and privilege. I use each to interpret the overall journey each family member and the whole family itself experiences. But first, descriptions of the discourses help frame the responses the family gave within the issues and available research on Mestizo identities.

#### Pain

Pain is a notion which is very difficult to define. Like wise, pain experienced as a Mestizo is hard to delineate. Each person’s individual pain and threshold experience, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual, is very different from another’s. Thus, the way in which I use pain refers to the discomfort one experiences on any level as a result of an

identity journey. In this way, the discourse of pain in a Mestizo's life may be better understood in comparison to the historical effects of scientific determinism (Lewontin, 1993) on society.

Scientific determinism is the effort by science to objectively institutionalize itself within society. That is, science as an ideological and technical field of knowledge wants to bring certitude to the "masses," to explain and predict life (Lewontin, 1993, p. 3). However, Lewontin points out that this effort is not entirely altruistic. In fact, the social reproduction of knowledge by science is largely fueled by the wealthy and power elites (p. 3). They attempt to decide what the masses should know. Because these elite individuals and scientists are part of society, going through and experiencing "human productivity," their views are embodied and inseparable from the struggles of society itself (p. 3).

The subtle or hidden assumptions and predispositions of the elite, and hence science, are then embedded into the explanations and uses of scientific theories and methodologies (p. 10). Those reinforce and reproduce certain ideologies within society. Thus, science functions as a "buffer zone" between rebellious people, who fight savage inequalities of science, and those who do not know the difference. Two such institutional buffers are religion and technology. These institutions are part of the social fray despite the fact they claim otherwise. Their weapons are ideological and not brute force or armory. Like wise, science tries to promulgate its views and itself about the world to the masses, replacing religion and technology, and now is seen as the "chief legitimizing force in modern society" (p. 8).

This socio-biology can be seen in how scientists construct the best stories to explain social phenomena. For example, modern medicine attempts to claim for itself recognition of the eradication of certain diseases, such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, and measles, and the increase in life-expectancy (pp. 42, 43, 100). But science has not finally discovered reality or a “true” model of existence, just a good story on which to enjoy the benefits of determinism and monetary reward. Obviously, enough people may have bought into the story, too. Ontological guilt and risk are the caveats by which the story is perpetuated and forced upon the masses, especially the impoverished and uneducated.

Thus, science is a social institution, “reflecting and reinforcing the dominant values and views of society at each historical epoch” (p. 9). Moreover, “science is more than an institution devoted to the manipulation of the physical world. It also has a function in the formation of consciousness about the political and social world” (p. 103). Once a scientific theory is expanded, it is not merely a dichotomy between primacy of thought and action. It should lead to the betterment of people, of the common good. Unfortunately, this betterment is not enjoyed by Mestizos but instead has the opposite effect: pain.

Harding (1993) and Gould (1981) both assert that science, as a social institution, constructs a “racial economy of science” and “eurocentrism.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, Harding argues science itself constructs the idea that race is “scientific.” She states:

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<sup>18</sup> Eurocentrism refers to the idea that “western sciences and their technologies are the most important measures of human progress... earlier and often equal, or in some cases, superior to those of at least the early modern period [of progressive science] in Europe” (Harding, 1993, pp. 7-8).

The histories of scientific constructions of race are especially revealing. For one thing, what now clearly appears as racist research often was conducted by the most distinguished scientists of the day. Moreover, the scientists were not all political regressives; some were in other respects among the most progressive thinkers of their day on race issues. Clearly, racist and Eurocentric beliefs and practices cannot be attributed solely to ‘crackpots,’ to intentional racism, or to prejudices—bad attitudes and false beliefs—as the dominant liberal social theory would have it (p. 9).

....First, it is important to keep in mind that the concept of race is constructed in at least three forms—individual, structural, and symbolic. It appears as a characteristic of individuals, of course. But it also appears as a characteristic of the structure of societies—some are more organized by racial hierarchies than are others. Thus South Africa, Nazi Germany, and the American South during and after slavery, with their elaborate structures of racial classification and restrictions on which race can do activities, simply *have* more race than do other less rigidly and comprehensively racially stratified societies. Moreover, race also appears as a symbolic system in which “black,” “brown,” “yellow,” “red,” and “dark” signify evil, ignorance, danger, and pollution and “white” and “light” signify good, knowledge, safety, and purity (pp. 11-12).

Similarly, Gould (1981) shows how eurocentrism in science focuses solely on heredity. Heredity exclusively uses and is responsible for the concept of an inferior race (p. 20). This inferiority appears as the three forms mentioned by Harding: individual, structural, and symbolic. This inferiority of all other races but the White race was once circulated by evidence created through craniometry and polygeny from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz.<sup>19</sup> Later, Alfred Binet, interested in the Craniometry and polygeny work, decided to create a scale on which racial intelligence could be measured. The scale became today’s modern Intelligence Quotient, or IQ (Gould, 1981, p. 151).

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz were largely responsible for quantitative data on craniometry and polygeny, which eventually led to Intelligence Quotient Testing (or IQ Testing). Morton supplied the research on skull measurement, whereas Agassiz supplied the theory of ranking individuals by species and evolution (Gould, 1981, p. 31).

Binet's research on IQ was later used by H. H. Goddard who developed an entity for intelligence that could rank and define an idiot or imbecile. An "idiot" was one without full speech abilities, with a mental capacity below 3 years of age, and an "imbecile" was one who could not master written language, mentally at age 3 to 7 (Gould, 1981, p. 158). These were then added to the one descriptor of greatest threat: those who could function but were "feeble-minded," or had mental capacities of 8 to 12 years of age. They were finally categorized as the "high-grade defectives" of society that were given the label "morons" (p. 159).

Eventually, Goddard's research was used by eugenicists to find any and all inferiors, or anyone else they did not like, for a forced sterilization. It was especially used on Mestizos as half-breeds were considered sinful (Gould, 1981, p. 48), and that all efforts from pure people should focus on stopping the "amalgamation" (p. 48). Goddard perpetuated the following items, finding inferiors for his new IQ testing by:

1. Narrowing down mental deficiency to a single gene, supposedly traced easily in the feeble-minded (Gould, 1981, p. 163) by means of logic and that "variance equals difference";
2. Recommending colonization and sterilization of the feeble-minded to control the population of desirables (p. 164);
3. Developing simplistic immigration policies for the control of future feeble-mindedness: "Don't allow native morons to breed and keep the foreign ones out" (pp. 164-65).
4. Devising field work where people would travel to New York and hand pick the feeble-minded simply by sight (p. 165) and administer the Binet scale, in English, of course. The idea was that the average immigrant was below normal;
5. Publishing a pedigree report of many "worthless souls" who should not have been born (p. 168); and



6. Touching-up certain photos of certain families to justify his claim of feeble-mindedness (p. 171).

Thus, the ties between scientific determinism—through racial inferiority—and the discourse of pain for identity are apparent. It is this scientific determinism and racial construction that leads to an inferior race, class, and people for another's gain and dominance (Gould, 1981, p. 21). Race, then, is historically situated within science and science within race, both acting upon the masses, particularly Mestizos, bringing pain in identity.

### Privilege

In order to better situate the discourse of privilege into the framework of Mestizo identity, it may be best to know what privilege is not, or at least what privilege may seem to be for those “on the other side” of the racial issues (Rothenberg, 2005, p. 1). That is, it may be beneficial to know the limitations of the term and to know how White people perceive privilege. I choose white people, or those who see themselves as white since—as pointed out earlier—white is historically used as the benchmark for how other races and cultures have been judged (p. 3; see also Chapter 2: Review of the Literature). It is the gold standard, so to speak. Thus, I also discuss how a Mestizo might feel about “Whiteness”<sup>20</sup> for a deeper understanding of privilege.

Privilege, particularly white privilege, is not racism. However, “white privilege is on the other side of racism...by choosing to look at white privilege, we gain an understanding of who benefits from racism and how they do so” (Rothenberg, 2005, p.

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<sup>20</sup> Whiteness “refers to a historical systematic structural race-based superiority” (Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 2005, p. 30).

1). Thus, as I speak to privilege, I am not referring directly to racism but there are certain undertones and obvious connections to racism itself. As Jensen (2005) cites, "In a white supremacist culture, all white people have privilege, whether or not they are overtly racist themselves" (p. 115).

Also, privilege is not visible or disclosed. The goals of taking apart racism and undue privilege would then require a disclosure or visibility that privilege usually does not give. It is, instead, invisible and subtle, many times escaping the very awareness and acknowledgement of those enjoying it. As Rothenberg (2005) states, "Like Whiteness, white privilege has often been invisible to those who benefit from it most" (p. 3).

Furthermore, privilege is not sporadic or exclusive. According to Wildman and Davis (2005), "Privilege is systemic, not an occasional occurrence. Privilege is invisible only until looked for, but silence in the face of privilege sustains its invisibility" (p. 95). In this way, privilege is institutionalized. Also, privilege is not exclusive. As Johnson (2005) claims, "We don't have to be special or even feel special in order to have access to privilege, because privilege doesn't derive from who we are or what we've done. It is a social arrangement that depends on which categories we happen to be sorted into by other people and how they treat us as a result" (p. 104). Thus, privilege is felt or experienced by all, especially those who are white because "all whites are racist in the use of this term [the perpetuation of whiteness], because we benefit from a systemic white privilege" (Wildman & Davis, 2005, p. 101).

What is privilege, then, and how is it understood in the eyes of those who are Mestizo? Wildman and Davis (2005) define privilege as: (1) a "normalization" of the

“characteristics of a privileged group” usually benefiting those in the group; and (2) those able to be silent, or able to “opt out of struggles of oppression” (pp. 98-100). In this sense, privilege is created by language and affiliation. For example, when we talk about film actors, we tend to refer to them by symbolic language, such as the colonial woman and her black nanny, thereby creating a system of rules and words by which we think and speak and get others to think and speak, too. We then tend to identify with the categories of these people. With the woman, the privilege of being in control, having money for a nanny, or being in charge of a nanny, without having skin color as a descriptor is one category. With the nanny, we face a reminder of the historical slave experience, a reminder of where oppressed people have been, and where we may currently be socially.

A Mestizo cognizant of his lower position within the privilege framework may see privilege as something that escapes him. He may not know why access has been denied, but is aware that the poor treatment is due to the privilege or access someone else experiences. He recognizes he is not enjoying the benefits by being someone else, or belonging to some other group, regardless of what the group may be. “For every social category that is privileged, one or more other categories are oppressed in relation to it” (Johnson, 2005, p. 106). Thus, Mestizos may witness privilege as the result of oppression.

Similarly, Mestizos see the “corollary aspects” of white privilege (McIntosh, 2005, p. 109). That is, they may not be able to interpret their struggle against scholarly literature, but they certainly recognize they do not have the same “invisible package of unearned assets” which grant them acceptance and access to things they do not have (p.

109). Some of these invisible aspects are: (1) living in a good neighborhood with pleasant neighbors; (2) not being followed or harassed at a shopping mall; (3) finding someone to cut their hair; (4) finding someone in their race when asking to speak to the “person in charge”; and (5) easily finding band-aids in their skin color, toys, dolls, greeting cards, and picture books “featuring people of [their] race” (pp. 110-111).

Thus, in this interpretation I use privilege as a cultural capital (Apple, 1990; Lipsitz, 2005), or hidden discourse and asset. It is attached to being a Mestizo while belonging or not belonging to certain structural and symbolic socio-racial groups. This privilege is experienced both collectively and individually. Each person’s privilege differs from another’s, but those in *la familia* all experience similar attributes of privilege not afforded to the lower class or inferiors.

### Luis

That Luis is Mestizo or mixed is seen in his comments and in the details given in his ethnographical sketch. He makes most of these points himself, and it is also apparent in the analysis of his identity against the research literature. What follows here, then, is a discussion and interpretation of Luis’ variable identity against the discourses of pain and privilege as they relate specifically to being a Mestizo.

Pain can clearly be seen in Luis’ struggle to situate himself in a culture or race.

He admitted this and said,

*I feel odd* [italics added]. My race is French-Canadian, but culturally I’m Honduran. I eat Spanish foods, have Spanish children, and the fact that I speak Spanish fluently doesn’t help me find solace in one identity versus another. While most Iowans don’t recognize me as White, they also don’t see me as Mexican, either. *They don’t know where to situate me* [italics added].

*I don't feel a sense of nationhood* [italics added]. I feel I'm Iowan but very different from Iowans. When I was in Honduras, my gringo-hood became important. I had to be gringo. Because of lousy U.S. foreign policy, I became the apologist for my race, my people. It became harder and harder [in Honduras]. Even here I feel out of place. *I don't fit in anywhere...* [italics added]. In Honduras, I was the token gringo; in the U.S., I'm the token Honduran. I'm like Graham Green's *Quite American*.

In this way, Luis goes back and forth between his French-Canadian racial identity, which he does not like because of his father, and his "inclination" towards the "Canadian-American-Honduran" identity. In order to have "another direction from enmity or disaffection," he thinks the Canadian-American-Honduran identity will suit him, but even in this he does not "feel comfortable." Still, he favors the Honduran identification but ultimately experiences the pain of being forced into a category into which he does not fully identify.

These identity movements are a result of two earlier events in his life, heavily influencing his feelings: leaving Iowa eighteen years ago to work in Honduras; and returning to Iowa last year to work in the states once again. These movements are also influenced by his feelings for his father. He originally left the U.S. to seek a new life for himself after college. He longed to escape the stifling home life he experienced under his father's care. He indicated this by stating:

*I always felt outside of my identity* [italics added]. One set of family friends spoke German. We had a different religion. We spoke French at home. He [father] really hyped-up our French heritage and forced French on us. We hated it! He used the French thing quite a bit. We spoke English with mom (who spoke French) when he was gone. She had a community feel to her heritage. She wasn't preoccupied with identity, whereas father became a Francophile to reinforce his Canadian-American while in the U.S. Maybe he hid because he didn't fit in anywhere he went.

Of course, Luis' schooling is also affected by his home life and forced French identity. Although he did not admit this at first, he eventually shares his brother was held back, that he perhaps does not experience this because he spoke English with his mother. He further states he met with a psychologist because of the struggles he was having at home and difficulties at school. He connects school to home experiences, and specifically his father, when he claimed,

I would always talk about horrible things with my dad and French. It wasn't his ethnicity but his Asperger's that was a problem for me. I became introverted. Grade school was fun, middle a pain, and in high school I was missing the basic skills in all but religion and music and art. My senior year, I went to France, but my dad was pissed because I didn't trace our ancestry like he wanted me to. *It was also painful at home because my dad retired and was always home* [italics added]. I stayed in my room and read classics from college classes from my brother. I learned a lot. I was successful at writing and used it to enter the university.

It is not until Luis leaves home for college that he finally escapes his father's regime. His experiences with French being forced upon him, his different ethnicity and background from the girls to whom he felt attracted, and his father's Asperger's push him into a covert resistance of what his French-Canadian background and language represent, of what Iowa represents to him. This is one of the main reasons he left for Honduras eighteen years ago. He was unhappy with his life in Iowa, unhappy with his father, and unsituated in his identity.

When Luis establishes himself in Honduras, even as a token gringo, he finds his identity suited him better than the one he had at home. He said,

Ethnicity interacts with school and family, and it's difficult to separate them out. I blame my dad and his ethnic qualities of forced French more than anything. When I went to France, I felt at home. I feel any bicultural environment feels more natural to me than a monolingual one.

Luis also feels the pain of being a single father. He attempts to transcend this pain by being the best father he can. This is seen in his “transnational motherhood,” or his being role as father-mother. Many men who singly raise their children do not make this biological transition easily and either remarry rather quickly because “the children need a mom,” or these men are unsuccessful at being the father their children need. Luis makes this transition, but the fact that he is both father and mother bring pain, despite his successes. The pain is there because it is—as with being a Mestizo—a middle ground. There is inferiority or liminal aspects to being both parents at the same time, unable to fully escape one role versus the other for the fear of how it may be viewed by the children.

Thus, Luis feels wedged between two different races, cultures, and social classes. This apparent middle ground gives Luis a racial inferiority, causing him to feel the same “sinful” aspects of “half-breeds,” “expatriates,” or other Mestizo Mexican-Indians of Goddard’s time period (Gould, 1981). Ever since his youth, he has fought the notion of being American. I began to see how he fought the American notion when he pushed on me: (1) his impressions of Isabella; (2) the authentic Honduran foods which they did not always eat, despite conveyed aspirations; and (3) certain Honduran songs while I visited. He forced these things on me because he still struggles with his disaffection for authority and with his French father. And even though he identifies as a Honduran, he is still stuck between that and his American identity.

This middle ground brings pain for several reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, a middle inferiority or Mestizo-hood is the social construction of the elite to control the

lower classes and mixed peoples of rebellion. The fact Americans and Hondurans do not know how to deal with Luis and his Mestizo-hood is evidence that eurocentrism and hereditarianism still play large roles in the racially constructed ideologies of these two nations.

Similarly, Luis is unable to position himself in either culture as a Mestizo. When he chooses to identify as American, he is treated as an outsider because of his partial cultural knowledge from living in Honduras for so long. Most Americans, fascinated by his multi-cultural life in Honduras, force him into a “token” Honduran identity. They are unwilling to accept him back in the native social clique because he is different. Like wise, most Hondurans do not fully accept him because of his whiteness and upbringing in the states. They are either scared to accept, or they are interested in him because of his Americanism. Therefore he represents the next best thing: “a token Gringo” who supplies cultural information as an outsider.

Thus, with either Americans or Hondurans, Luis feels pain because he is not able to fully identify with either group. His Mestizo-hood means he is “pushed and pulled by different segments of society” (Bruhl et al., n.d., p. 6). He is pushed away initially, just to be later pulled back into social standing to suit another’s gain and dominance (Gould, 1981, p. 21). Schools want his expertise and language. Teachers crave his cultural experience. Students are hungry for identification. Thus he is torn.

Privilege is also part of Luis’s mixed identification experiences. He experiences these privileges in overt and covert ways. For example, he said,

I always feel like I’m viewing a culture from outside. So, all those eighteen years [in Honduras] I did my best to assimilate, not hide in the U.S. cultural bubble.



There were a lot of gringos there, but I did my best to minimize this, to not live with other gringos. Now, I deeply miss Honduras. My roots were in Honduras. In Honduras, I was the Gringo in that niche, and now I feel the full force of that change. Spanish feels more right to me than English in certain contexts. I've almost been creolized. I've met this culture [Honduran] half way, and it became who I am.

That Luis feels he can be Honduran-American, or a cultural Honduran living in America, show he enjoys certain privileges. He feels he had a "niche" in Honduras and fit into society in a special way, able to use Spanish to navigate his way through the culture. According to Wildman and Davis (2005), language appears to be "linguistically neutral" but it is in fact a system of privilege and "contributes to the invisibility and regeneration of privilege" (p. 95). Luis' language overtly allows him to move in and out of the Honduran and American culture. With the U.S., he is a Spanish expert, possessing special knowledge and privilege because of his bilingual ability. But to the Honduran, he is the English native expert, able to articulate and extrapolate native linguistic nuances.

Also, his identification as a Mestizo, albeit limiting within America, is overtly powerful. He has two completely different cultures and class constructs to move between. In this sense, he has what Geertz (1979) calls a "dual identity," or a flexible identity. It is when one negotiates his or her world and is in the process of cultural interactions (as reported in Gregg, 1991, p. 41). Thus, Luis is able to change his identity based on his specific situations and based upon the environment and pressures, not always adhering to the higher ideologies to which he aspires. To Americans, he becomes the token Honduran to better fit in; to Hondurans, he becomes the token Gringo to be accepted.

Luis also has covert privileges attached to his identity. First, Luis acknowledged he worked in the university. Thus, he possesses certain societal privileges simply by the

contacts he has and the cultural knowledge he possesses by being in a more affluent circle. In fact, the university itself is a traditional system of white, upper class males who dominated much of the higher education arena until just recently (Brodkin, 2005).

Speaking to this social privilege, Johnson (2005) states, "Individuals are the ones who experience privilege or the lack of it, but individuals aren't what is actually privileged. Instead, privilege is defined in relation to a group or social category" (p. 103).

Lastly, Luis is male and Latino. Both of these give him covert privileges. As a male, he has power and privilege (Adams & Coltrane, 2004, pp. 190-191). Taught from an early age about gender differences, Luis has grown under the advantages of being a male. He is afforded more power and prestige from society simply because of his maleness and has since become part "to a more or lesser extent based on cross-cutting issues of race and class, [the] social institutions of inequality," (p. 196). As for being Latino, Luis speaks Spanish, eats Spanish foods, and has Spanish children. He also feels more Honduran than American. He has identified culturally as Latino yet is able to hold onto his French-Canadian "whiteness" (Foley, 2005, p. 55). This identification brings with it some privilege. Foley states,

Hispanic identity thus implies a kind of separateness but equal whiteness—whiteness with a twist of salsa, enough to make one ethnically favorable and culturally exotic without, however, compromising one's racial privilege as a white person (p. 55).

### Isabella

Isabella's identity is also interpreted against the discourses of pain and privilege as they relate specifically to being a Mestiza. In as much as Isabella is a female, her

gender has not kept her from experiencing power or privilege. At the same time, privilege has not protected her from the unnatural yet all too common pains associated with being a female or Mestiza. Thus, both pain and privilege are apparent in Isabella's life. I begin with privilege.

Isabella says she feels more Honduran than American. However, close attention to her comments reveal that she also negotiates her identity based on her environment, or "environmental transactions" (Mead, 1943, as reported in Purkey, 1970, p. 5). In this respect, she shifts around, adapting to the situation in which she finds herself in order to avoid rejection or pain (Clark, 1998). She admitted this and said,

Mixed, I think, because I practice everything. I do American, Mexican, and Honduran stuff.

Everything because we all originated from the same person in Africa or China. We are all immigrants. We are all the same. Mostly [I see myself as] Honduran. I also have my dad's blood, French-Canadian. From my mom's side, El Salvador or someone else. I think I'm half and half, but mostly Honduran because I was born there. [My] blood half and half because my mom's side was there and my dad's side from here. For my culture, Honduran but now more American. Sometimes we eat the same but [sometimes] Honduran. My dad sees me as both but my brothers see me more Honduran than American.

The presence of privilege is very clear in her identity. Even though negative in others, Isabella feels comfortable with identifying as "everything." To her brothers and to herself, she is Honduran. To her father she is both (Mestiza); and to outsiders, she is mixed or Mexican-Honduran. Isabella herself even acknowledges her mother's racial side and adopts it as her own.

These privileges also exist in Isabella's schooling experiences. Of her identity in schooling, she says, "It helped me become more Honduran because we had an anthem [of

Honduras], a test, to study its history. I didn't know all of it, but I learned it." She also feels her identity positively influences her schooling performance to the point where her experiences are "easier" and "normal." Isabella enjoys the hidden benefits of participation in the American culture. She mentions she attends school dances, basketball games, and playing soccer. The experiences help her feel more American.

This idea is explained by Purkey (1970) who found that people will bring their performance into accordance with their self concepts. They will reject other evidence other wise, even highly convincing. As he states, "People are constantly trying to behave in a manner which is consistent with the way they view themselves" (p. 12). Thus, Isabella's identity fulfills the desires she has of herself based on the experiences she already had in Honduras. Her self concept becomes her behavior (p. 13), and she does just as well in school with her new "everything" identity because she sees herself successful.

I also see privilege in Isabella's identity and varied communication forms. Just as she is a "multi-faceted N-Gener" (Davies, 2006), "hungry for expression, discovery and [her] own self-development" (Buckingham, 2006), she is also eager to become the new Honduran-American. Besides feeling mixed racial, culturally, and socially, Isabella filters her identity through "multiple layers" (Davies, 2006, p. 211). This means she is becoming American while Honduran, "which is also to say, becoming White" (Foley, 2005, p. 61).

Thus, the same "Hispanic as whiteness [as white privilege]" aspect of Luis is present in Isabella (Foley, 2005, p. 55). Foley adds, "[Spanish] immigrants may begin as

racial outsiders and 'illegal aliens,' but their U.S.-born offspring are sometimes able to forge identities as ethnically White Hispanics" (p. 56). Even though Luis is the reinstated outsider or expatriate, Isabella is able to create this hybridism.

Isabella's ability to identify as "everything" comes as a cost. There are sacrifices and pains associated with identifying the way she does. The first of these pains is her acceptance by others as an outsider. Forbes (2005) argues, "A mestizo without a nationality or ethnic group to belong to is indeed an outcast" (p. 3). He discusses how most mixed or indigenous races situate themselves to some "group, an ethnic affiliation, or a community" (p. 3). That Isabella is a digital child certainly gives her an affiliation so that she is not entirely the "outcast" of which Forbes speaks. But her identity is indeed negotiated so that she does not find herself vulnerable to the constructions of "outcast" by others.

Of the U.S., Isabella says, "I don't like it very much. It's boring. In Honduras, I always played with my neighbors outside. Not here. We were more friendly with the neighbors there. I miss the beach, the food, the culture in general." She also recalls a woman who sold goods from her home in addition to music, dances, and holidays. These statements resemble one who is struggling with belonging to a culture in which she does not feel comfortable. This is the shiftlessness present in her identity because she is not yet situated.

When I asked Isabella about the influence of her schooling on her identity and equally her identity on her schooling, she told me she was discriminated against because of her skin color. She said, "At school I feel Mexican because people who don't know me

think I'm Mexican because I'm brown. Those I tell know I'm Honduran but others think I'm Mexican or something."

Americans at school automatically categorize Isabella as Mexican simply because of her dark skin. Isabella did not like this and added, "I am different because I speak different." Sadly, treatment based solely on skin color still largely exists, influencing identity constructions (Crawford, 1979, p. 8). This treatment and racial profiling based merely on skin-color is explained by Foley (2005):

Today, many Hispanics enjoy the wages of whiteness as a result of a complex matrix of phenotype, class position, culture, and citizenship status, as well as the willingness of many Anglos to make room for yet another group of off-white Hispanics. Still, many persons of Mexican decent, especially recent immigrants are excluded from the domain of whiteness. A dark-skinned non-English-speaking Mexican immigrant doing lawn and garden work does not share the same class and ethnoracial status as acculturated, educated Hispanics (pp. 62-63).

While speaking to the clear influence of ethnicity on culture, and race on position, Dalton (2005) reminds us that incoming immigrants only experience lower status because of temporary situations, such as "their recent arrival, their lack of language or job skills, or even because of rank discrimination" (p. 17). Despite these, "*Race* and hierarchy are, however, indelibly wed" (p. 17). Thus, because Isabella speaks English and Spanish fluently, studied at a prestigious private bilingual school, and is the oldest child, her pain is more a result of her gender (being a woman in a man's world) and a result of her color rather than these other factors.

Addressing gender specifically, Brodtkin (2005) reminds us that women war vets were historically exempt from GI Bills, FHA, and VA mortgages. This assistance was to help war vets "to become professionals, technicians, salesmen, and managers in a

growing economy” (p. 51). While most white males from war benefited from these, women were contemptibly left out. Moreover, Shiva (1993) and O’Brien (1993) argue women have been systemically excluded and underrepresented in the sciences and all other major fields, despite their very large representation in the populace.

### Nick

Nick has gone through many changes for a boy his age. He went through a divorce, moved from one country to another, and changed from the Spanish to English language in his schooling and community life. Regardless, Nick has experienced many more acts of privilege than pain. In fact, the only significant pain he encounters is his Mestizo identity. Thus, after a very brief interpretation of this pain, Nick’s experiences with privilege are covered.

As most Mestizos, Nick sees himself as one person but from two separate cultures or classes. On one hand, he is an American; on the other hand, Nick identifies as Honduran (in that exact order). In this way, he is marginalized, or as Foley (2005) and Forbes (2005) put it: “Mestisaje.” These types of people have “several characteristics in common”:

1. They live in areas that were historically colonized by European imperialism;
2. They do not have the power or resources to determine their own destiny (either political or intellectual-psychological);
3. Their identities and lives are results of European imperialism and colonial policy; and
4. They are people with both European and non-European ancestry” (Forbes, 2005, p. 2).

Nick is marginalized and suffers for being a Mestizo. Besides being in a middle-ground because of his adolescence, Nick is also in a middle identity. "For every social category that is privileged, one or more other categories are oppressed in relation to it" (Johnson, 2005, p. 106). Thus, Nick witnesses pain in the identity he does not choose as a result of his other decision. In other words, Nick's Honduran identity will suffer as he navigates his American identity. Like wise, his American identity will suffer under his Honduran one. It is not an easy position to be in, wrought with pain and suffering.

As with Luis, Nick experiences privilege because of his language usage (Wildman & Davis, 2005), allowing him to move between his cultures and identities. He admitted this and said,

I am both. I am American and Honduran because of my parents, I guess. One is from here [United States] and the other is from there [Honduras]. I feel like I'm both because I'm from both countries and because Mestizo means the same. It's [my identity] cultural and racial: cultural because of what we did there. We played different games; we were more like doing stuff instead of watching TV. When we ate, it's different, too. The language you use is Spanish most of the time, but English right now. When I'm in one country that uses a language, I use that language. When I'm in another, I use that language. When I'm in Honduras, I speak Spanish. When I'm in America, I speak English.

Nick also used formal language in his bilingual schooling experiences in Hondurans. Likewise, his current experiences in the bilingual school in Marshalltown require him to use formal language. Because of this, his world "is also raced," making it hard for him to not record "mental notes as to race" (Wildman & Davis, 2005, p. 96). Thus, Nick "uses [his] language to categorize by race, particularly, if [he] is white, when that race is other than white" (p. 96). I saw this when he used an analogy of language to categorize his own race and identity, saying he did not feel more Honduran versus more



American by placement, unless it involved language. So Nick is both white and other than white simultaneously through “language juxtaposition” (p. 97).

One final area worth mentioning is Nick’s privilege with Mestisaje, or mixed racial marginalization. Even though painful, Nick experiences a privilege in identifying as a Mestizo. Harding (1993) writes:

The fact of the matter is that peoples in the world choose to identify themselves not as raceless economic men but as members of racially exploited and marginalized groups, or for a small but increasing number, of Eurocentric and racially overadvantaged groups...to mobilize resistance to Western racism” (p. 13).

This “resistance” movement by some to identify as marginalized in order to fight “Western racism” is also apparent in how Nick identifies. The privileges attached to his identity because of identification help him thwart the advances of the “raceless economic” movement. He shows this by saying,

My dad says I’m both, too, because he talks to me in Spanish, too. Most of the time it’s half and half. He talks to me in English, too. My brother says the same. My sister says I’m Honduran because she talks to me in Spanish most of the time. With my friends I feel both because most of my classmates are Mexican, so I feel Hispanic. Most of the school is half and half [half White, half Latino]. There are Americans, too, so I feel both. I speak English with most of them.

### Andre

The discourses of pain and privilege are especially interesting for Andre. He is the youngest, not quite an adolescent, protected in many ways by his innocence and youth from the harsh realities of being Mestizo. At the same time, there are some instances when Andre experiences pain and privilege.

Privilege is seen in Andre's use, or lack of, the English language. As Nick, language is a powerful predictor of privilege for Andre. However, unlike Nick, Andre deals with code switching. This is perfectly normal for a bilingual speaker (Brisk & Harrington, 2000, p. 6), especially a young one; but Baker (2000) warns that some parents "criticize" or point out "mistakes, revealing anxiety and concern" over the mixing of the languages, thus having negative effects on their children (pp. 63–64).

Baker (2000) also says some children who code switch are obviously prone to a "dislocation between two cultures" (p. 69). Andre experiences this pain subconsciously as he represents the blending of cultures and languages. He is the past to some in the family and the present to others. To Isabella, Andre represents the past or the protection and promotion to remain Honduran. He mainly uses Spanish with Isabella. To Luis, he is the present, the blending of the two cultures. In this way, he uses both English and Spanish with his dad. To Nick, Andre is the future, the transference to Americanism or whiteness and further privileges. In all those scenarios, Baker claims,

In younger in-migrants, there can be an aggressive reaction, having lost the identity of home and heritage, and finding it difficult to penetrate the thick walls to enter the new host culture. For some in-migrants, there may be a sense of rootlessness, confusion of identity, feeling neither one ethnic identity nor the other. Thus can lead to hopelessness, an ambiguity of cultural existence or feeling lost in a cultural wildness (p. 69).

Andre also uses inventive play quite well for his age. This, too, conjures up less than desirable images for Andre. He learns that he can not use inventive play with his family the same way he used it for school friends; leaving Honduras only complicates the levels of difference. Accordingly, Andre adopts "different identities (and role-playing behavior) in school with teachers, in the playground with friends, in the streets in the

evening and at weekends, in church or the mosque ... [learning] to play different roles, wear different costumes' and harmonize with a different set of players" (p. 71).

Andre also experiences privilege with his Mestizo identity and youthfulness. Returning to Baker (2000), Andre's experience with inventive play and code switching can be understood entirely differently. That Andre switches between cultures and languages is also an advantage. To this end, Baker states:

Overall, bilingualism is likely to be an advantage in social relationships. Children will be able to increase the variety of their friendships and make bridges with children from different language groups... Bilingualism helps dismantle social barriers, enables more fluent growth of friendships with children from two or more language communities, widening the child's social, cultural and educational horizons (p. 74).

Similarly, Andre experiences privilege through special treatment by his friends. They act differently with him because he is new and has new things to show them; they have not seen his art work before. Thus, immediately Andre feels the privileges afforded him. His self recognition has a positive effect on his school performance. He admitted this when he said, "I am better at my grades because I am a little smarter because of the school, because they [Honduran teachers] teach me."

This privilege translates into better achievement. Shaw, Edson, and Bell (1960) show self concepts are lower in underachievers as compared to higher self concepts in achievers (as reported in Purkey, 1970, p. 16). This is because those underachievers expect to do poorly whereas the others do not.

Thus, Hispanics or Mestizos choosing white identities may do better because they see themselves as white versus identifying Hispanics. Those who continue to identify as Hispanic may also perform poorly because they expect to do so (Purkey, 1970, p. 13).

### La Familia (The Family)

We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of opportunity to strive or even hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within (Gould, 1981, pp. 28-29).

La familia, as a unit of Mestizos, demonstrates the discourses of pain and privilege. They have done exceptionally well for the oppressions they deal with. The many benefits that counteract those oppressions offer them hope in the face of a difficult transition to a rather monolingual society.

One of the most basic privileges is clearly in their schooling. The children attended a local and private bilingual school in Honduras, as did Luis of his private Catholic school when was young. Equally, they attend a bilingual school in the states, with the exception of Isabella who does not because there are none existing at her level. Thus, the children experience privilege by being formally educated in English and Spanish. The advantages of growing up bilingual and biliterate include: communication, cultural, cognitive, character, curriculum, and cash aspects (Baker, 2001, p. 2). Ultimately, this bilingualism will “affect the rest of their lives” (p. 1).

Another privilege for la familia is the general increased acceptance of mestisaje (Burns, 1994, p. 224). Although “much still remains to be done” the overall treatments of these oppressed peoples and groups has “changed considerably” (p. 224). Examples of this change are seen from the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when in 1930 the U.S. Census Bureau finally added a “separate category for Mexicans” as a racial identity (Foley, 2005, p. 59). The Latino group, for the first time in history, became “racialized as a non-white group” (pp. 59-60). The adoption of a race or ethnicity for Hispanics by the

U.S. Census Bureau takes place today. Mixed people now represent a much larger portion of the nation than before, self-defining as “White,” as indicated by their marked participation in the latest census (see Chapter 2: Review of the Literature).

Thus, *la familia* can escape some of the injustices that surround them. As Wildman and Davis (2005) claim, “members of privileged groups can opt out of struggles against oppression if they choose” (p. 99). This choice is available to them because they are mixed white and Spanish people. They can hide in their white portion, free from the oppressions of those that cannot, or they can choose to hide it. In this way, they are safer than others who cannot travel back and forth as they do. According to Johnson (2005), this is possible because “like privilege, oppression results from the social relationship between privilege and oppressed categories, which makes it possible for individuals to vary in their personal experience of being oppressed” (p. 106).

However, there is a flip side to that privilege. It is oppression. In this, *la familia* experiences pain. Referring to this layered relationship between privilege and oppression, Johnson (2005) states:

Living in a particular society can make people feel miserable, but we can't call that misery “oppression” unless it arises from being on the losing end in a system of privilege. That can't happen in relation to society as a whole, because a society isn't something that can be the recipient of privilege. Only people can do this by belonging to privileged categories in relation to other categories that aren't (pp. 106-107).

Because *la familia* can identify as white, due to their *Mestisaje*, and Honduran, they are part of a privileged group. But those privileges extend only as far as other privileged groups allow. Thus, they are part of a losing system. As Johnson (2005) explained, *la familia* also is subject to pain.

One example of their pain is provided by Foley (2005), who said, "Those able to construct identities as Spaniards often regarded Mestizos, Indians, and Africans with racial contempt" (p. 58). This same contempt is seen by privileged white groups who held *la familia* back from progression. The family, although from a more affluent experience in Hondurans, is greeted by skin-color designations and racism, and treated poorly at times because they are not like other Mexicans or Whites. They are racially profiled and relegated to inferior positions because of their uniqueness.

Another pain in their identification is how the dominant U.S. cultures "still know little about how the family ideology shapes the consciousness and expectations of those growing up in the margins of the mainstream" (Pyke, 2004, p. 438). Not finding foods reflective of the Honduran culture, living in rather poor conditions because of the move, not finding solace in their neighbors or neighborhood, and because they recognized the climate and economic structure as very different from the are examples of that pain.

Thus, *la familia* experiences pain being Mestizo, stratified into separate social classes. These classes are a social stratification and racism by the privileged who seek to legitimize the savage social, institutional, and political relations in the country (Selden, 1999, p. 85). In this sense, they still fight the biological determinism and so-called sciences that limit one's culture, personality, and worth in self-identity.

## CHAPTER 5

## AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Epigram

Who am I? I recently had a conversation with my oldest sister regarding our Indian heritage. She sent the entire family an e-mail almost two years ago about our Indian heritage, right at the start of this study. Then she sent us copies of letters she received from very old family members down South just last winter. We finally spoke of it on the phone. Supposedly, we may not be the same tribal Indians we thought we were, a mere twelfth Indian, and the other twelfth Spaniard. Funny, last time I checked I still felt the same. That is, I feel Indian simply because I grew up being told I was Indian and therefore have a difficult time not seeing my self that way.

Even if someone told me, "Sorry. We found that you are in fact not an Indian at all, not one ounce of Indian blood," would that suddenly negate the feelings I have of being an Indian? What makes me an Indian, anyway? And what makes any of us think or act in racial, cultural, or social ways? Is it the way we feel or what we do, or both? Perhaps it is the way we feel, the labels we bear—arbitrary as they may seem at times—the meanings we assign to the feelings and labels, and the meanings others give our feelings and labels. In other words, the totality of identity.

Here are snap shots of the conversations between us over the years.

February 1, 2007:

Hey sibs,

Can you guys tell me what you know of our Indian background? For as long as I can remember, Dad said his Grandmother, with an Indian last name he can't pronounce, is 100% Indian from the Osage tribe. That her father, Dad's Great Grandfather (and his wife), also 100% Osage Indian, owned land and lived in Oklahoma. That he was being forced off his land (probably for the oil), so he sold it and moved the family to the Indian Reservation in Globe, Arizona. Sometime later she met a man named Hurd and had a child, Dad's father (our grandfather) born on the reservation. Then this man and dad's grandmother take their kid to Texas where other Hurd children are born. This has always been my understanding of our family history, which explains how an Osage ended up with Apache and Mescalero tribes, but not related to them. Today in our local paper there was an article about the "Code Talkers" during WW I and II using Native American language to communicate, so that the Germans and Japanese could never break it. Well, it started us on a huge discussion of his background and he told me that this grandfather on his mother's side had some Indian background, which was Osage. I'm totally confused,

and find it hard to believe! Dad's grandfather was a white guy, and his mom was white! I remember meeting him, and he was as white as our old neighbor!!!

Well, let me know if you ever heard him say something different. The last time we talked about this subject was when Dad came to visit me last September.

Were keeping things hopping around here. :-) Hope to here from you soon, love Hannah.

(H. Reynolds, personal communication, February 1, 2007).

March 14, 2008:

Dear Family,

Hope everyone is well; we are fine. It's been sunny yesterday and today - wahoo! We're enjoying it, and the chickens are laying more eggs!

I'm glad you all were able to get the letters from Dad's Uncle and Aunt. His letter is more readable because it's typed, but her letter is much harder to read, and doesn't always flow smoothly. But the information in the letters is great. She says her mother (Dad's Grandmother from the last e-mail) was born in Barcelona, Spain! That her family, (parents, a brother, and two sisters) moved to Mexico when Spain was populating the country, and then made their way north - which later became the U.S. She doesn't mention anything about Native Indian background, which I now think there may not be any. Even though I have been able to see the record of the 1910 Census, which lists Mr. Hurd, Grandmother Hurd, and dad's dad (born 1909), as living in Globe, Arizona, it does state Mr. Hurd's background as from England, and lists Grandmother's birthplace as Spain, and our grandfather's birth place as Arizona. Well, I'm trying to find anymore information that I can. If you have information, could you send it to me? Globe Arizona is the furthest point of the Indian Reservation (Apache) to the west, and it spreads to the east. Just because our Grandpa Hurd played there as a child doesn't mean he has Indian blood. I haven't been able to prove they lived on the reservation, just near it. I am also trying to follow Grandma's Indian background, Osage. It comes from her father, but after that I'm not sure who. Thankfully, Dad was given grandmother's book, A Texan from Tennessee, which shows Dad's first family, and grandmother's background, but so far I haven't found the Indian connection. I know one exists because Dad's first daughter was able to show some documented proof, and get financial assistance for the Nursing School from some Indian education fund. I can make photo copies of his Aunt's letter and mail them out, so you can actually read it. .

I'd better go; this is a novel already, my love to all, write back! Love, Hannah

(H. Reynolds, personal communication, March 14, 2008).



I suppose it is just as easy to say or believe one is not a racial or cultural subgroup they thought they were. This brings an almost immediate call to action for one to reconcile their identity, even if it means staying in the middle, if one so chooses to stay.

### Introduction

I now return to the purpose and task of this study: investigating my affective identity. Using reportable knowledge, by means of significant factors from the family's journey, I construct, then deconstruct, and finally reconstruct (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) my own identity experiences. This three-tiered process more fully informs me of my own identity. I do this through the method of poststructuralism, linking "language, subjectivity, social organization, and power." These connections allow me to construct meaning naturally and freely (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Thus, my autoethnographic context and episodes are positioned in a most unrestricted, most unreserved condition. But first, a very brief discussion of the poststructuralist method is warranted.

I realized the same guiding heuristic I used for researching the family was needed for my own journey. Thus, through the process of inquiry (Creswell, 1998), I linked the areas of: (1) language; (2) subjectivity; (3) social organization; and (4) power. Each component represents a part of the overall construction I made, with Language as the axis on which the others function. I visit each to emphasize my focus.

Foucault (1966/1970) and Derrida (1967/1974) are my guides for the use of language in my episodes (as reported in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, pp. 968-969). Foucault showed us that language is a "postrepresentation" to a "postinterpretative" experience. As he himself wrote, "language is not what it is because it has meaning," but

simply a transitory vehicle for the meaning we assign to it (p. 968). Similarly, Derrida posited “différance,” which refers to how meaning in language is never “fixed” but constantly changing with context and consensus (p. 968). Accordingly, language does not simply mirror social reality but actually “produces meaning and creates social reality” (p. 961). Thus, the language I use is not the meaning itself behind my identity or experiences; rather, as the “meaning-maker,” I use language as a vehicle to convey the meaning I construct and reconstruct, interpret and reinterpret (p. 969).

Subjectivity is also connected to language and perhaps is best understood in relation to theater. The metaphor for subjectivity is the major cast list. In my life they represent: the contexts; the embeddings; the hidden agendas or curriculums; and the major and minor actors surrounding my identity. Along with language, then, I “construct [my] subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific” to an event that carries meaning for me based on my memories and experiences (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960-962). These personal and historical memories (p. 970) allow me to reconstruct how I identified, but that identity may be constantly “shifting and contradictory” because I am “both the site and subject of these discursive struggles for identity and for remaking memory” (p. 962). Returning to an earlier metaphor, the major cast list certainly do not all appear on stage at once. Rather, they change for each scene or episode in my life, as do the memory and experience with each represented cast list.

Following language and subjectivity, the social organizations in this autoethnography are my family, friends, and schooling. They are social organizations because they operate within the sphere of society and contain the “interests and

prevailing discourses” of a smaller, local neighborhood. These organizations are also connected with much bigger organizations: a community; our region; a state; the Midwest; and even society itself. I make the argument that these organizations are also connected to other organizations, namely the human society and the ideological institutions that drive our thoughts and actions. Thus, family, friends, and schooling represent the specific interests and discourses within my writing.

Embedded within the components of language, subjectivity, and social organization is Power. Power must be taken at contextual value. That is, it must be situated within a context, connected to a specific “site and subject” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962). In this sense, an analogy may prove insightful for how power corroborates the other components. Imagine the experience of a woman (site and subject) who has been sexually debased by an extended family member. If she lived in a country (social organization) where marriage with relatives was tolerated (social interest and discourse), she may come to accept the act committed against her as common. If she indeed constructs her experience as reality, say as adolescent experimentation, instead of as unacceptable, it is a misguided use of power, that of her family, culture, and ideology. Her memories and reality are influenced by the existing interests and discourses at the specific time and location, thereby affecting her power and identity.

Thus, poststructuralism is an ideal method for my episodes, especially since it is situated within qualitative research. It helps me with the reproduction of meaning and social reality in “knowing the self and knowing about the subject... [causing me] to

reflect on [the] method and to explore new ways of knowing” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962).

I conduct this autoethnography by weaving in and out of my life experiences—gleaning racial, cultural, and social aspects—allowing a reconstruction of my identity journey. I begin with the context of my family, community, and schooling. Then, my identity journey is reconstructed into episodic writings, utilizing poststructuralist methods. I end with reflexivity, elucidating how the Mestizo-Latino descriptor and experience resonate with my individual identity.

### Context

#### The Perfect Family

They grew up in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago, a happy family of five: a father, mother, and three young daughters. Their home was a simple, corner-lot ranch, a model home for the area being first built and showcased by agents. This family even had a German Shepherd, Savage, who framed their joy-filled life on Cul-de-sac Lane. Life seemed as blue-collar perfect as *The Wonder Years*.<sup>21</sup>

The father and mother both worked while the children attended a charming, nearby school: he at a petroleum plant, and she at a local Veteran’s hospital. His clothes always had the aroma and stains of oil and gas, which the girls all welcomed against the onslaught of moms extra pens and medical writing pads invading the kitchen.

Dinner was a family affair, with father telling many of the jokes he heard from the

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<sup>21</sup> *The Wonder Years* was a 1980s sitcom set in the 60s and 70s, depicting how a typical suburban family and their son, Josh, dealt with difficult political, social, and adolescent aspects (see Silver, 1988).

plant. Mother made plátanos, arroz con coco, queso fresco, fruta, boyos y arepas, paeia, y algún carne... (plantains, coconut rice, fresh cheese, fresh fruit, deep-fried and boiled white, cornmeal, chicken meal with rice, vegetables, and yucca, and some meat) for their Colombian meals. The home always smelled of coconut, lavender, and firewood. When guests came, the cuisine usually did not change. This heightened people's awareness of their differences. Prior to the mid 80s, before they adopted the black box and cable, this same dinner and fireplace scene represented the location and sentiment of family gatherings.

The family was a mixed family, one of the first in Streamwood. Prior to the sixties, families were mainly white, middle class workers, with occasional farmers living on the edges of either Streamwood or Elgin. This demographic quickly changed to reflect almost zero incoming farmers against an explosion of working class White, Latino, and Black Families. The new races and cultures brought challenges for new and old residents. And this family stuck out like a sore thumb. Instead of dogs and cats, they kept chickens, pigeons, and other exotic animals as pets, that they eventually ate! Even so, they navigated the two cultures well. To one race, they could be one thing; and to another race, they could be something different. This always reminded them that they could be in both racial and cultural arenas, whenever convenient for them. But it also meant they could never fully be White, middle class Americans.

The community was once a quaint town, about three to five thousand residents. More development has since turned this once country-like suburb—with the occasional corn stalk stuck in the ground—into a city-like suburb, with mega-malls, factories, and

paved sidewalks all around. It currently boasts forty thousand residents (“Our community,” 2008). The last piece of wild, untamed land was taken ten years ago. It has not been the same since.

Their house stood only thirty miles from the Chicago city limits. Downtown stretched out for nine miles. If one lived outside these miles, they were considered a suburbanite. The family’s suburb, like many near Chicago, did not have definite boundaries. All the suburbs ran together, blended in this way. One could easily find dividing town or county lines in rural areas, but not in this city. The blend is so tight that one could leave one suburb and enter a completely different one without even knowing it.

The schools were within walking distance. The children walked back and forth to primary and middle school almost everyday. They were not far at all, and they could cut through the side streets near the library. The schools had few Latinos. They were different. Only a handful of families were Colombian like them. The rest were Mexicans, eating beans and tacos instead of plantains and rice. Their language was different. Their food was different. Their culture overall felt different.

### The Three Trials

Life for this perfect family could not be more pristine. That is, until the trials came. The first was the tragic death of the father’s brother and sister-in-law. It was a rather traumatic experience, leaving two surviving children, a boy and girl, without a home. As nearest and next of kin, the father and mother took in the two kids, abruptly changing their family from five to seven. Then, an unfortunate miscarriage occurred. The mother lost what she thought would be a boy, a few years after her youngest daughter

was born. A little more than five years later, nearly lost in hope, a new baby was born. The boy, the first born son, marked the second trial in this family's life. This baby grew much older and eventually became me, the author. The third trial was my father's injury and disability. Those three events changed our lives forever.

### The Best Kept Family Secret

The death of my uncle, my father's brother, was poignant. Growing up, I was kept from knowing what really happened, an occurrence of innocence continuing into my late high school years. I was always told he, his wife, and his son died in a car crash. I later learned this was not the case. In fact, he actually committed a double murder by killing his wife and oldest son, and then killed himself. For some unbeknownst reason, the man did not kill all his children. He left two: Mark and Melissa. They were spared because they happened to be in another room at the time. They lived in that lifeless house for awhile before anyone realized what happened. A neighbor then called the police. My parents, after years and years of consideration and attempts at adoption, were only able to act as legal guardians for Mark and Melissa. They were held back by the legalities of foster care and other relatives. But life with Mark and Melissa would only become harder.

They changed the birth order. Mark fifteen and Melissa fourteen, they were both older than my sisters. This complicated the arrival. My sisters, who were born first and enjoyed biological privilege, felt suddenly thrust into a whirlwind. The entire family felt this way. Birth orders in families can be powerful agents. To disrupt that hierarchy has lasting affects. I was too young to understand this struggle, being a baby when it all

happened. Later I experienced the cruelty and witnessed the envy that can come from one who is an adopted child.

Being the new oldest son, there was deep felt animosity between Mark and me. I was the youngest yet first born, biological son, destined to inherit the father's blessing. Because of this and his father's death, he was to inherit wind. I was closer to my father than he could get because I was a toddler, flesh and blood; he was already a teenager, and my father was his uncle. My father made matters more difficult by being a conventional provider and hands-off type of guy.

I was publicly envied and secretly hated by Mark because of this situation. I can recall many times when Mark and I would play a variation of games in our basement. The major difference between others' games and Mark's was that I was forced to naively stand in doorways, arms and legs open wide, to receive whipped tennis balls at my body. I could never throw as hard as he could, and the game itself bordered cruel punishment. This was the only place and way he could express his turmoil because tripping me as I walked by no longer worked after I was a toddler.

In fact, nothing worked for Mark after a certain point. His inability to cope with his genuine traumas led to such destructive behaviors, he was eventually asked to leave (and sometimes literally thrown out and chased down the street by my father until he left). Of course, Mark always returned home days, weeks, months, or sometimes even years later, like the prodigal son, just to leave again. He left permanently when he entered the Navy, and this seemed to help him deal with the issues. However, he was discharged dishonorably and became an avid drug user years later. Suffice it to say, he did eventually



quite his drug habit and made peace with us after twenty years of wandering and silent absence with family visitations.

Although she adjusted slightly better, Melissa also had struggles with the family. This appeared more between my mother and Melissa. Instead of aggressive behavior, Melissa was passive resistant to the rules. Whether out of fear for what happened to her brother, or from genuine care, she never did leave us. In fact, Melissa came around more than most in her situation might. She asked for advice and always appeared caring. The issue was that she never followed it.

For example, after graduating high school she wanted to marry a guy whom she fell in love with, against my mother's advice. Well, motherly intuition against adolescent love will seldom win. Melissa married anyway and had children, only to end her marriage with a drunken man and divorce. Her children apparently suffered scars, too. One of her sons was molested by his own brother, and the brother became a teenage sex offender and high school drop out. After this, there was silence.

She only broke the silence twice since: to inform us she had fortunately remarried; and for the passing of my mother. That she did not reconcile this silence may be due in part to my family's neglect in contacting her before my mother's passing. As Melissa stated, "Why? Why didn't you tell me? I had no much I wanted to tell her, so much I hadn't said." My family attempted to explain the suddenness of my mother's death, forgetting to contact her because of her lingering absences from the family. But unlike Mark, the silence between Melissa and the family continues even today.

### The Incoming

My birth in the family marks the second trial. I am the only son born after three older daughters, after my parents made a failed attempt at having a last child before me. Growing up, I was more or less smothered by family and relatives being the first male after three sisters and five female cousins. Thus, I had nine other “moms” (including Melissa) watching over me. Sure, I did chores and such, but being the only boy allowed me power and privilege (Adams & Coltrane, 2004, pp. 190-191). For example, the dances and dating that were not allowed for my sisters were permissible for me. I had things they did not have. I did things they did not do. I was different, treated differently. I could sense their unease with this chauvinistic situation.

Thus, I experienced pain with that privilege. Some of this pain runs deep, far too deep to explain here. But it left me with an understanding that hatred and jealousy can be a wonderfully powerful force yet horrible thing at the same time. I can only substantiate that these acts were outside of the struggles many commonly experience and believe are hatred. Other acts were common, such as feeling like an interrupter to a conversation, one that has taken place over a lifetime, or feeling like an only child because there are more than five years between my sisters and me. At other times, I was excluded from theme park rides or horseback riding (the very last time we ever went as an entire family) because of my age or my size. I felt like an outsider, looking in on someone else’s family. The fact I had no brother or even a younger sibling close to my age made it more difficult. I was like an only child.

This privilege and pain carried over to schooling. By the time I attended elementary, my school was newly built. This was to accommodate the increase in residents and commerce to the area. But it was not the school my two oldest sisters attended in the beginning. They attended a local school in Elgin. So we could not share in that experience despite being siblings. Thus, they had an entirely different experience with their schooling as compared to mine, a different culture.

The high school had approximately 2000 students, with hallways large enough for a semi-truck. When my eldest sister attended, all the available sports were offered, and class sizes were about 20 to 25 students. She did not go until her ninth grade because it was newly open. By the time I attended, the school had 3500 students, and sports were being cut for liability reasons. Teachers were nice, and there were even Black and Spanish teachers. The high school was a collection agency. All the schools in Streamwood were feeders, going into the high school. Diversity was nothing new to me, but I did not identify well with the ethnic representation, either.

### The "Fatal Flaw"

Speaking to the "fatal flaw" of illness, injury, disability, and uncertainty, Sparkes (1996) states:

Such "fateful moments"...threaten the protective cocoon that defends the individual's ontological security "because the 'business as usual' attitude that is so important to that cocoon is inevitably broken through" (p. 465).

He became ill. No one knows how for sure, but what we do know is that many, many years ago, when father was in his twenties, he suddenly dealt with severe arthritis. He went to a doctor who prescribed him "Butazoladin" for his pain. He took it faithfully

for nine months until his doctor then informed him he had to stop. Supposedly, the drug was being pulled from the pharmaceutical shelves because the Food and Drug Administration felt it was no longer fit for human consumption. It was used in horses. What is worse, the doctor informed my father that the drug was changing his blood's chemical composition.

Then, in July of 1986, farther became ill with bronchitis, which eventually turned into pneumonia. My aunt medically attended his needs, and was shocked to learn his x-rays showed he had an advanced degenerative spinal condition: Lumbar Spinal Stenosis.<sup>22</sup> To this day, no one knows the cause of his condition; only that he took an encumbering drug for some time in his past. Those were his injuries, the easy parts to face. However, the flaw also broke our "protective cocoon," thus rendering us vulnerable to an illness, disability, and uncertainty we had not expected to deal with. This was the third trial changing our lives indefinitely.

My father's injuries left him with more than just physical limitations. He had an illness, of sorts, a mental bout with ideological masculinity. Growing up, he was never close to his own father. This upbringing was complicated by the birth of his three daughters who were more or less raised by their mother and aunts. Thus, he made life his own way (see Epigram, p. 2). With the spinal flaw, this changed. People saw him differently. He saw himself differently. Thus, he could not easily reconcile this new

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<sup>22</sup> Lumbar Spinal Stenosis is "a narrowing of one or more areas in your spine—most often in your upper or lower back. This narrowing can put pressure on your spinal cord... cause cramping, pain or numbness in your legs, back, neck, shoulders or arms; a loss of sensation in your extremities; and sometimes problems with bladder or bowel function" (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 2008).

“vulnerability and fragility” he had against the maleness and independency no longer there that once existed (Sparkes, 1996, p. 487).

In the past, the maleness always kept him safe from his own shortcomings and feelings, and also from us. If nothing else, he was not always around simply because of his job. These mental illnesses, then, left him even more incapacitated than his physical injuries. Not able to cope with the thoughts surrounding his new life made it extremely difficult for him to function. He wanted to give up, to end the pain, the limitations, the illness. He never did talk about the good associated with the illness or the lessons he may have learned as a result. This left us feeling insecure. Everything we knew up to that point was being challenged. Our father was upset, despondent, no longer the strong, industrial father figure or provider we once knew. He was not the same funny guy anymore.

Prior to the injury, we were part of the upper middle class, with access to many socio-cultural privileges. After the accident, we unwillingly became categorized as the working class, barely making enough to stay above the poverty rate. His disability made it impossible for him to continue the job. He could no longer climb tankers at the plant, a physical necessity. He took disability and qualified for a pension and social security shortly thereafter. He also took up the household work fulltime, another blow at his maleness. Even so, there were many arguments about money. Thus, the image of strength we saw in our father was now replaced with an image of degeneration or deterioration.

Sure, we still went to church and had vacations. But we felt different. For me, home represented a theological gap or separation from church doctrine. From the pews of

the sanctuary, I would hear sermons preached about “God’s provision” and “Trusting in Him,” but home was different. I did not see these sermons active in father as I heard they should have been for those in life’s “tribulations.” Instead, he was discontent and idle, creating a laziness and defiance for himself and my mother. Because of this, housework was many times left undone. My mother would endlessly complain because of this situation. She was the dominant figure in the home, the new male, because she was the one who earned the money, the one who sustained the family financially.

Vacations were also painful reminders of the injury. They continued, but not without complaint. The worst part was the isolation and uncertainty I experienced. Rather than feel enthusiastic about leisure time with my father, I learned how to be different. That is, I learned how to be a different kind of father for my own future children, by navigating and negotiating through lessons of what he could not do for or with me. And in this task I became passionate.

Instead of simply talking with my children about things, I would show them. Instead of complaining about things out of my control, I would change the things I could. This gave me an alternative aspect or reality between me and my father. I developed a keener sense of identity and masculinity from his journey. I knew he had a hard life, and I did not expect him to be perfect. After all, he was conventional, old-fashioned, and lived a different history than I. But his difference, his fatal flaw, gave me a new security. And I recognized our histories were finally merging, becoming “entangled” (Sparkes, 2003).

## Episodes

### Episode 1 – 1976

“SLAM.....SLAM.....” It was the loudest sound I ever heard. (Relentlessly.)

“SLAM.....SLAM..... SLAM!”

It’s so loud that it almost hurts. “SLAM...SLAM...SLAM. Cou... What?” (Confused.) “Cou..?” I wanted to cough, to throw up, something, anything, but I couldn’t. I was being pulled and pushed, grabbed and poked. It wasn’t any fun. I didn’t want to go any further. I wanted to stay here: safe, warm, secure. I liked it here. I’ve been here for awhile now. It’s not too bad, you know, living in tight corridors. You eventually adjust with time. OUCH! “SLAM...SLAM.”

What’s happening to me, to my home? I feel pinned. I can’t move like I usually do. “SLAM, SLAM, SLAM, POP!”

What!? Wait, there’s something...I think I see something. Yes, it’s a light. I see a light. “WHOA!!!.....”

(Falling...falling...).

“Ahh! Where am I? What’s going on!? Who are you people? What do you want? Leave me alone! I don’t want to be here, to feel this way, to be this...wait. Where am I?”

(Grant Hospital, Chicago Illinois. March 02, 1976: 6:12 p.m.—My Birth).

### Episode 2 – 1981

I am so excited. We just read a story about some animals that all share and go into a mitten during winter. There’s so many in the end, the mitten explodes! My teacher wants me to draw a picture of the mitten exploding. I can’t draw real good, but I want to

do my best. We have to write a couple of sentences about it [the story], too. Now I can do that. I want to do a good job, to show my teacher I'm a good learner. It's important to me. But I can't draw very good.

"Sis, can you help me draw this picture for Mrs. Vain? You are better at drawing than me. You're in fifth grade already. I wrote the sentences already," I said.

She told me, "I can draw the picture for you, but you need to color it. Okay?"

"Sure," I said.

(The next morning at school).

"Students, please bring your pictures and sentences to me now," Mrs. Vain instructed.

I went straight up to Mrs. Vain and proudly handed her my homework. She said thanks, and I went back to my seat. I sat next to the sink on the right side of the room.

Our room was a big room. We had windows going to the street in front, and a door in the back of the room to the main office and principal's office. I know the principal. His name is Mr. Phillips. He's big and kind of scary! I wonder when we will get our homework back.

I liked school. My sister was upstairs in a different part of the building. It's not a big school, only a couple hundred kids can fit in it. I like seeing my friends from the neighborhood. I even know kids from 1<sup>st</sup> grade. They say hi to me in the hallway. I go to music and gym almost every day, but our teacher takes us everywhere. Everyone is so happy with the school because it is new for us. I don't learn in Spanish even though I can speak it at home with my mother and abuelita (little grandma).



(Two days later).

“Ellis, can you please come see me?” Mrs. Vain asked.

I came right up. I saw something in her hands. Maybe it was something my mom and dad had to sign. I sure hope I wasn't in trouble, whatever it was.

“Ellis, this is wonderful work (pause). I can see you took a lot of thought and care doing this assignment,” she exclaimed.

“Yes, I did. Thanks,” I offered.

“Is this your own work, Ellis?” she asked.

“Yes, Mrs. Vain,” I said but suddenly remembered that I asked my sister to help me. There's no way Mrs. Vain means this. I mean, my sister just helped me. It's not like she did my homework for me.

“Ellis, this is really good work, almost too good for a Kindergartener. Did you do this all by yourself?” she asked again.

“Yes, Mrs. Vain, I did it myself. No one did it for me,” I proudly stated.

“Did you get help with it? Did someone help you do it?” she finally rephrased. At last I realized where Mrs. Vain was going with her questions.

“My sister did the picture, but I colored it!” I added quickly, to make sure she knew my innocence in the situation. I did not want to be in trouble at home.

“Ellis, when someone else does your work, that's called cheating,” she firmly stated.

The word “cheating” came out of her mouth almost as if she enjoyed discovering that I had asked my sister for help. I didn't think I did anything wrong, even now that she

told me. In my family, we all help each other with our stuff. What's the difference at school? They said we would be doing a lot of sharing and working together. I thought they really meant it. Why did they lie?

Mother wasn't very happy when she got the news that I had cheated on my homework in Kindergarten. My sister and I explained it to her. She wasn't mad at us but mad at the school, I think. Anyway, I had to do it over, but this time to draw and color it all by myself. I don't know why she would want my ugly art. I can't draw. I told her that. Well, I did it in one night, and turned it in the next day. I did not like the work at all.

(A few months later...).

After that problem with Mrs. Vain, I didn't want anymore trouble. Education was important. My mother always told me so. She said to me, "Ellis, do your work and don't get into any more trouble." I tried to follow her advice. I wanted to please her.

I failed. But it wasn't my fault! You see, we were having show-and-tell, and it was my turn. I wanted to show Mrs. Vain how good I could do. I told my mother that I needed her help. Mrs. Vain could not say that my mother couldn't help me. Then, I had it. The greatest idea ever! I would bring my rabbit to school and pull it out of the show-and-tell bag. All the kids would think I was the best, that I had the best thing to share. The teacher would be happy, and I would be important. The whole class would know.

Well, it didn't work. I told Mrs. Vain my mom brought my show-and-tell for me. Then, I ran out to meet her. She dropped off the rabbit at the door from the street. I ran to get it from her. I put it in the bag and walked back to the red-orange carpet area where we all sat down for show-and-tell. I said I was ready. Mrs. Vain asked me in front of all the

kids what I had to share today. I said, "This!" as I pulled my rabbit out of the bag. There were a lot of cheers and excitement.

"My bunny's name is Puffy" I told them (My sister named it, but we all took care of it.) My mother and father let me buy it from the Kane County Fair. It is white with pink eyes. She is puffy all over, just like her name. We keep her outside in a cage."

"Wow, Ellis. I don't think we've ever had a live rabbit before for show-and-tell. I think you'd better give it back to your mom. Where is she right now?" she asked me hesitantly.

"Outside waiting in the car," I said, noticing she wasn't as happy as I thought she'd be. In fact, she looked shocked.

"Why don't you go give it to your mom? I think that will do for today's show-and-tell," she said, finally telling all the kids to return to their tables. "Ellis, please come see me after you give it back to your mom."

(Returning a few moments later...).

"Yes, Mrs. Vain," I said.

"Ellis, I didn't know you were going to show a live animal for show and tell. We usually don't do that. It's an opportunity to show something you have at home, like in the house. Not a live item. Why don't you do it again in a few weeks, but this time, bring something from home, no animals," she told me.

"Like what? I don't know what to bring. My Bunny was important to me. I thought everyone would like it..." I began.

“We DID like it, but not for school. How about something from your room, like a toy,” she offered.

I told Mrs. Vain okay, but in my heart I was not happy. I didn't see anything wrong with bringing Puffy. I did show-and-tell again a few weeks later. This time, I brought some dumb old toy from my room. I learned that kindergarten was not that fun after all. I couldn't wait for 1<sup>st</sup> grade...

### Episode 3 – 1982 to 1984

“Sit up! Keep your eyes forward,” I commanded.

I walked around the classroom, watching each of my friends as if I was a general in the army. I was finally important. I was in charge. It felt good. I was asked to be the class monitor, while Mrs. Gibbons went to the office. I made check marks on the board with kids' names for how often they misbehaved while she was gone.

I put Rob's name on the board, but only as a joke. I wanted him to like me. I would erase his name before Mrs. Gibbons came back. It was only to make them laugh, to see I could be cool. I was told I was funny, but I wanted kids to like me, too. I marked him three times, as if he was real bad while she was gone and needed go to the principal. Oh no! Mrs. Gibbons came back early...

“Ellis, is this what really happened?” she asked, her height taking in every inch of my little body. “Did Rob really deserve all these marks?”

(Very embarrassed and red). “No, Mrs. Gibbons. I was just playing,” I said apologetically.

“Ellis, I trusted you to do a good job. You cannot be class monitor any longer. I can’t trust you. This is a serious job, not one that you can play around with,” she explained.

I just couldn’t get it right. I tried to follow the rules. I was just trying to have fun with my friends. I didn’t mean to hurt anybody. But now my friends think I am a trouble maker. They only like me because I am funny, but they stay away from me because I play too much. That bothers me. Now I am only seen as a class clown.

(A few months later...).

“Class, we’re all going to take a field trip to the local fire station. Does anyone know where it is?” The teacher asked.

(Raising my hand). “I do, Mrs. Gibbons. I live across the street,” I said.

“Oh. Okay, Ellis. Well, we are going to visit it,” she said.

(While on the field trip...).

“Which house is yours, Ellis,” My friends asked me again.

This was great! No, this was perfect! My friends see I am also a cool person, not just a clown. They will also see my home, a nice one on the corner. I was proud of our home. It had a nice deck in the back. People always stop and say, “Nice deck,” and “Nice apple tree.” I couldn’t wait to show them. I didn’t even care that we were going to the fire station. I lived across the street from it. I’ve been there a thousand times before.

“Right up there,” I remind them, smiling deeply inside.

Now everyone was looking and asking about my house, as if Christmas was early and we were all in line to see Santa. I was on a mission. I knew what I was going to do once I got there. I had to do it.

“Here it is,” I proudly proclaimed.

“You have a very nice home, Ellis,” Mrs. Gibbons said.

“I have rabbits, too. Does anyone want to see them,” I ask around quickly.

“Oh! I want to see one,” “Me, too.” “Oo, Bunnies!” some of the kids stated excitedly.

“Can I show them, Mrs. Gibbons? They’re just around the corner,” I asked while almost jumping over the fence.

“Don’t you think you should ask your parents, first, Ellis,” Mrs. Gibbons cautiously said as if to herself more than to me.

“No, I can just hop over the fence and get them. It’ll be all right. I do it all the time,” I added while finishing my ascent into the yard.

I ran and got Puffy. As if a show-and-tell redemption was one the horizon, I walked along the line of kids now leaning over our backyard fence, letting them touch the rabbit. They loved it, and so did I.

(A few months later...).

Life was good. I became known as the funny boy on the corner with rabbits. Of course, this made it very hard for me because I wanted to talk to my friends all the time. Pleasing the teacher started to lose its affect on me.

Report Card: Heritage Elementary, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Mrs. Gibbons

General Achievement: At grade level in Reading and Math

Homework: Satisfactory

Behavior: Satisfactory; socializes a lot

Teacher Comments: Ellis is a joy to have in class. But he needs to focus his energy into school habits. He socializes and visits with friends quite often. Ellis needs to pay attention more in class.

(2<sup>nd</sup> Grade).

I hate it. It's totally different than 1<sup>st</sup>. We don't take trips to the fire station anymore. What's worse is that I have Mrs. Stoll for my teacher. We did visit the public library, but this wasn't special. We didn't even look around. We just sat around and listened to a story from some old lady.

School itself is okay, but I keep getting into trouble. The teachers seem mad but not too bad. Not like Joe Breuer, who kicked a teacher. He was in big trouble. We never saw him again after that time. I also never showed my rabbit to anybody else anymore. We have a little brown one now. He is soft like Puffy.

Learning is okay for me, but I don't always understand what the teacher is trying to tell or show me. I ask a lot of questions, but this gets them mad, like if I am trying to make fun of them or show off. I really am trying, but they go too fast after each thing they say. I know I need to "pay attention" but I'd rather do hands-on stuff or experience what we are learning instead of just reading about it.

This one time, we got a giant sheet and all took hold of a side. The teacher told us to lift up our end and wave it up and down until we all had it moving. Then, we all lifted it high as we could above our heads. When it was high up, we snuck inside and sat down. It was cool. The sheet came down slowly. We were told the air inside escapes slowly because we were sitting on the ends. She also said something about heat and gravity. I understood all of it. I did a good job on that project.

Report Card: Heritage Elementary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Mrs. Stoll

General Achievement: Advanced in Spelling; at grade level in Reading and Science / Health; Low grade level in Language and Math (slower paced)

Homework: Satisfactory; needs help with writing and math assignments

Behavior: Satisfactory - unsatisfactory

Teacher Comments: Please call me to set up a conference. I would like to discuss Ellis' progress in school. Ellis is off task too much. I am very concerned about his basic skills. He now has a seat near the window.

(A few days later...).

"Thank you for coming, Mrs. Hurd. Please sit down," Mrs. Stoll said.

"Thank you," mother replied.

"I want to begin by saying thank you for coming on such a short notice. I've had Ellis in class now for a few weeks. I have watched him grow and progress. I really like Ellis. However, I am concerned about his rate of learning as compared to his peers. He isn't making the same amount of progress or as quickly" she explained.



“Well, Ellis don’ have a much help at home because I work all day, and his father, too. Maybe his sisters can help. They are older. He can work on this at home?” my mother asked.

“That may help, but I am not sure if it will solve the problem. If you are comfortable with it, I would like to have Ellis tested,” Mrs. Stoll stated. “This testing is special for those kids who seem to have problems learning. I have moved Ellis’ seat, and I have given him some extra help during recess, but these alone may not solve his problems. Do I have your consent, ah, your permission, to test Ellis?” she asked.

“Well, I don’ know. How long is the test,” mother asked.

“It takes a few weeks. There are different parts done by different teachers. In the end, all the parts are put together to see if Ellis needs special help in special classes” Mrs. Stoll explained. “We tell you all the parts and what they mean. If Ellis’ scores are low, he will have extra help with school.”

A few weeks later, I was tested. All I knew was that I had to go to special classes everyday when everyone else in my regular class was silently reading. In that special class, we played games and talked about things. It didn’t make sense to me. I felt funny walking down the hallway with other kids who went to these classes all the time, the whole day. Some of them had helmets on their heads because of accidents. Others were like me, but could not calm down. I even saw my best friend, Rick, was there. I wondered if his mother was told the same thing as my mother.

Special Education Report:

(Initial Report: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade).

IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) Referral: 9/10/83 9:00 to 10:00 AM, Room 110

Initial Placement: LD Itinerant; 80 minutes; mainstreamed

Number of Weeks: Fall

Reading: Comprehension – 1.1; Holt Reading Level – age 7

Math: Works slowly; does simple math: addition and subtraction at 1<sup>st</sup> grade level

Language Arts: Spelling at 1<sup>st</sup> grade level; auditory discernment low

Motor Skills: Adequate; 6 to 10 age equivalent

Social Behavior: Satisfactory; has friends; gets along with peers

Program Area: Reading and Language Arts

(Months later).

“Even though Ellis does not qualify for special education services, we feel he still may need the same type of help, but legally we cannot give him this help without another form giving us your permission to have him in a special class to work on paying attention and speech or life skills. This will be one time a day, all week, for as long as Ellis needs, even into high school if he wants. It will be with Mrs. Foster. He will need to pay attention in class more and not socialize so much. He will also need to work extra at home. Does this sound okay? Do you have any questions?” asked Mrs. Stoll.

My mother did not have much to say, except yes and thank you. She never had a child in my situation. She told me that none of my sisters had these problems. I had these issues because “I no listen to the teacher and what they say.” She told me to pay attention in class from now on, to socialize before and after school. She never told me I was tested

for special education. I never knew until I discovered it later, hidden among my baby book items.

Special Education Report:

(Ending Report: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade).

IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) Review: 4/18/84 10:30 to 10:45 AM, Room 110

Placement: LD Itinerant; mainstreamed

Number of Weeks: Reduce time to twice a week

Reading: Comprehension – 2.6, 2.2, 3.1; Holt Reading Level – age 9.2

Math: Brigrance – 3.0; Works fine

Language Arts: Handwriting is sometimes not neat; auditory discernment low

Social Behavior: Improved on-task behavior

Recommendations:

Continue following directions; give parent practice sheets for addition and subtraction to 18; needs to practice handwriting; reduce time.

Episode 4 – 1984 to 1987

(4<sup>th</sup> Grade).

Behind the “Iron Curtain.” We are learning history and new vocabulary with the “iron curtain” of Russia and Germany in Europe. I feel like I, too, have an iron curtain. Things are so bad for me with talking and friends that my teachers now have me sitting by myself behind a “partition.” My friends come up every once in awhile to sneak notes to me, as if I’m being “rationed” food from (what’s the word the teacher used...oh, yes) “insurgents,” from outside a concentration camp. My “trapdoor” can only be opened by

the teacher, Mrs. McGrath. During lessons, I can see her out of the corner and holes in the "partition." I'm "stationed" between the wall on my left, two filing cabinets guarding me north and south, and the partition on my right. It's lonely being "segregated."

(5<sup>th</sup> Grade: Lunchtime...).

I lied. I told my principal that I did it when Cedric Stokes really did. He was the one who whipped the tinfoil lunch tray cover, rolled into a ball, accidentally hitting the girl's eye. He didn't mean to hit Sandra, but she stood up, and he was trying to hit me. We called it "hit-a-momma." We played like this almost ever yday, but not because I wanted to play. We had to be careful so that the lunch ladies would not see us throwing stuff. This time, though, someone tattled.

We were sent to the principal's office. He told us to sit in a little room, a closet, and talk it over to see who really hit Sandra. Of course, I knew I hadn't hit her because I was ducking during his throw. Cedric, unfortunately, denied even throwing it. He switched the entire story on me, saying I did it all. Cedric was bad for me, a bad influence to distract me from my biggest job: paying attention.

We were getting nowhere. Mr. Phillips, a huge measure of a man, was leaning heavily on us to tell the truth. He said the person who did it would have to call their parents. Well, that definitely was NOT going to happen. Things between my mother and I were not good. I began seeing flash backs of the last two years...

(Flash Back: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade).

"SLAM.....SLAM....." It was the loudest sound I ever heard. (Relentlessly.)  
"SLAM.....SLAM..... SLAM!"

I'm sick and tired already of getting "pulled-out." It's dumb. I go to a huge room and do silly stuff with speech and life skills. I am a goof, a clown in there. Even though most of the girls are two or three years older than me—what seems like an entire lifetime to a kid—I still like them and try to impress them. This is what I am learning in my extra help class. But there are other things I am learning, too. Harder lessons I share with no one.

I'm learning that kids see me differently now. They know I am not special ed., as they call it, but they also know I get extra help, that I leave the classroom. They like me good enough, and many still think I am funny. Still, I don't like going. I feel that I am being separated for my own harm. I fall behind. I also don't get a chance to spend time with my friends because I am always getting extra help. I want to talk with them more when I return to class. Sometimes this social time is all broke up, and then stuff does not turnout too good for me. One time, I remember this kid saying something about my dad, and I told him to take it back. I was pushing his head over a trash can with my hand when Miss Rudder came up. She stopped me, and said I probably said stuff, too.

Well, this got to my conference with my mother. She was ticked about it. I could tell. And after we left, she glanced at me twice: the first time to say she was ticked at me; the second time to say I was going to "get it." It would not be the first time, that's for sure. We entered the stairwell, you know, and then it went fuzzy...

(Confused.) I wanted to cough, to throw up, something, anything, but I couldn't. I was being pulled and pushed, grabbed and poked. It wasn't any fun. I didn't want to go any further. I wanted to stay up there: safe, warm, secure. I liked it there. I've been there

for awhile now. It's not too bad, you know, living in tight corridors. You eventually adjust with time. OUCH! "SLAM...SLAM."

(Returning to 5<sup>th</sup> grade).

I realized the pounding I heard was no longer my mother punching my head but Mr. Phillips entering the closet where Cedric and I were sitting. He came in and said,

"At this point, boys, I have all day. We will stay until 3:30, when I'll call your parents to come and get you, if you don't tell me who did it. One of you is lying, and at this point, I think it's You!" He declared, pointing at Cedric.

My heart leaped. I thought, "Here's my chance." So, I told Cedric to confess. We actually went to see Mr. Phillips, and when we were there, Cedric chickened out. He went back on his word. We were standing there all dumfounded. Then, I saw it. The paddle. There it was on his shelf. It was the kiss of death to trouble makers. We all knew of kids who went into Mr. Phillips's office, never to come out the same. The paddle. It was an eerie reminder of my home life. Suddenly I grew afraid, confused. I didn't know what else to do. I lied.

I confessed the entire thing as if I did it just to avoid anymore trouble. I knew if I was late, she would think I was in trouble. Fortunate for me, she was at work today. We called my father instead. I survived.

#### Episode 5 – 1987 to 1988

A breakthrough. Sixth grade is a lot better than most of elementary. I have a teacher who encourages, who recognizes not only conceptual teaching but one who encourages me through failures. I thrive to be recognized, to please, but it seems I may

still be destined to fail because of my experiences at school so far. Mrs. Kinzey also recognizes my efforts in front of other kids and teachers. I'm glad, too, because she looks and acts tough. I don't think I'd want to get on her bad side.

I also like Rebecca. She came to my birthday party and accidentally spilled red cool-aid on her shirt. I received a new sweatshirt for one of my presents. I told her she could borrow it. She changed in our bathroom, coming out with my new sweater on, and for some reason that changed me forever. Rebecca and I were going steady until another girl stole my eraser. I gave her attention for it (my first mistake) and tried to get it back (my second mistake) and the next thing I knew, Rebecca thought I was playing with her and never gave me the time of day again. That bothered me.

This is basically how things go for how I see myself, too. I am an American at school and a Colombian at home. I can travel back and forth between the cultures, too, but I am more accepted as an American because of my cultural habits. This is okay with me unless I want to spend time with other Hispanics who do not fully accept me because I also spend time with White kids. I don't walk the halls as a Hispanic, speaking Spanish, so maybe they think I'm fake, or they just don't like the two cultures in me. I guess it's because I speak English better than most of them, and I have so many White friends, too.

Even though I can be White or Latino, it bothers me that the Mexicans don't always accept me. I mean, I am Colombian and speak Spanish; we almost eat the same, speak the same, and almost have the same cultures. Oh, well. I invite my White friends to my aunt and uncle's house. They don't seem to care as much that I am Colombian as the Mexicans do that I am not Mexican.

Another breakthrough is the dance. I get to go to the first ever dance. None of my sisters went to a dance when they were in late elementary school. They were told they were too young. I asked several times before they told me yes. I think my parents may be letting of some of the family's older traditions that don't make sense or don't apply to me as much because I am a boy.

But the best news of all was that my teachers told my mom I did not need to continue with the speech and life skills class when I got to the middle school next year; that it was up to me to decide if I wanted to keep going. Of course, I chose to stop.

#### Episode 6 – 1988

It has been one of the worst years of my life. A year filled with death and sorrow. My uncle in New Jersey was killed in a car crash, walking home from the university where my aunt worked. They walked along the side of the road. A drunken lady swerved towards them. He pushed my aunt out of the way to save her and he was hit. He clung to the car's hood to live, but the lady stopped. He flew twenty feet in the air and landed hard on the pavement. He was probably unconscious at this point. But then the lady sped forward and hit him again, dragging his body another half mile. He eventually was dislodged from the vehicle, and she kept going. I don't think they ever found her. He was a great guy, and this was a huge loss to the family.

Mi Abuelita (my little grandmother), the center of our Colombian culture, also died. She travelled to Colombia to attend the funeral of her brother but was ill prior to her departure. She went to the hospital while in Barranquilla for her weakness. While there she became septic. She could not fight this and quickly died. My mom was devastated.



We all were. She represented the Colombian culture in us more than anything. She was not mixed. She was the fully accepted, full-blood Colombian that none of us grandkids are.

I really didn't talk to her that much, only a few sentences in Spanish when I visited. Still I cried when she died. Seeing everyone else's pain and crying also helped me to cry.

My best friends moved. ALL THREE! Craig from three houses down, my life long friend, left me. Craig and I had a lot in common. He had three older sisters, I had three older sisters. He was the youngest, and I was the youngest, too. They had a dog like us, his dad's name was my dad's name, and his mom even had a name that began with the same letter as my mom. We both liked sports, Star Wars, and Mac and Cheese (but he liked his with ketchup, and I couldn't stand that...). His dad got a new manager's job at Dominick's food chain, so they moved up and on in life. He lived too far away to visit often. I can't believe he's gone. It sure hurts.

My other best friend moved, too. Laura. She was a friend from church. We left the church for some other church near my aunt and uncle, even though they didn't really go regularly. But Laura left right before we did. I used to spend time with her all the time. She was like the girl from a book I read called, Bride to Terabithia. She was always there. We watched TV together, had sleepovers and we laughed. It is hard with her and Craig gone. It is lonely.

Josh also left me, but he still lives down the court. He left me for high school. He said it was different being older. He's two years older than me, but I didn't see why he

had to stop spending time with me. It's not like we're five years apart and in different schools completely. He sold me some of his Star Wars stuff the other day, so that helped me feel better, but I still miss spending time with him and playing on the computer with him. I feel like there's no one now.

All my sisters are gone, too, except one. My oldest sister is away at college, in Grand Rapids Michigan. It is very far. I miss her a lot. I used to crawl into bed with her at night when I was scared. Her door was next to mine. My middle sister is getting married. She found a White guy, just like my oldest sister. Her fiancé is pretty cool. We hang a lot. My youngest sister is talking about going to college next year, after high school. We already don't see each other very much because of her friends. It seems like a lot to handle. Sometimes, I stay in my room and cry, scared to think about the day when all my sisters will be gone, when I'll be the only one left in the house, an only child.

As if things weren't bad enough, my schooling isn't going well. People tell me it's the struggles we're all going through, the deaths and all, but I don't know. I have always struggled in school. Why should it be any different now? I know I still can't focus at school, despite all those years in that stupid speech class they forced on me. Maybe I should have stayed in it? Maybe I should have continued. Maybe it would be easier being only American, White, or only Indian, or only Colombian instead of all three. I just don't feel Colombian with the death of my Grandmother. I feel caught in a science vocabulary word I learned: in a blood and culture "whirlwind."

Episode 7 – 1988 to 1989

School sucks, life sucks. Rebellion and failure are always around me. I don't know who I am. I know English but I practice the Spanish culture. I don't identify with others, either. I only find happiness in a middle ground: making people laugh. If they can be happy, I can share their happiness. The only problem is that I can't seem to do it.

I brought home a Spanish girlfriend. Everyone thinks she is the nicest girl, but uglier than anything they've ever seen. This bothers me. While I know I am far from perfect, I never thought of Jucinda as ugly. She's like me: mixed. She's half Latina, half Black. She dresses in style, and she's a good person. I talk to her on the phone a lot. In fact, I invited her over one time to meet the family. We all happened to be eating dinner. She waited patiently on the couch for me while I ate my meal. I talked to her from across the room.

"Jucinda, are you sure you don't want to eat something?" I asked again.

"No thanks. I ate at home," she said.

"Ellis, why do you want to date her? She's ugly," my mother whispered while I got up to get more bread.

"I don't think so," I responded.

(A few minutes later...).

"You can do better than that, Ellis. She's ugly. Yuck," she restated.

(I shrugged my shoulders silently.) "Mother, that's mean. She's not ugly. I like her," I explained.

"She's ugly, Ellis. Send her home," she finally said.

I never sent Jucinda home, but it made me wonder about my feelings for her. After all, maybe I was wrong. Maybe she was ugly. Did I miss something? Am I under some enchantment or something that some friends and my mom think this? I finally realized it was not me. Jucinda left for Texas after a few weeks. I told her we had better end it because I did not like long distance relationships and that we were only in middle school. She reluctantly agreed.

(A few weeks later...).

I had another girl friend soon after. This time she was White. My mother, almost as quickly as me mentioning I had one, told me I was too young date. This was her opinion, and I wondered why it came out now rather than with Jucinda. Well, we weren't on good terms because of this. Our inability to connect with each other reached its pinnacle when I went bike riding in the rain with a friend.

We hit the trails early. They were across the street from my home. The problem was that the trails got muddier as time went on, and we were in the middle of them. It didn't make sense for us to return to the beginning, so we rode on. We finally had to walk our bikes it got so muddy. Even a police officer helped us pull our bikes for awhile. He was nice. All of a sudden, my entire family pulled up in the van! I was about to ask what happened, because my mother was crying, but the police officer beat me to it.

"Don't be angry with them ma'am. There just kids. They weren't doing anything wrong" he mentioned as mother tried to control her anger and emotions.

"I been wondering where you been for hours! I been worried sick!" she said, quickly cutting off the officer.

(Seeing defeat). "Well, anyway, like I said. They weren't doing anything wrong. I helped them pull their bikes out of the mud. It's been raining. Go easy on them, ma'am. Don't punish them," he said as he got into his car and left.

"Get in!" my mother commanded. "I had no idea where you were."

I listened, unable to completely understand the problem with being gone for a few hours. She knew I was out riding with Ricky. I mean, I wasn't a little boy anymore. It didn't matter. I knew I'd get it. The punishment I received was undeserved. It made me feel like a little boy, and I hated her for it. It was the last time I was physically confronted by my mother.

(Six months later).

I steal from the local grocery store, but I have never been caught; tried smoking, and ditched school from time to time. On one occasion, I even walked out with about 250 other kids from my middle school. They told us that the school district was cutting sports to save money, so we protested and chanted, "No sports, no school, no kids! No sports, no school, no kids!"

"SLAM.....SLAM....." It was the loudest sound I ever heard. (Relentlessly.)

"SLAM.....SLAM..... SLAM!"

I liked pounding the glass windows on the school building. It was fun. We were all doing it. I felt like an activist. I felt powerful! But then, it happened. "CRACK!"

(Confused.) I wanted to cough, to throw up, something, anything, but I couldn't. I was being pulled and pushed, grabbed and poked. It wasn't any fun. I didn't want to go any further. I wanted to stay in there: safe, warm, secure. I liked it in there. I've been

there for awhile now. It's not too bad, you know, living in tight corridors. You eventually adjust with time. OUCH! "SLAM...SLAM."

We all broke the windows. My friend, Rick, and I took off to his house with two other girls. The kids that remained were in big trouble. The cops eventually came, and they were rounded up. They sat the kids down on the grass. Meanwhile, we were at my friend's house, clueless that this was happening. We tried playing spin the bottle. It was fun for awhile, but then one of the girls had an asthma attack. I had to do the unthinkable; the worst possible thing an activist could possibly do: I called my mother. I was surprised I didn't "get it" again after last year's bike incident, but I still felt horrible.

The good news was that the girl lived and my picture wasn't in the newspaper, so suspension escaped me, but I had to attend a silly meeting with my mother to learn about how my initial behavior was unacceptable. Despite a tough year, I really did learn something that day: I learned that I can be a comedian all I want, just as long as I stayed in school and pleased society. I also learned how strong my mother is. She got into an argument with another parent at the meeting about the whole sports and school issue. The other parent was angry that the kids spoke out. My mother, in her best broken English, said while she didn't agree with how we did what we did, she supported our beliefs. Others listening may have easily picked out the language mistakes my mom made, but I couldn't hear them. All I clearly could hear was victory, ours as kids for keeping sports and mine as her son. I couldn't have been prouder of my mother that day.

Episode 8 – 1990 to 1995

(Summer of my 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation: 1990).

I took summer school math so that I could enter high school better prepared. I was excited to start a new school, a new opportunity, and in some ways a new life. Math was okay, and it even taught me an important lesson: I can be a comedian in the classroom, as long as I don't get caught. This new approach helped me gain confidence in who I was. Maybe identity is not just who others say you are, not just blood? I don't know. I will need more time to decide. I guess I learned some math, too.

(Summer of my Freshman Year: 1991).

I also did some escorting in Chicago this summer, for a Latino medical group. They bring university medical students from Cartagena, Colombia to become practicing doctors here in the states. Some of them have been practicing here for years. They've established families, too. Their daughters have a rite of passage recognition ceremony once they reach sixteen. It is like the Mexican celebration, Quinceñera, where a girl who turns fifteen is thrown a party by her friends and family to be recognized as an adult.

For Colombians, the celebration is similar, but a group of girls are recognized at the same time and must dance the Cumbia in front of everyone. There is also food and dancing for guests, once the girls perform. The Colombian Council also speaks about the opportunities the organization has made to medicine and Colombian doctors. I simply danced and escorted the girls around. This did help me make a connection to my Colombian side. Up to then, I was afraid I was losing touch with it, but this gave me an outlet. Some of the conversations were odd because I was a working class kid surrounded

by affluent Colombian girls who had doctors as parents. The connections there, in terms of our different classes, were stretched, but overall, it was fun.

(Junior Year: 1992).

As I entered junior year, I remembered something else I learned way back in middle school: transcendence. I knew I could travel back and forth between cultures and races, if necessary. At school, this was very valuable to me. With jocks, I became the jock. With skaters, I became a skater. With Blacks, I became Black, with Whites, White, and with Latinos, Latino. I even was able to become a temporary gang banger, with instant access to certain people that were considered by others off limits. Of course, this was temporary. I could not stay in any one group too long because I would then become one of them, losing my transient role. Losing it would defeat the benefit of being mixed. I was proud to be mixed because of this.

One thing that always bothers me with this social and culture transcendence is its appearance in the classroom. Even though I can travel relatively easy between groups racially, culturally, or socially, I do not have what it takes to do well in the classroom. It seems others only deal with one set of rules or one set of language issues, but I have two. All these hidden rules and techniques don't seem to be at my finger tips like they are for others. I don't seem to have a complete set as others do. Mine has rules from the Colombian and American Indian cultures mixed. I have rules from the affluent and working class, too. I've been in both, so I have understandings of both. I just don't have one set like others.



Many teachers like to teach us from only one set of rules, without any sensitivity for other sets. People will eventually learn one set, but it seems dumb to force us to learn one set when many kids in other countries have two or three sets. Here's what I mean. The other day we did an activity to learn how we learn. My teacher, Mr. Hatch, told me I learn best by hearing things. Well, I know that I also like to experience what I am learning even though my teacher said my learning language is auditory, whatever that means. So, maybe we need to expand the set of rules we are all drawing from.

I like camps because of this. They teach me in many different ways. I like hands-on, camping, reading a book, and then watching the movie of the book to find differences between them. I like conceptual stuff, like art and music. I like my history and English class because they are combined into a block subject. The teachers have us explore issues in integrated ways. I love this! I also like biology, even though I am not good at science. Taking care of animals and plants seems to be easy for me. Maybe college will hold something like this for me to do.

(Senior Year: 1993).

My counselor just told me my grades were too low for college. They pull all the kids in at mid year to discuss with them "career aspirations." Well, I aspire to be a pilot, but he said I couldn't because I didn't know math well enough. Sucks to be me! Now I don't know what I'll do. It might be too late to change. I had two horrible years before my junior year. I may not make it.

(First Semester of College: 1994 to 1995).

I did not get accepted into college, so I am at the community college. What a joke! Everyone here does not take school seriously, and I see all my old friends from high school. Did they all screw up, too? I did because I had a rough start to high school. I had a very low GPA, which didn't help me to get into Moody in Chicago. Maybe that wasn't the path for me anyhow? I know of a couple of local private schools, but they are very expensive. I can't afford that. My mother is working harder than anyone I have ever seen, against all of our wishes. I hope she stops soon. And my dad isn't doing too hot with his injuries, either. My psychology professor seems to feel the same way I do. The other day, we spoke.

"Ellis, this is a very low score. Did you study for the test?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, Dr. Clark," I lied.

"Well, you know school isn't for everyone. Maybe it's not for you. Have you ever thought about just going straight to the workforce?" He asked.

"Dr. Clark, I know I can do better. I just need more time. I will try harder on the next test. I don't think the workforce suits me. I want to be in college," I explained.

"Well, okay. Good luck, but don't give up on the workforce idea" he exclaimed as I walked out of the media office in which we were talking.

(During October).

"SLAM.....SLAM....." It was the loudest sound I ever heard. (Relentlessly.)

"SLAM.....SLAM..... SLAM!"

The sound woke me in the middle of the night. Maybe it was the rustling of trees or branches on the windows. It was windy out. Or maybe I was dreaming; my heart pounded in my chest for my undecided future. I heard it again. Then I realized it wasn't me. I wondered what the strange pounding might have been, coming from outside of my room. I got up from my bed to find my father in the kitchen, beating, pounding, slamming his clenched fists on his legs. It was the oddest and scariest picture I had seen of him yet. While looking down at his legs, frustrated, he stated,

"I can't get them to stop moving. They are twitching. They won't stop moving."

"What do you mean, they won't stop moving? What won't stop moving? Your legs? I don't see them moving," I asked perplexed.

"They are moving and I can't relax. They won't stop moving," he said again.

"How can I help? Would it help to elevate them? When did you last take your medication?" I gently asked.

"I'm in pain. The medicine isn't working. I don't have what I need: Demerol. I need something stronger," he explained.

"You have medicine. When did you last take it?" I asked again, just now realizing he either had too much caffeine during the day, or that he was getting low on his meds from taking too many throughout the month.

"Two hours ago, but it doesn't help," he exclaimed. "I'm still in pain."

(Confused.) I wanted to cough, to throw up, something, anything, but I couldn't. I was being pulled and pushed, grabbed and poked. It wasn't any fun. I didn't want to go any further. I wanted to stay in my room: safe, warm, secure. I liked it in there. I've been

there for awhile now. It's not too bad, you know, living in tight corridors. You eventually adjust with time. OUCH! "SLAM...SLAM."

(Three months later...).

It happened. A miracle! I got accepted into a four-year, private college nearby. I start my probationary period next week. I'm excited. A second chance to learn. No, a chance to learn how to learn. I even got a scholarship and some assistance, so mother can't use me as a reason to continue working. She needs to stop soon. I will soon be leaving home, the baby, the last one of the tribe, to spread my wings and fly.

Oddly enough, I feel more Colombian than ever. I have been using my Spanish more, and now feel that race and blood alone do not really make my identity. They are too vague, too limiting. It's what I do that makes me who I am. It's my actions, beliefs, failures, and successes. It's all of it. Of course, I need more of the successes part, so the prospect of college is exciting. I don't know yet what I'll do, but I'm sure the atmosphere will help me figure it out.

### Reflexivity

Two essential discourses are present in my identity journey. They are: pain and privilege. These discourses are also present in the identity journeys and reinterpretations of la familia. Thus, I use interpretive data to inform and reinterpret my own identity experiences as reconstructed above. This reinterpretation is more than "self-indulgence" of my thoughts and identity, so much more (Sparkes, 2002). Because the current research does not consider both discourses together for Mestizo identities, I do so as an

intersectionality of interpretation. This empowers me to more fully understand my identity history by using the noticeable factors from their lives to my own.

I begin with a brief discussion of identity and its role in the construction of self. Afterwards, I cover the discourses of pain and privilege and show their importance. The social organizations of language and power are embedded within these discourses, and I use pain and privilege to reinterpret my context and episodes. I conclude with a reflection of how I arrange the Mestizo descriptor with my own identity.

### Identity and Self

Identity is how one sees him or herself. In some cases, identity *is* the self. Accordingly, it was shown that identity—from this point forward synonymous with self and self with identity—is developed in many ways. First, Taylor (1994) said our identity is shaped by others' impressions or the absence thereof (see Chapter 2: Review of the Literature, p. 13). Mead (1943) showed that identity is developed through “environmental transactions,” that it is socio-psychological (see Chapter 4: Analysis and Interpretation, p. 87). Similarly, Geertz (1979) argued those with “dual identity” have a flexible self and negotiate the world through cultural interactions (see Chapter 4: Analysis and Interpretation, p. 107). These developments are all outside of oneself. Thus, we must travel within identity to more fully understand the concept of self.

The ideology of “self” comes from the field of metaphysics and is known as human personality, “recursive” and “obscure in its transformations” within a complex

structural system (Gregg, 1991). Although Scientific Enlightenment<sup>23</sup> at one point tried to do away with metaphysics, they failed because their own measurements, theories, and experiments were rooted in metaphysics and human personality (p. xiv). Like wise, “the genesis and ontological structure of ‘the’ Self is meaningfully addressed by philosophical discussions of metaphysics” (p. 200). Thus, we must entertain those philosophical discussions, realizing that identity refers to the abstraction behind self, such as the soul beneath identity or the self (p. xviii).

An epistemological look at what was then “modern” psychology, Allport (1937), Lewin (1935), and Vygotsky (1978) suggested all people had “phenotype” and “genotype” distinctions (as reported in Gregg, 1991, p. 178). Their work later became called “generative,” “layered,” and the “surface-structure / deep-structure” transformation theories for understanding self-representation (p. 179). The third theory is the model from which I draw and deserves closer attention.

Surface-structure theory can be simply understood as the self on three levels: (1) the self based on one’s own self image, or how one sees oneself; (2) the self based on others’ images, forced or voluntary; and (3) the self based on environmental transactions, such as failures, successes, and negotiations of self. Conversely, the deep-structure theory of the self is the soul or spirit behind all of the socio-cultural and socio-psychological interactions. Together, they make the total history of one’s identity and self-concept (as reported in Gregg, 1991).

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<sup>23</sup> Scientific Enlightenment refers to a time when science enjoyed its clout as an irrefutable entity or truth that all could believe in, much like religion was of the early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Gregg, 1991; Lewontin, 1993).

### Self as a Social Structure

In this way, the life narrative is the totality of the self as a social structure. At times, these narratives frame the surface-structure of self; and at others they frame the deep-structure of self. These narratives are full of the basic trappings of power and love for which everyone searches. The self-debates between power and love eventually construct life narratives, leading to the positions one takes or believes he or she is supposed to take in the social structure and in their own self representations (Gregg, 1991, p. xiv).

Thus, individuals—through their life narratives—distort and then attempt to fix the inequalities and oppressions they themselves paradoxically perpetuate or create, believing they themselves somehow transcend (Gregg, 1991, p. xv).

### Pain

My identity experiences are understood in reference to the pains felt by la familia. From Luis, Isabella, Nick, and Andre I have gleaned five similar factors of pain seen within my identity journey. These pains are: (1) socio-cultural pains resulting from my birth order and step-brother; (2) racial and cultural pains resulting from maternal and paternal misidentification; (3) schooling pains resulting from educative differences; (4) socio-class pain resulting from my father's injury and disability; and (5) socio-cultural pain resulting from being mixed. These demonstrate how I was caught between worlds, left with an uncomfortable, lonely, and fearsome instability.

Pain can clearly be seen in the experiences resulting from my birth order and treatment I endured from my step-brother. Both clearly show the pain of transient roles.

First, I was born into a family consisting of six siblings, all of them older than me. Just as Luis experienced the pain of being a single father-mother figure to his children, I experienced the pain of my birth order limitations. This is because my birth order was last. I was the youngest. Yet I exhibited characteristics of an oldest child because there were more than five years between me and my siblings. This caused an alternative birth order for me where I became like the oldest child again. These pains created a difficult situation as I travelled between the acceptances of being the youngest child while having the personality of an oldest, never fully situated in either role.

Adams (1972) asserts the “dethronement” of the oldest child by the youngest means a “monopolization” of parental attention, where the “only child and youngest child are much alike” (p. 5). Thus, I was caught between biological hierarchy—“charming,” “tenacious,” “affectionate,” and “attention-seeking,”—as the youngest (Leman, 2000), and the dethronement of a “conscientious,” “well organized,” “serious,” “perfectionist,” “goal-oriented” person as the oldest or only child (as reported in Schilling, 2001, p. 2). This also led to competitiveness, to do my best at anything I did as if to catch-up with my siblings.

This birth order re-configuration brought a sense of “frustration” and jealousy for my step-brother (Kidwell, 1981, p. 4). Prior to his adoption, and before the death of his oldest brother, he was second-born. With the murder of his brother, he became the oldest in his family. As he came into our family as the new oldest sibling, he needed to face my sister—the oldest biologically—and me, the first-born biological son. Being the



youngest, with an alternative birth order, I was the potential “dethronement” of his and my sister’s positions within the family (Adams, 1972).

Mark became so envious of our biological status that his estrangement translated into cruel acts against me (i.e. tripping, whipping ball game, etc.). Stein (n.d.) also argues that Mark lashed out by his eventual overt “demanding” nature because he came to “resent...the biological parents” (p. 1). His estrangement for us, especially for me as the first-born biological son, forced an inferior identity on me until he left, always fearful of what would come next.

The second pain in my identity experiences involved my struggles with my father and mother. These pains came from different situations, but both resulted in a misidentification with my race and culture. As with Luis and his father’s forced French, my father was a source of identity pain. As a Mestizo, I knew I was both Native American and Colombian. Because we spoke Spanish at home, ate Spanish foods, watched Spanish television, and conversed with Spanish relatives, my Colombian ethnicity was on the forefront of my identity. Yet, my father made fun of Mexicans and always strongly encouraged his Indian side onto us. I had a hard time identifying as an Indian because his rather racist comments and verbal mistreatment or prejudice of others was contradictory against my own mixed identity.

That my father occasionally did these things should have encouraged my Colombian ethnicity. But it did not. The Asperger’s in Luis’s father made it difficult for him to identify with his father. Like wise, I could not identify as a Colombian at one point because my feelings for my mother made it quite impossible. I could not warm up to her

during my adolescence. Most of the time, ours was a love-hate relationship. I loved and respected her, but I also hated what she did to me. I indicated this by saying:

My mother did not have much to say, except yes and thank you. She never had a child in my situation. She told me that none of my sisters had these problems. I had these issues because “I no listen to the teacher and what they say.” She told me to pay attention in class from now on, to socialize before and after school. She never told me I was tested for special education. I never knew until I discovered it later, hidden among my baby book items.

“SLAM.....SLAM.....” It was the loudest sound I ever heard. (Relentlessly.)  
 “SLAM.....SLAM..... SLAM!”

I’m sick and tired already of getting “pulled-out.” It’s dumb. I go to a huge room and do silly stuff with speech and life skills. I am a goof, a clown in there. Even though most of the girls are two or three years older than me—what seems like an entire lifetime to a kid—I still like them and try to impress them. This is what I am learning in my extra help class. But there are other things I am learning, too. Harder lessons I share with no one. I’m learning that kids see me differently now. They know I am not special ed., as they call it, but they also know I get extra help, that I leave the classroom. Sometimes this social time is all broke up, and then stuff does not turnout too good for me...On time, I remember this kid saying something about my dad, and I told him to take it back. I was pushing his head over a trash can.

...Well, this got to my conference with my mother. She was ticked about it. I could tell. And after we left, she glanced at me twice: the first time to say she was ticked at me; the second time to say I was going to “get it.” It would not be the first time, that’s for sure. We entered the stairwell, you know, and then it went fuzzy...I realized the pounding I heard was no longer my mother punching my head but Mr. Phillips entering the closet where Cedric and I were sitting.

Thus, I did and did not want to be Colombian. If I did, it meant being like my mother. If I did not, I would not be like her one day. Hence, the turmoil over my mother was two-fold: on the one hand, she gave me birth, provided for me, and gave me extras; on the other, she was aggressive. She did not discipline me with reason but with reaction. Her aggression did not send her intended message: behave!

Straus (2004) claims, "For some children, the lessons learned through spanking include the idea that they only need to be good if Mommy or Daddy is watching or will know about it," but "...there are a number of harmful side effects, such as a greater chance that the child will grow up to be depressed or violent" (p. 415). This is why I turned to passive rebellions such as stealing, smoking, and ditching school. I suppose my mother must have experienced this type of aggressive structure at some point in her life that she brought it on me, sometimes with a leather belt leaving welts on my legs and only a spoon or her hand at others. I did eventually get her message, though unintended on her part. I learned "hitting is the way to correct wrongs...that being extremely angry justifies hitting" (p. 416). Thus, I was left to another pain in my identity.

I also felt pain between my identity and schooling. These issues were far reaching, beginning early and unresolved until college. Andre also experienced pain with his identity and schooling experiences. His was a "dislocation between two cultures," stemming from language and code switching (Baker, 2000, p. 69). Similarly, my failures in schooling resulted from poor teaching methods, being bilingual, and from being a conceptual learner.

I demonstrated the first through the story I told of Mrs. Vain, my Kindergarten teacher, who thought I was cheating by having my sister help me draw the mitten story picture. The social discourse used by the school was one of sharing and working together, yet their hidden agenda was one of competition, encouraging a "contest mobility" or meritocracy from the very beginning (Turner, 1960). I recognized this when I said:

The word "cheating" came out of her mouth almost as if she enjoyed discovering that I had asked my sister for help. I didn't think I did anything wrong, even now

that she told me. In my family, we all help each other with our stuff. What's the difference at school? They said we would be doing a lot of sharing and working together. I thought they really meant it. Why did they lie?

Being bilingual only complicated the matter. I had an entire schema from which to separately draw against the dominant monolingual discourse that the school was using. I interpreted the world from two sets of lenses, not just one. The teachers thought I was just slow, eventually testing me for special education. I had not come to realize my bilingualism affected my schooling achievement until later in college. Until then, I was "behind for about three or four years" in my academic skills in English as compared to other dominant monolinguals (Baker, 2000, p. 132). This was because I was partially immersed in Spanish, only speaking it at home with no academic focus, taking away a total immersion in English. Thus, I operated, as Baker pointed out, slower in the early years of elementary until middle school, when I would "catch-up with mainstream peers in English language attainment" (p. 132).

I also experienced pain at school in my identity because I was a conceptual learner. That is, by being bilingual, I learned holistically. However, schools twenty-five years ago, and arguably today, were not interested in teaching so much as testing and sorting (Hurn, 1993; Sacks, 1999). To this end, teachers initially interpreted my bilingual pace as a learning disability. Thus, my achievement was affected because I was not as quick or as linear as others. This fact led me to a schooling stigmatism. I suddenly stood along side the many bilinguals who had experienced a disproportionate representation within special education due to misidentification (Garcia & Ortiz, 1994).

I continued down this pathway, completely disinterested in schooling, in anticipation of getting into college. When I realized this, things became easier for me. I simply had to relearn at home in conceptual ways, changing lectures during the school day into concrete and authentic applications. In this way, I educated myself. I was shocked when I was not accepted into college, finding I had learned how to learn too late.

Another area where I experienced pain in identification was my father's injury and disability. Because of his injury and inability to cope, I was left angry and hurt. This especially affected my social class identity. This pain was also present in Luis' life when I shared how he dealt with the pains of leaving his privileged life in Honduras as Don Luis only to accept a lower position and status in Iowa. In the same way, we enjoyed the workings of the middle class prior to my father's accident. We were happy, it seemed. After his accident, this all changed. I admitted this when I said,

In the past, the maleness always kept him safe from his own shortcomings and feelings, and also from us. If nothing else, he was not always around simply because of his job. These mental illnesses, then, left him even more incapacitated than his physical injuries. Not able to cope with the thoughts surrounding his new life made it extremely difficult for him to function. He wanted to give up, to end the pain, the limitations, the illness. He never did talk about the good associated with the injury or the lessons he may have learned as a result of it. This left us feeling insecure. Everything we knew up to that point was being challenged. Our father was upset, despondent, no longer the strong, industrial father figure or provider we once knew. He was not the same funny guy anymore.

Prior to the injury, we were part of the upper middle class, with access to many socio-cultural privileges. After the accident, we unwillingly became categorized as the working class, barely making enough to stay above the poverty rate. His disability made it impossible for him to continue the job. He could no longer climb tankers at the plant, a physical necessity. He took disability and qualified for a pension and social security shortly thereafter. He also took up the household work fulltime, another blow at his maleness. Even so, there were many arguments about money. Thus, the image of strength we saw in our father was now replaced with an image of degeneration or deterioration.

Thus, I was insecure. I thought it was very unfair how I suffered due to his age and disability, unfair that I did not have a “normal” father as everyone else. But even more powerful than those, my identity as a son and future man was distressed. All I knew about men I learned from my father. In fact, Adams and Coltrane (2004) argue that “gendered parents transmit gender-laden assumptions and values to their children, starting before the children are born” (p. 191). Hence, as a result of his insecurities and injuries, I continued to resist and suffer both at school and at home.

The last powerful area for understanding my identity pain is my Mestizo Identity. Just like Nick was marginalized in his identity experience, I, too, was a Mestisaje, having two racial and socio-cultural identities. The pain was felt because I wanted to be 100% Colombian, able to please my mother; but other times, I wanted to be father’s little Indian boy, just like the first plush Indian toy I received from him thirty-one years ago for my first birthday. Referring to this pain, I said,

School sucks, life sucks. Rebellion and failure are always around me. I don’t know who I am. I know English but I practice the Spanish culture. I don’t identify with others, either. I only find happiness in a middle ground: making people laugh. If they can be happy, I can share their happiness. The only problem is that I can’t seem to do it.

Like Nick, if I identified as a Colombian, my Indian race and culture suffered. If I identified as an Indian, I denied my socio-cultural practices. I was unhappy and unsituated either way. However, I could not stay in the middle, either, as that, too, brought pain. It meant never fully identifying and feeling pushed and pulled by different parts of the societal order (Bruhl et al., n.d.). I also recognized this pain in my schooling performance. I state,

One thing that always bothers me with this social and culture transcendence is its appearance in the classroom. Even though I can travel relatively easy between groups socially or ethnically, I do not have what it takes to do well in the classroom. It seems others only deal with one set of rules or one set of language issues but I have two. All these hidden rules and techniques don't seem to be at my finger tips like they are for others. I don't seem to have a complete set as others do. My set has books from the Colombian and American Indian cultures mixed in. I have books from the affluent and working class, too. I've been in both, so I have understandings of both. I just don't have a set like others, though.

### Privilege

My identity is also understood in reference to the privileges I experienced.

Similarly, I draw from la familia for concurrent factors within my identity journey. These privileges include: (1) socio-cultural privileges resulting from my birth order and being male; (2) schooling privileges resulting from being bilingual; and (3) identity privileges resulting from being mixed. These display the benefits of being in-between worlds, left with a transcendence and power to journey in multiple directions.

My birth order, and being the first biologically-born son, gave me access to things no one else had in the family. I was privileged. Speaking to this, I asserted:

My birth in the family marked the second trial. I was the only son born after three older daughters, after my parents made a failed attempt at having a last child before. Because of this, I was more or less smothered by family and relatives being the first male after three sisters and five female cousins. Thus, I had nine other "moms" (including Melissa) watching over me. Sure, I did chores and such, but being the only boy allowed me power and privilege (Adams & Coltrane, 2004, pp. 190-191). For example, the dances and dating that were not allowed for my sisters were permissible for me. I had things they did not have. I did things they did not do. I was different, treated differently. I could sense their unease with this chauvinistic situation.

And in my episode:

Another breakthrough is the dance. I get to go to the first ever dance. None of my sisters went to a dance when they were in middle school. They were told they were too young. I asked several times before they told me yes. I think my parents

may be letting of some of the family's older traditions that don't make sense or don't apply to me as much because I am a boy.

Understanding my birth-order privileges can be seen in the similarities of Luis' reconstructed role as father-mother. He was raising children against a dominant white-male society, which told him he should have a wife to raise children. Comparatively, my birth privilege gave me an overwhelming sense to prove myself as a male among women, namely my sisters. With others, I was more or less "effeminate," caught at one point secretly playing with my sister's dolls, and in trouble with my uncle for having put on make-up with my female cousins (Stein, n.d.). Because I was usually in the company of girls, I learned to speak with them better than males. In fact, many have commented that my communicative style is unlike a man's, which I only see as a privilege. This explains why I was more comfortable recreating mock relationships among the "female" dolls versus killing off my G.I. Joe's that I was given because I was "male." This fact helped me identify with females growing up, in touch with my feelings. Thus, my gender and being youngest afforded me privileges I did not see nor hear about with my sisters.

I also experienced privilege in my schooling stemming from my bilingualism. I admitted this in my episode:

This is basically how things go for how I see myself, too. I am an American at school and a Colombian at home. I can travel back and forth between the cultures, too, but I am more accepted as an American because of my cultural habits. This is okay with me unless I want to spend time with another Hispanics who do not fully accept me because I also spend time with White kids. I don't walk the halls as a Hispanic, speaking Spanish, so maybe they think I'm fake, or they just don't like the two cultures in me. I guess it's because I speak English better than most of them, and I have so many White friends, too.

Even though I can be White or Latino, it bothers me that the Mexicans don't always accept me. I mean, I am Colombian and speak Spanish; we almost eat the



same, speak the same, and almost have the same cultures. Oh, well. I invite my White friends to my aunt and uncle's house. They don't seem to care as much that I am Colombian as the Mexicans do that I am not Mexican.

But the best news of all was that my teachers told my mom I did not need to continue with the speech and life skills class when I got to the middle school next year; that it was up to me to decide if I wanted to keep going. Of course, I chose to stop.

Accordingly, I can change my speech and cultural associations for almost any context, as did Nick and Andre at school and at home with each other. For my wife and family, I use Spanish and English interchangeably, and speak in grounded tones and terms. I do not speak to them as a distant professional. When I speak to colleagues and extended family, I use formal English with stylistic wording. I even change within my cultural associations by claiming to be Latino to those who do not or cannot differentiate between what a Mexican is versus a Colombian. To Mexicans, however, I can speak more openly and identify as a Colombian. This privileged language allows me to move in and out of social circles, regardless of language or culture, or if others happen to be English or Spanish.

The last area of significant privilege comes from my Mestizo identity. While writing my episodes, I claim,

As I entered junior year, I remembered something else I learned way back in middle school: transcendence. I knew I could travel back and forth between cultures and races, if necessary. At school, this was very valuable to me. With jocks, I became the jock. With skaters, I became a skater. With Blacks, I became Black, with Whites, White, and with Latinos, Latino. I even was able to become a temporary gang banger, with instant access to certain people that were considered by others off limits. Of course, this was temporary. I could not stay in any one group too long because I would then become one of them, losing my transient role. Losing it would defeat the benefit of being mixed. I was proud to be mixed because of this.

Oddly enough, I feel more Colombian than ever. I have been using my Spanish more, and now feel that race and blood alone do not really make my identity. They are too vague, too limiting. It's what I do that makes me who I am. It's my actions, beliefs, failures, and successes. It's all of it. Of course, I need more of the successes part, so the prospect of college is exciting. I don't know yet what I'll do, but I'm sure the atmosphere will help me figure it out.

The privileges from identifying as mixed meant I had a dual identity (Geertz, 1979, as reported in Gregg, 1991). In other words, when I spoke to others, I could identify with them or I could identify with myself or another. Luis also moved in-between his Honduran and French-Canadian identities. In the same way, I was an Indian (or Criollo) in the company of Spanish Americans I did not like, but Spanish American in the company of Indians that did not like me. One identity would put me closer to the concept of an outsider while the other would put me within a more dominant or privileged standing. Either way, my identity was flexible where I negotiated based on my environmental situations.

I also possessed a cultural awareness of both identities. In this way, I knew the subtleties of the particular culture I identified with at the time. As Tversky (1977) claimed, highly complex individuals, such as Mestizos, are "feature-matching" individuals, where "the same pair of objects, therefore, can be viewed as similar or different depending on the choice of a frame of reference" (as reported in Gregg, p. 55). Isabella was doing this in her technological abilities. She knew the subtleties of the digital culture well enough to know it in Honduras, and she now knows the workings of it in the U.S., too. For me, my environment determined and gave an interpretation to my identity just as my identity determined and gives me an interpretation to my environment. Thus, as Isabella, I built a bank of cultural identity, always ready to either add or subtract

racial, cultural, or social characteristics that fascinated me and ultimately developed who I became today.

### Mestizo Retrospection

The cornerstone aspect of this study concerned researching my affective identity. To do that, I considered my identity history through various means. In addition, I researched the aspects of other's journeys to more fully understand mine. Thus, I constructed, deconstructed, and lastly interpreted factors that influenced and determined our journeys. These were the emergent discourses of pain and privilege shared in the interpretations.

That this research is complete allows me to make clear the decision on whether or not I fully identify with the Mestizo construct. In short, I do not identify with the Mestizo construct. That is, the Mestizo construct and all that it may or may not represent does not resonate with my identity, and thus I do not recognize it as my own. I have several reasons for reaching this determination.

First, that I do not recognize the Mestizo construct as my own is not to say I do not recognize Mestizos. I do believe a Mestizo construct exists, as exemplified in the review of the literature and by this study itself. I recognize the affective histories of Mestizos, and recognize some may choose to see themselves as Mestizos. However, I do not choose to use that descriptor for myself.

Furthermore, that I do not recognize the Mestizo construct as my own is not to say I do not see myself as a mixed person. I indeed recognize and identify as a mixed person simply because I have mixtures of racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. However, I do

not wish to use the term Mestizo to characterize myself. Also, I do not wish others to see me this way. I am not comfortable with the implications, the insinuations behind being a Mestizo.

Some of these implications come from the review of literature. In the review, I explained the historical and rather hegemonic creations and uses of the term. The fact Spaniards actually created a new race of mixed people they chose to call Mestizos, later subjected to their European rule, is disheartening. I would in essence be subjecting myself to that same historical regime, for all it stood, if I identified as a Mestizo. Moreover, I would be subjecting myself to the system of prediction and control created by the Spaniard power elite still in existence today.

Even if the atrocities of the Spaniards did not exist, I would not situate myself as a Mestizo due to the influence of scientific determinism as described in the interpretation chapters. As discussed, the construction of race and racial inferiority as scientific made life extremely difficult for Mestizos. Similarly, these same superior-white insinuations are present in today's Mestizo construct. Thus, I am uncomfortable identifying as a Mestizo because of its representations stemming from scientific determinism.

Last, the Mestizo construct is a mobile definition and description representing the created social stratifications of society. For example, one can now identify as a Mestizo not just for academic purposes but for cultural or metaphorical purposes, too. These identifications will cause others to ultimately force Mestizos into groups or classes within the hierarchy of society. In fact, I showed how one can identify as a Mestizo simply because they see themselves this way, even though they may not be mixed. The reverse

of this was seen in la familia, too, where some identified as mixed even though they do not see themselves as Mestizos. These identifications place people into a social structure regardless of their awareness.

Thus, I do not wish to arrange my identity under the liminal pains of the social strata and, as Turner (1969) suggests, subject myself to the values attached to certain “stratified orders of indexicality” by identifying as a Mestizo (as reported in Stroud & Wee, 2007). The Mestizo construct has codes and restrictions outside of my personal experience or environment. However, my firm separation from the Mestizo construct is not a guarantee others will not see me as a Mestizo. These factors I realize even as I have not adopted the Mestizo identification.

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Epigram

For men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learnt to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives' tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poets they read, and the God they believed in. It is all these things that have made them what they are and these are things that you can't come to know by hearsay, you can only know them if you have lived them. You can only know them if you *are* them (Maugham, 1954, p. 2).

Introduction

When I first undertook this topic of study, I thought I knew exactly what I wanted: a statistical report showing the variance and covariance (ANOVA/ANCOVA) of identity on schooling performance. I even conducted a few pilot studies to begin a baseline for data collection. But somewhere between that first design and this one, something happened. Something changed me. Ironically, it was the same something that stopped me fourteen years ago from attending Moody Bible Institute as pastor to instead attend Judson University as teacher; the same something that kept me from marrying any one of the women I met before being liberated by my wife; that same something that pushed me towards a masters in education at National-Louis University rather than a masters in literature at Northern Illinois University; that stopped me from a doctoral degree in educational administration and superintendentcy at Drake to instead follow curriculum and instruction at the University of Northern Iowa; from giving up on numerous difficult situations. And the list could go on. That something I believe was conviction.

Conviction had convinced me that the design I originally pursued was not the best for the purposes or for the future audiences of this study. That sensation, and later sentiment, led me to investigate the possibility of a qualitative methodology and ethnographic design for the study of identity and self-representation. Not completely satisfied with merely studying others' identities, I eventually added the Interpretivist process as another layer, thus constructing an autobiographical component for the possible meanings behind my identity. I added epigrams to situate my experiences and emotionality in Mestizo identification. In time, they all became what it is today: an autoethnographic examination of Mestizo identity.

Conviction continued to help me later in this study. As a result, I chose to use three ways to investigate the Mestizo identity: personal and reflexive narratives; site-based observations and field notes; and intensive interviews. Together, they gave me the means to analyze and understand the Mestizo experience. Of course, each component is also saturated with the workings of how one even develops an identity in the first place. Thus, two discourses presented themselves within these three areas: pain and privilege. These discourses made it possible for me to interpret the journeys I and others took in Mestizo identification.

I now return to conviction, challenged with a new task: to provide conclusive comments to the collections I constructed. Accordingly, I summarize my findings on pain and privilege, as seen in the identity journeys of *la familia* and myself, while adding a brief synopsis of the guiding research questions after my reflexivity summary. Then, I

offer implications of these new perspectives to teachers, students, and finally to Mestizos in general. Last, I revisit reflexivity for concluding thoughts.

### Summary

In Chapter 1, an introduction was given on the purpose of the study. It also discussed the background and methodology of autoethnography, as well as my conceived identity prior to the investigation. As indicated, an investigation of both how and why I arrived at my racial, cultural, and social identity was undertaken, with an additional look at how and why others identify. The guiding research questions were thus built into the investigation of my affective history.

I provided meaning and descriptions of Mestizos in Chapter 2. I also provided a rich historical framework for Mestizo identity. Additional intersecting components, such as race, social class, schooling, and marginality, were clarified and connected to the Mestizo identity experience. The fact qualitative research, much more autoethnography, has been neglected as a medium for the topic of Mestizo identity was discussed.

Chapter 3 situated the theoretical and methodological designs of the investigation, along with a discussion of the research procedures. As seen, the philosophically and epistemologically saturated approach of qualitative research was used, with an autoethnographic design. An overview of the data collection procedures—personal and reflexive narratives; site-based observations and field notes; and intensive interviews—was also given. Their interplay, within the context of the Interpretivist process, offered the structure for my research method. The chapter concluded with a reflexivity of poststructuralism and truth.



The analysis and interpretation of the data I collected and constructed was given in Chapter 4. The approaches of Creswell (1998); Eisner (1998); and Geertz (1973) were used as an introduction to the descriptions and identity sketches I constructed and analyzed of each family member. Similarly, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) were discussed for how I interpreted the discourses of pain and privilege within the identity of each member and the family as a whole.

The comments of Richardson and St. Pierre were followed by the two milieus in which the research took place. Then ethnographic identity sketches were given, constructed and analyzed for each family member. Another general introduction was provided for the discourses of pain and privilege. Last, an interpretation was constructed in Chapter 4 of each family member and the family as a racial, cultural, and social group against the discourses. In the following sections, I summarize those interpretations.

### Pain and Privilege

Pain was defined as and compared to any and all of the historic discomforts felt as the results of scientific determinism. It was shown the origins of scientific certitude, institutionalization, race, and eurocentrism—which brought hereditarianism and racial inferiority—were all linked to the pain experienced in identity. Mestizos especially bore the brunt of this racial inferiority and were thus sterilized and ostracized, their historical pains now appearing as a racial and social hegemony.

Conversely, privilege was shown in comparison to “whiteness” as the hidden subtleties and invisible advantages that some enjoy, either consciously or subconsciously. These advantages often impede other groups that differ. In that way, it was shown

privilege itself is systemic and institutionalized, sorting people into different hegemonic and socio-racial groups who cannot opt out of oppression, unlike the privileged.

Moreover, I displayed how Mestizos see privilege as a system of language and affiliation, unavailable to them and possibly a result of oppression. They are aware that they do not partake in seemingly unexplainable yet existing privileges others enjoy.

### Luis

Beginning with Luis, I showed how pain characterizes his life because of his shifting identity between being a French-Canadian by race and that of Honduran by culture. These pains are rooted in his feelings and experiences over his father. His schooling experiences are thus affected. He currently experiences pain in his social identity tokenisms: in Honduras as a gringo and here in the U.S. as a Honduran. Lastly, his identity as father-mother is an area of pain he is not able to fully transcend in his parental roles.

Luis however, also experiences privilege in his Mestizo or mixed identity experiences. I mentioned how his language and being bilingual affords him socio-cultural privileges monolinguals cannot enjoy. He transcends either country's groups in this way for privileges in identity and belonging, which later improve his schooling performance. Also, he is able to negotiate and claim a dual identity as Mestizo, flexible and changing for specific situations. In this same way, his social identity as Mestizo allows him to possess certain societal privileges by being affluent in Honduras. Last, it became apparent his gender and identity, as a white French-Canadian and white Hispanic male, give him privileges from which he benefits.

### Isabella

Isabella also experiences pain. I demonstrated those pains are a result or at least directly related to but not a causality of her privileges. These pains came from her ability to identify as everything, which endanger her to the acceptances by others of her as an outcast or outsider. Similarly, the pain she experiences resulting from her disaffection for the U.S. culture has direct effects on her schooling experiences. She is not accepted by terms of her race or dark color, and thus experiences discrimination and racial profiling. Thus, her identity and social status suffers because of her gender and skin-color.

It was explained that privilege in Isabella's identity results from several factors. First, it was shown that Isabella negotiates her identity based on her environment. Thus, she racially and socially identifies as everything and anything: Honduran to her brothers; a Mestiza to her father's French-Canadian side and mother's Salvadorian side; herself as Honduran; and to others a Mexican. This openness gives her an advantage in schooling and augmented her experiences. Socially, she is becoming more American in multiple layers. Also, her experiences as a digital child privilege her in various forms of communication. These layers and communications allowed her to forge new identities in being a Honduran and an American.

### Nick

Like Luis and Isabella, Nick experiences pain in his identity journey. This pain is comparatively less than his privileges as a Mestizo. This was seen in his Mestisaje, or mixed American-Honduran racial, identification. The marginalization may as a result lead to more experienced pain because he cannot fully situate himself in one culture or

the other, for every time he attempts to be more American, he will be less Honduran, and every time he seeks to be more Honduran he will be less American.

However, Nick experiences many privileges which may outweigh the pains of his identity marginalization. The first of these is his privileges in language. He can use the formal and informal language of two different countries to navigate and negotiate meaning. Also, Nick represents a number of those who enter into these groups to exploit or fight against Western racism. He may do this already subconsciously. He mainly speaks English at school as thus is advantaged to use the dominant language of the U.S. without any difficulty, paving the way for future Mestizos or disadvantaged groups.

#### Andre

Andre is the last family member in la familia and experiences pain, although minimally due to his limited experiences and age. This was shown by his code switching, which were a privilege and pain. It was a pain for Andre because the ways in which schools and communities accept him. Traditionally, these organizations have been critical of code switchers. It was also shown that Andre may not be comfortable as a code switcher, thus feeling an identity dislocation.

Like wise, Andre experiences privilege with code switching. This is because he can create better social relationships and a better or larger pool of friends from which to draw. Also, he his treatment by friends indicates he already adapts well. In turn, his schooling performance has been good. He sees himself more positively now.

### La Familia (The Family)

I demonstrated that the family experiences pains because of operating from within a marginalized group living in a dominant society. Consequently, they may feel the oppression of being part of a losing system. Despite progress, Mestizos are still regarded as strange or inferior due to ignorance or cruelty. Moreover, although Mestizos, or half-and-half, they still experience racial, gender, and color discrimination. This is sadly expected for them because they are in the middle of two races, cultures, or classes and held inferior by the hatred of one side and the control of another. Thus, they experience the socio-cultural stratification of the dominant.

However, the children and Luis have all attended prestigious and advantaged schools in their lives. In Honduras, they were all at the local private bilingual schools, and Luis the university. Here in the U.S., it is the two-way bilingual school of Marshalltown, the only one in the state of Iowa, and for Luis the school district as teacher-coordinator of middle level ELL services. In addition, I explained how they have seen the increased acceptance of a historically marginalized group. These were some of their privileges.

Thus, la familia are pioneers or "frontiersmen" in that they are clearing a path for those that will follow. They have fought for the betterment of Mestizos and will continue to offer narratives to others by further mingling, merging, intermarrying, and infiltrating the Western racism and dominant culture that preys on the weak. They will do this until they reach such a point where they are accepted completely, not as token whites or half-breeds, as human beings, partners in the course of society.

The intersectionality of autoethnographic data, of the family's and that of mine, and thus the crux of my study, is given in Chapter 5. I restated the overall purpose of the study—to investigate my affective identity—and gave a brief introduction of poststructuralism (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I continued by offering a context first, of my family, community, and schooling, followed by constructed episodes of significant events in my identification experiences. Last, I provided reflexivity by means of how I interpreted my context and episodes against the same discourses of pain and privilege discussed in Chapter 4 with *la familia*. I also reflected on how I reconciled the Mestizo descriptor and my own identity. In the following sections, I summarize those interpretations, along with a brief synopsis of the guiding research questions.

### Pain

I described five interrelated factors which encased the discourse of pain present in my life and from the lives of *la familia*. They were: (1) socio-cultural pains resulting from my birth order and step-brother; (2) racial and cultural pains resulting from maternal and paternal misidentification; (3) schooling pains resulting from educative differences; (4) socio-class pain resulting from my father's injury and disability; and (5) socio-cultural pain resulting from being mixed.

I portrayed each of the pains by entering into a description of the specifics. In the first pain, I showed how my alternative birth order gave me a transient role in identification. Like wise, I gave examples of how the cruelty from my step brother, resulting from his re-configured birth order, brought inferiority in my identification. In the second pain, I showed how my father's occasional prejudice led to a racial

misidentification where I did not want to be an Indian. Similarly, my mother's aggressive mistreatment led to a cultural misidentification and disconnect with my Colombian side. My third pain involved low schooling performance resulting from educative differences. This was shown as a combination of poor teaching methods, of being bilingual, and from being a conceptual learner; these led to failures and misidentifications in special education and with peers. In the fourth pain, I described my father's injury and disability acting on my concepts of masculinity and social class. They led to an insecure identification. The final factor I described as pain was my Mestizo-hood. I told how my dual roles left me feeling frustrated with my schooling performance. They all demonstrated how my identity was left to an uncomfortable, lonely, and fearsome instability as a result.

### Privilege

My identity was also interpreted against the discourse of privilege. Like pain, there were factors which la familia and I collectively experienced. These three were: (1) socio-cultural privileges resulting from my birth order and being male; (2) schooling privileges resulting from being bilingual; and (3) identity privileges resulting from being mixed.

These privileges were shown with details that explained how they appeared in my life. The first privilege provided me opportunities my sisters did not have, and an alternative perspective in gender roles, allowing me to transcend the gender barrier. My second privilege was in being bilingual. I described how doors were open for me and peer relationships were enriched because I spoke two languages growing up. Similarly, I

explained how I could move in and out of social circles because my language assisted my self-representation. The last privilege I portrayed was my Mestizo identity. Accordingly, I described how I am able to move in and out of ethnic or cultural groups based on the situation. Having a dual identity enabled me to identify freely. Together these privileges allowed me a transcendence and power to journey in multiple directions.

### Reflexivity

In retrospect, I accomplished much more than what I originally intended to do, both in terms of my identity and in terms of this study. I set out to study and determine the influences of my affective identity. I accomplished this task. In doing so, I also researched the identities of four other people, elucidating their journeys for a better understanding of what it meant to be mixed. I also discussed how I reached my decision to not position myself under the Mestizo construct for many reasons. Those reasons included: (1) the historical regime of the Spaniards; (2) the systems of prediction and control; (3) attributes of scientific determinism; and (4) the limitedness of social stratifications within the social strata.

For example, Mead (1943) stated identity roles, such as "Intellectual" and "Indian," do not truly exist but instead are fragmented inventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century stratifications of society (as reported in Gregg, 1991, p. 184). Like wise, he stated identity is a game process, where some are: (1) unsocialized, thereby acting selfishly; (2) partially socialized, thereby lost in the multiplicity of fragmented selves; and (3) fully socialized, where one has a superordinate identity, in line with the common good. Hence, power-



elite who act superior constantly force a structure of competition over lower classes (p. 185).

Thus, I recognized the existence of the Mestizo construct, and the people with their historical and present day struggles. I arranged myself as a mixed person but not in reference to the Mestizo construct itself. Now that this study is complete, I can without reservation say I am comfortable identifying as a Colombian and Native American. That is, I am Colombian because of my practicing culture and Native American because of my Father's roots. I am not white, although I enjoy the privileges of whiteness.

#### Research Questions Revisited

The cornerstone questions, Who am I? and What is my affective history and identity journey? were answered both individually and collectively. They appeared as I wrote interpretations of my identity against the factors of la familia. I have gleaned from the study, embedded within the interpretations, an understanding to the guiding research questions. The questions are interrelated. Each one was individually pursued, yet together they support my understanding for a much larger discourse. In fact, it is important to point out that the questions were presented separately, but the answers appeared collectively. Thus, it was very difficult to provide an answer for one question without considering or answering another. This must be kept in mind as each question is revisited. I address each very briefly, to add strength and closure to the overall study.

1. How and why did I arrive at the racial, cultural, and social identity I have today?

I arrived at my racial, cultural, and social identity by the influences and factors of my environment and attitude. That is, the combination of "environmental transactions"

(Mead, 1943, as reported in Purkey, 1970) along with personal meanings I assigned to those transactions led to my affective identity. These transactions came from social organizations, the contexts and subjects surrounding those organizations, and the discourses of power embedded within their messages. The personal meanings came from awareness that factors were postrepresentations, not occurring as undisputed realities. Similarly, my assigned meanings to transactions were postinterpretive. Thus, these social, contextual, and subjective discourses were either accepted or not accepted, and my identity was influenced.

Why did I arrive at the identity I have today? This happened because I negotiated my identity against the factors and meanings from those transactions and discourses. The two dominant discourses in my identity journey were pain and privilege. If those factors resonated with my desires, they were kept while I disregard others that were not. These negotiations allowed me to situate myself within some identities while rejecting others.

According to Mead (1943) there is not an “I” and “me” or “not me.” In other words, there is no unification of an “I,” or “no definite character” (as reported in Purkey, 1970, p. 184). Thus, I arrived at my identity today because I recognized my identity was “self-as-social-structure,” travelling between pain and privilege and unable to fully integrate into self or society due to the fragmentations of society as a social structure (p. 184).

## 2. What societal and personal forces influenced my journey?

The main forces influencing my identity were the discourses of pain and privilege within my schooling and home life. They in turn influenced the personal aspects of my

identity. Here I address the factors from my home life. I will address schooling next.

My identity was influenced and formed by several pain factors. They included socio-cultural pains from my birth order and step-brother, racial and cultural pains resulting from maternal and paternal misidentification, and my social class pain from my father's injury and disability. Like wise, the privilege of being the youngest male, and being mixed, gave me privileges others in my family did not have. I portrayed each of the pains through details and descriptions. As I negotiated transactions with age and experience, I reintroduced factors and identities rejected earlier from pain or personal preference. I finally reconciled my relationship with my mother and father, realizing that even with all their mistakes as parents, they loved me and did the best they could with how they were dealt childhood and life. No, I did not receive the youthful, active father I longed for, but I did have an intellectual leader instead. Likewise, I did not have the gentle, popular mother I saw with many others, but I did have a strong and determined mother instead. I learned to adapt and be grateful for them. In turn, those factors influenced my schooling performance.

3. What role did my schooling experiences, if any, play in this history?

Gordon (1968) asserts: "Race, class, and family structure are assumed to interact, each in its own way, to shape such dimensions of self-conception as basic self-acceptance, self-perceived mental capacity and academic ability, the sense of general competence and of self-esteem" (p. 5). In the same way, my family transactions of strong racial and socio-economic identification and misidentification greatly influenced my schooling.

Schooling can be situated as one of society's organizations of power. They reproduce dominant discourses created within society. The elite are largely responsible for these discourses. Thus, schooling played a very large role for how I constructed my identity. The role of schooling in my identity was clearly seen in how I travelled in and out of the system of educative privilege. Sometimes, I was a highly valued student-so it seems. At others, I was hardly remembered. Being mixed did this.

From early on this hierarchy had begun. Even in Kindergarten I learned that I was a different type of learner, a conceptual learner. Schools did not know how to help me. I was tested for special education and did not qualify, although I received related services anyhow. Thus, I was considered a special education student even though I was not a special learner. This fact affected my identity in school indefinitely.

Thus, pain and privilege characterized my identity experience. These were schooling privileges resulting from being bilingual, and identity privileges resulting from being mixed. The pains were more volatile.

Accordingly, I described how I was able to move in and out of ethnic or cultural groups based on the situation. Having a dual identity enabled me to identify freely. Together, I showed how these privileges had transcendence and empowered me to journey in multiple directions.

#### 4. How do these findings resonant with the journeys of others?

I showed how noticeable factors from the lives of la familia were seen in my own identity journey. The factors from my journey were equally seen in theirs. The significant

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episodes we shared demonstrated that factors of identity were similar. The findings were characterized within the discourses of pain and privilege.

For pain, I discussed how we shared socio-cultural pains from hierarchy and social stratifications. I also shared racial and cultural pains resulting from maternal and paternal misidentification. Schooling pains resulted from educative differences, along with socio-cultural pains from being mixed.

Like wise, I demonstrated how my journey factors resonated with those of la familia in the discourse of privilege. These included socio-cultural privileges from being male, schooling privileges from being bilingual, and identity privileges from being mixed.

5. Is there a new perspective for understanding the identity journeys of Mestizo from these findings? If so, does this perspective elucidate the racial, cultural, and social identity complexities of Mestizos?

There is indeed a new perspective from which we can understand the journeys of Mestizos. The findings of my study show that all Mestizos, regardless of their unique journeys of schooling, class, and society, share a common characteristic: the dichotomized discourse of pain and privilege. This perspective is collective within all their journeys. Pain and privilege construct and deconstruct the images of race, culture, and social class. These images then become ingrained within the lives of Mestizos, serving as the framework for their identity constructions.

This perspective helps clarify the identity journeys Mestizos endure. Through the lenses of pain and privilege, deeper understandings of what it means to be Mestizo occur. Further more, these discourses are not represented together in the literature available on

Mestizos but instead appear separately, disconnected. However, pain and privilege factors must be considered together so that the understandings of Mestizos or mixed people may continue better than before.

The following list summarizes the pain-privilege discourse as seen in the identities of Mestizos:

1. Mestizos construct their identities from social organizations and institutions within society. Thus, their identities are social structures. Everything develops who they become.
2. Mestizos find they cannot fully identify with either of their races, cultures, or social classes because society is fragmented and thus changing constantly.
3. Mestizos bear the insinuations of the past, for how their particular identity descriptor came about.
4. Mestizos all experience privilege to some degree and can travel back and forth between racial, cultural, and social groups.

This new perspective also implies those wishing to study Mestizos must do so holistically to gain a better understanding of identity. This means looking at others' stories to gain additional perspectives on language and society, looking at discourses of power and status as they may relate to pain and privilege. It means considering one's whole culture, not simply genetics or race alone.

#### Implications

The research on Mestizos very seldom focuses on both the pains and privileges of identifying. In fact, most of the educators and residents I interviewed believe Mestizo identities are understood in either pain or privilege, or that the issues can be attributed to language or culture, but none admitted it was both. This is where I begin with the implications for understanding Mestizos.

Speaking to pain and privilege, Johnson (2005) states,

Living in a particular society can make people feel miserable, but we can't call that misery "oppression" unless it arises from being on the losing end in a system of privilege. That can't happen in relation to society as a whole, because a society isn't something that can be the recipient of privilege. Only people can do this by belonging to privileged categories in relation to other categories that aren't (pp. 106-107).

Thus, the implications made for Mestizos cover three areas: language, culture, and identity. They are given in the context of pain and privilege to three groups: Educators, Students, and Mestizos.

### Educators

Given the limited amount of literature and research relating specifically to Mestizo identities makes it difficult to characterize steps or provide a systematic plan for teachers to implement. Thus, what follows is a combination of the research available on language, culture, and identity, providing collective perspectives on how a Mestizo might be situated or understood within those implications. Most of the implications are transferable; meaning the implications given can be applied to any student, irrespective of their ethnicity or socio-cultural standing, but may be especially beneficial to Mestizos.

How language is characterized or used, or allowed in the classroom, by educators is vital. Language influences Mestizos' concepts of culture. Also, their culture then informs them of their identities. Thus, three areas in terms of language, culture, and identity emerge in the implications for educators: (1) "coding" Mestizos; (2) code switching as part of normal bilingualism; and (3) language and identity considerations. The first of these concerns "coding" Mestizos.



Speaking to this, Tuner (1969) said the “liminal” learner enters into social settings completely aware of the “different social values attached to particular codes” (as reported in Stroud & Wee, 2007, p. 13). These codes, or “network of classifications” are then used regularly by educators and students to “suspended or put on hold” the normal classroom discourse and formal language in order to go through alternative activities of learning (p. 13). This means an educator who uses codes in the classroom, such as code switching or informal language when responding to students is actually perpetuating the “liminal” student, who already possesses knowledge of the elder-authority codes existing. The students are aware of when the educator has left the normal discourse and language of the classroom. These codes do not represent true “street talk” that establish identity. Rather the codes are rooted in created hierarchy. But the codes still serve the purpose of engaging the student in conversations in ways an educator normally would not. Stroud and Wee (2007) cite,

Consequently, both teacher and students can interact by freely drawing on the identities associated with the different codes with relatively little risk of rejection or ridicule. Though it is true that the risk of ridicule can never be totally eliminated, it is a risk worth taking (p. 13).

Thus, Mestizo identities may fair better if the language being utilized by the educator is in code or role-play rather than in formal terms all the time. These findings require that educators recognize and adjust their classroom codes and metaphors to represent more sensitive identity language. In this sense, the educators can directly communicate their desires through codes to convey messages of power. For example, an educator may choose to say, “Pretend I am a student. Please, re explain the assignment me in your own words.” This message says the teacher is speaking seriously and wants to

know if the students understand the task without browbeating them with formal language. To do this, educators must be ready to assist learners with the messages of power and language when the time arrives.

The fact bilingualism, especially code switching, has not been well received by organizations of power within schools makes it difficult for educators to adjust. Baker (2000) warns that those who “criticize” or point out “mistakes, revealing anxiety and concern” over the code switching might leave negative connotations with speakers (pp. 63–64). This was seen in Andre, who code switched with each family member and represented a different cultural aspect to each one. To Isabella, Andre represents the past; To Luis, Andre is the present; and to Nick, he is the future, the transference to Americanism or whiteness and further privileges. With either scenario, Baker (2000) claims,

In younger in-migrants, there can be an aggressive reaction, having lost the identity of home and heritage, and finding it difficult to penetrate the thick walls to enter the new host culture. For some in-migrants, there may be a sense of rootlessness, confusion of identity, feeling neither one ethnic identity nor the other. This can lead to hopelessness, an ambiguity of cultural existence or feeling lost in a cultural wildness (p. 69).

Educators must recognize that code switching is a natural phenomenon of bilingualism. In order to encourage the transference of skills from one language to another, educators must avoid isolating language usage in the classroom with Mestizos (Collier, 1995; Garcia & Ortiz, 1994; Roseberry-McKibbin et al., 2005). This should be done regardless of whether one identifies as a Mestizo or not. But this may be especially important for those who call themselves Mestizos. Thus, educators need not mention phrases of apprehension, such as, “This is America!” and “You will only speak English in

this classroom!” when speaking of their own fears related to code switching and bilingualism. Instead, they must work with Mestizos and others who code switch to ensure the messages communicated are empowering.

This may also mean educators need to take a foreign language or cultural class, such as Spanish or Spanish Heritage, to better reach students who speak more than one language. “[Teachers can] teach kids other languages, like French, Chinese, whatever they want” (A. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). Moreover, educators must begin to “mix classes more, to mix [Mestizos] more [with Americans], and to learn more English and help [Mestizos] find a place to live” (I. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). These suggestions certainly are held by educators themselves who claim good educators must help Mestizos who sometimes feel “pulled and forced [because of] getting mixed messages from home” (M. Cooper, personal communication, January 10, 2008). Thus, good educators must also make use of “good strategies” so that the “school culture” does not “delay their [identity] development” (K. Galton, personal communication, January 5, 2008). This requires that educators in general make concerted efforts at being good teachers.

Lastly, language and identity must be considered together (Yihong, Yuan, Ying, & Yan, 2007). This language implication requires educators acknowledge that schools shape and create socio-cultural and socio-psychological structures. In turn, schools actually create the identities children believe they have of themselves (Apple, 1990; Hurn, 1993). In terms of language, this was seen in Nick, who uses his language to categorize race or culture. He recognizes he is virtually changing his race or culture when

switching between two different languages as “language juxtaposition” (Wildman & Davis, 2005, p. 97).

That Mestizos may be giving up parts of their cultures while taking on others necessitates educator sensitivity for Mestizo culture and identity. They must recognize Mestizos histories have been shaped in various ways, not all of them easy or pleasant to remember. This sensitivity may then help educators in the classroom with Mestizos who naturally categorize race, in others and in themselves, by the language used of Mestizos and their mixed situations.

Thus, schools must stop rewarding students “on a massive scale” where [students] adjust culturally to the school rather than the school adjust to the students” (Purkey, 1970, p. 40). It also means educators must advocate for their students. Educators must remember they reflect back images of themselves and others back onto their students. They must speak to the similarities and differences and then collectively acknowledge the compatibility of schools to adjust to students’ cultural needs. If this is lacking, educators must seek out, organize, and then construct this type of emancipation for Mestizos. This is what student-centered curriculum is all about (Marsh & Willis, 2003).

“Crossing” is just one technique educators could use to encourage identity and language development that Stroud and Wee (2007) discuss (pp. 78-79). It invites students to invest in alternate identities they do not already have, such as the submissive wanderers who must ask many before getting an answer, to situate themselves in someone else’s perspective or experience. The cross is done by adopting identities they may not have otherwise had, through language. Instead of teachers role-playing as

mentioned before, the students actually adopt alternative identities which may decrease the anxiety of learning to better comprehend language. This in turn may better situate Mestizos in other identities to comprehend more.

Educators can also “give Mestizos more jobs” to experience more authentic activities while learning (N. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). In this, educators must “not assume all Central Americans are the same, to assume all Central Americas speak Spanish or the same Spanish” (L. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). Then educators may begin to see that helping Mestizos is a contextualized issue, requiring in-depth and individualized care. In other words, educators must “increase bonds [by] knowing the stories, the good and bad,” (B. Edwards, personal communication, January 13, 2008), and by seeking to “understand the struggles that Mestizos are going through” (T. Sanchez, personal communication, January 20, 2008). If educators do this, they may get to know the resistance of some who are Mestizo and thus help them and themselves. Why is this needed? Rist (1970) states,

The success of an educational institution and any individual teacher should not be measured by the treatment of the high-achieving students, but rather by the treatment of those not achieving. As is the case with a chain, ultimate value is based on the weakest member. So long as the lower-status students are treated differently in both quality and quantity of education, there will exist an imperative for change” (p. 448).

### Students

Students may also benefit from the implications of this study. Students will find they too have a responsibility to understand the discourses of pain and privilege as they concern their Mestizo identity. This is because they may better navigate or negotiate their identities if they are aware of the elements that go into being a Mestizo. This may

empower them to resist Western racism as a social institution of power. Thus, their attention must be drawn to those same areas outlined for educators: language, culture, and identity.

Family has a large influence on culture and identity. Gordon (1968) found: (1) family structure is associated to a student's self-concept, educational aspirations, and occupational aspirations; and (2) the higher the family's aspirations towards educational achievement, and self-conception, the higher the student's will be. He also found causality between race and social class to self-concept and achievement (pp. 90-91). These findings tell us that Mestizos, and their self-concepts and educational performances, are highly influenced by their families.

Gordon's conclusions, now forty years later, are very similar to the literature on families and gender identification from Adams and Coltrane (2004), who also found "family is typically considered the main institution for both production and reproduction of polarized gender values" and that "it is also in the family that children get their first look at what gender means" (p. 190). Thus, a family's perspective on being bilingual and Mestizo will be important for students to know and understand. It may directly affect their identities. They will need to be ready to search for their own identities, values about gender, and values about bilingualism once they learn to separate their ideas from their family's.

Other considerations for students are the many benefits and pains associated with bilingualism. Mestizo students who are bilingual must recognize and then reconcile their bilingualism against the prevailing factors. Baker (2000) mentioned,

Overall, bilingualism is likely to be an advantage in social relationships. Children will be able to increase the variety of their friendships and make bridges with children from different language groups...Bilingualism helps dismantle social barriers, enables more fluent growth of friendships with children from two or more language communities, [thus] widening the child's social, cultural and educational horizons (p. 74).

Considering Baker, bilinguals may experience wonderful benefits to speaking two languages. Their friendships may be richer, and overall they may be afforded many privileges. Students may experience higher achievement being a Mestizo and bilingual, able to operate from several mental constructs simultaneously. This was shown in la familia by how the children were performing well in their schools.

Specifically, this bilingual scenario was seen in Nick, who was able to participate in the dominant discussions of both the Honduran and American society. He could be Honduran or American, depending on what language he used and to whom he spoke. This fact alone may have increased his socio-cultural connections, thus increasing his self-concept and schooling performance. However, students must also realize there are pains in being bilingual.

Baker (2000) argues bilinguals may experience what he calls a "dislocation between two cultures" (p. 69). This dislocation is the result of those who find it difficult to identify with either culture or language because of the mixed associations with each, as I demonstrated (see Chapter 5). In fact, some students may suffer from lower educational achievement if they choose to identify with a less dominant culture or language (Herman, 2002). They may forfeit certain privileges of "whiteness" while gaining privileges of ethnicity. In other words, a Mestizo may be confused with using both languages, not knowing which language and culture to eventually situate within. Baker (2000) asserts:

It is often the case that the strengths of a person's two languages tend to vary across time. As there is more or less exposure to one language, as different people such as brothers and sisters enter the family situation, as schooling starts and peer group relationships grow, so does the language dominance and preference of children for one of their two languages (p. 75).

Thus, Mestizo students must also be willing to pursue other identities outside of their own race, culture, and social class in order to move ahead of the pains associated with being a bilingual. This is seen in Nick, who identifies as an artist, Andre, who identifies as the inventive player, and Isabella with her digital child identity in communications and connections through technology. This pursuit of other identities may allow Mestizos to feel well rounded, giving them an outlet outside of their families, schools, and self-concepts. This will also help them fight Western racism because they will be situation in an identity.

Even so, Mestizos may still feel the sting of discrimination based solely on race, color, or gender. This was seen in Isabella's struggle where she is treated as a Mexican merely based on her brown skin tone. She did not identify with the identity they imposed upon her no more than the Mexican identity forced on me at times. Students have to be prepared to deal with some of the harsh discriminations and social oppressions that may face them, both inside and out of schools. Then, they can talk about their experiences. But students must be willing to share these types of stories, their stories, so that all may have stories from which to draw and learn. "It can be like an ancient story to see how their lives were" (A. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008).

Students can trust that they will enter and navigate the typical adolescent stages irrespective of their bilingualism, culture, or identities. This was seen in Nick who went



through all the typical stages of adolescence despite being bilingual, being mixed, and despite having a mixed or dual identity. This may bring comfort to those who are concerned their identifications may disconnect them from the traditional pathways of adolescence.

Last, other types of students who are not Mestizos must be willing to work alongside those that are, or identify as mixed. They must be ready to release deeply ingrained myths and fears they have from being around or associating with those from different classes, cultures, or identities. They must be clear on where the fight lays, not student against student, teacher against teacher, or even groups of people against each other. No, the fight lies between the rulers, the powers, and the organizational discourses present which oppress anyone attempting to rid the world of bigotry, of color and gender discrimination, and racism.

### Mestizos

Mestizos themselves can also benefit from seeing the results framed within the contexts of pain and privilege. As with educators and students, I situate these implications in language, culture, and identity.

Mestizos who are older and past school-age have already been situated within a societal structure. In order to rise above their particular circumstance, a Mestizo must first recognize their limitations. The fact that the Mestizo construct was created and has been in existence since Spanish Colonialism (Forbes, 2005) and since the birth of scientific determinism (Gould, 1981; Harding, 1993) means the issues will not go away with one story, with several stories, or even with more studies similar to this one. It will

require a concerted effort from many groups and many organizations who have been frustrated with the oppressions Mestizo face. These groups must then establish a societal transformation or revolution where the deeply ingrained myths and hegemony will be done away with once and for all. There are several ways this paradigm shift may happen.

First, society and the powers driving it must recognize people are all different but deserve fair treatment. That is, no one should be discriminated against because of her color or gender, or because of ethnicity or country. This is foundational. It will mean the eradication of the “pushed and pulled” and “outcaste” mentalities Mestizos experience with their identities (Bruhl et al., n.d., p. 6; Forbes, 2005). Like wise, Mestizos and others must remember and educate others about the silent histories of oppressed people (Pyke, 2004). Mestizos must share that they receive identities shaped by the impressions and contemptible images of others who hate (Foley, 2005; Taylor, 1994). Finally, Mestizos have to examine their own lives and be willing to assist others by taking on alternative identities or ethnicities besides “Mestizo,” so that they may better situate themselves. In this way, it will be beneficial for Mestizos to be more involved with their locales so that they are not “holding back from engaging” (R. Dunkin, personal communication, January 28, 2008). Other wise, Mestizos may falter in their pursuits, unaware of which identity or social construct to fight. This identification can begin with language.

A Mestizo can choose to identify with the language that they use the most or that may be the most dominant in their lives. This language can then serve as a force against the neutrality others face by way of the systems of privilege and “invisibility and regeneration of privilege” (Wildman & Davis, 2005, p. 95). Because all mixed people do

not identify as Mestizos, we “could thrown in language for this identity and life,” thereby depending on “personal relationships to overcome stereotypes or perspectives [of skin or appearance discrimination]” (R. Dunkin, personal communication, January 28, 2008).

If Mestizos do this, it may assist them in characterizing their own identities. That is, their once dual identities can be reconciled with an ethnicity or cultural designation versus the Mestizo descriptor, one born from the hegemony of past control and racism. This may offer them freedom over limitedness (Morial, 2006, p. 164) and a new self with which to identify (Purkey, 1970). To begin this process, Mestizos must cling to good attitudes because “attitude is 100% [of how one makes a difference]” (D. Telmer, personal communication, January 6, 2008).

That Mestizos will not be mixed or possess a dual identity is not the goal. People can certainly have dual identities. This was shown in Luis’ ability to identify as father-mother with his children and my birth-order reconfigurations. Also, that Mestizos look for a new sense of self is not to say they are two different people, although some may identify this way. No doubt there is a “price to pay about who you are, where you belong, but [being mixed] is richer than being monolingual, monocultural. They have a higher consciousness, resources, [and] greater flexibility” (L. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). Thus, the uses of language and reconceptualizing the terms in self-identification are the goals.

Perhaps the most important thing for Mestizos to recognize is that others (i.e. children, students, nieces, nephews, friends, co-workers, etc) may identify as they do. In this way, their identities may become the same as others’ by association. For example,

that Luis identified as a Honduran-American may have had profound influence on his sons and daughter seeing themselves as Hondurans and Americans or Mestizos. If Luis had said to his children early on they were only American, changes may have been seen in the ways they characterized themselves.

It very well may be that “mixed people” such as Mestizos “can be among the best citizens in any country because they act as liaisons to many groups while also feeling uncomfortable in that role, sending sparks...shedding light on our own ignorance” (L. Bertrand, personal communication, February 22, 2008). Thus, Mestizos must be cognizant of the identity issues. They must be ready to accept successes as well as defeats. Just as educators need to be aware of others’ stories, and just as students need to tell their own, so Mestizos need to examine their histories. Their stories must also be shared. As Telmer (personal communication, February 15, 2008) shared, “I think where you come from should be told, told, told. How else would you know it? If the Hispanic doesn’t tell his story, how will the next generation know? If it doesn’t get told, it gets lost!” Thus, only in these factors of language, culture, and identification will it be possible for Mestizos to embark on the journey for transformation needed within society, for others and for themselves.

### Reflexivity Revisited

We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience, and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history; only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself,—must go over the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know. What the former age has epitomized into a formula or rule for manipular convenience, it will lose all the good of verifying for itself, by means of the wall of that rule. Somewhere, sometime, it will demand

and find compensation for that loss by doing the work itself (Emerson, 1847, p. 240).

When I began this autoethnographic study almost two years ago, I never imagined it would be what it is today. Once again, visited by conviction, I believe I have learned some things as a result. I learned that most people identify with one ethnicity over another. Even mixed or Mestizos attempt to situate themselves within one language, culture, or identity. It seems this is based mainly on personality and ethnicity, and how both of those abstractions are received by others. Successful individuals go on confidently in the identities they constructed of themselves. This fact mobilizes the efforts against Western racism. Others less fortunate become the marginalized, the middle, the outcasts.

I have also come to recognize many white people identify as mixed, even though they do not specifically identify their past ethnicities or may not use the term mixed. This fascinates me yet also reminds me of the ever changing and ever shifting culture of identity within society. I doubt if this shall ever change as most people deep down like mystery and do not usually incline themselves to examination or personal predictability. Even so, after many years and generations in between, we seem to exchange our identities for new ones. Ones that better frame us for the times and struggles we may face or endure.

Lastly, I learned my affective identity, although well clarified and researched in this study, will likely change in my own future, influenced once again by family, culture, and society. Once gain, I will face a choice, just as I was in this study of my affective history. I will need to ask: Do I change my identity? or Do I stay in the middle? Staying

in the middle might mean accepting defeat of yesterday's battle and tomorrow's future. But changing my identity, or at least the way I see myself and thereby possibly changing how others accept me, may mean vulnerability. It may also mean an advantage in fighting against the shames of oppression and Western racism. Thus, today I chose not to stay in the middle. For tomorrow, I am uncertain.

I am now left with the notion that we all have our own stories to tell. In some ways, all we ever will have is stories. And these stories should be "told, told, told," as my well advanced yet active resident participant had said (D. Telmer, personal communication, January 6, 2008). And in this, we all have affective histories we could share, for ourselves, our families, and for the greater community. We all have things to say to those needing to hear them or willing to listen. All of life, regardless of language, culture, socio-economic status, or even identity itself, is, as Emerson said, one great biography.

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APPENDIX:  
THE MINOR CASTE SYSTEM AND MESTIZO VARIATIONS

| Nation            | African                   | ↕  | Spaniard | ↕       | Spaniard | ↕   | Indian                             | ↕     | African          |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|----------|---------|----------|---|------------------------------------|-------|------------------|
|                   |                           | ↕  |          | ↕       |          | ↕   |                                    | ↕     |                  |
| <b>U.S. North</b> | Negro                     | Mulatto;<br>Mixed;<br>Buck                   |          | Criollo |          | Mestizo;<br>Cholo                           | No-caste;<br>Out-caste;<br>Outcast | Zambo |                  |
| <b>U.S. South</b> | Quad-<br>roons;<br>Nigger | Mulatto;<br>Mustee;<br>Tom;<br>Coon;<br>Buck |          |         |          | Half-breed;<br>Half-blood;<br>Quarter-blood |                                    |       | High-<br>yellows |
| <b>Mexico</b>     | Negro                     | Mulato;<br>Mulo                              |          |         |          | Mestizo;<br>Mexicano;<br>Cholo              | Coyote;<br>Pardo                   | Lobo  |                  |
| <b>Guatemala</b>  |                           |  |          |         |          | Ladino                                      |                                    |       |                  |
| <b>Canada</b>     |                           |  |          |         |          | Métis                                       |                                    |       |                  |
| <b>Brazil</b>     |                           | Mulato                                       |          |         |          | Caboclo;<br>Mameluco                        |                                    |       |                  |
| <b>Peru</b>       |                           |  |          |         |          | Cholas;<br>Cholos;<br>Campesinos            |                                    |       |                  |