

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: *GÜERAS, MORENAS, y PRIETAS:*  
MEXICANA COLOR LINES AND  
ETHNORACIAL SAMENESS-DIFFERENCE.

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This interdisciplinary study documents the ethnoracial identities and racialized experiences of women of Mexican descent residing in the greater Tampa Bay region and the multiple meanings that they assigned to race and color categories. Tampa's in-between status, straddling North and South and black/white imaginaries provides important insight into the ways that this rural Mexican population negotiate questions of race and color. The study's participants share a history of migrant farm work and by extension experienced familiar tropes of Mexican racialization that connect manual labor, illegality, to low social status. What is less known is the significance of vernacular Mexican color terminology such as *morena*, *prieta*, and *negra* (approximate translation: brown, dark brown, and black) and the migration of meaning of this dynamic and relational lexicon of race, color, and gender.

The use of this informal language of race and color suggests an ethnoracial form of cultural citizenship that permits the right to difference in the face of Mexican non-

racialism and U.S. color-blindness. The simultaneous practice of tolerance and rejection of racial difference reflects the constant negotiation of *mestizaje* (race mixture); that has worked to erase a larger history of Mexican multiraciality. The everyday use of this dynamic color terminology serves as embodied testaments to Mexico's overlapping Indian-Black-European histories and cultures.

I argue that the term *morena* works as an idealized and ambiguous middle ground that permits ethnoracial heterogeneity. Most telling, this idealized racial middle ground bends and shifts to accommodate a range of skin colors and tones symbolically located in between a white and black color line. This major finding complicates contemporary theories that presume that Mexican and Latin American racial ideologies reject and eliminate black and white polarizations. The everyday negotiations of color labels among women of Mexican descent offer a window into the translocal movement between and among these fluid categories. This research promises to recast *mestizaje* as an embodied experience and reanimate color as a category of analysis to consider the significance of the overlap of Indo-Hispanic and Afro-Latin American racial formations in Mexico.

*GÜERAS, MORENAS, y PRIETAS: MEXICANA COLOR LINES AND  
ETHNORACIAL SAMENESS-DIFFERENCE*

By

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to my mother, Ildefonsa Davila Jaramillo and my wonderful brothers and sisters in struggle, Alicia, Manuela, Jesus, and Juan Carlos for their strength, humor, wit and unwavering love.

*Nunca voy a olvidarme del campo*

*Siempre voy a sentirme orgullosa*

*Como extraño sus calles de tierra*

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## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Methodology and Theoretical Framework.....	18
Chapter 3: Historical Background and Contributing Literatures.....	49
Chapter 4: Latino Florida: Race and Location.....	76
Chapter 5: MeXicana Colorlines: Theorizing Multiple Cultures of Race and Color .....	116
Chapter 6: Morenas, Negras y Prietas: Embodied Identities In Mexican America .....	142
Conclusion: 21 <sup>st</sup> Century MeXicana Color lines .....	181
Figures.....	199
Appendices.....	204
Glossary .....	216
Bibliography .....	217

## List of Figures

- Figure 1: Map of Mexico, Indicating Participants Place of Birth
- Figure 2: Map of Hillsborough County, Florida
- Figure 3: Strawberry Mural in Balm, Florida with Study Participant
- Figure 4: Local Lowrider Show Flyer
- Figure 5: 2010 U.S. Census Questions #8 and #9
- Figure 6: Mexican *Telenovela* Star Roster

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Tu prima esta mas clara que tu (Your cousin is more clara than you).*

*Esa gente si son blancos puros (Those people are blancos puros)*

*What do I do with my Afro-Indian hair?!*

I came to this dissertation project by way of everyday encounters with a Mexican lexicon of race and color traveling to Mexico from central Florida. My family members on many occasions would make color comparisons and references to racial purity and hair texture alluding to the discursive and material sites of ancestry, appearance, and belonging. These appraisals, approximations, and observations reflected in the above autoethnographic epigraphs worked as an informal reference system that permitted us a space in a complex ethnoracial history and hierarchy. This visual vocabulary of identity shaped my own color consciousness and color identifications as a “brown” and “morena” Mexican woman (Please see the Glossary for major folk ethnoracial terms used in Mexico). Telling was my uncle’s first appraisal of my appearance during a trip I made with my family to Guanajuato, Mexico. His hushed and judgmental tone of me denoted his preference for lighter over darker skin color. This was my first introduction to Mexican color consciousness. It was in this moment that I became more aware of my skin color than before and began to experiment with different ways of becoming lighter in color and appearance.

This awareness took place during the early 1990s, the heyday of *Mi Vida Loca* (My Crazy Life 1994), a Chicana film classic that also doubled as a fashion manual

that captured my angst and budding *chola-descence*. My friends and I studied the makeup and hairstyles, wearing Covergirl powder on our faces two or three shades too light and dark lipsticks that were named after blackberries and port wine. While the desire to be lighter skinned was a common value my friends and I shared, a stable reference point for light complexion and its related features of blonde hair and “colored” eyes<sup>1</sup> did not exist. Our ethnoracial realities comprised mostly of various gradations of *morenas* and a speckling of *güeras*. Selena Quintanilla and Bibi Gaytan who were the local emblems of Mexican beauty and popular grupero songs like “*Morenita*” by Los Bukis and “*La Morena*” by La Banda Limon, payed homage to Mexican women’s brown skin color and celebrated their dark features. Yet, we idealized light complexions and listened to our mothers when they instructed us to stay out of the sun.

Remarkably, my sister’s frank comment about her “Afro-Indian hair” alludes to an imperfect invocation of Mexican mixed race and embodied mestiza histories. In this moment, she expressed frustration with her hair and sought my advice on ways to control and maintain its form and texture. I took note of the unconventional pairing of African and Indigenous ancestries and the unraveling of a traditional Indo-Hispanic Mexican mestizaje. Collectively, my family’s engagement with color terminology and expressions reflected a history of naming ancestors or *antepasados*. This imperfect custom of appraisal and comparisons reflects the history of 500 years of *mestizaje*, rife with conflict, exchange, and negotiation.

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<sup>1</sup>. This phrase is commonly used among Mexican Americans, to describe eyes that are green, blue, or hazel. This is a translation from the Spanish phrase, *ojos de color*.

What do we make of these discursive enunciations of purity and mixture? What are the everyday and on the ground understandings of race and color that Mexican women engage with? What is the significance of Mexican colloquial ethnoracial terms and expression in identity formation and embodied discourse? These overarching questions are explored in this interdisciplinary and integrative dissertation project that attempts to capture the vast complexity of the everyday language of race and color as it relates to overlapping U.S. and Mexican racial ideologies. This interdisciplinary study sits at the intersections of the fields of American Studies, Latina Studies, and Women's Studies. In doing so, this project integrates studies of Mexican racial identity ideologies, overlapping systems of racial categorization, and gendered systems of representations. Most appropriately, materials collected for this study were gathered in Tampa, Florida, a site of a burgeoning Mexican/American community.

*Güeras, Morenas, y Prietas: Mexicana Color Lines and Ethnoracial Sameness-Difference* consists of 3 main interpretive approaches: 1) identifying the multiple grids of race and color embedded in everyday racial discourse; 2) highlighting the gendered visual vocabularies of race and color within the paradigms of *embodied mestizaje* and *visible identities* ; and 3) mapping out the relationships between formal and informal sites of race-making.

In this interdisciplinary and qualitative dissertation project, I investigate the multiple dimensions of race and color that women of Mexican descent negotiate in their everyday lives. The main questions that guide this dissertation are: 1) What interpretive frameworks do Mexicanas use to make meaning of racial and ethnic

difference? 2) What race and color labels do they adopt to describe themselves and others? and 3) How do regional racial formations shape Mexican racial and ethnic identities? This dissertation argues that Mexicanas engage with complex and contradicting narratives of race and color that negotiate discourses of racial difference and racial sameness. The everyday negotiations of race and color illuminate a dialogic relationship with context-specific racial binaries and color continuums that reproduce and restructure dominant and emergent paradigms of racial difference and racial mixture.

This interdisciplinary and feminist approach departs from traditional empirical studies of racial categorization in that it does not attempt to look for stable meanings nor verify the permanence of racial categories and terminology. Rather, this study looks to identify and theorize the slippery and in-between spaces located in racial classification terminology that shifts from the formal to the informal sites of race-making. It is these unstable and unclassifiable spaces that provide important insight onto the complex ways that hegemonic racial categorizations are negotiated, contested, and reconfigured. The interdisciplinary character of this dissertation study does not neatly fit into the categories of the sociology or anthropology of race but seeks to bridge disciplinary boundaries and enrich our conversations about the significance of the everydayness of race, racial categorizations, and racism.

To explore the relationship among race, gender, and color ideologies with a diverse group of Mexicanas, I borrowed qualitative research methods and techniques from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and communication studies. This project fashions together an interdisciplinary and integrative dissertation study that delves

into the material and discursive contours of race and color in the everyday lives of Mexican women. Discourse and language are key sites of the production of cultural representations and terminology that shape personal and collective experience mobilizing discursive meanings into material consequences. This interdisciplinary research also combines humanities and social science methods including extensive fieldwork using semi-structured interviews, informal participation observation, and photo elicitation. Utilizing a snow-ball sample, I conducted 25 face-to face, semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 1.5 hours each. Participants who were interviewed were recruited for the focus group. I conducted a total of 3 focus groups that lasted approximately 2 hours each.

This dissertation is not a straightforward empirical investigation of skin color stratification, life chances, and educational attainment. Nor it is a study of the social psychology of racial attitudes or a socio-linguistic treatment of race and color labels. Important studies have provided necessary evidence on the material and symbolic repercussions of racism and its enduring legacies of racial segregation, stereotyping, and other forms of social inequality (Arce et al 1987; Montalvo 2004; Telzer and Vasquez Garcia 2009). I draw resources from these studies and redirect our attention to the “ordinariness of racism” (Holland 3), and the significance of feminist critical race theory in highlighting the discursive negotiations of popular terminology such as *güera, prieta, and morena*. In doing so, however, I do not claim the primacy of discursive practices over structural determinants but look to highlight these relationships between racial discourse and social structure. On a broader level, I return to critical race theory as a significant site to offer insight and continue

engagements with one of the most powerful forces of the modern age- that of racialization.

Gaining insight from the everyday “color talk” among women of Mexican descent reveals the distinct process of racialization and the culturally defined meanings found in a Mexican language of race and color. I investigate the material and discursive meanings of categories, terms, labels, euphemisms, and expressions that reference race and color. The practice of “color talk” alludes to a recognized system of labels and folk terms that is used to distinguish and describe skin color among other markers of race (Sue 2009). An examination of the everyday language of race and color permits me to foreground everyday processes of racial formations and racializations that structure a larger history of U.S. and Mexican (American) racial projects. The ordinary and everyday spaces of race and racialization provide a window onto the histories of migration, black and white racial polarizations, and the specificity of Mexican (American) racial formations. Most importantly, highlighting the everyday language of race and color reveals the agentic strategies of re-positioning, negotiation, and alliance that locate Mexicanas as ethnoracial subjects. These discursive practices are linked to their material realities that allow for the strategies of upward mobility, group and self-definition, and resistance to dominant racial orders.

Women historically have held limited legal and political power but are often regarded as the (re)producers and gatekeepers of culture and nation (Davis 1997). Women literally reproduce bodies that represent and embody nation-states and national cultures. The gendered constructs of “women’s worlds” and *cosas de*

*mujeres*<sup>2</sup> (women's concerns) are devalued and assumed to hold limited social power in the public sphere. Stories, gossip or *chisme*, and conversations between and among women are often considered as unreliable sources of knowledge and impartial reflections of the social world. In my focus here, race is articulated through expressions, systems of representations, utterances, and articulations that form part and parcel of the ordinary and everyday experiences of race and racialization.

Mexican women are not stand-alone subjects or passive recipients of racist ideologies. Their gender, race, and class subjectivities are always in relationship to dominant and marginal formations of gender, race, nation, and sexuality. Their subjectivities and identities are also shaped by their distance and proximity to dominant and marginalized groups; the study's participants situated themselves within issues and concerns that were salient in their everyday lives. They voiced frustrations about Mexican stereotyping, anti-immigrant legislation, work place discrimination, colorism, sexism, and other forms of racial domination.

Their gendered, raced, and classed subjectivities and identities are intimately connected with histories of racialized Mexican migration and labor, a polarized black and white color line, and U.S. gendered formations. As Lelia Abu-Lugoud observes, "...[T]he effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their worlds" (474).

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<sup>2</sup>. The literal translation is "women's things" and most often used to describe subjects like childbearing, menstruation, and anything related to women's bodies and lives. I use it here to cast a wider net on what is considered to be part of the private lives of women.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

The complex negotiation of gendered, racial and ethnic identities reflect the dynamic and changing nature of racial labels and nomenclature in the United States. This ambitious study bridges debates about *mestizaje*, fluid ethnoracial labels, and gendered racialization among Mexican American women and women of color in more general terms. Everyday conversations about race, skin color, and racism with Latinas reveal the multiple positions of power that circulate in formal and informal social fields. Gaining insight from the everyday “color talk” and “body talk” among Latinas reveals the new dimensions of race and racism that reference contemporary color-blind and color-consciousness racial discourses.

The everyday “grammar of race” are discursive artifacts that are remnants of Mexican historical identities and amalgamated embodied experiences. These color-coded identities paint a vivid picture of the role of nomenclature, racial discourse, and black and white polarizations in the ways that race, color, and gender are experienced from a personal and collective level. As anthropologist Laura Lewis notes, “The experience and condition of hybridity translates into categories other than personhood” (320).

The notion of the *translocal*, “[R]ecognises that localities continue to be important as sources of meaning and identity for mobile subjects; at the level of human experience, the distinctiveness of place is retained rather than eroded by global migration flows” (Conradson and McKay 168). A translocal approach explains how Mexicanas experience their national origins and identities located in Tampa Bay area’s South County. In a similar vein, the study of Mexican vernacular

cultures of race and color illuminate the interplay between local region and national identities. The aspect of *translocal subjectivities* demonstrates these connections in the following way: “Translocal subjectivities [are used] to describe the multiply-located senses of self amongst those who inhabit transnational social fields” (Conradson and McKay 168).

This study also has implication for a number of topics such as the intersection of race and color ideologies, the mulilayered nature of Mexican racial identities, and the significance of black/white racial polarizations.

In this respect, my use of the term black and white polarization is quite deliberate. The use of this term explores Mexican versions of black and white color line that migrates to the United States. Contrary to authors who suggest that this polarization is learned and accepted upon arrival in the United States, I argue that the black-white version of the Mexican color line is entrenched in the language and racial discourse that I examine in this dissertation project. These parallel racial pillars shape Mexican racial ideologies that reflect the *mestizaje* that took place in Mexico.

Furthermore, theorizing the experiences of Mexican women as members of a “majority minority” Latina group in the U.S. and the specific ways in which they negotiate multiple discourses of race is significant to advance broader scholarly discussions about the relationship between race and color among Latinas.<sup>3</sup> In foregrounding these experiences, this dissertation also sets out to sharpen race and color as categories of analysis to expand a theoretical discussion about color

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<sup>3</sup>. For an excellent overview of works in Chicana/o history that address race and ethnic identity please see Ruiz “*Morena/o, Blanca/o...*” 343-360.

continuums and color consciousness. Despite celebratory accounts of what some consider as disruptions of the U.S. black-white color line theorizations of Latina racial formations must consider the complex overlap of Latin American and U.S. racial ideologies and the endurance of hegemonic racial hierarchies. Jorge Duany reminds us that, “Despite the fluidity of Latino identities, the categories of black and white remain intact and opposed to one another” (64). We can begin to unpack the implications of this quote by considering the presence of racial polarizations among racially diverse populations. In this case, this dissertation study looks to trouble the established models that presume racial democracy (*mestizaje*), Latino non-racialism, and transgressions of the black-white color line.

Scholars in the interdisciplinary field of Latina and Latino studies have identified the centrality of race, racialization, and racial identity in the everyday lives of Latina/o populations. However, scholars in these fields have not adequately addressed the role of informal Mexican lexicon of race and color in shaping identity and experiences of embodiment. Terms and expressions used on an everyday basis such as *morena*, *güera* and *prieta* point us in the direction of recognizing the ways that non-elite women negotiate and negotiate questions of race and racism. Unusually, contemporary scholarly work that examines race and color among Mexican women is produced outside the United States, notably in the United Kingdom (Moreno Figueroa 2012 2010 2009 2008). I work to bridge this gap in the understanding of the dynamic lexicons of race and color that circulate in everyday Mexican-Chicana language from a racial formation and critical race studies perspective. My approach also looks to trace the migration of meaning of this

ambiguous lexicon to reanimate color as a category of analysis.

Furthermore, findings from this study destabilize and complicate the racialized categories of “Mexican” and “Mexican woman” revealing the internal discursive reference points that reflect a history of multiraciality and muticoloredness of this diverse population. At the heart of this dissertation is the exploration of the distinct overlap of multiple racial formations and its vocabularies; and the specific ways that Mexicanas make meaning of these lexicons. Furthermore, grounded theory from this study denaturalizes “pure” categories of race that position one-dimensional constructs of whiteness, brownness, and blackness as essential race-making components. These racial formations assume a beginning and an ending of race, centering racial purity as central site of race-making (England 2009).

Fundamentally, this dissertation study explores the everydayness of gendered ethnoracial discourses that reference skin color, hair texture, and other physical markers of race. I am primarily concerned with the ways that Mexican women deploy ethnoracial categories and identities in everyday life. In this aspect, this investigation may appear to reproduce essentialist understandings of racial difference and racial sameness entrenched in biology and the body. I directly respond to critics in making clear that by making the embodied and physical aspects of racialization salient, does not reproduce race and racism, rather it highlights the instances in which the repercussions of physical racialization are invoked, instantiated, negotiated, and mobilized as assemblages of history, ancestry, embodiment, and group belonging. As Michael Hames Garcia reminds us, “Race is not more or less a fiction than nation or ethnicity, and it is just as likely to go away” (331). Wishing away race and its related

practices of institutional and everyday racisms is not analytically productive nor does it provide any substantive clues to why exactly race endures.

## **RESEARCH SITE**

This study is contextualized within the current post racial moment that necessitates racial ambiguity and color-blindness- while simultaneously we see the contradictions of the U.S. racial state and its expansive racial projects that continue the legacies of racial domination and empire building.<sup>4</sup> The greater Tampa region is significant to consider in the formation of Mexican ethnoracial identities and practices in that it gives us an insight on the ways that racial categories and labels circulate outside major Latino immigration and migration destinations or “U.S. based ethnic geographies” (McKiernan-Gonzalez 190). Centering on this region contributes to translocal knowledge of racial formations outside the “Miami-Cuban frame” (McKiernan-Gonzalez 190). The greater Tampa area is home to one of the most diverse Latino populations in the state (U.S Census Bureau File 2010). Lacking a specific geographical and cultural identity—the greater Tampa area is an ideal place to explore overlapping and competing racial ideologies. This region’s unique in-between status; in between North/South; metropolitan/rural; New Florida/Old Florida; and white/black— provides important insight into the ways that this rural Mexican

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<sup>4</sup>. On June 25, 2012, the U.S. Supreme court upheld one of the major provisions of Arizona’s contested SB-1070 immigration legislation bill. This provision protects the state’s right to stop and interrogate individuals who are believed to be undocumented. Critics argue that “the ask for papers” provision depends and reifies racial profiling in that enforcers rely on racialized criteria to persecute brown bodies regardless of documentation status. The states of Alabama and Georgia have attempted to enforce similar immigration bills.

population negotiates questions of race and color.

## **MEXICANOS IN FLORIDA**

The mass immigration and migration of Mexicans to Florida during the 1980s and 1990s was shaped by the drastic drop of oil prices in Mexico, the devaluing of the peso, and the implementation of new Mexican policies such as the influential passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] (Fink 2009). The migration patterns that emerged during this period decentralized the traditional places of Mexican immigration. Mexican immigration to Florida and other Southeastern states is a direct result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA's provisions made it more difficult for Mexican immigrants to travel to the heavily policed border states of California, Texas, and Arizona (Massey et al 2010). Subsequently, Mexican immigrants traveled outside the traditional areas of settlement to new destinations leading them to North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and Florida among other new sites of arrival.

This research study takes place in Hillsborough County in what Gary Mormino terms an "urban megacounty" that produces more strawberries than any other county in the U.S. (Mormino 2005). Mexican immigrants labored in the orange groves, and strawberry and tomato fields, later transitioning into the service sector in the neighboring all-white retirement community of Sun City Center. This region is also informally known as "South County," denotes the agricultural centers of Wimauma and Ruskin located in the southernmost portion of the region near the border of Manatee County (Please see Appendix 1 for a map of Hillsborough County). South County is located approximately 30 minutes south of Tampa and is

nestled in-between the mangroves of the Bay, the remnants of the Mormon-owned *campos*,<sup>5</sup> and the new housing developments along the main highway (Route 301).

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter one provides an introduction and lays out the key arguments of this dissertation study. The second chapter outlines the methodology and theoretical frameworks that structure this study. Included in this chapter I explain my use of qualitative methods, issues of translation and research positionality as well as other approaches used in this work in South County, Florida. There is a significant discussion of critical race theory as an explanatory framework in this study.

In the third chapter, I provide a historical background for this study and discuss the main bodies of literatures that frame this discussion. In chapter four, the discussion focuses on the distinctness of the southern portion of Hillsborough County in the Tampa Bay region, and its relationship to Mexican migrant labor. Using Nicholas De Genova's term "Mexican/migrant" and Mai Ngai's "impossible subject", this chapter locates Mexican women as members of a migratory labor force that have endured the indelible mark of Mexican racialization. This process reflects a larger historical development that connects migrant labor, movement, and Mexican-ness and shapes how regional racial formations are similar to other parts of the country.

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<sup>5</sup>. The word *campo* is a Spanglish translation of "camp" which described the housing settlements that migrant workers lived in. In Ruskin, the most known camp was the *campo de los Mormones*, also known as Deseret Farms. This large agricultural business was owned and operated by a group of Mormon growers.

This form of anti-Mexican racism is associated with rurality, anti-modernity, poverty, and dark skin. Although, the racial landscape in Hillsborough County shares this history, what is distinct about this area are the translocal patterns of Mexican im/migration and the ways in which *Mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) is oppositionally shaped against Chicana/o identity. This boundary-making process also subjects them to a re-racialization process that racialize them as Mexican Indians in the context of migrant dark skin color, labor, language, poverty, and a rural location. Here, I introduce the concept of *ethnoracial moments* to demonstrate study participant's awareness and negotiation of more than one system of racialization. These ethnoracial moments are linked to a core process of racialization that locates race and color on the body. In these ethnoracial moments, I highlight the everyday interrogations and “phenotyping” that subjects study participants to a specific line of questioning.

In chapter five, the discussion focuses on *Mexicana Color Lines*, a way of understanding the ways that study participants' understandings of race and color intersect with state mediated definitions of race. This approach illuminates how U.S. race binaries and Mexican color continuums are constantly in flux and remapped onto one another. Racial binaries and color continuums are reconfigured and remap how these color schemes are simultaneously invoked to situate Mexicanas in the middle of a binary and continuum. This chapter considers the dialogic relationship between institutional defined notions of race and Mexican cultural understandings of race-color.

The segments of the photo elicitation study are also discussed here to explore the embodied markers of beauty and femininity such as body size, hair texture, skin color, and facial features. The photo elicitation guide serves as an interpretive tool that foreground a discussion of the visual contours of racialization to explore the system of representations that symbolize race and color. A central aspect of this understanding transpires from the ways that study participants negotiate the racial gaze and how they perceive themselves in relationship to dominant understandings of race and color.

In chapter six, the analysis considers the instability, ambiguity, and flexibility of the Mexican label of *morena*. Continuing the close discursive analysis from the preceding discussion, this chapter considers the role of the “racial middle ground” and the ways that *morena* is an idealized and intermediate space that includes Mexican women of various skin colors. This discussion relies on a discursive analysis of various representations of *morenas* embedded in the ethnoracial moments that I analyze here. This approach permits a theoretical exploration of this racial middle ground that also invokes multiple grids of Mexican lightness and darkness. This analysis of *morena* considers the ways that this category forms part of an unstable visual vocabulary that interfaces with related color categories of *negra* and *prieta*. The instability of *morena* as a referent paints a vivid picture of the expansiveness of this intermediate ethnoracial space that shifts and morphs depending on context. Moreover, *morena* is demonstrative of the ways that Mexican women retain a sense of coloredness despite nationalized efforts to homogenize and repress multiracial ancestries and histories.

Finally, the concluding chapter synthesizes the significance of the work to larger discussions of comparative racial formations. I close with broad observations concerning the future directions of this research.

## Chapter 2: Methodology and Theoretical Framework

“It is a self-censoring of the private voice that is trained toward the meritorious, disciplined voice. Such claims of objectivity and subjectivity are by now well-rehearsed. But they hold a different meaning for those of us who regard the inclusion of our subjective reality as a crucial and necessary political intervention” (Monica Russel y Rodriguez 100).

The following discussion provides details of the multiple methods employed in this work. It positions this work in reference to the mechanics of qualitative research, including the role of the “insider outsider.” Theories of race, nation, and origin are articulated.

This multi-voiced methodology acknowledges the “private voice” as an alternative site of knowledge production to understand the practices that women of color specifically women of Mexican descent, engage with on a daily basis. This multi-vocal aspect permits a collaborative, multilayered, and integrative approach to explore the “messy spaces” of the everyday language of race and color and continue the work of theorizing personal insight and lived experiences (Russel y Rodriguez 2004).

I searched for subtextual language and references that are uttered everyday but not actively spoken about. As an interview technique, I invoked color labels and categories for participants to respond to; sometimes this worked as a way to open up conversations and other times led to dead ends, confused looks, and uncomfortable silences. Exploring the endurance and the cultural work of these racial labels in the present day proved to be a lot more difficult than I anticipated. Constructing an interview guide proved to be also very challenging. Indeed I found that, “an interview is not the telling of a life” (Frankenberg 71). The process seemed very

mechanical and clinical. It ended up serving its purpose as a guide, but I soon learned that it was exactly that, an avenue to begin conversations and a way to talk about the everyday, common-sense, taken for granted lexicon of race and color.

It was not surprising that many declined requests for interviews. Even women who I knew from previous peer networks declined my requests. Many never even responded to my emails. This was challenging to deal with, facing what felt like rejection and feeling vulnerable during the research process. Did they perceive me as an intrusive researcher? Were they suspicious of my intentions? I felt so clinical with my voice recorder and laptop taking notes about the everyday lives of Mexicanas. I wondered if there was a better way. Subsequently, the interdisciplinary and integrative approach I developed reflects a middle ground of sorts. It strikes a balance between traditional avenues of social science inquiry and interdisciplinary and intersectional frameworks, drawing from the resources of autoethnography, personal interviews, group interviews, and photo elicitation.

The method of autoethnography places the study's questions in the context of social relations and allowed me to incorporate my experiences with race and color (Vidal Ortiz 2001; Anzaldúa and Moraga 1983). My lived experiences of race and color are contextualized within the larger history of Chicana feminist theorizing and build on the legacy of critical reflexivity, collective theorizing, and alternative knowledge production. Autoethnography also permits me to reveal the heterogeneous power relations in which I position myself as both researcher and researched and as a member of this "community." Collectively, this collaborative methodology and approach connects history, personal experience, and group

perspectives and carves out an intellectual space that animates the endurance of Mexican color categories and their cultural and ideological underpinnings.

Feminist scholars posit that value-free and objective research is unrealistic and cannot fully account for the role of the researcher and the power of interpretation (Harding 1987). Sociologist Julie Bettie observes "...[The] ethnographic text is not a transparent account of reality but a product of the interaction and negotiation between researcher and researched" (22). The finished account or interpretation is dialogically produced with and among multiple power relations, one of which is mediated by my values, beliefs, and investments. I engage in a reflexive model of inquiry that acknowledges that the researcher is the final author of the text and that heterogeneous power relations are always at work in the research process. The "double project" of self-reflexivity and accountability is central to the production of knowledge of this dissertation project (Braithwaite 2004).

During the research process, I continually faced my own assumptions and challenged myself to confront the knowability of *Mexicana* racial identities. Participants also directly and indirectly challenged me to interrogate these assumptions and to critically reflect on my social position and intellectual investments. For example, a native Tejana revealed that she was not from Mexico and had little contact with anyone in her family in Mexico for many years. She asked, "Do you still want to meet?" I scanned my mind and thought about how I presented my study to her—what were the assumptions behind me asking for *Mexicana* participants? How did I unintentionally exclude her from this group of women? Another woman, a native of Veracruz, wondered aloud if I was looking to

interview, “*alguien muy Mexicana*” (someone who is very Mexican). She laughed at her question but was curious to learn if she indeed fit the “requirements” of my study. These exchanges reminded me of the significance of shared histories but also reminded me that we are not bounded by a mythical sisterhood and hence we would not share similar identifications and investments in the identity of “Mexicana”.

All of the women shared a history of migrant farm labor. This was the reason they were in Florida, to work and live in the agricultural region of the southern portion of Hillsborough County. Some arrived from *el valle de* Texas as U.S born and primarily English speaking Tejanas, others arrived from rural parts of Guanajuato, Guerrero, and Michoacán (Please see Figure 1 for map of Mexico). Some were natives of Florida; born in *la Bahía* de Tampa, daughters of tomato, orange, and strawberry field laborers. Despite, this shared labor history, they differed in political views, opinions about racial discrimination, and outlooks about skin color. This study depended on the participant’s willingness to volunteer their time and space to this dissertation study. I recruited participants through personal friendship networks and word of mouth applying a snowball technique. I met with a total of 25 interview participants between the ages of 23-55 residing in the southern portion of Hillsborough County in the Tampa Bay region. All of the interviews were audio recorded and took place in the home of the participant. At the end of the interview I offered a small gift valued at less than five dollars as an expression of appreciation for participation. Most of the participants are working-class and working-poor, married, have children, and worked outside the home in retail, service, social service, and education sectors. Though limited in size of group and in geographical scope of

inquiry, this dissertation study nevertheless represents what I believe to be a significant and useful picture of gendered ethnoracial formations and competing systems of racial classification. Findings are not generalizable to other groups of Mexican women, however, they contribute a complex account of the variation of Mexican (American) experiences in the United States.

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

While contemplating the design of this project, I looked to my own experiences to search for clues. Thoughts about how race and color was invoked in my own family in passing conversations, over-heard gossip, and stories were shared. I soon realized that other women might have similar views and definitions of race and color. I knew that I could not understand the culture of race and color without first-hand accounts of this meaning-making process. Subsequently, the importance of semi-structured and in-depth interviews was made significant. I looked to personal or respondent interviews as an appropriate method to gain nuanced and deep understandings of the quotidian accounts of race and color and search for commonalities, shared viewpoints, and sites of contradiction and dissonance. The design of this study does not rely on a static hypothesis but looks to the personal and collective understandings of race and racialization to place Mexican women as central actors and subjects in this complex historical process.

This research was conducted in accordance with human subjects protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maryland (please see Appendix 1). A combination of in-depth and semi-structured interviews, informal participation observation, photo elicitation, and semi-structured focus groups

allowed me to investigate ethnoracial nuance, complexity, and contradiction. I conducted interviews between July 2010 and August 2011; the most intensive period of data-collection took place during the summer of 2011. In-depth interviewing permits focused analysis and attention to the specific ways that women of Mexican descent make meaning of racial and ethnic categories in their everyday lives. Interviews lasted between one and two hours; some interviews lasted as long as five hours and were conducted in series. Some participants agreed to be interviewed more than once for follow-up and clarification.

I asked in-depth questions that large-scale survey studies cannot (please see Appendix 2 for interview guide). In depth and semi-structured interviewing provides participants time, space, and flexibility to reflect on their subjective experiences and allows for discussion and clarification. In-depth interviewing also taps into the fluid nature of racial labels and classification systems, reflecting the dynamic relationship between social practice and everyday interaction. I asked questions that focused on three main sites 1) informal and formal race/color labels and terminology 2) interpretive frameworks of race and racism 3) gendered contours of Mexicanidad. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanglish, and Spanish; many of the participants were bilingual and code switched between and among these linguistic sites. The participants' use of language reflected "a language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés* (author's emphasis), but both" (Anzaldúa 77).

I sought to intervene on the historical practice of “hostile inquires” that many women of color have experienced in various institutional settings (Segura 1989). I was also very cognizant of the specific ways women of color have been constructed as objects of study for large-scale public health and other social science investigations. Mexican women have been discursively produced as one-dimensional “rural”, “migrant”, “needy”, and “underprivileged” research subjects<sup>6</sup> by dominant theories of the underclass and the culture of poverty. On the other side of the border, the same group of women are imagined as members of *las clases populares* and *campesinas*- complete with their raced, gendered, and classed associations in the Mexican context. To address these ethical concerns I approached the interview process as a non-hierarchical and an open discussion that emerged as an “unavoidable collaborative” and “conversational partnerships” (Cotterill 1992; Rubin and Rubin 79).

I sought to engage in dialogue instead of interrogation. Although, the conversational approach during interviews enabled me to avoid objective distancing and scientific detachment from the participants and the subject matter, I did not go into the research process with the intentions of forming long-lasting relationships with study participants or providing concrete solutions to the problems of racialization and racism. While this may appear to be pessimistic or irresponsible, the

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<sup>6</sup>. As recent as 2006, a controversial public health campaign *Pocos Hijos Para Darles Mas (Less to Give Them More)* was launched in Wimauma, FL to educate Mexican families, especially Mexican women about family planning to reduce the size of their families. Public health inquiries and campaigns such as this often rely on racialized discourses of Mexican women’s “hyperfertility.”

material outcomes, conclusions, and benefits from this research project are difficult to assess and I do not profess that my contributions will be lauded with celebration and respect in the community of participants. Nor do I assume that study participants wish to continue an ongoing relationship with me.

Yet, I am very grateful to the participants and the time they gave to this research study. This study would have not been possible without their voluntary participation. Even with the contradictions embedded in the concept of community, research participants agreed to be part of this process mostly because they wanted to help me. At the end of many interview sessions, study participants remarked, “I hope I was of help,” reflecting the porous boundaries between the research project and my positionality as a former member of this Central Florida community.

I was also very aware of power differentials between the participants and myself. Interviews are fluid encounters in which power relations shift throughout the conversation in which vulnerability is experienced by both researcher and participant (Cotterill 1992). I asked personal questions to create a socio-demographic profile for each participant. Questions were asked about their places of birth, occupations, marital status, and levels of education. At times the education question was a site of struggle and some participants hesitated to answer what appeared to be an intrusive question. I also encountered moments during the research process in which I became very aware that questions of race and color were a private matter for some participants.

For example, one of the participants, expressed, “I think it’s [race] personal unless they want to share it with you. It’s related to their appearance, and the way they look, those are private things” (Participant Interview August 2011). Here, the participant identifies the process of race-making as a private matter, using the words “*their*” and “*they*” to create a comfortable distance between her and the process/spectacle of racialization. Similar public and private accounts of participant’s ethnoracial subjectivities and identities emerged throughout the interview process. At times, participants responded with brief “yes” and “no” answers and other times, took the opportunity to share in detail racial experiences that stayed with them throughout the years.

This discovery reflects Elena Tajima Creef’s observation, “It did not occur to me at the time that some stories are too painful to be shared publically with a tape recorder running or that a group dynamic may prompt only certain kinds of public memories” (77). Some participants engaged in similar forms of public racial discourses that permitted them to create distance from racism and racialization. For instance when asked about experiences with racial discrimination, some would premise their responses with phrases like: “It only happened once” and “I am lucky I haven’t experienced that” (Interview series 2011). To demonstrate the relationship between public and private understandings of race, I asked participants for their preference on remaining anonymous in the study. Some welcomed the idea of publically participating; others chose to remain unidentified in the study. I changed the names of participants who wished to remain unknown.

Indeed the private/public divide is at the heart of how race is made and negotiated in an everyday context. Paradoxically, racialized women are often held the most responsible for managing race and keeping it private from the gaze of the outside world. In having these frank, uncomfortable, and sometimes crass conversations- a certain ideological work was unraveling before us. Disentangling the historical process from the vantage point of marginalized and racialized women provides important evidence on how women negotiate this process that assigns racialized meaning to their bodies and national identities. As members of a majority minority group, Mexicanas residing in this region, carry with them a large history of Mexican racialization. They experienced familiar tropes of Mexican racialization that connect manual labor, illegality, to low social status. What is less known is the significance of vernacular Mexican color terminology such as *morena*, *prieta*, and *negra* (approximate translation: brown, dark brown, and black) and the migration of meaning of this dynamic and relational lexicon of race and color.

Following a snow-ball technique, out of 25 participants, I personally knew 5 participants from high school and other peer networks. These participants were the first I interviewed and they referred me to other women in the area who may be interested in participating. The rest of the participants did not know me personally, but they had at one time or another worked with my parents in the fields of Ruskin and Wimauma. My social location as the daughter of Mexican migrants helped gain access to study participants. This “insider-status” facilitated the recruitment process and provided a level of assurance and familiarity for some of the participants.

It also allowed for spontaneous exchanges that happened in-between breaks and formed part of an “unofficial” or ethnographic interview. These informal exchanges took place between participants and other family members present during the interviews that provided fruitful insights that I most likely would have not encountered without “deep insider understandings” (Lofland and Lofland 69). Similar instances took place at parties and other social events that I attended while I was in Florida.

Although I did not fully engage in friendship as a method, I often found myself in the role of the “sympathetic listener” and a “friendly stranger” (Cotterill 1992).<sup>7</sup> I also used features of the interactive interview to foster a conversational and dialogical exchange. Interactive interviewing prompts the researcher to disclose personal and social experiences with participants to provide context for the interview process. The practice of asking participants if they had any questions for me took place at the end of the interview. Many times they asked about graduate school, the process of earning a doctorate degree, and what my findings were so far. Sometimes the interactive aspect of the interviews produced uncomfortable moments of self-disclosure.

In one instance, a participant asked me about my views on education and what I thought about the local elementary school being “mostly Mexican” (Participant

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<sup>7</sup>. Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy discusses “friendship as method” as a qualitative research approach that engages in-depth conversation, everyday involvement in the lives of participants, compassion, giving, and vulnerability. This method lends itself to long periods of ethnographic work and extensive personal interaction with research participants.

Interview July 2011). I acknowledged her concern for the education of her children but avoided playing the expert. The contradiction of her question was palpable. Here I was investigating race, racism, and racialization and I found myself personally struggling with the realities of internalized racism. At the same time, I recognized why she thought I was an appropriate person to bring up an educational issue given my social status as researcher-teacher.

### **Focus Groups**

I organized focus groups to encourage “epistemological partnerships” between the participants and me (Russel y Rodriguez “Confronting Anthropology's Silencing Praxis...”). Focus groups are ideal for the collection of data within a group. A focus group is an open-ended discussion among a group centered on a common theme or topic (Wilkinson 271). The format of a focus group is an ideal site to observe the interactions among participants and with the moderator. One of the benefits of a focus group is that it taps into everyday lived processes such as talking, debating, and sharing what occurs in the everyday lives of women. This process of “collective sense-making” in focus groups provides a unique data collection opportunity for the researcher (Wilkinson 271). Wilkinson further notes that “collective sense is made, meanings [are] negotiated, and identities elaborated through the process of social interaction between people” (274).

Focus groups were designed to seek the collective and contextualized stories women tell about the multiple dimensions of race and color. These contextualized stories are embedded in racial discourse or the “way people talk about race” (Widdance Twine *Racism in a Racial Democracy* 20). In this context, focus groups

are used outside of their traditional use (marketing firms and political consultants) to allow a diverse group of Mexicanas to engage with a range of topics that are relevant to their lives. Everyday conversations about race, skin color, and racism with women of Mexican descent are central to understand and reveal the multiple positions of power that circulate in the terms, euphemisms, expressions, references, that construct shared understandings and definitions. The focus groups were organized around three main activities: responses to popular culture vignettes, storytelling, and photo elicitation. I also incorporated vignettes and storytelling in the focus group to elicit personal reactions to real life situations (Gonzalez-Lopez 2004). (Please see Appendix 3 for focus group discussion guide). In all, I conducted a total of 3 focus groups with an average of 7 participants- each focus group lasted approximately one and a half hours.

### **Photo Elicitation**

Photo elicitation is a visual ethnographic method that uses photographs to bring forth responses from informants (Banks 2001; Mitchell 2011). Building on the work of Wendy Roth and Ginetta Candelario, I used photo elicitation to inquire about the everyday terminology, expressions, and euphemisms used to describe race and color (2009; 2012). I also chose this method to explore the visual contours of race and color identifications. A central aspect of racialization targets visible markers of race and color such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture (Martin Alcoff 2001). I looked to this method to look into the specific ways that women identify “visible identities” and the specific ways in which they make sense of the cultural definitions of Mexican color coding.

In my photo elicitation guide, I used high-quality images purchased from stock photography websites BigStock.com and PhotoStock.com representing the ethnoracial diversity among Mexican women. The practical reason for buying these images online was to reproduce high-resolution images for use during focus groups. More conceptually, I chose images from stock photo sites to disrupt “routine frames of references” (Harper 20). I steered away from images of popular Latina starlets such as Eva Longoria, Jennifer Lopez, Jessica Alba, and Salma Hayek.<sup>8</sup> Latina celebrities are hypermediated by global media outlets and are conditioned by a Eurocentric culture that prizes highly stylized and disciplined forms of feminine beauty. I searched for representations of non-celebrity women that would strike familiarity for the participants but would foster a discussion that is not dominated by celebrity culture.<sup>9</sup>

In the search features of each stock photo website I typed the term “Mexican woman”, the search yielded a multitude of still photographs depicting women in various professional, family, and interpersonal settings. Most of the photographs identified the women as “Mexican”, “Hispanic” and “Latina.” Hence, there was no direct way to verify the nationality of the women featured in the photographs. The completed version of the photo elicitation guide served as a springboard for discussion about Mexicana ethnoracial diversity and the ways in which the labels and

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<sup>8</sup>. For excellent discussions on Latina celebrity cultures see Valdivia 2000; Beltran 2009; and Molina-Guzman 2010.

<sup>9</sup>. Not surprisingly, Jessica Alba and Salma Hayek were frequently mentioned during the focus groups.

visual representations of Latina, Hispanic, and Mexican(a) are collapsed onto one another. Most importantly, locating images of everyday Mexican/Latina/Hispanic women was important to prompt open-ended conversations about beauty, success, desirability, race, and color. I also sought to explore self-definitions and self-representations by fostering discussion about whom and what the images represented to the group.

I deliberately selected images and poses that were non-sexualized in pose and dress and symbolized “respectable presentations” (Widdance Twine *A White Side of Black Britian*). While the notion of respectability is always imbued with dominant tropes of femininity and race, I intentionally intervene on the racialized and pornographic images that are readily available to consume for general audiences.<sup>10</sup> The lack of a full spectrum of representations of Latinas, specifically women of Mexican descent, speaks to the contradiction of their simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility in the public imaginary. Moreover, I depended on the less sexualized images of stock photography as internet searches for “morena” and “morenita” also yielded mostly pornographic images. Similar results appeared when searching for “Latina” and “Mexican woman.”<sup>11</sup> Using a total of 12 photographs, I inquired about the use of folk racial categories (*blanca, morena, prieta, güera, and negra*) to

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<sup>10</sup>. I found the following captions and descriptions located underneath several of the stock mages: “Latina beauty”, “Latina mother playing”, “Latina Business Woman”, and “Sexy Latina Woman”.

<sup>11</sup>. I began designing the photo elicitation at the public library; I got disapproving looks from other library patrons who mistakenly assumed I was using a public place to search and look at pornographic images.

investigate how Mexican women identify, negotiate, and make meaning of race and color.

On the other opposite side of the spectrum, I also found images of “authentic” Mexican women in folkloric costume and also wearing traditional rebozos (shawls). Omitting these “traditional” images of Mexican women from the photo elicitation guide worked to filter the over abundance of these representations. The fact that I could only locate images of Mexican women on the opposite sides of a representational spectrum (highly sexualized and authentic moralized) is illustrative of the representational deficiency of Mexican women.

The completed photo elicitation guide worked as an alternative to photographing “real” images of Mexican women (Please see Appendices 4a and 4b).<sup>12</sup> The completed photo elicitation guide was an imperfect tool in that the finished product was not far removed from mainstream standards of beauty and femininity. Images available for purchase on these stock photo websites are primarily for corporate audiences. Companies and non-profit organizations obtain these images for the production of brochures, websites, and other promotional items.<sup>13</sup> Many of the selected photos resembled professional headshots of Latinas depicted as non-threatening, young, and as presented as heterosexual by heteronormative standards.

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<sup>12</sup>. Wendy Roth’s study uses candid snapshots of Dominican and Puerto Rican men and women living in New York City for her photo elicitation study of racial identity.

<sup>13</sup>. I came across the photo of the young woman featured in the first page of the photo elicitation guide (Appendix 4a # 6) in the coupon section of the St. Pete Times for Scotch tape in the summer of 2011. I thank my sister for cutting it out of the newspaper for me.

Despite these limitations, the final selection of images reflected the challenges of locating non-sexualized and non-celebrity visual representations of Mexican women. I did not seek to look for “authentic” and essentialist images of Mexican femininity and acknowledge that final selected images are also structured by similar logics that I sought to interrogate and deconstruct.

### **MULIPLE MEANINGS AND EMBODIED INTERPRETATIONS**

The interpretation of participants’ responses via interviews, conversations, and focus group discussions are mediated by a dialogic relationship between participants’ subjectivity, experiences, and worldview with my own. Participants responded in first, second, and third-person narrative—blurring the lines between self and other. Their polysemic responses came in the form of stories, memories, anecdotes, and observations. Many times they interjected their own questions, asked me to clarify my questions, quoted others, and made references to news stories, celebrities, and popular culture. These multivoiced responses became an important site of analysis and interpretation. Their words and reflections are central “texts” that I interpret and position as “evidence.” I engage in a close reading of their responses to explore a range of possible meanings embedded in the expressions, representations, and utterances of race and color. Therefore, I employ positioned and interpretive analysis that highlights the tensions between multiple racial formations.

I also paid attention to the discursive and affective spaces of silence, hesitation, confusion, irritation, and excitement. I took note of body language, local and regional accents, and physical surroundings. The embodied aspects of the interview process emerged most vividly when participants would physically point to

their hands or arms to show me their skin color. At times, some of the participants held up their arms next to mine to compare and contrast their skin color. Their collective expression gave insight to what is meant by the phrase “participant observation” and revealed the everydayness of embodied ethnoracial experience.

I transcribed over 30 hours of interview responses that totaled over 200 pages of single-spaced transcriptions. I identified recurring topics and emerging patterns in responses. Verbatim selections from interviews and focus groups were identified and highlighted that supported the major themes of analysis. Narrative, discourse, content and visual analyses were conducted to interpret interview, focus group, and photo elicitation responses. The process of identifying major themes of overlap and dissonance was the beginning process of building theory from the ground up. Qualitative researchers Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss describe and define a systematic way of constructing grounded theory from data and assigning theoretical constructs to its interpretation (2008).

## **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

I utilized discourse analysis to analyze interviews, field notes, videos, and other visual sources. Discourse analysis lends itself well with the data sources in which discursive readings of multiple power formations and meanings are central to the larger research project. Specifically, I engaged in discourse analysis to work closely with the overlapping bodies of racial knowledge, plurality of meaning, and the formation of knowledge subjects. I look for the instances in which the racial categories of “Mexican”, “migrant worker”, and “Mexicana”, and “mestizo” are assembled and unraveled revealing its biologicistic, gendered, and embodied referents.

Other scholars provide additional understanding for language use in the context of racialization.

For example, Julie Bettie hones on the concept of discourse, describing them as “public meaning systems” that shape dominant understandings of the social world (54). Discourse analysis of interview responses and focus group interactions permits me to foreground the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power (Weedon 1997). Chicana scholar Rosalinda Fregoso also uses discourse analysis in her study of the symbolic role of Mexicana and Chicana women in film and Mexican-U.S. border cultures. Looking to film and other cultural narratives of femininity, Fregoso explores the role of MeXicana<sup>14</sup> social identities in nation-building narratives that mark Mexicanas as perpetual foreigners and as biological threats to the U.S. nation-state. Fregoso’s engagement with discourse analysis reveals how powerful narratives of nation, race, and gender intersect on the powerful system of cultural representations that depict Mexicanas as racially unclassifiable but also as one-dimensional racial stereotypes. I interpret participants’ responses deploying a discursive analysis to uncover new and old public meaning systems of race and color.

Public systems of racial representation collapse people of Mexican descent as “all short, brown, and Indian looking” (Interview series 2011).<sup>15</sup> The constant

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<sup>14</sup>. Rosalinda Fregoso uses the term “MeXicana” to denote the diversity of experiences and identities that are shaped in the Mexican-U.S. borderlands. Often the terms “Chicana” and “Mexican” work to divide women across generations and citizenship status. I read Fregoso’s take on “MeXicana” identities alongside Ana Castillo’s discussion of “Xicana.”

<sup>15</sup>. Salvador Vidal Ortiz shares his account of this form of racialization in his autoethnographic essay about Puerto Rican racialization. He describes an instance when he is mistaken for a white man

negotiation of this hard racialization process forms an ambivalent relationship with racial mixture. The most dominant consequence of this process of racialization is the larger history of erasure that denies Mexican's mixed race ancestries on both sides of the border (Menchaca 2001). Negative meanings associated with dark skin, Spanish language, and occupation, shape a double-edged form of racism that denigrates dark-skinned Mexicans while simultaneously upholds an "authentic" Mexican (Hunter 2004). These public meaning systems help to interpret social identities and experiences among study participants. Further, they help reveal the ways that collective and embodied experiences are embedded in everyday language and discourse.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Another key component to the qualitative research process is data analysis and interpretation. Data analysis of qualitative research data is a complex and dynamic process involving the interpretation of the text and image and preparing data for analysis. Field notes, interview data, and other documents were carefully coded to begin a systematic process of analysis. Coding data provided me the opportunity to construct analytical categories and emergent themes found in the research. For example, data codes marked the settings, contexts, processes, activities, and strategies—all of which formed theoretical constructs for this multi-layered analysis (Creswell 2008).

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because he does not look like, "[T]hose Mexican, Indian looking-like, non-English-speaking short guys," (189)

Most importantly, I analyzed interview data to look for the instances of contradiction, overlap, nuance, ambiguity, and commonalities that formed the basis of my theoretical analysis. I ensured that I marked the responses that were most unusual and out of place to compare to common responses.<sup>16</sup> These everyday testaments of ethnoracial identity and embodiment mark the path on the ways in which individual narratives can have bearing on collective histories and consciousness. The on-the-ground and idiosyncratic negotiations of race, color, and the broader histories of racialization place Mexican women at the center of these historical, discursive, and embodied practices.

#### **A Note on Translation(s)**

I retained the original Spanish-language term that women used to describe race and color in the transcriptions of the interviews. To the best of my knowledge, I translated from Spanish to English, and from English to Spanish attempting to represent the nuanced voices and responses of participants. The translations are mediated through my positioned subjectivity as a bilingual woman and like all linguistic translations, they vary from region to region, and from translator to translator. I chose to keep the Spanish language color term to demonstrate the multiple meanings and definitions that the label takes form in that particular discursive moment to make salient the fluidity, instability, and situational aspect of these references. A glossary is available for reference to guide the reader's interpretation and translation (see Table 2 for a glossary of common terms used).

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<sup>16</sup>. On two separate occasions, respondents referred to a form of Mexican Indianness embodied by light skin and blue eyes. In both cases, respondents referred to a grandmother with these features.

This approach does not assume that color referents hold no social meaning, but rather that they are unstable and hold multiple meanings and allude to various reference points (Please see Table 3 for a selection of varied definitions provided by respondents). Inherently, these “slippery semantics” points us to the presence of multiple racial orders and its cultural and ideological functions (Godreau 2008).

### **A Note about Terminology**

I locate participants as members of a racialized group of women in whom some have access to upward mobility depending on their documentation status, English language proficiency, level of education, and marital status among other factors.<sup>17</sup> I also locate subaltern groups as those that are referenced in interview responses (*lo indio, esa negra, esos negros*) as “racial others,”<sup>18</sup> which are alluded to and collapsed into one-dimensional racial stereotypes. I do not use a generational model in this context because it has a somewhat sweeping character that defaults into useless generalizations.<sup>19</sup> As shown here, study participants born in the United States married Mexican nationals, made lasting friendships with one another regardless of citizenship status, and learned Spanglish from their U.S. born children that blurred the lines between generations.

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<sup>17</sup>. I have found Josephina Saldaña-Portillo’s writings to be instructive on this issue. She makes a distinction between “first world marginal subject” and “rural subaltern of the third world.”

<sup>18</sup>. Approximate translation: characteristics associated with Indian-ness, that black woman, and those black people.

<sup>19</sup>. While a generational model may be useful in some contexts, I trace an assimilationist logic in the model; one that insists on quantifying the temporal, spatial, and racial differences between “foreigner” and “American.”

I also choose the term “Mexicana” instead of Chicana or Mexican American to reflect the chosen identities of the majority of participants and the specificity of the region. Most women chose this identity over others because it reflected their strong ties to Mexico and a specific set of experiences rooted in struggle and migrant farm labor. Many U.S. born women also identified as Mexican that mirrored their strong ties to their parents’ ethnic identity and their cultural and linguistic affiliations. In central Florida, the cultural and political identity of “Chicana” held little social meaning and often was confused with “women who are from Chicago” or understood as “women who felt superior to Mexicans” (Interview series July 2011). Choosing the term “Mexicana” is similar to Nicholas De Genova’s conceptualization of *Mexican/migrant* that reflects a “heterogeneity of experiences and conditions, ranging from seasonal migration to long-term settlement, and from undocumented legal status to U.S. citizenship” (*Working the Boundaries* 2).

I also find the term “Mexican America” helpful in structuring a comparative and translocal approach that is integral to the larger project. In my focus here, I look to excavate a genealogy of a radical hybridity and plurality that has remained elusive, unclassifiable, and under the skin of hegemonic racial ideologies on both sides of the border. Casting a translocal analysis in this context permits me to consider the overlap of Mexican and U.S. racial terminology and their histories of racialization. More important, it provides a point of entry to consider the movement of meaning across multiple borders and place. A translocal approach permits me to frame Mexican women’s experiences and racial identities within the context of migration flows, specificity of locale, and human experience (Conradson and McKay 2007).

Although, situated in distinct historical and social contexts, both U.S. and Mexican racial formations privilege whiteness and share a history of Eugenic fascination with racial mixture (Stern 2009). Several essays in a recent collection on race and classification in “Mexican America” edited by Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith make this translocal connection more salient than ever before (2009). Contributing author Alexandra Minna Stern identifies 1930 as a key historical moment to compare the racial regimes of the United States and that of Mexico. Writing in this anthology, Minna Stern asserts,

For Mexican-origin peoples in the postcolonial borderlands of Mexican America this meant traversing a slippery terrain where Mexicans could simultaneously occupy the amorphous and enigmatic category of mestizo, the selectively contractive category of white, the bio-national category of Mexican, and a variety of in-between hybrid positions (153).

Nonetheless, it is important to state a caveat. While all but two participants identified with the political and social identity of *Chicana*, I do not eschew this term and its history nor do I intend to reinforce heteropatriarchal Mexican nationalism. The appellation of Mexicana reflects the uneven relations of power that are fraught with struggle and conflict. Norma Alarcón offers us a useful reflection on this complex issue, “She is the descendent of native women who are continually transformed into mestizas, Mexicanas, emigres to Anglo America, Chicanas, Latinas, Hispanic – there are as many names as there are namers” (69). As a group of racialized women, Mexicanas are given many names at times, often too many names. The presence of these names, labels, and categories demonstrates how these discursive sites are fertile ground for political and social struggle. In this case, using

the term Mexicana positions and frames this study based on the experiences of Mexicanas living and working in the Tampa Bay region of the state of Florida.

Furthermore, in this context, I elect to use the broad term of “Indian” and its subjectivity “Indianness” to represent a far-reaching form of system of representations that respondents reference in the region. In this aspect, the ethnoracial term “india” and “indio” is perceived as a generic category, a racialized trope that references an unnamable distant Mexican past rooted in Aztec and Mayan histories. In most cases, *lo indio* (Indianness) is associated with ignorance, dark skin color, and rural and agrarian backgrounds.<sup>20</sup> No participant claimed any connection to Mexican *indígenas* or related ethnic identities<sup>21</sup>; that reflects the majority of the Mexican mestizo population in this area and by extension the dominance of Mexican mestizaje.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This interdisciplinary dissertation is indebted to the comparative and interdisciplinary works pioneered in Mexican American Studies, Critical Race Studies, Women’s Studies, and Ethnic Studies (Frankenberg 1993; Almaguer 1994; Haney Lopez 1996; Fregoso 2003; Gomez 2007). The theoretical parameters of this dissertation consist of two central critical frameworks: racial formation theory and feminist theories of difference and power. Michael Omi and Howard Winant forward

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<sup>20</sup>. In comparison, the term *india* and *indio* in the Dominican Republic is used to reference an idealized racial middle ground that invokes a form of blackness and Indianness that is specific to the Dominican Republic and its relationship to Haiti.

<sup>21</sup>. This is the name that indigenous peoples of Mexico claim- *indígenas* comprise over 56 ethnic groups in the country.

a racial formation theory that demonstrates the ways in which categories of race are created, transformed, and abolished under particular sociohistorical and political conditions (1994). They also demonstrate how the concepts of *racial project* and *racialization* are central to the formation of racial categories, race-making narratives, and racialized hierarchies. Omi and Winant define a racial project as "...[A]n interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (56).

Racial formation theory is central to this project because it challenges established approaches to the study of race: looking at the ways in which race operates as a form of political organization, considers the heterogeneity of ethnic groups, and the cultural and ideological underpinnings of race (Omi and Winant 1994). The concept of *racialization* is also important to this study in that it provides a critical examination of the specific way that "race" is constructed into a real and material concept.<sup>22</sup> The process of racialization assigns negative racial meanings and marks human bodies as racially distinct populations. Racial formation theory forwards a complex theoretical framework to consider the cultural and ideological work of Mexicana vocabulary of race and color. I also chose to identify and define the broader field of "feminist theories of difference and power" to include the dynamic and emerging analytical frameworks that think through multiplicity, the

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<sup>22</sup>. This is the only place in the dissertation that I place the word race in quotation marks. Race is socially constructed and biological understandings of race hold little or no scientific value. However, the repercussions and the material effects of race are very real and shape and enforce everyday forms of racial domination.

politics of location, and mutually constituted subjectivities and identities.

Collectively, these frameworks are recognized as *intersectionality*, *racialized gender*, and *ethnorace*.

Linda Martín Alcoff's feminist theorization of Latina/o "visible identities" is also germane to this project. Alcoff calls for a reconceptualization of mixed race identity to theorize the category of "Latino" as a visible identity. The visibility of Latino racialization considers the significance of material aspects of skin color, phenotype, and other markers of race and ways in which this embodiment shapes how race is constructed and experienced. Alcoff asserts, "There is a visual registry operating in social relations that is socially constructed, historically evolving, and culturally variegated but nonetheless powerfully determinant over individual experience" (194). This "visual registry" structures how bodies are read, perceived, and come to signify racially distinct bodies and groups. Alcoff's theory of visible identities argues for a theoretical engagement with the embodied aspects of race-making that is central to this dissertation project.

The construct of ethnorace is also valuable to the theoretical project of this dissertation in that it describes the complex interplay between multiple definitions of race and ethnicity—and reflects the messiness of Mexican racial categories, identities, and subjectivities. The concept of ethnorace acknowledges the structure of racialization and the agency of self-asserted identities. An ethnoracial perspective allows for the conceptual space to consider how race is often conflated with ethnicity and vice versa, revealing the overlapping biological and cultural discourses that make race and ethnicity intelligible. The co-constitution of biological and cultural referents

of race and ethnicity allow us to explain the ways that racialized groups adopt and forge resistant ethnoracial identities- even when they appear to reproduce essentialized identities based on the discourses of blood, genetics, and ancestry.

Spanish colonial racial ideologies emphasized the concept of purity of blood as an ideological reference for discriminatory practice in establishing social hierarchies in the colonies. “Blood” therefore came to symbolize location in the social order and was naturalized as a form of identity (Kitch 2009). These embodied forms of social identity have migrated north.

Thinking through the symbolics of blood also permits me to do the theoretical work to interrogate established models of Mexican assimilation and acculturation that often frame these debates exclusively through the paradigm of ethnicity.<sup>23</sup> Studies of Mexican (American) ethnoracial formations must always consider the historical weight of overlapping racial formations of “illegal alien” and “migrant agricultural worker” that do not fit into the logic of an ethnic relations models that assumes a linear trajectory of settlement, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation (Ngai 2004).

As Nicholas De Genova aptly observes, “This inherent ambiguity and heterogeneity about being ‘Mexican,’ regardless of one’s place of birth, citizenship status, or cultural orientations and tastes, is instructive; it reflects an expression in

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<sup>23</sup>. Examples of an ethnicity paradigm are found in all disciplines; those I take note are in history and sociology. The ethnicity paradigm frames studies that consider the “endurance of Mexican ethnicity” and “replenished Mexican ethnicity,” often neglecting the interplay between constructs of race, color, and ethnicity.

everyday practice of the resignification of Mexicanness as a specifically *racialized* category within the U.S. social order”(Working the Boundaries 3). An ethnicity paradigm not only underestimates race and the historical process of racialization but also leaves gender unexamined. For example, the discursive category of “ethnic Mexican” takes on a masculine form as dominant frameworks of immigration and migration assume a universalized and male subject. Mexican women have been systematically erased from the diverse ethnoracial history of Mexican experiences in the United States as gendered and ethnoracial subjects (Perez 1999).

Finally, critical feminist theorizations of power and difference are useful to understand heterogeneous relations of power that structure these complex social formations. Feminist scholars have produced a rich body of theory that contend with these issues particularly feminist standpoint theory (Hartstock 1998; Narayan 1997; Baca Zinn and Dinn 1996; Hill Collins 2000). Taken as a whole, feminist standpoint theory has intervened in the assumed objectivity of positivist knowledge claims and production. Standpoint theoreticians argued that systems of domination could be most clearly seen and understood from the vantage point of women oppressed by those systems of power. Systems of domination must take into the account of marginalized actors or subjects but this positionality is not innocent nor does it presuppose a naturalized state of oppression. Participants of this study are active readers, actors, thinkers, and speakers; positioned in a complex constellation of power relations in which they are constantly embedded.

These frameworks enable multifaceted and intersectional conceptualizations of power that depart from over deterministic top-down analyses of hegemony,

domination, and gender inequality. Racial formation theory and feminist theories of difference and power both explore the relationship(s) between the discursive and material, shedding light on the ways that discourses are linked to institutions that shape cultural representations of nation and citizenship, among other sites of racialization.

For purposes of this dissertation study, I consider Critical Race Theory to encompass a wide spectrum of critical work located in the sites of legal, sociological, and feminist cultural studies of race and racialization. Legal studies of race and racialization explore the centrality of the legal system in the creation, transformation, and abolishing of racial categories in the United States and the mainstay of white supremacy in all aspects of society. Sociological studies contribute productive theoretical models that center race as an analytical category and its interaction with other social structures of power. Conceptually linked to these epistemological sites are feminist cultural studies that situate the “cultural politics” of racial difference and gendered identity. Feminist cultural studies denaturalize multiple modalities of power that shape social identities, cultural forms, and systems of signification.

Collectively, these critical sites of inquiry redraw our attention to the “master status of race,” (Basch et al 1994) and the related material and symbolic effects and affects that manifest itself in everyday life and struggle to answer the seemingly uncomplicated questions: Who has race? How is race experienced? How have communities of marginalized women “survived” the material, discursive, and affective consequences of racialization (Montalvo, 2004)? We must continue to reveal what makes race work and the ideological necessity of racial differentiation to

consider the continual significance of race and racism in everyday life. Most importantly, the interdisciplinary constellation that undergirds this theoretical framework insists on the centrality of feminist critical race theory in studying the experience and embodiment of race and color in Mexican America.

## Chapter 3: Historical Background and Contributing

### Literatures

“The Spanish concept of race itself had both new and old connotations. Transmuting in the context of the Enlightenment and rapid social change, it did not entirely shed its old skin” (Maria Elena Martinez)

### Historical Background

I outline an interdisciplinary trajectory that historicizes both Mexican racial formations and modern racialization of Mexicans in a U.S. context. This is not an easy task to undertake. Again, I find the term “Mexican America” helpful in structuring a comparative and translocal approach that is integral to this project. In studying the relationships between and among racial ideology, racial identity, and racial classification in Mexican America, I identified the major studies that scaffold this dissertation study located in the fields of history, sociology, anthropology that intersect with the critical knowledge projects of Women’s Studies, Cultural Studies, and Latina/o Studies.

In my focus here, I look to trace a genealogy of *mestizaje*/mixture, a form of hybridity that has remained elusive, unclassifiable, and under the skin of hegemonic racial ideologies. At the same time I acknowledge the complex ways that resistance to hegemony is perpetually mired in contradiction and ambivalence. There is no perfect form of liberation and freedom from oppressive racial classifications and appellations. This discussion is my modest attempt to capture this imperfect

resistance to U.S. and Mexican racializations and racisms that people of Mexican America, particularly women, engage in on a daily basis.

Several well-documented historical case studies provide important evidence on the complex relationship between colonial racial ideologies, multiple racial classifications, and racial identity. Historical work conducted by Maria Elena Martinez and Douglas Cope has been instructive to this study. Maria Elena Martinez studies the Spanish doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) and the ways it shaped post-conquest ideas of *raza* and *casta*. Martinez finds important distinctions among Spanish notions of ancestry and legitimacy that illuminate the hybrid nature of the race-concept that emerged in New Spain. *Raza* was thought of as ancestry that was transmitted through pure Christian bloodlines. Since its inception the word *raza* had strong religious connotations and reflected Anti-Semitic and Anti-Muslim sentiments.

Pre-modern forms of anti-black racism emerged from Spain's distrust of North African Moors and their reliance on African enslaved labor. Africans were considered impure on two overlapping registers: religion and association with slavery justified by the Hamitic myth (Martinez 2008). Martinez elaborates this relationship, "In their [Spanish] mental universe, black blood emanated from slaves and therefore could not be completely absorbed into Old Christian lineages, purified, redeemed" (2009, 31). The language of blood shaped the notion of *castas* and gave way to the New World *sistema de castas*.

As early as 1530 in official colonial documents, *mestizo* was defined as "mixed" or *mixto*; the appellation of *mulato* emerged in 1549 to denote partial

African ancestry. The pseudo-science of Spanish colonial *casta* system was heavily influenced by the grammar of animal science and botany.<sup>24</sup> In turn, an early visual discourse of the body and beauty emerged as a way to appraise, name, and evaluate the “new” people of the conquest.

Douglas Cope identifies the time period between 1660 and 1720 as a period of maturity and stability of the Spanish colonial *casta* system that attempted to maintain social control of indigenous and *casta* (mixed race) populations.<sup>25</sup> The *casta* system, overseen by Spanish administrators and clergy sought to cement the emerging racial binary between *la república de indios* and *la república de españoles* (the Indian and Spanish republics) (Cope 50). Most troubling to the Spanish crown, were the racially mixed groups of *castas* that represented “new kinds of people for whom names had to be invented” (Cope 4).

These “new kinds of people” were assigned the appellations of mestizo/o (indigenous-Spanish), castiza/o (indigenous-mulatta/o), zamba/o (indigenous-African), mulata/o (African-Spanish), morisca/o (mulata-Spanish), among other names denoting specific ethnoracial mixtures (Kellogg 72).<sup>26</sup> This ethnoracial classification scheme struggled to quantify the Spanish, Indigenous, and African bloodlines of the multiracial population that outnumbered the supposed “pure blooded” Spanish and Indians. In this sense, the *castas* threatened the racial ideology

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<sup>24</sup>. The word *mulato* comes from the Spanish word *mulo/a* that is the offspring of a horse and a donkey.

<sup>25</sup>. The appellation of *castas* was assigned to groups of people who could not be easily categorized as “mestizo,” “Indian” or “Spanish”.

<sup>26</sup>. Over 30 of these categories existed in Mexico

of *pureza de sangre* and their embodied racial ambiguity came to represent illegitimacy, idleness, contamination, and criminality. This group of people did not fit into rigid racial categories, challenged the Spanish crown's dream of a properly ordered society and subjects; in which the social and racial boundaries between Spanish and Indian were clearly demarcated. To add to their liminal and marginalized status, *castas* were not designated a specific role in colonial society which shaped the popular representations of *castas* as vagabonds, illegitimate, and prone to other forms of social immorality. All this suggests the inability of the Spanish regime to regulate every one of its multiracial and "pure blood" subjects, revealing the "limits of racial domination."

Mexico's colonial *clasificación colorada* (color coded classification system) relied on skin color and other physical markers of race as criteria to assign ethnoracial labels and status to its populations (Aguirre Beltran 168). However, skin color and phenotype were not the only factors that determined racial status. Dress, hairstyle, accent, and language also played a role as the color line between *castas* and *Indios* became increasingly difficult to regulate and visually assess. In turn, marginalized *castas* used the instability and inconsistencies of the *casta* system to their advantage, often forming alliances among other *castas* to gain wealth and status in the Spanish colonial system.

The "limits of racial domination" was also seen through the uneven administration of the *casta* system and the many ways that non-elites rejected, modified, and appropriated racial labels to their advantage for social mobility and self-definition. The *fact of domination* was placed in tension with the *fact of*

*hybridity*, providing room for negotiation and “ideological independence” from hegemonic racial ideologies. To this end, Cope’s insights open up a vein for a productive discussion about the ways that non-elites experienced and navigated the porous boundaries of race, color, and ethnicity. This is what I take up in the core of this dissertation project.

Most importantly, Cope provides important evidence on the ways that the marginalized in Mexico City disrupted the power of elite racial ideology. He notes, “To Spaniards, the term ‘Indian’ seemed straightforward; not so for those who received this designation” (5). This suggests that the racial labels assigned by the Spanish crown were open to interpretation and often were met with indifference, apathy, and outright resistance. What it also suggests is that the properly ordered colonial society was “more imagined than real,” (Kellogg 77) and its diversity overflowed at the seams revealing a level of hybridity that challenged the elite power structure. How were they to distinguish between the creole and the mestizo? Between the mestizo and the “pure” Indian or African?

More recent writers have also taken up the construction of ethnoracial difference in colonial Mexico. Social historians Carol A. Smith and Susan Kellogg take issue with the lack of a gendered analysis in the formation of ethnoracial categories. Both scholars pay attention to gender, kinship, and marriage relations that regulate women roles and bodies, particularly mestiza and *casta* women. Elite control of women’s reproduction and marriage choices was most controlled at the upper strata of society (Smith 1997). Upper-class patriarchs were concerned with

ensuring legitimate marriages and children, protecting family honor, and maintaining racial purity.

In the case of Latin America, specifically Mexico, a central site of the construction of gendered ethnoracial categories is most vividly illustrated in Mexico's colonial *casta* paintings. Susan Kellogg argues that these depictions facilitated creole elites' acceptance of their mestiza/o heritages. She provides evidence to the centrality of mestiza women in the formation of a proto-national Mexican identity. However, Kellogg finds that women of African descent were most often depicted as perpetrators of violence in the paintings- demonstrating the limits and boundaries of Mexican mestizaje.<sup>27</sup> Native and Mestiza women were often represented as passive and submissive.

These depictions allowed elite men to claim mestizo ancestries without disrupting the dominant patriarchal social order. Most of the paintings showed higher-ranking men coupled with lower status women and their mixed-race offspring. Signs of violence, poverty, and inequality were glossed over in favor of "tranquil scenes of nuclear families" (Kellogg 74). In this respect, *casta* paintings represented an idealized yet contradictory form of social harmony from the vantage point of the ruling class.<sup>28</sup> Kellogg asserts, "[The] almost oxymoronic quality of the paintings mirrored an emerging sense of Mexican identity rooted in ethnoracial difference yet

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<sup>27</sup>. People of African and Asian descent in Mexico are not present in proto-national and national mestizo imaginaries. Filipino, Chinese, and Indian populations were taken to Mexico in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as free and enslaved laborers.

<sup>28</sup>. Kellogg also learns that the *casta* paintings emerged around the same time that the Spanish regime became more concerned with regulating interethnoracial marriages.

unified and whole” (75). The dilemma over sameness-difference has endured into the contemporary moment and is often battled over in everyday language that reflects the lived experience of *mestizaje*.

All this suggests the limited social significance of *casta* terminology in everyday life especially to those located at the lower rungs of Spanish colonial society. We can begin to unpack the implications of this major limitation of colonial power by taking into account the present-day lived experiences of racialization of subaltern women. Although the aforementioned scholars demonstrate the social distance between *criollo* and subaltern views on racial identity and classification, it is also important to explore the reaches of dominant racial ideology in the contemporary moment and the ways it shapes everyday engagements with race and color. The negotiation of dominant racial ideology and its material and discursive consequences marks the path of this investigation.

### **Mexican Mestizaje**

For purposes of simplification, I will outline three main historical stages of Mexican *mestizaje*: colonial *mestizaje* (1521-1810), post-independence *mestizaje* (1810-1910), and post-revolutionary *mestizaje* (1910- present). As previously discussed, the “original” mixture alarmed Spanish colonials who strived to define and demarcate the boundaries between *criollos*, *Indios*, and *castas*. The “conquest ideology” denigrated the indigenous population to a position of servitude but also relegated them the status of purity and Christian redemption. The status of the *mestizo* was conflated with the *casta* and was often associated with illegitimate and

impure status. In the early colonial period, mestizos were described as “orphaned boys, sons of Spanish men and Indian women” (qtd in Cope 15).

*Mestizaje* is a complex discursive formation with a long genealogy that defined and described the cultures and new “races” of the Americas. Racialized formulations of *mestizaje* originate from the aforementioned Spanish colonial model implemented in Latin America that ranked colonized people by color, class, and gender along a scale from darker to lighter— a racial continuum designed to distinguish among the African, Indian, mestizo, and “pure” Spanish populations (Katzew 2004). This racial continuum and the categories produced varied from country to country reflecting numerous “racial types” or *castas*. The multi-voiced discourse of *mestizaje* also served as the political basis for 20<sup>th</sup> century nation-building projects in Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, and Peru for *criollos* who sought to fashion national identity in their image (Knight 1990; Martinez-Echazabal 1998; Nelson 1999; De La Cadena 2000). These nation-building initiatives centered on the formation of a unified national culture, language, and identity through massive educational, political, and cultural projects (R. Lopez 2002).

In Mexico, post-revolutionary elites were part of a movement that upheld *indigenismo*, a constellation of intellectual, political, and artistic beliefs affirming that the roots of Mexican national identity could be located in Mexico’s Indian cultures (Hershfield 2006). The pre-Revolution Porfirian agenda of order and progress produced initiatives to attract European immigrants and foreign investment to rid Mexico of its “backwardness.” During the Porfiriato, the *indigenismo* that arose was mostly performative and appealed to Creole nationalistic sentiment with no genuine

attention to the material realities of Indian life. Diaz's regime was notorious for its *pan o palo* (bread or the club) tactics to fully integrate Indians into the nation.

During the post- revolutionary period, these projects of national unification and ethnic assimilation were carried out on a large-scale to reach its rural populations. The two key vehicles used to transform the heterogeneous populace into a unified “mestizo” nation were education and culture. Textbooks, beauty pageants, folkloric dances, and the promotion of regional cuisines emphasized Mexico’s Spanish and Indigenous heritages. From this national perspective, Indigenous aspects of Mexican heritage were displayed and celebrated, but often the living communities of *indigenas* were largely ignored and marginalized.

Jose Vasconcelos, minister of Education in Mexico during the 1940s, was a central actor in the large-scale assimilation projects of nationalized mestizaje. In his famous essay, *La Raza Cosmica*, he argued that a cosmic race would result in the melding of Mexico’s racial groups. However, he warned that the cosmic race would never materialize because of the “Indian and African elements” which “diluted” his racial schema of superior stock. Vasconcelos forwarded an assimilationist’s paradigm that called for the re-education of indigenous peoples whereby they would ultimately integrate as mestizo citizens. Mestizaje, as a model for citizenship, would form an ideal and modern Mexican national subject, who spoke Spanish, attended state-sponsored schools, and identified as Mexican (Saldaña-Portillo 2001).

Spanish and European aspects were continually glorified and idealized in other arenas of Mexican culture. The emphasis on the “white” and European aspects of Mexican society was a reflection of the undergirding social policy of

*blanqueamiento*. *Blanqueamiento* is a multi-voiced discourse and practice that claimed the superiority of whiteness and advocated for the biological, social, and cultural whitening of their mixed race populations (Safa 2005). Peter Wade further explains, “Mestizaje takes on powerful moral connotations: it is not just neutral mixture but hierarchical movement, and the movement that potentially has the greatest value is upward movement- *blanqueamiento* or whitening, understood in physical and cultural terms” (21).

For example, the 1930s tortilla cultural debates revealed the hegemony of a eugenic discourse and the lengths to which whiteness served as a way to symbolically jettison undesired populations and their cultural practices. In this case, *los científicos*, Porfirio Diaz’s appointed social scientists, argued for the superiority of wheat and worked to do away with the corn tortilla as a national food product and symbol of Mexico (Pilcher 1998). In this sense, wheat products operated as a racial symbol of whiteness, modernity, and progress, permitting Mexico entrance into the global arena as a unique and mestizo nation-state.

On a broad scale, the official narrative of Mexican mestizaje worked to reconcile racial sameness and racial difference within the historical context of enslavement, conquest, exploitation, and historical erasure. The naturalized/nationalized version of mestizaje emerged as a way to politely embrace a bifurcate mestizo-Hispanic identity that claimed ties to a strong Mexican national sense of we-ness (Knight 1990). As a consequence, the neglected *la tercera raiz*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>. I take issue with naming the cultural and political project of Mexican Afrodescendent history and identity as *la tercer raiz* (the third root) because it establishes a tacit ordering and ranking of Mexico’s

(Third African root, African ancestry) has been submerged in this larger narrative of Mexicaness (Vaughn 2005).

### **Race and Color in the Mexican Context**

Contemporary understandings of Mexican color-coded racial ideologies, labels, and identities remain under analyzed in both Mexico and the United States. Recent social science scholarship reveals the relationship between Mexican racial ideologies and skin color distinction in Mexico. Andres Villarreal makes a compelling case for studying skin color stratification in Indo-Latin America (Central America, Mexico, and Andean countries of Latin America). He argues that the bulk of research on the topic is conducted in Afro-Latin America (the Caribbean and Brazil), in regions with large populations with African ancestry (Villarreal 2010). Not understood, this research gap conflates racial difference with visible signs of blackness, treating mestizo/o societies exclusively as an ethnic group. In this case, Villarreal establishes Mexican ethnoracial society as one of marked by “extreme ambiguity” (653). He observes, “While Mexicans do make color comparisons in everyday life no clear categorization appears to exist” (653).

Villarreal agrees with other scholars that discrimination in mestizo nations is not primarily based on phenotypic criteria but also shaped by linguistic, class, and cultural factors. Despite the ambiguity of racial classification and the fluidity of the ethnoracial boundary between *mestizo* and Indian (the primary Mexican ethnoracial boundary), he finds that Mexicans with light-skin and European features are more

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racial schemas. Despite this, cultural activists have embraced this term to raise awareness about the erasure of blackness from Mexico’s history.

likely to occupy the highest and most respected positions in society. In comparison, Mexicans with darker-skin and Indigenous features obtain lower levels of education and occupational status- hence having limited avenues for upward social mobility. Villarreal's empirical study demonstrates the existence of skin color discrimination in a society such as Mexico where the primary ethno(racial) categories are not based on phenotypical differences. What is also instructive is his suggestion that skin color is more likely to determine access to the upper strata of society in terms of wealth, education, and status. In other words, it matters more to be lighter skinned in order to access the privileges associated with whiteness. This further demonstrates the relationship between class and color and the material consequences of colorism experienced by marginalized groups.

Another site of inquiry explores the meanings of blackness, race mixture, race, and color. Cristina Sue studies the contemporary understandings of race and color and the practice of color differentiation or what she terms as "color talk" in Veracruz, Mexico. Sue inquires about five major folk racial categories (*blanco, moreno claro, moreno, moreno oscuro, and negro*)<sup>30</sup> to explore how Mexicans make meaning of these color categories. Sue argues that Mexicans engage in a practice of color talk to avoid confronting racism and deploy the language of color as a proxy for race. Sue's methodology centers the significance of everyday discourses of racism and the role that folk racial categories play in Mexico against the backdrop of Mexican *mestizaje* and its associated national project of racial uniformity.

In this region, which has a neighboring population of Mexicans of African descent, she finds the existence of heightened awareness of the markers of blackness

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<sup>30</sup>. Approximate translation (white, light brown, brown, dark brown, and black).

identifiable through skin color and facial features. Mexican notions of blackness are explained as of excess sun exposure that shapes the path to an ideological “moreno escape hatch” that creates distance from blackness. The hegemonic racial project of *mestizaje* erases African ancestry and history in Mexico and shapes the desire for phenotypical whiteness. Sue distinguishes this desire for lighter somatic features from the goal of racial purity—arguing that respondents demonstrate a desire to whiten within the mixed race or *mestizo* category. This practice is historicized within overlapping Mexican state projects of *mestizaje*, *blanqueamiento*, and *indigenismo* that strive for a unified mestizo identity retaining certain aspects of Mexican ethnicity while at the same time, absorbing the “African and Indigenous” elements (Vasconcelos). Sue’s interview study offers strong evidence on the ways that Mexicans distinguish between race and color- perceiving them as two separate discursive entities.

Bobby Vaughn pursues the theme of Mexican constructions of blackness more fully in his ethnographic study of Afro Mexicans in the southern portion of Mexico. While Cristina Sue found that the racial “significant other” was a denigrated and erased form of blackness, Vaughn finds that Afro Mexicans have low regard towards indigenous communities. Afro Mexicanos associate indigently with poverty, lack of civilization, and ignorance. Speaking of these distinctions, an Afro Mexican woman declares, “*Yo no soy india para esta comiendo frijoles todos los dias!*” [I am not an Indian woman to be eating beans every day!] (qtd in Vaughn 123). Vaughn’s findings destabilize harmonious imaginings of Mexico as a racial democracy and reveal the contradictions of the national narrative of *mestizaje*. In this sense, both

Vaughn and Sue demonstrate the unraveling of this master narrative and the presence of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms that undergird Mexican ideologies of *mestizaje*. This tautology dating back to the conquest insists on the racial inferiority of people of African and Indigenous descent. The power of these two seemingly distinct racial pillars (Spanish-Indian and African-Indian-Spanish) structure the contemporary grammar of embodied ancestry embedded in Mexican racial discourse that endures in everyday language.

More recently, Laura Lewis conducted an extensive ethnographic study of the interrelatedness of blackness and Indianness in the historically black region of Guerrero, Mexico (2012). In her account, Lewis explores the overlapping systems of representations of “color talk” and “body talk” used to define and describe blackness and Indian-ness in Guerrero (2012).<sup>31</sup> Lewis finds that residents of San Nicolas engage in a complex practice that references skin color, hair texture, and body shape and size. Lewis offers important evidence on the ways that *moreno-ness* represents an active and living engagement with the overlapping histories of Indian-ness and Blackness in la costa chica of Guerrero. I deploy Lewis’s findings to sketch in broad strokes a picture of the translocal engagements with Mexican grids of darkness and lightness that intersect on the site of *morena-ness*.

### **Racial Formations in Mexican America**

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<sup>31</sup>. African American Mexican, Maria Rosario Jackson, writes about the practice of “body talk”, she writes, “In Mexico City...I was called *chata*, *chinita*, *trompudita*, and *morena* all racial terms, though said with affection I think” (435).

Collectively, these discussed works provide a critical entry point in which I continue to build a translocal approach linking Mexican and U.S. racial categorization systems and racial ideologies on *both* sides of the border. As previously mentioned, I have found the term “Mexican America” helpful in structuring a comparative and translocal approach that is integral to this project. In my focus here, I look to trace a genealogy of *mestizaje*/mixture, a form of hybridity that has remained elusive, unclassifiable, and under the skin of hegemonic racial ideologies on both sides of the border. Casting a translocal analysis in this context permits me to consider the overlap of Mexican and U.S. terminology and their histories of racialization. More importantly, “Mexican America” provides a point of entry to consider the multidirectional movement of meaning across borders.

Speaking of the transnational and translocal aspects of Mexican racial identity and racism, Monica Moreno Figueroa, asserts, “It is the complex continuities and plurality of Mexico’s histories, which are traced, in its transnational dimensions: the interactions and collisions between different social groups, within the colonial enterprises, and those that developed thereafter” (“Historically Rooted Transnationalism” 286). The translocal dimensions of Mexican racial formations reflect the overarching historical processes imposed through Spanish colonialism, Mexican nation-state building, and Mexican-American re-racialization in the United States (De Genova 2008).

In the complex historical process by which Mexican/Americans were assigned the status of racial ambiguity, in-betweenness, and unclassifiability, marginalized people of Mexican America were often represented as racial mongrels, embodiments

of the lowest of “racial types” and victims of their racial ancestries (De Leon 1983). Antebellum writings in the United States described Mexicans embodied ancestry in terms of their bodily forms and skin complexions- emphasizing their racial difference (De Leon 1983). The visual category and the process of Mexican racialization was firmly inscribed on the Mexican body by which the racialized trope of “Mexican” emerged as a visual discourse of race. Furthermore, Anglo settlers during this time visually assessed Mexicans as racially confusing, describing them as “half breeds,” “nearly Black,” and “mongrels” (Rodriguez Dominguez 2005).

In both Mexico and the United States, social scientists and politicians battled over the “Indian” and “Mexican” problems (Knight 1990; Menchaca 2001; Gomez 2007). Are Indians Mexican? Are Mexicans Indian? Indian and Black? Mulattos and Mestizos? These questions over the racial ancestry and the classification of Mexican/Americans spilled over into the public debate about the boundaries of the national body politic and the threat that Mexicans presented to a “healthy” nation-state (Molina 2006). In this respect Alexa Stern Minn observes, “Anxieties over the putative biological instability and the failure to define the mestizo in general were rife on both sides of the border (152). Fundamentally, Mexican/Americans’ racial ambiguity did not mean their racial status was insignificant in the structuring of local and translocal ethnoracial schemas and local histories. Rather it points us in the direction of further examining the ways that racial mixture in the Americas was defined and regulated; and the central role that people of Mexican America have played in contesting the boundaries of racial classification and nomenclature in the Americas.

In both the U.S. and in Mexico race is still believed to carry biological and ancestral meanings. Ian F. Haney-Lopez reminds us that the definition of race is still largely believed to be based on ancestry and morphology (1996). Haney-Lopez argues that although race is socially and legally constructed, the idea that biological race is destiny persists through avenues of racialized power (1996). Educational institutions, government documents, and everyday practices maintain the “rule of race” to uphold a naturalized boundary between the “races” (Lipsitz 2003). Despite the social construction theory of race, human groups are still perceived as distinct races of people bounded together by “socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry” (Haney-Lopez 13).

### **Nomenclature and Access to Whiteness**

People of Mexican America claim ties to Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, *Tejano*, Hispanic, Spanish, *Mestizo*, histories and identities. The existence of such a diversity of experiences demonstrates the unique history of the people of Mexican America. This diversity reflects the historical intersections of race, class, ethnicity, and citizenship in the formation of diverse ethnoracial identities that are relational and oppositional to the concepts of whiteness, Mexicaness, and blackness. These complex racial formations are contextualized within the histories of empire building, labor exploitation, and the denial of citizenship rights to people of Mexican America. At the same time, the matrix of Mexican-Chicano racial formations was mediated by skin color, citizenship rights, and access to land and property (Menchaca 2001). In studying Mexican America’s diverse ethnoracial ancestries, Martha Menchaca observes, “Throughout history the Mexican Americans’ Spanish ancestry

protected them many times from the full impact of racial discrimination because they were part White” (36).

Mexicans’ ambiguous racial status and at times their proximity to whiteness afforded them certain access to upward mobility that was often denied to darker-skinned Mexicans. This unique positioning demonstrates the ways that Mexicans are located at the nexus of biological and social constructs of race. In this sense, this links U.S. and Mexican constructs of race and color- further demonstrating the translocal connectivities among these ideologies.

The access to whiteness has been tenuous at best. Nicholas De Genova remarks, “This heightened racial ambiguity is undoubtedly revealing in much the same way that Latino responses to the U.S. Census expose a definite inclination among some to tenuously embrace the elusive promise of whiteness” (*Working the Boundaries* 198). The racial schemas of the United States and Mexico intersect on the nexus of whiteness. Although Anglo Saxon whiteness and Latin America whiteness are often treated as oppositional historical constructs they both meet at the promise of a “white” and “neutral” populace; a trajectory that mirrors the discourses of assimilation and *mestizaje*. The logic of *mestizaje* collides with U.S. constructs of whiteness that are wrapped up in the trajectory towards full assimilation into the body politic. In this respect David Theo Goldberg has an interesting argument about the flexibility of race. He remarks:

Race,...is ironically a hybrid concept. It assumes significance, in both senses, in terms of prevailing social and epistemological conditions of the time, yet simultaneously bearing with it sedimentary traces of past significations (559).

Here the concepts of “social” and “biological” race are useful. It has been established by both U.S. and Latin American scholars that the key difference between these racial schemas is the ways that “social” and “biological” race are inscribed, regulated, and maintained. This artificial boundary between the social and biological constructs disables productive discussion about the shared meanings and uses of assigning racialized meanings and racisms across space and time.<sup>32</sup> The past significations that Goldberg references, or the “semantics of race,” point us to the ways that race is a stand-in for: ethnicity, nation, skin color, physiognomy, blood quantum, descent or heritage, geographic location, culture, and language (1992). The palimpsest of race reflects these past significations and demonstrates the ways that people of Mexican America are deeply embedded in the translocal histories of race-making in the Americas.

Let us further examine the question of Mexican Americans’ racial ambiguity and at times racial unclassifiability through the logics of *mestizaje*. Speaking of this logic, Gilberto Rosas observes, “*Mestizaje* effectively bleaches its subjects” (77). Monica Moreno Figueroa adds to this analysis positioning women’s experiences with racism who are on the “right” and “wrong” side of *mestizaje* (“Linda Morenita”). Invoking Jose Vasconcelos’s vision of *la Raza Cosmica* and the “voluntary extinction” of Blacks and Indians, Moreno Figueroa identifies the core racialization process embedded in the logics of *mestizaje*. Participants in Moreno Figueroa’s

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<sup>32</sup>. Miriam Jimenez-Roman and others refer to this paradigm as Latin American racial exceptionalism in which proponents claim that Spanish colonials were more tolerant of racial mixture, practiced a more benign form of slavery and colonialism, and were more willing to have children with Black and Indian women.

interview projects reveal the everyday racisms that they endure. She finds that lighter-skinned women position themselves on the positive side of *mestizaje*- towards a trajectory of Mexican whiteness that promises them a life of positive affect and good treatment. Women on the wrong side, those with darker skin and Indigenous features, report mistreatment by their family members, public disparagements, and low-self-esteem.

I draw on this work to think through the logics of *mestizaje* that makes claim to a future of whiteness; one that locates certain members of Mexican America on the right side of *mestizaje* in a neutralized racial middle ground. Not white and not black, people of Mexican America have made fragile claims to U.S. and Latin American whiteness. In terms of U.S. racial classifications, early 20<sup>th</sup> century census workers were instructed to visually classify Mexicans as whites, “unless they were definitely Negro, Indian, or some other race” (qtd in C. Rodriguez 222).

Recent scholarship situates debates about Latino racial and ethnic identities in the realm of the U.S. census and other state-led initiatives of race-management. The complex histories of Latino racializations are best described as a condition and process of “differential racialization” (Pulido 2006). Some Latino groups have gained access to whiteness; others have gained access to an immigrant ethnic identity; while other groups are cemented in a rigid racial categorization as foreigners to the nation. This complexity of experiences with race, racialization, and racism is further complicated with Latinos’ status as an official ethnic group on the U.S. census. By definition, Latinos can be of any race, and thus some are afforded a host of ethnic and racial options not available to other groups (C. Rodriguez 2000).

U.S. anthropological and sociological explorations of color consciousness, colorism, and racial categorizations are integral to this dissertation study. Eileen O'Brien explores the paradigm of continuums and the "racial middle ground" that Latinos and Asians occupy in the United States (2008). O'Brien addresses the "whitening" and "browning" thesis in contemporary sociology that questions the role of Asians and Latinos in U.S. race relations. The "whitening" thesis argues that Asians and Latinos will assimilate into hegemonic whiteness through inter-marriage and forge a black/non-black color line. Proponents of the "browning" argument posit that Asians and Latinos will disrupt the black/white binary and create nuanced categories and identities that are neither white nor black. O'Brien argues that Asian and Latinos are not entirely assimilating into whiteness nor are they claiming brownness as a main site of identity.

O'Brien's work reflects the current turn in anthropology and sociology that explores a paradigm of continuums and relationality that moves away from "old bipolar habits". These new dimensions of racial identity are important to address, yet we must identify the ways in which old forms of domination and hierarchy are repackaged and reproduced in what appears to be a new social formation. For example, O'Brien suggests that Asian and Latinos may come to represent a 3<sup>rd</sup> World cosmopolitan subjectivity that reflects a more "nuanced" and "children of the world" perspective (2008).

I caution against the romanticization of cosmopolitan identities and subjectivities because they can easily become rhetorical devices that create distance from "domestic racial problems." The nuance that is often associated with ambiguity,

racial neutrality, and ethnoracial fluidity is not far removed from hegemonic racial logics that privilege color-blindness and state-supported *mestizaje* (Jimenez-Roman 2007). If a brown social positioning and identity is to challenge the black-white binary and reveal a multitude of gradation and nuance- in what ways does this fluidity and nuance work to escape rigid racialization that is most often imposed on U.S. blackness and other racialized populations? In other words, what does the disruption of the black-white binary look like? Does it matter that multiple categories and gradations of color exist while simultaneously they appear to value phenotypical and symbolic whiteness?<sup>33</sup>

These theoretical questions are ripe for discussion and echo critical race theorist Ian Haney Lopez's observation, "The future of race in the United States depends on how Hispanics come to be seen or see themselves, in racial terms" (1996). This points us in the direction of exploring the shared meanings and deployments of race and color located within both U.S. and Latin American schemes of race and color (Roth 2012).

### **KEY INTERVIEW STUDIES ON COLOR AND COLORISM**

In studying the significance of color and appearance, sociologist Frank Montalvo's work is instructive. Montalvo shares "critical incident" interviews that demonstrate the shared race and color ideologies among Latinas. Most importantly, he attempts to draw important comparisons between Mexico's colonial experiences with contemporary manifestations of color-based discrimination in the United States.

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<sup>33</sup>. Miriam Jimenez-Roman argues that Latin American *mestizaje* and U.S. hypodecent share a similar goal in the distancing and disparagement of blackness.

Given this, the terminology that he uses to describe the social occurrence of skin color references and appraisals, is “phenotyping.” He outlines phenotyping as, “the social process that provides or withholds life-chance opportunities and psychic benefits from individuals according to the extent to which their ethnoracial appearance is similar to or different from representative members of the dominant culture” (“Surviving Race” 27).

While my focus in the dissertation is not on life chances and mental wellbeing, his use of the term stresses the significance of physical appearance and skin color. Montalvo, continues, [Phenotyping] reveals racism at its core when members of the same ethnic group are treated differently by society because of differences in their skin color and physiognomy” (“Surviving Race” 27). Perhaps this is the central reason why studies of skin color and phenotype in Latino Studies remain scant. Imploding the process of racialization thereby revealing its physical components is often met with contempt, dismissal, and disinterest.

Margaret Hunter’s study offers comparative evidence of colorism and color consciousness among Mexican American and African American women. Hunter explores the relationship between skin color and beauty ideals—linking the preference for light skin and European features with improved life chances and increased marriage prospects. Light-skinned Mexican and African American women are perceived as more desirable than their dark-skinned peers. Hunter defines the social process that ranks women with European-features and light skin as most desirable and beautiful as the “beauty queue” (2005). The beauty queue represents a form of racism within African American and Mexican American communities that is

related to larger global racial projects that shape gendered racial hierarchies that value whiteness and denigrates darkness.

This gendered form of oppression relies on age-old traditions of valorizing women primarily based on their looks and bodies that shapes women's decision to alter their pigmentation and bodies in troubling ways.<sup>34</sup> Hunter's intersectional work illuminates racial ideologies at work in the everyday lives of women and asks us to interrogate the meanings of colorism in the contemporary "postracial" climate. Hunter's study is the most cited on the topic and no other comprehensive and comparative study on the meanings of skin color among Mexican American women has been conducted.

Although, Hunter provides a useful comparative framework to position this dissertation study, I take issue with what appears to be an over determined beauty queue that presumes that light skin and European features will always be prized. Other factors that emerged from my findings such as body size, accent, and facial features demonstrate that Hunter's beauty queue does not account for other embodied and non-embodied factors that destabilize light-skin privilege.<sup>35</sup> While this study looks to re-center color as an interpretive category, it does not aim to claim its primacy in mediating social relations of power.

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<sup>34</sup>. Margaret Hunter points to the alarming rates of cosmetic surgery and skin lightening practices among women of color in the United States and abroad. These surgeries include nose jobs, eyelid surgeries, and breast reductions.

<sup>35</sup>. Sandra Garza's work offers more evidence on the instability of light-skinned privilege in work about colorism among Tejanas.

Together, these two studies provide a methodological framework to investigate the racialized experiences of Mexican women.<sup>36</sup> I extend Frank Montalvo's "critical incident" interviews into this study to theorize the significance of *ethnoracial moments*. These instances provide important evidence on the embodied experience of race and racism- cutting to the core of the racialization process. At the same time, I look to these ethnoracial moments to think through the complex ways that the visual vocabularies of race and color are deployed as forms of resistance against the translocal racial orders that structure participants' lives.

### **Reproduction of Mexican Racism**

I find the writings of Monica Moreno Figueroa central to this dissertation study (2012, 2010a, 2010b, 2008a, 2008b). Here I briefly outline her main contributions and delineate how this study departs from her work. The analyses advanced by Moreno Figueroa demonstrate the centrality of a racist mestizo logic in structuring everyday forms of Mexican racism. In her empirical and theoretical explorations, she interviews Mexican women residing in Central Mexico, conducting life story interviews and focus groups with participants. She also permits participants to use family photographs to describe and narrate the affects of racism. Her main contribution lies in revealing the emotional life of racism in Mexico- a mestizo nation that denies its existence. By excavating the affective and interpersonal aspects of

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<sup>36</sup>. Scholars in the fields of sociology and social psychology have produced a rich body of empirical research that investigates the relationship between colorism, self-esteem, and racial identity. I have identified these two works as the most useful to the structure of this larger project.

racism in Mexico we can begin to consider the ways that “racial democracies” such as Mexico engage and sustain racist practices outside institutionalized racism.

Moreno Figueroa examines the reproduction of racism through family photographs-situating the affective readings of these images as the quotidian impacts of Mexican racism undergirded by the logic of *mestizaje*. Moreno Figueroa makes clear the historical structures that reproduce the aspiration to whiteness and the disparagement of Indian and dark features. She declares that racism exists in Mexico and that the core of *mestizaje* is a form of whiteness that mediates Mexican family life. This important work permits me to argue for the centrality of race in the lives of mestizo Mexican women. It also prepares the ground for a transnational and translocal analysis of the racialized experiences of *las mujeres del otro lado* (women living on the other side of the border). In this case, I consider the experiences of Mexican women residing in Central Florida, some of whom have migrated from Central Mexico, specifically the states of Guanajuato, Mexico City, Queretaro (Please see Figure 1 for the location of these Mexican states). I focus on the racialized experiences and ethnoracial identities of women residing on *este lado* (this side) of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Most importantly, this work allows for a nuanced reading of Mexican racial formations that interface with U.S. constructs of race and color. Moreno Figueroa demonstrates the expansiveness of racism in Mexico, locating whiteness at the center of *mestizaje*. I am more concerned with the “excluded others”, the unclassifiable ancestries that cannot be divided up into equal parts Spanish and Indian. I look to the *ethnoracial moments* to demonstrate how Mexican women make claims to submerged

ancestries not acknowledged by official narratives of Mexican mestizaje. I seek to decentralize the significance of mestizaje, instead looking to the many ways that whiteness and other manifestations of dominant racial ideology are resisted, dismissed, and evaded.

Taken as a whole, the focus of this discussion looks at the significance of these theories to help situate the overarching objective of this dissertation study. Here, I trace a translocal approach to situate the matrix of Mexican American racial formations that positions this diverse population within competing frames of whiteness, blackness, and Indianness. I draw on Frank Montalvo's "critical incident" interviews to construct an analysis of the *ethnoracial moments* of study participants. These moments reveal the relationship between institutional and cultural racism and most importantly, the ways that Mexican American women have survived the dehumanizing effects and affects of racism and racialization. The subsequent chapter situates Latina/o migration in Florida and community formation. The discussion also contextualizes racialized experience and identity formation within the space of South County, the southernmost part of Hillsborough County.

## Chapter 4: Latino Florida: Race and Location

*Florida has passed from New Spain to Old South to New South to an emerging Sunbelt, and in the process has picked up more than its share of cultural complexity”*  
(Arsenault and Mormino)

Florida holds a unique place in the U.S. imaginary—sunny beaches, Disney World, the Kennedy Space Center, and as the nation’s southernmost state. Florida was once part of the Spanish empire from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century—spanning from California to Florida, bordering on the Southwestern U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico (Henderson and Mormino 1991). The Spanish outpost of St. Augustine was founded forty years before colonial Jamestown in Virginia (Ruiz “Nuestra America”). The Sunshine State is unique in its Spanish borderlands history and its varied geographic and cultural landscapes that are both rural and metropolitan—Northern and Southern—and forms part of the “new and old geographies of Latin American migration” (Williams et al 209). At present, Florida has the third largest number of Latinos in the United States. More importantly, for this study, many of those communities reside within the greater Tampa Bay area.

This chapter is divided up into three main sections. The first situates Latino communities and *Latinidades* in the larger state of Florida, discussing key migration patterns and modes of incorporation for Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican and Central American communities. The second section discusses Latino communities in the greater Tampa Bay region that is situated in Hillsborough County, one of the largest and most Latino counties in the state of Florida. Finally, in the third section, I

explore the history of “South County,” through the lens of Mexican migration and translocal networks of place, identity and community formation. This section discusses how study participants position themselves as Mexican women in relation to translocal systems of racial signification that locate them at the interstices of race, gender, and labor. I now turn our attention to the history of Latina/o migration and community formation in Florida.

Historian Gary Mormino notes, “The last decades of the century encompassed motion, migration, and mobility—a movement of capital, technology, culture, and most of all, people. The Florida of today is the America of tomorrow” (9). Florida’s modern history of diverse Latin American emigration, migration, and immigration spans back to the arrival of the first Cuban exiles during the Cuban Independence and Spanish-American Wars to the recently arrived Mexican immigrants and Central American refugees. In a period of a hundred years, Florida is now the permanent and temporary home to people who originate from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central America, and South America.

Currently, Florida ranks third in the U.S. Latino population after California and Texas. As these communities continue to grow and diversify.<sup>37</sup> Further, as of 2010, over 50 percent of the United States’ Latino population resided in these three states (U.S. 2010 Census Brief). However, what makes Florida distinctive from

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<sup>37</sup>. In 2010, Florida’s Latino population made up a total of 22.5 percent of the state’s entire census count. The largest Latino groups in Florida are Cubans (6.5 %), Puerto Ricans (4.5%) and Mexicans (3.3 %). Central Americans represent 2.3% of the total Latino population (Nicaraguans are the largest group) and South Americans represent 3.6% respectively (Colombians are the largest South American contingency). (2010 Census Summary File 1)

California and Texas is that Florida's Latino communities are much more diverse and home to the three largest Latino groups: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. Florida 2010 Census data show that the five most populous Latino cities are Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Orlando. Not traditionally perceived as a Latino city, Jacksonville's Latino population increased by almost 12 percent since 2000. Miami's Latino community grew by approximately 10 percent and Tampa almost witnessed an 11 percent growth. Orlando experienced the largest growth in Latinos' presence by 28 percent (U.S. 2010 Census Brief). Far from homogenous, Florida's Latino population are exiles, refugees, economic migrants, professional workers, and im/migrant and seasonal workers. Just how diverse Florida is requires an understanding of politics and geography with a specific focus on Tampa.

The first Cuban émigrés traveled to *La Florida* at the end of Cuba's Ten Years' War in 1878 to search for employment opportunities in the cigar factories in Key West and Tampa (Greenbaum 2002). After a series of fires and work strikes in Key West cigar factories, Cuban workers migrated to Ybor City in Tampa, also known as the "Cigar-Making Capital of the World" (Grillo 2000). Cuban entrepreneur Vicente Martinez Ybor founded the city with his namesake in 1886, attracting skilled cigar makers from Spain and Cuba (Greenbaum 2002). The centrality of Ybor City as a place of industry and Cuban political activism made Tampa the largest Cuban settlement in the United States. By 1910, skilled Spanish, Cuban, and Italian workers established a strong political and cultural presence in

Ybor City (Mormino and Pozzetta 1987).<sup>38</sup> Collectively, these communities called themselves “Latin”—reflecting their shared political views and a common Latin language root (Greenbaum 2002). Despite this shared label, Mormino and Pozzetta observe, “[This] period did not realize the creation of a unitary Latin community but rather witnessed the formation of several sub communities which, in certain respects have endured to this day” (191).

Today, Cubans are one of the most politicized and visible Latino communities in Tampa, who established a strong presence in West Tampa after the collapse of Ybor City’s cigar industry.<sup>39</sup> Former cigar workers moved to West Tampa’s neighborhoods, bringing with them a strong sense of *Cubanidad* rooted in their shared Latin-ness (Greenbaum 2009). West Tampa’s overlapping Cuban, Italian, and Spanish heritages were celebrated in the trilingual newspaper *La Gaceta* that is published in Spanish, English, and Italian. Community oral history projects such as "A West Side Story: Voces de West Tampa" document the multicultural and multiracial histories of West Tampa.

For people of the Puerto Rican diaspora, Florida has become the “new destination of the *guagua aérea*” (Silver 58).<sup>40</sup> Puerto Ricans who have settled in

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<sup>38</sup>. In 1912, Puerto Rican activist, Luisa Capetillo worked for a summer as a *lectora* (reader) in an Ybor City cigar factory.

<sup>39</sup>. Ybor City was the home to thousands of Cuban, Spanish, and Italian cigar makers- the peak of this industry lasted between 1885 and 1925 respectively.

<sup>40</sup>. Jorge Duany also terms this migration pattern as “airborne migration” (“The Orlando Ricans” 90).

Florida reside primarily in Orlando, Tampa, and Miami (Duany 2010). Those who first settled in Central Florida between 1950 and 1970 arrived as military personnel, NASA and Disney recruits, teachers, and students (Silver 2010). Puerto Ricans engaged in patterns of circular and return migration that took them from the Island to and from New York and Florida. Silver notes, “As the Puerto Rican *vaivén* (back and forth) has become increasingly multidirectional, central Florida has emerged as one of the primary destinations for those arriving directly from Puerto Rico, for those who have lived and worked for decades in Northern cities, and for those who see the back and forth as a way of life” (66). Florida now has the second-largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the United States, behind New York.

The large-scale immigration and migration of Mexicans to Florida during the 1980s and 1990s was primarily shaped by the drastic drop of oil prices in Mexico, the devalorization of the peso, and the implementation of new Mexican policies such as the influential passing of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Fink 2009). The migration patterns that transpired during this period decentralized traditional places of Mexican immigration. Mexican immigration to Florida and other Southeastern states is a direct result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). IRCA made it more difficult for Mexican immigrants to travel to the heavily policed border states of California, Texas, and Arizona (Massey et al 2010). The major sites of arrival for Mexican immigrants in the past have been California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Illinois. For instance, between 1910-1960 90% of all Mexican immigrants lived in one of these states. (Massey et al 2010). Subsequently, Mexican immigrants traveled outside the traditional areas of settlement

to less policed areas leading them to North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and Florida.<sup>41</sup>

Agricultural production centers in Florida shaped the East Coast agricultural labor stream that up into the 1960s was predominately made up of African American, West Indian, and white workers (Williams et al 2009). The change of agricultural production to single-crop operations made fieldwork more seasonal, unstable, demanding, and poorly paid (Schmidt 2009). As a result, African American workers migrated to other Florida cities or out of state in search of more stable and well-paying employment. Ella Schmidt points out that, “The labor flight forced local farmers to look for other sources of workers, who, if possible, would take care of themselves while crops did not need to be tended” (28). Subsequently, Mexican migrants from Texas and Mexican immigrants from California and other parts of the United States were contracted as migrant and seasonal workers. Furthermore, the demand for Mexican labor increased as contract H-1 workers (mostly Jamaican and Bahamian) were banned in the late 1960s from working in Florida fields (Schmidt 2009).

Mexicans in Florida—the focus of this research—primarily reside in the agricultural counties of Hillsborough, Hendry, Collier, Desoto, Hardee, Okeechobee, and Glade, and make up the largest Hispanic population (Schmidt 2009). Mexican

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<sup>41</sup>. Recently, The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 also known as the Sensenbrenner bill HR4437, heightened border control measures and expanded the definition of aggravated felony to include “smuggling, illegal entry, and re-entry crimes” (National Conference of State Legislatures).

migrant farm workers are documented arriving in Dade County as early as 1955, some of these migrant workers later permanently settled in the now predominately Mexican town of Homestead, Florida, 30 minutes south of Miami (Ferber 1971). All throughout the state, we see a vast diversity of Mexican migrants and immigrants living in close proximity to one another. Mexicanos, Chicanos, Tejanos, and ethnic Indigenous all share Mexican roots and agricultural origins. Otomís from Hidalgo, Mexico and Chiapanecos from Chiapas arrived in Florida mostly residing in Clearwater (Pinellas County) brought with them a strong sense of community and cooperation (Fortuny Loret de Mola et al 2009). Otomís in Clearwater have successfully established themselves in the area—organizing heritage and language workshops for their children, and creating transnational hometown associations (Cardenas 2007). In this sense, Otomis and Chiapanecos shape a transnational moral community that “rests upon a system of shared meanings, norms, and practices rooted in a strong ethnic identity that links them to their place of origin” (Williams et al 12).

Central and South Americans form part of Florida’s newest Latino communities. Many of these new Floridians left their countries to escape the violence and economic upheaval of Central America’s “hidden wars.” Refugees from Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador arrived in Miami and other Florida cities during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>42</sup> Gadsden County in Northern Florida became a site of major settlement for Salvadoran refugees (Mormino 2005). Mayans from

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<sup>42</sup>. Various immigrant policies shaped Central American immigration during the 1980s and 1990s: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act, and the Temporary Protected Status Program.

Huehuetenango and Jacaltenango, Guatemala traveled to Jupiter and Indiantown in south central Florida to work in the golf courses and other service sectors, also transforming these communities (Williams et al 2009).<sup>43</sup> Guatemalan Mayans have worked to establish a cultural presence in Jupiter creating non-profit organizations like Corn-Maya Inc. (Steigenga and Williams 2009). Corn-Maya has since served as a central site of political and cultural activism for the Jacalteco communities.

### **Latino Tampa- New and Old Racial Geographies**

The greater Tampa region is significant to consider in the formation of Mexican racial identities in that it gives us an insight on the ways that ethnoracial lexicons, categories, and identities circulate outside major Latino immigration and migration destinations or “U.S. based ethnic geographies” (McKiernan-Gonzalez 2010).<sup>44</sup> Centering on this region contributes to translocal knowledge of racial formations outside the Floridian “Miami-Cuban frame” (McKiernan-Gonzalez 190). Overall, the greater Tampa area is home to one of the most diverse Latino populations in the state (Coates and Corsa 2002).

Tampa, Florida is a regional urban center, four hours north of Miami, on the Gulf Coast. Tampa is located in Hillsborough County, one of the largest counties in the state of Florida (Please see Figure 2). It is estimated that almost 25% of Hillsborough County is Latino and is among the top five counties in the U.S. South

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<sup>43</sup>. The documentary *Pueblo Hermanos* (Brother Villages) explores the ethnoracial tensions and immigration debates centering on Guatemalan and Mexican workers in Jupiter, Florida.

<sup>44</sup>. These are also known as “gateway” cities of major Latino immigration: New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami.

with a high percentage of people of Latino descent.<sup>45</sup> Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Cubans make up the majority of Hillsborough County's Latino population, representing more than half of the county's Latino population (2010 U.S. Census Bureau Summary).<sup>46</sup> Puerto Ricans are now the largest Latino group in the region (Mormino 294).

Urban and suburban Hillsborough County is heterogeneous in terms of its Latino population in comparison to rural Hillsborough County where mostly Mexican immigrants/migrants reside. The “new Latinos”—Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Venezuelans, Colombians, Dominicans, among other groups arrived to the region attracted by the low cost of living and job availability (Schweitzer 1999). The newly arrived Latinos found it more affordable to live in the Tampa area compared to major Latino metropolitan cities such as Miami, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. The historically “Latin” enclave of West Tampa is now home to recently arrived Puerto Ricans, Costa Ricans, and Dominicans (Zayas 2005). This ethnic diversity positions the participants in this study in the narrowing of Latino, from the wider concept of that identity, to one specifically directed to the Mexican identified population in this area.

Lacking a centralized geographical and cultural identity—the greater Tampa area is an ideal place to explore Mexican gendered and racial identity and its

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<sup>45</sup>. Florida's Latino population represents 22.9% of the state's entire population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File.

<sup>46</sup>. Puerto Ricans represent 7.4%, Cubans 5.3%, and Mexicans 5.3% of Hillsborough County's Latino demographic, “other” Hispanic/Latino groups make up 6.8% of Hillsborough County's population. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File.

relationship to whiteness, blackness, and Mexicanness. Color identity is critical to examine in a wider U.S. context where skin color is aligned with Mexican social and cultural stereotypes. Tampa's in-between status, straddling North and South and black/white imaginaries<sup>47</sup>, provides important insight into the ways that this rural Mexican community members negotiate questions of race and color. The study's participants share a history of migrant farm work and by extension experienced familiar tropes of Mexican racialization that connect manual labor and illegality to low social status. What is less known is the significance of vernacular Mexican color terminology such as *morena*, *prieta*, and *negra* (approximate translation: brown, dark brown, and black) and the migration of meaning of this dynamic and relational lexicon of race and color.

The greater Tampa bay region is a productive site to explore the complex web of Mexican racial identity and the intersections of new and old systems of racial formations. The main Latino communities residing in the area negotiate color lines that are specific to their national histories of race-making and also local constructs of race and color. Latin American definitions of race developed from a point of color continuums that reflected the African, Indigenous, and European *mestizajes* of the Americas. Ethnoracial boundaries are culturally mediated and included aspects of class, color, dress, phenotype, and region in determining the ways that Mexican color labels such as *blanca*, *negra*, *india*, and *morena* operate and are used in the region.

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<sup>47</sup>. Old Florida is also known as "Cracker Country" characterized by patterns of racial segregation, a rigid black and white color line, and small town life.

This double negotiation process is exemplified in the ways that Latinos self-identify on the U.S. Census (C. Rodriguez 2000). For example, Census demographers found that Cubans are most likely to identify as white, Dominicans are most likely to identify as black, and Mexicans as “other” (Logan 471). Major patterns of self-identification on the Census reveal three main Latino categorizations, White Hispanics, Black Hispanics, and “Hispanic Hispanic” (Logan 471).<sup>48</sup> To some degree, Census data cannot accurately account for groups of Latinos such as in the case of Guatemalans, who are often undercounted because many choose to identify as Native American, white, Mayan, or other (Palma et al 2009). However, the Census is instructive in beginning to understand the complex ways that Latinos self-identify and define racial identity.

On the ground, the ethnoracial schisms between and among white Cubans, Afro-Cubans, Italians, African Americans, Spaniards, and Anglos at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Tampa played out in new and old ways. In what Cuban cultural activist Maura Barrios observed as, “Jim Crow meets José Martí”—white, African American, and Latin communities negotiated Anglo and Cuban color lines—at times “accommodating southern racial projects” (Greenbaum 102). For example, some politicized Cuban cigar workers resisted Spanish ideologies of racial purity; Afro-Cubans negotiated the Cuban color line; and African Americans endured the violence of Jim Crow racial segregation.<sup>49</sup> This is the history of Tampa’s color line.

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<sup>48</sup>. “Hispanic Hispanic” refers to the majority of Latinos who respond to the “other” category on the census. Other emergent categories include Non-Black Cuban, Black Cuban, Non Black Mexican, Black Mexican, Non Black Puerto Rican, and Black Other Spanish

<sup>49</sup>. Please see Maura Barrios, *Jose Marti Meets Jim Crow: Race and Identity Among Tampa Cubans*.

Jose Yglesias, wrote in the 1940s, “Ybor City was an island in the South. When an American got mad at any Latin, he called him a Cuban nigger” (qtd in Mirabal “The Afro-Cuban Community in Ybor City...” 19). Afro-Cubans forged community ties with African Americans and found protection and solace from Anglo and Cuban color-based discrimination in African American cultural and educational institutions. On the other hand, Afro Cubans at times invoked their ethnicity to distinguish themselves from African Americans. Nancy Mirabal asserts, “[As] Cubans living and working in an immigrant community, they occupied a fluid, in-between position where they were neither white nor necessarily black” (“Telling Silences and Making Community...” 51).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Puerto Ricans arriving in Florida cities from Puerto Rico and New York negotiated local color lines. For a brief moment, some Puerto Rican workers shared the same labor fields with Mexican migrant workers (Ferster 1971).<sup>50</sup> This labor trend was discontinued by the steady arrival of Mexican migrant workers from Texas, Michigan, and all over Mexico. Speaking of the ways that Puerto Ricans negotiated U.S. constructs of race, sociologist Elizabeth Aranda observes the following:

You can find a Puerto Rican to be white, *trigueño* (wheat colored), black, and he’s Puerto Rican...In reality, it is unpredictable what color Puerto Ricans are going to be because of the rich mixture that we have, thank God...That’s why the same Puerto Rican can be in the same family, white, black, and yellow, and still be Puerto Rican and

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<sup>50</sup>. Elizabeth Abel explores the history of Jim Crow signage and briefly discusses a sign located in Lake Okeechobee area in Central Florida. “No Niggers, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans Allowed” revealed the new racial geographies of Central Florida of the 1940s and 1950s.

brothers. You here [in the U.S.] are the ones with the problem” (qtd in Aranda 120).

Given Puerto Rican and by extension Latin American constructs of color based on a continuum model, many encounter the familiar forms of racism that is present in both U.S. and Latin American societies. In the U.S., Latinos of African descent are often excluded from established frameworks of *Latinidad*. For example, Herman Monroe, an Afro-Cuban born and raised in Ybor City remarks that, “A lot of dark-skinned Hispanics live in black neighborhoods because they feel more comfortable,” he continues, “You don’t have to explain your blackness. I myself associate more with blacks. I always have” (qtd in Cabrera 2005). Afro-Latino experiences with racism-colorism are demonstrative of sight-specific criteria that mediate identity and how individuals and communities are perceived. Monroe comments that he does not have to “explain his blackness.” As a population with multiple ancestries, Latinos often are pressed for racial explanations; are they white? Black? Indian? Other? I now turn to the specificities of the research site to explore regional racial formations and their relationship to race, space, labor and gender.

### **South County**

Hillsborough County is what historian Gary Mormino calls an “urban megacounty” that produces more strawberries than any other county in the United States (Please refer to Figure 3). Estimates report that strawberry sales earned 45 percent of the county’s agricultural revenues (Hillsborough County Agriculture 2010). Mexican immigrants also worked in the orange groves and tomato fields while some workers later transitioned into the service sector in the neighboring retirement

community of Sun City Center.<sup>51</sup> The rural and agricultural towns of Ruskin and Wimauma, also known, as “South County,” is the most Mexican part of the region. Recent census estimates that the Mexican population represents approximately 65 percent of Wimauma’s Latino demographic (Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics 2010)<sup>52</sup>. In the neighboring town of Ruskin, Mexicans represent 20 percent of its Latino demographic.<sup>53</sup> Further, Ruskin and Wimauma are struggling communities in which Wimauma carries the burden of the stigmas of poverty, criminality, illegality, and rurality. Over one-third of Wimauma’s households live under the poverty line and this statistic does not account for those who are undocumented (Mormino 2005).

A history of Florida’s oppressive Jim Crow class-color line and a long history of neglect and racial discrimination prepared the ground for the unequal relations of production and social relations in Wimauma. Exploitative systems of convict leasing, debt peonage and sharecropping exploited African American workers and farmers up until the 1960s (Utenberger 2005). This mainly impoverished community was at one

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<sup>51</sup>. Through the 1986 IRCA amnesty provision, many Mexican immigrants in the region gained permanent residency status through the concerted efforts of migrant farmworker self-help groups. Florida farmers were also part of these efforts in the attempts to retain their primary source of labor.

<sup>52</sup>. “Other Latinos” represent 6.4% of Wimauma’s Latino population; Puerto Ricans make up almost 2%, Cubans represent less than one percent of the Latino population in the area. The non-Hispanic population is as follows: 68.5 % White, 6.2% Black, 1% American Indian, and 0.9% Asian.

<sup>53</sup>. “Other Latinos” represent 8.2% of Ruskin’s Latino population; Puerto Ricans make over 6%, Cubans represent 2 percent respectively. The non-Hispanic population is as follows: 81.7 % White, 6.7% Black, and 0.9% Asian.

point 50 percent African American who worked in the turpentine, phosphate mines, cattle, and citrus industries. The only school in town, Wimauma Elementary School, only admitted white students- forcing Black students to travel to Old Sun City and Bethune School to attend middle and high school<sup>54</sup> (Bleau 2005). The 1965 Civil Rights Acts loosened the grip of Jim Crow and enabled African Americans to seek better educational and employment opportunities than before outside of Wimauma. Many moved to East Tampa seeking work in light industry, construction work, and other sectors of the labor market.

In the period between 1979 and 1990, Wimauma experienced a 50 percent population increase (Utenberger 2005). This demographic shift represented the arrival of Mexican seasonal and migrant workers to the region (Utenberger 2005). Since then, Mexicans are now the largest minority group in the area, forging a white/Mexican color line that is built upon the racial hierarchy of former Jim Crow Wimauma. This racial palimpsest retains vestiges of previous racialization processes that are mediated by local economic, political and social inequalities. In this sense, the arrival and permanent settlement of Mexican im/migrants did not replace or disrupt a black/white oppositional formation, but reconfigured and reshaped it to add another “color” to Wimauma’s racial scheme. Furthermore, lacking organized political representation, Wimauma as a whole was often left out of county dialogues concerning public transportation and economic development. Seen as an

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<sup>54</sup>. In the 1940s and 1950s, during the arrival of Florida’s first Mexican im/migrants, school officials in Pasco and Hardy counties debated whether to send Mexican children to white or black schools.

underdeveloped, agricultural, and mostly Mexican space, Wimauma remains indelibly marked as marginal and rural and now a very Mexican space.

Route 301, the main highway, divides Wimauma and Sun City Center into two places that could not be more different from one another. Sun City Center, a predominately all white retirement community stands in stark contrast to the predominantly Mexican and impoverished town of Wimauma. Retirement homes, restaurants, and private homes depend on Mexican workers and in turn, workers depend on the Sun City wages. This unequal relationship plays out in the residential segregation patterns that divide these neighboring communities forging an Anglo/Mexican color line.

Today, Wimauma is experiencing a housing development boom whereby arable farming land that once produced strawberries, oranges, and tomatoes is replaced by residential units. In an interesting turn of economic events, Florida farmers blame the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for the decline in the tomato business. Since 2001, the number of Florida tomato farmers has decreased from 300 to 70 since NAFTA was implemented in 1994 (Bleau 2006). The *campos* of the 1980s and 1990s (work camps) are now the sites of upscale apartment buildings and new businesses. Former migrant farm workers are finding work in Sun City Center as landscapers, cooks, construction workers, and nurses' aides. Given this, most of Wimauma's Mexican residents are working class and working poor, whose lives strive to establish a sense of belonging and to pursue upward mobility for themselves and their children.

In comparison to Mexican ethnic enclaves like the Otomís in Clearwater; Mexicans in Wimauma demonstrate a weak form of solidarity with one another. A shared history of migration and migrant farm work loosely binds them together as people of the Mexican diaspora, yet efforts of unification are informal and decentralized. The uneven solidarities of Wimauma's Mexican populace are similar to the informal community ties found in Immokalee, Florida (Steigenga and Williams 2009). Ethnoracial boundaries distinguish Mexicans from the urban *Districto Federal* (Mexico City) and those from the rural *rancherías* of Guanajuato and Michoacán (Please refer to Figure 1 for Map of Mexico highlighting the states of origin). English-dominant speaking Tejanos and Mexican Americans create social distance from those who have recently arrived. Indigenous Mexicans from Oaxaca test the social conventions of *Mexicanidad* and the stronghold of the Spanish language. Given this, an emerging ethnoracial boundary marks the space between indigenous and non-indigenous Mexicans. Taken together, these ethnoracial boundaries divide the Mexican community and disable solidarities among Mexican mestizos, indigenous people, and Tejanos. Despite these divisions, Mexicanos in Wimauma attempt to make a place for themselves establishing loosely connected cultural and social institutions and practices

### **Mexican Community Formation in South County**

In the early 1980s, the Ruskin Drive-In theatre played Mexican movies every Sunday night to appeal to the region's growing Mexican population. Mexican movies featuring Vicente Fernandez, Los Tigres del Norte, and Cantiflas played to hundreds of Mexican viewers who found joy in connecting to Mexico in the rural town

bordering the Tampa Bay. It was no surprise that many Mexicanos went to the drive-in considering that the theatre was located 5 minutes from one of the main work camps, Deseret Farms. On the airwaves, Mexican music was beginning to gain a presence on the local AM station. Norberto Vallejo, hosted the 3-hour segment, *Fiesta Mexicana* featuring the tropical, norteño, and banda sounds of the moment (Bugansky 2002). The same radio station offered time slots to other Latino groups like the Puerto Rican cultural group who hosted, *Boriquen Encanta* (Puerto Rico enchants), one of my own mother's favorite radio shows. Here, my mother listened to the *jibaro* (country) songs played live on the radio that struck a chord with her experiences of migration and longing for her *rancho* in Mexico. The Latin radio's theme song, produced by local Cuban and Puerto Rican radio producers, served as an alarm clock for us while my mother prepared breakfast. *Tampa que linda eres... que bella son tus mujeres...* (Tampa, how lovely you are, how beautiful your women are) the lyrics swayed to a Cuban bolero beat- preparing us for a day at work and school. The Mexican radio show eventually grew into its own radio station, La Mera Mera 1550.

At the time, very few Mexican dance halls and nightclubs existed, so many traveled to Zolfo Springs and Wachula to go to the *bailes*. Wachula soon became known for its popular dance hall, *Cielito Lindo* (Beautiful Sky) that attracted many of Mexico's biggest grupero bands. Many took day trips to Wachula to buy Mexican groceries and visit family members in the area. Today, Wimauma and the neighboring Manatee County accommodate the cultural needs of its growing Mexican community, with numerous grocery stores, restaurants, taco stands, dance halls, and

nightclubs. More formally, the Catholic Church and other cultural groups have also made inroads for the Mexican community.

This is clearly seen in the local Mexican Catholic church, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, organized various community events like the annual Mexican Independence Day Parade held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September. The church also organized *bailables* (folkloric dances), beauty pageants and fundraisers. Mexican youth soccer leagues like the Youth Soccer Association (RYSA) with team names like “The Future of Wimauma,” provide a space for young people to play and socialize (Zink 2003). More recently, members of *Puro Lows*, a local car club, organize charity events like the “Latino Alzheimer’s Fundraiser Lowrider Show” (Please see Figure 4).<sup>55</sup> Other strive to create cultural and music scenes to reflect the hybridized youth cultures emerging in the region. For example, local tejano, norteño, and rap groups are beginning to establish a local presence as producers, performers, and promoters. Local Mexican grupero ensembles like *Grupo Markizz* and *Grupo Atrevido* have local followings and perform all over Florida.

### **Educational and Political Currents**

Several key educational programs have provided opportunities for the Mexican community in Wimauma and Ruskin. Children of Mexican migrant farm workers have benefited from Title I anti-poverty funding implemented at the K-12 levels. The Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) received some of this

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<sup>55</sup>. Lowrider car culture is embraced as a Mexican-Chicano culture in Florida, these cultural practices are shared and borrowed from a larger Chicana/o aesthetic that transpires in California and Texas.

funding and provided Head Start pre-school education to mostly Mexican children. RCMA provided child care education to parents and also hired many Spanish-speaking childcare workers. Because of this, Spanish was spoken in the *escuelitas* (little schools) and children were encouraged to learn about Mexican language and culture. In this way, RCMA acted as a place to maintain Mexican culture and language. To this day, RCMA remains an informal site of Mexican cultural activities and is one of the main sites of employment for Mexican and Mexican American women in the region.

RCMA also partnered with Migrant Student services in the middle and high schools to provide academic support to its migrant student population. For high school dropouts, some were able to access resources allotted for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) that helped students earn their high school diploma or general education diploma (GED). HEP was not only able to help students complete their high school education but also provide students support to attend college (Fountain, 1983). At one point, HEP was a residential program and was hosted on campus at the University of South Florida. Students graduating from HEP often applied to USF and became part of the academic success projects like the C.A.M.P. program (College Assistant Migrant Program) and the USF Latino Scholarship Program. Collectively, educational efforts pushed for and by children of migrant workers and other advocates have paved a path to secondary and post-secondary opportunities and upward mobility.

Despite the success of these programs, many students felt alienated in the school environment, often being pushed out of high school because of hefty out of

school suspensions and the overall feeling of isolation (Schmidt 2009). My own formal education story is a testament to the severe limitations of the Florida public school system, especially as it pertains to racialized minorities. As the eldest, I graduated from high school benefiting from AP and Honors courses, which facilitated my entry into the University of South Florida. My two sisters and two brothers dropped out of high school for various reasons, mostly feeling alienated, unchallenged, and frustrated with the school environment. My brother and sisters earned their General Education Diplomas on their own. My sisters eventually earned their bachelor's degrees from the University of South Florida with support from HEP and CAMP. My youngest brother has not earned his GED, which severely limits his employment opportunities. This educational spectrum among my family of U.S. born Mexicans tells a larger story of racialized educational inequalities and the continual impact of alienating school environments<sup>56</sup> (Valenzuela 1999).

Political organizing in the region exists but it is largely decentralized and unorganized. However, in 2001, migrant workers and their children from Ruskin and Wimauma witnessed and participated in one of most documented Mexican/Latino labor protests in the region (Steigenga and Williams 2009). The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) marched into Ruskin and Wimauma drumming up

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56. Mexican "at risk" students are referred to the South County Career Center for vocational training. Critics see this alternative high school as a way to marginalize Mexican students and discourage them from attending two and four year post-secondary education institutions. Others applaud the SCCC for helping students earn high school diplomas and obtain employment after graduation.

support for the “Yo No Quiero Taco Bell” boycott that demanded Taco Bell to increase what they paid for tomatoes by one cent to improve workers’ living wages (Steigenga and Williams 2009). CIW workers and supporters traveled nation-wide on a bus to raise awareness of labor right abuses especially the low wages earned.<sup>57</sup>

Redland Christian Migrant Association’s (RCMA) employees and local community leaders joined the cause and proudly marched alongside the workers. Ironically, protestors affiliated with RCMA suddenly pulled out of the protest because administrators urged them to do so. Since a portion of RCMA’s funding came from Florida’s citrus, strawberry, and tomato growers, it was seen as a conflict of interest for RCMA employees to show solidarity with CIW. After several years of negotiations, CIW ended the boycott after Taco Bell agreed to the “penny-per- pound pass through” that guaranteed increased wages for workers (Steigenga and Williams 118).

Since then, former migrant workers’ ties to the CIW remain undefined and ambiguous. This historic boycott provided an example for many on the power of labor organizing but it did not create a sense of community among the diverse Mexicans in Wimauma. To this day, this sense of disjuncture makes Wimauma a place of ambivalent solidarities and ethnoracial divisions. To develop an understanding of the experiences of Mexicanas living in this region the discussion turns to the participants of this study and their understandings of race, color, and

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<sup>57</sup>. Workers earn 50 cents per bucket, which averages 32 pounds; in order to earn minimum wage, workers must pick approximately 2.25 tons of tomatoes (10 hour work day). On average, workers will earn less than \$12, 000 a year.

ethnicity. In the following section we will consider these experiences to contextualize Mexican racialization through the grid of race, class, color, gender, and space. This familiar racialization process plays out in new and old ways in the region revealing the specificities of Mexican racial identity in the region.

### **South County Color Lines**

Amalia, a participant of this study, is an accomplished and spirited Mexicana born in North Carolina to a family that traveled all over the Eastern coast as migrant farm workers. Her father, a local activist and community leader, set a strong example for her to pursue a life of community involvement and now entrepreneurship.

Describing her high school experience in South County during the late 1990s, she shares:

*The clubs at school, the prom court, they were all Americanos, during our senior year we made an invasion of that, and there was a black prom queen. The way the school was built and organized, most of the well-off people were Americanos, we were poor and worked in the fields. Our history and that our parents were migrant workers, added to it. It wasn't in your face. I remember this kid, he was a total asshole, but he was sometimes nice to me. In junior high, he became a skinhead and that really affected me. All of that combined taught me that race mattered, and seeing it all play out at school really was interesting to me. It was constant conflict.*

Speaking about the racial boundaries present during her high school experience,

Amalia is very aware of her outsider status as a daughter of Mexican migrant workers. She uses the term “Americanos” (Americans) to indirectly refer to white students that dominated the social activities in school. Amalia aligns herself with the black prom queen to illuminate the temporary interruption of white dominance.

Using this line of reasoning, Amalia positions herself as an outsider that identifies with another racialized group. What is most telling is her clarity about the

significance of race in her everyday life as “constant conflict.” In essence, her Mexicana outsider status is situated within this space that was previously occupied by African Americans (Utenberger 2005). At the same time, her experience reflects a distinct process of Mexican racialization that attaches negative meanings to skin color, rural space, migrant labor, Spanish-language use, and documentation status that shape Amalia’s conceptions of Americaness and belonging.

In her discussion of Mexican migrant worker marginalization, Ella Schmidt observes,

Unfortunately, current political debates and popular attitudes toward Mexican immigration to the United States sadly illustrate that after more than 100 years of Mexican immigration to this county, the national conversation continues to be informed by the same political rhetoric and popular attitudes that prevented, and continue to prevent, the majority of the Mexican immigrant workers from becoming part of the social and cultural fabric of American society (xx-xxi).

The history of Mexican racialization in the United States is intricately tied to the laboring class of Mexicans who have worked in the country as bracero workers, domestic workers, migrant farm workers, and other vulnerable occupations (Ngai 2004). The “impossibility” of Mexicans accessing full citizenship rights and a sense of belonging in the country is undergirded by anti-Mexican racism, and a series of systematic legislative and everyday practices that restrict full citizenship rights and inclusion in the category of “American” or in Amalia’s case *Americano* (Nakano Glenn 2002). The “constant conflict” that Amalia references is demonstrative of the on going struggle for belonging in institutional settings that are white dominated. She understands the structure of the school, how school activities were planned and organized, and a strategy to disrupt white hegemony. Reading between the lines, we

see the ways in which Mexican migrant labor intersects with race and space.

Cecilia, a medical receptionist, born in Acambaro, Guanajuato explains her understanding of race, labor, and space:

*I learned that since I was a kid, I recognized that I was Mexican, and that the other kids were white or black. We understood and recognized color. In elementary school, Secret Santa brought me a black Barbie doll, and I exchanged her for a white doll! I got another one the following year that was Hawaiian looking, and for me she was Mexican! I kept that one! (Laughs) My kids, are in elementary school, Carlitos has a hard time remembering that even though his skin is light that he is Mexican. Adolfo knows because he is darker. It took me awhile to teach them that they are Mexican, maybe because they are not exposed to how we grew up. We learned that Mexicans were outside working in the fields and the whites were indoors supervising us.*

This extract vividly demonstrates the specificities of a black-white color line and the ways that people of Mexican descent located themselves within this racial scheme.

All the while, Cecilia educates her sons on the Mexican color-coded scheme in which a gradation of color exists within the same family structure. Cecilia's double-awareness of her Mexican ambiguity within the black-white system interfaces with the unequivocal labor relations that forged an Anglo/Mexican color line in this region. Mexican migrant workers were outside in the sun picking strawberries, tomatoes, and oranges while white supervisors worked inside overseeing the workers. Her intervention demonstrates the intersections of labor relations and a system of cultural representations that mark Mexicans as both racially ambiguous and racially distinct, unmistakable as "Mexican" (Nakano Glenn 2002).

Let us consider more in depth Cecilia's elementary school experiences in the development of her racial consciousness and moment of self-recognition in what I call an *ethnoracial moment*. Cecilia's ethnoracial moment is contextualized within

the “southern orthodoxy” or “southern biracialism,” (Hewitt 5) of black-white racial codes and an emerging triracial Latin American scheme of race-color-class (Bonilla-Silva 2003). She observes that she knew she was not white or black and identified most with the “Hawaiian looking” Barbie doll. In this process however, she previously exchanged a black doll for a white doll to approximate her own social location. Frank Montalvo describes similar moments as “critical incidents” in an individual’s life experience that shapes racial consciousness and racial identity (“Surviving Race” 2004). Here, I build on Frank Montalvo’s “critical incident” interviews to construct an analysis of the *ethnoracial moments* of study participants. These moments reveal the relationship between institutional and cultural racism and most importantly, the ways that Mexican American women have experienced the dehumanizing effects and affects of racism and racialization.

Looked at collectively, the relationship between the dehumanizing effects and affects of racialization and racism, and the strategic ways that Cecilia negotiates these histories (both U.S. and Mexican) point to a larger history of survival and cultural adaptation. Let us link the “banal pairing otherwise known as the black/white binary” (Holland 7) and Mexican constructs of race-color. Here, I deliberately invoke the “critical contempt” often assigned to contemporary discussions of the black/white binary (Holland 28), particularly as it pertains to discussions of Latina/o racial formations and Latina/o lived experiences of racism.

Cecilia’s double awareness of race and color is mediated by her translocal knowledge of the racial systems of Mexico and the United States. Her awareness is also reflective of a history of racial multiplicity and complexity that mainstream

histories of U.S. race relations have systematically erased from public discourse (Bost 2003). Subsequently, the myth of the crystallization of a black/white binary maintains dominance in public understandings of race, racialization, and racial identity in the United States. Scholars have produced a rich body of work that implodes the myth of the hardening of black-white color line, offering important evidence on the complexity U.S Southern and Southwestern racial formations (Foley 1997; Hewitt 2001; Gomez 2007; Edwards 2004; Maynor Lowery, 2010). In the specific case of this region, Cecilia's racial knowledge is mediated by her understanding of whiteness, blackness, and Mexicanness. This understanding reflects her choice to select the "Hawaiian-looking" doll as the most appropriate ethnoracial representation.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, regional racisms reflect anti-Mexican sentiments directed at poor, undocumented, migrant workers. Sylvia, an elementary school teacher, born in the Mexican state of Michoacán, speaks of her experiences with a gendered form of racism in the region:

*At the grocery store, I was told I had to buy special formula for my newborn because he couldn't digest the regular formula, this was \$89 a can! I asked the lady for the special formula, she says to me, "You know WIC doesn't cover it right?" I asked you for the formula, I didn't ask you if WIC covered it. I paid with my debit card, she just looked at me. It was the same pinche vieja (stupid lady) that gives me shit when I come in... The assumption that I was on WIC because I am Mexican! That is racial! If I was blonde and blue eyed would she have told me the same thing? I don't go in there looking trashy with my chancas... (flip-flops) I don't think so! I sent an email to complain! When I get nervous, my accent kicks in! I am not as clear, I cooled off and went home and wrote an email when I am clearer. Te ven con la cara de india!*

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<sup>58</sup>. The tropes of racial ambiguity and racial mixing that Cecilia references here hint to a common ground among communities that are not black and not white. F. James Davis's, "The Hawaiian Alternative to the One-Drop Rule," is instructive in these comparisons (1995).

*(They see you with the face of an Indian) For me, it's not the accent that embarrassed me, I don't think the right word is fitting in, it's more of acculturation, I am trying to get to the point where I feel more integrated into society, without losing myself, it's kind of embarrassing when I can't control my accent. Not that I need to control it per say, but I feel like I have to, present it in a certain way."*

This dense extract demonstrates the complexity of the lived experience of gendered racism. Sylvia's grocery store encounter lies at the nexus of race, class, and gender and the everyday indignities that women of color endure. For Sylvia, she was offended by the cashier's assumption that she was receiving W.I.C. benefits (Women, Infants, and Children Food and Nutrition Service). The social equation linking personal responsibility and poverty with Mexican communities shape Sylvia's outrage and her understanding of her own gendered-raced-classed body.

As a result of welfare reform legislation such as the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PWORA), state actors have systematically reduced the amount of benefits available to women and their families (Marchevsky and Theoharis 2001). Not surprisingly, PWORA also acted as an anti-immigration reform that targeted poor Latina women and their families. In Sylvia's account, she deliberately distances herself from the racialized representations of the welfare mother by using her debit card,<sup>59</sup> thereby demonstrating that she is capable of supporting her family without the support of the state. This form of

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<sup>59</sup>. A host of companies market prepaid debit cards to working poor communities to encourage financial literacy and financial responsibility. The logic that undergirds these efforts is a personal responsibility discourse that glosses over the structural causes of poverty among these communities. The Rush Card launched by Russell Simmons markets prepaid debit cards to vulnerable communities that charge up to \$300 a year for card use.

financial empowerment is directly connected to Sylvia's access to higher education and her salaried position as an elementary school teacher.

Given this, the racialized narratives of the irresponsible welfare mother collide with Sylvia's own understandings of raced-classed-gendered structures of power that mark her as "Mexican" in the region. Her ability to act on her own behalf enacted through a financial and cognitive form of empowerment<sup>60</sup> (Stromquist 2006) is dependent on her gendered-race presentation as she remarks on her physical appearance, style of dress, and accent. All of which are intimately linked to the double process of racialization that mark her as both "Mexican" and "India". Note, Sylvia's reference to blonde hair and blue eyes, the standard codes for whiteness and white privilege. Immediately afterwards, she assesses her own raced-classed-gendered body, making claims to a form of respectability that is oppositional to the damning narratives/representations of welfare queens and the mothers of "anchor babies" (Chavez 2013).

Sylvia's "class performance" as an educated, Mexican woman who has access to a bank account is again mediated by her awareness of the codes of conduct that allow her to claim dignity and respect (Bettie 2001). *Chanclas*, the Spanish word for flip-flops is symbolic of a style of dress that marks an individual as low social status ("trashy") and even worse an individual who does not take pride in her/his appearance. Layering the controlling images of welfare and immigrant mothers with the codes of class and respectability, Sylvia's is also very aware of her Mexican

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<sup>60</sup>. Nelly Stromquist argues for an expansive definition of empowerment that includes financial, cognitive, political, and psychological forms of empowerment.

accent. In the effort to clearly communicate her anger at the cashier she goes home and writes an email to complain to the store manager. She uses the words “control,” “acculturation”, and “present” to explain how she perceives her accent.

The relationship between Spanish language (especially Mexican-inflected Spanish) and racial stereotypes is demonstrative of how language and accent is racialized. Also, similar to Cecilia’s understanding of race, Sylvia references two systems of race: one that racializes Mexicans in the U.S. and another that racializes Mexican Indians. These two systems meet in the instance when Sylvia exclaims, *Te ven con la cara de india!* (*They see you with the face of an Indian!*). Sylvia’s reference to Mexican Indianness is also dependent and relational to the recognition of whiteness (blond hair, blue eyes) and in comparison, a heightened awareness of her physical appearance. Here, Sylvia references a far-reaching system of representations that racialize Mexican Indianness as backwards, antiquated, impoverished, and racially inferior (Lominitz 1996; Knight 1999). This powerful set of representations is centrally located on the body and “phenotypic sight-specific difference” (Nelson 206).

In both Mexico and the United States, the image of “the Indian” carried the burden of representing both racial purity and racial hybridity (Aldama 2001; Alonso 2004). Racist scientists and politicians during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries obsessed over quantum, physical measurements of the body, and debated about the generation of “good” and “bad” blood (Stern 2009; Kitch 2009; TallBear 2004). In Mexico, Indian heritage is upheld as the cornerstone of Mexican democracy yet the cultures, languages, and traditions of living and fluid Indigenous communities are often

disparaged. Writing about the paradox of inclusion and exclusion, Monica Moreno Figueroa notes, “Those who locate themselves as Mexicans have learned to see and praise *indigena* peoples as an essential and vital part of the national culture and landscape, giving ‘sense’ and depth to Mexican history, but they do not seem to have any desire to ‘look’ like them” (“Distributed Intensities...” 393).

A host of expressions, jokes, and references circulate in Mexican public discourse about the “looking” and *being* Indian.<sup>61</sup> Disparaging expressions such as *es contra-Indios* (anti-modern), *India bajada de la sierra a tamborazos* (Indian woman who comes from the mountain) and *India pata rajada* (Indian woman with weather-beaten feet) are related to Sylvia’s remark, *Te ven con la cara de india*. The convergence of racialized meanings meet on the materiality of rural spaces, poverty, and physical appearance. This shapes a complex form of racism that is practiced and widely accepted, yet a public awareness of race and racism remains absent. These enduring sets of representations travel with Sylvia and people of Mexican America reflecting the continual struggle to belong and seek justice. Returning to the context of South County, similar conditions exist that racialize Mexican Indians: the rural location, poverty, and the negative meanings associated with “Indian” features such as dark skin color, weather-beaten skin, and accent.<sup>62</sup> The “physical insignificance of

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<sup>61</sup>. Diane Nelson’s work is instructive here. Nelson examines the cultural work of Rigoberta Menchu jokes in Guatemala and the social anxieties that they reflected in terms of race, gender, and nation.

<sup>62</sup>. In Mexico, “La India Maria,” a character developed by the comedian/actress Maria Elena Velasco is one of the most popular and embraced representations of Mexican Indianness. Velasco has starred

the typical Mexican” (Moreno Figueroa “Linda Morenita” 169) marked by the “Indian” system of representation shape Sylvia’s awareness of how she is perceived *con la cara de india*. These representations communicate messages about class, color, intelligence, and modernization (Hunter 2005).

Francisca, a native of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, sheds more light on this historical process:

*Es que piensan por que uno es Mexicano piensan que uno esta Indito. Si no te ven de esa manera no eres Mexicano. Tenemos que andar con trenzas, y que todos los dias comimos tacos. Nos tienen en un estereotipo. (People think that just because one is Mexican that one is Indian (diminutive use). If they don’t see you this way you are not Mexican. We have to be in braids, and eating tacos everyday. They have stereotyped us.)*

Cecilia also demonstrates the relationship between Mexicanness and Indianness.

When prompted about how she is perceived she remarks:

*When they get to know me, they see that I am a hard-worker, they give me an opportunity. ‘Esta gente que trabaja en la labor, que no saben nada, gente mala, indigena.’ (Says aloud: Those people who work in the fields, who don’t know anything, bad people, Indian.) When they get to know me that I am noble and hardworking they change their opinion.*

Both Francisca and Cecilia mark the path of a double process of racialization that renders Mexican labor and Indianness as inferior, uneducated, bad, and simply Indian. Francisca’s use of the diminutive term, *Indito* (little Indian) reflects the relationship between being perceived as insignificant and Mexican. In this tightly wound system of representations, “the Indian is Mexican and the Mexican is Indian” (qtd in Lewis 6). In Francisca’s case, we see her reference a set of stereotypes that represent a transnational process of racialization that depict Mexicans as wearing

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in over 20 films and various comedy specials. Although problematic, Velasco often directed these performances incorporating critiques of Latin American and U.S. constructs of whiteness.

braids and eating tacos everyday. More specifically, the depiction of wearing braids denote a far-reaching system of representations that is operating here that shapes a polysemic Indianess that refers to both Mexican and Native Americans.

Let us link these systems of representations. Manuela, a native of Tampa, and a librarian, shares the following *ethnoracial moment*:

*White people used to ask me if I was Native American that was when I used to wear my hair in braids. I used to get asked- "What kind of Indian are you?" I would respond: "I don't really want to talk about that with you." It's pretty annoying because it's always white people making those comments. It's uncomfortable, you don't know how to set them straight, or you don't want to get into a long explanation, or you don't want to seem like you are offended. I think the way I look screams Mexican, you know what I am saying? I always feel then I have to explain How I am.. Why I am.. Why I am not what I am supposed to be...*

Manuela's ethnoracial moment reflects what Frank Montalvo describes as "phenotyping," the core of racialization that locates racial difference on the body ("Surviving Race" 2004). In this case, Manuela's body is read as Indian based on her braids. Phenotyping and racialization go hand and hand as the interrogator is curious as "What kind of *kind* (my emphasis) of Indian are you?" Race, phenotype, and other markers of race and color form the foundation of racialization and represent colonial and current typologies of race and color (Stoler 1995). In her indignant response, Manuela communicates that her body is not up for examination and she is not interested in "explaining herself." The act and practice of "explaining oneself" reflects white dominated imaginaries that situate people of color as perpetual outsiders and foreign to the nation regardless of place of birth and citizenship (Ngai 2004). The logic is manifested in the line of questioning that Manuela and other study participants have become so accustomed to: *Why are you here? Where do you come from? Why do you look the way that you do?* (Interview Series 2010-2011).

Returning to Sylvia's encounter at the super market, the issue of acculturation becomes central in her understanding of her own raced, classed, and gendered presentation as she struggles to make meaning of how she is perceived but also how she perceives herself. This dialogic process of meaning making is again mediated by Sylvia's ability to advocate for herself and demand dignity and respect; striving not to lose her identity and sense of *Mexicanidad*. Her class-performance (not wearing *chanclas* and presenting her accent in a certain way) is carried out to side-step full assimilation into white dominated society and actively maintains her identity as a Mexican woman.

However, this deliberate class performance is often set against the narratives and representations of welfare queens. This logic shifts to fortify identity discourses of *Mexicanidad* that are rooted in hard work, an immigrant success narrative, and a deliberate distancing from U.S. minorities. In the case in South County, Mexican identity formation is often set against the cultural narratives of irresponsible, welfare-dependent Chicana/os. Here, the identity of "Chicana/o" carries little political meaning and is often associated with assimilated Mexicans and "women who are from Chicago" (Interview series 2011). Let us examine the issue of *Mexicanidad* by looking at several extracts from participants' responses.

*Beatriz: I feel like Chicanos lost their identity, (sighs) Chicanos are too proud to be Americans but too ashamed to be Mexicans. I feel like they're in limbo, they don't really hold Mexican roots, but not integrated with white Americans either. It doesn't make sense, I feel like it's a loss of identity, it means to me in limbo. Yes, so your parents are Mexican and you are American, so are you Mexican? Are you white? No... So what are you? Whopty do.... That Chicana thing carries I think it carries air of superiority, that I am better than Mexicans. But you are still not white either! I remember hearing it when I was 6 or 7; my cousin was CHICANA (her emphasis), so your dad can't speak English? And you refuse to speak Spanish?*

*(I shouldn't even say this out loud but I am going to anyways). A lot of these Chicanos son los que no valen madre. (Aren't worth shit) (Laughs) They are all on welfare, no quieren trabajar (they don't want to work), they have no sense of responsibility. Okay you are Chicana, but how come you didn't go to school if you are so proud of being Chicana. The parents are hardworking Mexicans but they feel some kind of entitlement. Like my dad says, la hambre las tumba y el orgullo las levanta... they can't stand on their own two feet!*

In essence, Beatriz allows for a purchase on a narrative of immigrant success by locating Chicana/os as irresponsible and welfare dependent. This oppositional identity practice also hints to a discourse of Mexican authenticity that vilifies hybrid and in-between subjectivities (De Genova "American Abjection..." 2008). In this context, Chicanas and Chicanos are also perceived as "diluted" and "white-washed" Mexicans. The loss of identity and language that Sylvia recognizes positions Chicanas in-between Mexicanness and whiteness. In this way, Beatriz's understanding mirrors U.S. assimilationism that denies multiple identities and subjectivities. This either/or model of identity forecloses the resistant meanings of Chicanidad and positions Mexicanidad directly in opposition to Chicanidad. Again, personal responsibility models of success and upward mobility mediate Beatriz's Mexicanidad and the framing of social inequality as an issue of individual choice and morality.

For Beatriz, Chicanidad serves a way to create distance from Mexican origins and language. Beatriz frames this distancing process within the context of whiteness and assimilation. Norma Alarcon explains, "In effect, the name [Chicano] measured the distance between the excluded and the few who had found a place for themselves in Anglo-America" (63). Although the privilege Chicanas may have access to is tenuous at best, this identity is associated with whiteness and claims to a set of

advantages. This understanding glosses over the oppressive histories of assimilation and exclusion that have racialized Mexican Spanish as inferior (Anzaldúa 1987).<sup>63</sup>

These histories mediate the devaluing of Mexican Spanish and the ways people of Mexican America have created distance from the Spanish language. Let's consider Romana's, a native of Michoacán, understanding of this issue:

*My husband grew up with all white friends, talking to him I realized that the association with speaking Spanish and being Mexican is an association with migrant farm workers and embarrassment and being ashamed. He learned as a child that if he didn't speak Spanish then he wasn't Mexican. He hates to admit that.*

Yolanda, a native of Texas shares a similar perception of language and identity:

*To be honest with you, the first time I spoke Spanish I was 12 years old. It was when we came here to Florida, we lived in a campo (work camp) in Ellenton, and the girls there were Hispanics, and they talked to us in Spanish, and we were like "what?" They spoke English to us and asked us "Why don't you speak Spanish?" Our parents never taught us! We would hear my mom and dad speak Spanish to each other. My grandmother had a very hard time with us because she didn't speak much English and we spoke almost no Spanish. We asked our mom why we didn't speak Spanish, she said because we never had to use it. My dad really didn't like Mexicans, honestly. He despised people from Mexico because of the way they were. He didn't want us to be Mexicans, I guess. At 12, we started hanging out with these girls, working with them, working with a bunch of Mexicans, that's when we learned Spanish.*

These two passages elucidate the racialization process that links speaking Spanish with being Mexican. Being Mexican and speaking Spanish is not mutually exclusive; however, the older forms of racism that link Mexican Spanish with inferiority and low social status endure. This association is often reflected in dominant representations of Mexican Spanish embodied by the caricatures such as the

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<sup>63</sup>. Gloria Anzaldúa remarks "Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language" (77).

Anzaldúa also notes how groups of Chicanas feel uncomfortable speaking Spanish because of the fear of judgment and ridicule.

Frito Bandito and Speedy Gonzales (Berg 2002). Because of this, Mexican Spanish, especially the form of Spanish spoken by Mexican working class communities is treated as insignificant and of low-social standing. Writing about the formation of whiteness in San Diego, Ruth Frankenberg found that study participants failed to recognize that their Mexican neighbors spoke Spanish (1993). Instead, they believed that Spanish originated from a prestigious Iberian lineage and neglected to acknowledge local Mexicans as Native Spanish and Spanglish speakers.

While Beatriz understands Chicanidad in terms of language and belonging, study participants also understood Chicanidad within the context of space and place. For example, Vero, born in

Alabama, shares the following:

*I am Mexican, I never say that I am Chicana, I don't think people really care if I am from here or from over there. Why do they have to say that they are Chicana? Are they trying to make themselves look better because they are from here? Why can't they just say that they are Mexican? It's like to make a point that you are from here. I'd rather say that I am Mexican.*

Here, Vero expresses a form of Mexicanidad that claims strong ties to Mexico regardless of place of birth. Mexican identity in this context operates as a form of transnational subjectivity reflected in the popular expression, *Ni De Aqui Ni de Alla* (Not from here and not from there) that is forged across generations and citizenship status (Zavella 2011).<sup>64</sup> In this way, Nicholas De Genova describes this identity practice:<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>. Patricia Zavella terms notes this as “multiple first generations” to challenge generational models of identity and belonging.

<sup>65</sup>. In a similar vein, Gloria Anzaldúa notes, “We say nosotros los Mexicanos (by Mexicanos we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one)” (84).

This inherent ambiguity and heterogeneity about being ‘Mexican,’ regardless of one’s place of birth, citizenship status, or cultural orientations and tastes, is instructive; it reflects an expression in everyday practice of the resignification of Mexicanness as a specifically *racialized* category within the U.S. social order (*Working The Boundaries* 3).

Mireya, a native of San Felipe, Guanajuato holds similar views as Vero.

When I asked about her daughters, she remarked: *mis hijas son Mexicanas nacidas en los Estados Unidos. (My daughters are Mexican born in the United States)*. In this respect, Mireya maintains her Mexicanidad by assigning Mexican identity to her daughters irrespective of place of birth. Mireya’s daughter, Manuela, born and raised in Tampa, Florida, attempts to make meaning of the identity of Chicana:

*I really like the term Chicana, because it is more defined than Mexican American, it’s more than a government category. I have that on a vanity plate on my car, I always wonder what people think and if they even know what it means. I wonder if they think I am better than regular Mexicans, I don’t want it to come off that way.*

Again, the theme of claiming superiority emerges from participants’ responses. Manuela identifies the division between Chicanas and “regular Mexicans” to denote the social distance between both groups. Chicana identity in this context operates as a symbol of Americanness and is incongruent with Mexicanidad. In the case of South County, a place marked by unequal power relations, particularly the exploitation of Mexican migrant workers, Mexicanidad endures as a primary site of identification in opposition to “new” Chicana identities and subjectivities. Patricia Zavella, helps us link region and identity:

The notion of culture-region, a geographic and sociopolitical area where historical processes- including isolation, waves of industrialization, urbanization and discrimination towards racialized others- have segregated racial/ethnic groups and enabled historical actors to construct particular terms of ethnic identification in

opposition to the dominant society (“Reflections on Diversity Among Chicanas” 204).

Looked at collectively, participants’ experiences reflect the ideological contrasts of U.S. and Mexican racial formations and their respective racializations. All study participants share a history of partaking in migrant farm labor, either as breadwinners or supplementary income-owners (as in the case of the daughters of migrant workers). Granted, the immigrant success narrative that positions Mexican migrant workers as next in line to access the American Dream is used against the image of the lazy and welfare dependent Chicana/o. In spite of these oppositional identity practices, Mexican women negotiate everyday indignities and work to make lives for themselves and their families, carving out a space of Mexicanidad, dignity, and respect.

Here, I also surveyed the ways that study participants position themselves within South County’s black and white color line vis-à-vis their own understandings of Mexican color coded social locations. By placing their experiences at the center of this discussion, we are able to clearly see how Mexicanas navigate a double process of racialization that brackets *Mexicandiad*, Indianness with poverty and abjection. These racializations mediate women’s decision to claim Mexicanness as a primary site of identity to counteract the stigma associated with Mexican inflected Spanish, dark skin color, and region. Moreover, this site-specific and translocal discussion prepares the ground for the next chapter in which I explore some underlying theoretical ideas about racial classification and the material repercussions of these race management projects. Specifically the focus centers on the ways that study

participants make meaning of U.S. census categories and how these meanings overlap with what I term, *Mexicana colorlines*.

## **Chapter 5: MeXicana Colorlines: Theorizing Multiple Cultures of Race and Color**

Racial classification has always been built on its own impossibility. -Suzanne Bost

She has this fear that she has no names that she has many names that she doesn't know her names... -Gloria Anzaldúa

In the month of February of this year, I was stopped by Maryland state police a total of three times. Each time I was fortunate to drive away with verbal and paper warnings for minor traffic violations. By the end of the month, I had collected three of these glossy documents and I noticed something peculiar about them. I studied the citations carefully and saw that each attending officer had a different assessment of my racial identity. In the span of a month, I changed race from Hispanic, to white, to “Other.” I reflected on what felt to be the trappings of bureaucracy and the impossibility of racial classifications. This set of experiences reflects a history of Latina, specifically Mexicana racial ambiguity, the multiple racial categories that have been assigned to them, and the categories they resist and claim.

This racial multiplicity is shaped by at least a hundred years of U.S. and Mexican race-making that has defined notions of citizenship, whiteness, and racial mixture (Russel y Rodriguez “Mexicanas and Mongrels...”). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo marked the end of the 1848 Mexican-American War, which granted inhabitants of former Mexican territories (now the Southwestern part of the U.S) white legal status and U.S. citizenship. Mexican women’s whiteness was tenuous at best, and many were marked as “racial mongrels” because of their mixed

Indigenous, African, and European ancestries (Fregoso 2003). Mexicans during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were described and represented as, “feeble, superstitious priest ridden race of mongrels composed of Spanish, Indian and negro blood” (qtd in Kitch 201). Anti-Mexican racism fueled by Anglo-Saxon nativism attempted to condemn and erase the multiracial, multicultural history of the greater U.S.-Mexico borderlands. More than a century later, people of Mexican America continue to face racial exclusion regardless of generation and immigration status (Zavella 2011).

Mexicanas as a group are multiply racialized and are constructed as exotic beauties and foreign others. These two gendered racial constructs are not mutually exclusive, as both formations share a history of white supremacy and its expansive racial gaze. Theoretically, Mexicans are circumscribed by racial and ethnic polarizations— on one hand, racialized as one monolithic and homogeneous group— on the other labeled as “ethnic Mexicans” destined for full assimilation into the U.S. body politic. Prevailing theoretical paradigms of ethnicity compare Mexican experiences with that of older European groups of immigrants that assume a “telos of immigration represented by settlement, accommodation, and assimilation” (Ngai 2004). The theoretical notion of ethnorace reflects the racial formation process that situates both racialization and agentic claims to ethnic identity. Ethnoracial experiences are shaped by skin color, geography, language, gender, and documentation status among other lived experiences.

In this chapter, I explore the meaning and the intersection of Mexican color categories with U.S. racial formations within the paradigm of *Mexicana Colorlines*. For purposes of this discussion, I define “Mexicana color lines” as an ethnoracial

scheme that combines everyday colloquial categories and expressions with U.S. understandings of race. This definition builds and departs from Tomas Almaguer's observations of the "clash of cultures of race." Almaguer explains, "The uniquely multiracial nature of the Latino/a population is principally due to the clash of cultures of race, which draw racial lines differently" ("At The Crossroads of Race..." 208). These intersections are not linear and one-dimensional. Everyday engagements and negotiations with Mexican and U.S. color categories unravel the state-mediated nation-building projects of *mestizaje* and U.S. assimilation that aim to produce a unified, neutral, and racially homogeneous citizen-subject. These discursive processes are highlighted to demonstrate the ways in which they inform the material experiences of being sorted out in the machinery of race-making.

Oppressive racial ideologies historically imposed by Spanish and Anglo-Saxon racial orders converge on the sites of multiple constructs of whiteness, Mexicanness, and blackness. These dominant sites of white, Black, and "brown" race-making position Mexicans in a "racial middle ground" that is often oversimplified and under theorized (Jimenez-Roman 2007). This middle ground is not only in between "white" and "black" racial locations but also reflects a complex process of interaction between a U.S. racial binary system and Mexican continuum scheme of color. In my focus here, race is articulated through the language of color that works to disguise racial discourse and also produces an ambiguous social position. We will explore the discursive sites of negotiation and meaning making that are situated in institutional race-making (U.S Census) and Mexican cultures of race

and color. Here, I demonstrate how race binaries and color continuums are constantly in flux and are remapped onto one another.

The everyday negotiations of race and color labels among Mexicanas from South County offer a window onto the movement between and among U.S. race and Mexican color ideologies. These color categories are not the same as other Latina/o racial formations but are comparable. Evidence presented here suggests that presence and the use of Mexicana color categories operate as one form of resistance against multiple racial orders that enforces sameness and denigrates difference. These discursive practices are important sites of negotiation, exchange, and alliance that restructure the legacies of oppressive mestizo logics that negate ethnoracial diversity, especially blackness and Indianness. Most importantly, the endurance of this lexicon demonstrates minor and major interruptions of whiteness as a dominant racial logic and scheme. The logic of *mestizaje* is one that promises a trajectory towards wholeness, completion, and a form of whiteness that falls in line with past and current projects of modernization (Moreno Figueroa “Distributed Intensities”). This mestizo logic mirrors a U.S. discourse and practice of assimilationism that also promises a form of whiteness that is neutral and raceless.

The redrawing and reconfiguration of *Mexicana color lines* is a productive site of theorization that builds upon previous work that considers Chicana and Mexicana decolonizing practices and their transgressive possibilities (Anzaldúa 1987; Pérez 1999, Sandoval 2000). Most importantly, it situates multiraciality as a central site of theorization that forms the basis of a common ground for Latinas across ethnoracial and national borders (Martín Alcoff 2006). Continuing this important

theoretical work is necessary and sketches out a shared logic of race-color that forms a basis for comparative theorizations across nation-based frameworks. Wendy Roth notes that some scholars refer to the continuum taxonomy as “race-color” to demonstrate the similarity in the concepts used in North American and Latin America (58). Situating a *women of colors*<sup>66</sup> framework, and by extension, *Mexicana Color lines* demonstrates the ideological contrasts of the multiple cultures of race and color demonstrated through the ways that participants speak about race and color.

Inherent in the production of racial knowledge is the assigning of meanings and the construction of classifications, boundaries, and definitions (Bowker and Star 1999). These sites of formal and informal race-making and their classification systems are sites of political, cultural and social struggle. Bowker and Star assert, “Classifications are powerful technologies. Embedded in working infrastructures they become relatively invisible without losing any of that power” (Bowker and Star 319). This power is enacted centrally through a tightly overlapping system of representations and practices that define and depict groups of racialized people. Labels, categories, identity markers are technologies of race and extensions of the racial state (Goldberg *Racial Subjects*).

The U.S. Census, a central site of institutional race-making, historically racialized non-white groups based on ancestry and language (C. Rodriguez 2000). For example, In the 1950s and 1960s Latinos appeared on the U.S. Census as

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<sup>66</sup>. AnaLouise Keating uses the term “women of colors” to emphasize the diversity and heterogeneity of experiences located within the political term “women of color.” I find the term *women colors* helpful in this context to frame color as a category of analysis.

“Persons of Spanish Mother Tongue” (Almaguer “At the Crossroads of Race”). As a consequence, ethnoracial identities and nomenclature carry the weight of this historical process. At one point the heavy appellation of “Mexican” was used as a racial slur-as it was imposed by dominant white groups- carrying with it connotations of impurity, foreignness, and abjection (Bender 2003). Not surprisingly, the anthropometric but still popular term “Caucasian” does not carry the same weight and is often used interchangeably with “white” and “European-American” despite its origins in racialist thinking. The limits of the Census and other forms of governmental classifications lie in the inherent inability to holistically capture the complexity of the lived human experience. In other words, technologies of racial classification attempt to “classify the unclassifiable” (Bowker and Star 195). Yet attempts to classify human bodies are made daily. This discussion focuses on these classification efforts and the ways that study participants negotiate, resist, and make meaning of being seen and sorted out.

Here, I treat formal and informal categories as historical artifacts that reflect colonial and current systems of racial categorization and the ordering of human bodies. It is telling that an informal lexicon of race and color endures, providing a context to think about the overlap of Mexican and U.S. cultures of race. This suggests the significance of everyday ethnoracial identifications and terminologies and the ways that marginalized communities deploy these labels and categories. On a broader level, I continue a discursive analysis of interviewee responses to highlight the major site of negotiation that takes place through discourse, language, and system of overlapping representations that reference Mexican Indianess, whiteness and

blackness. I achieve this discussion in two main sections. The first section of this discussion explores the role of institutional race and the ways that study participants make meaning of these categorizations. The second section considers the material effects of these categorizations centering on the *racial gaze*. This exploration demonstrates the way that study participants endure everyday interrogations and the important ways that they identify themselves in relation to the photo elicitation segment of this study.

### **Sorting Things and People Out: The Role of Institutional Race**

In the interviews I designed and conducted with participants, I inquired about the U.S. census and the ways that they categories understand the role of institutional race in their day-to-day experiences. I showed study participants portions of the 2010 Census questionnaire, specifically questions #8 and #9 that inquire about Latina/o racial and ethnic identifiers (please see Figure 5). I asked interviewees if they were familiar with the questionnaire, how they identified on the Census and their own perceptions of the survey in general. The following section discusses respondents' understandings of the role of institutional race, defined by the categories and definitions set out by the Office of Budget Management (Roth 2012).

The concepts of race and ethnicity have shifted and changed over the past decades. In the United States, race has shifted from being an exclusively biological concept to one that is socially constructed. For example, in the 1930 Census, "Mexican" appeared as a racial category; the following 1940 Census eliminated the Mexican category and instructed census workers to classify Mexicans as "white" (Foley "Becoming Hispanic..."). Similar criteria existed for Puerto Ricans, Cubans,

and other Latino communities in which they were classified as “white”, unless they were “clearly Negro or Indian” (Kitch 202). Clara Rodriguez finds that before 1980, most Hispanics were classified as “white” (2000). The 1980 Census marked the first time in U.S. history that the census asked the respondents to indicate their race *and* if they were of Hispanic origin. Many Latinos opted to choose “other” because their ethnoracial affiliation was not listed, and filled in their national identity as “Puerto Rican”, “Mexican” and other ethnoracial identity markers (Almaguer “At the Crossroads of Race”). Latinos influenced by social movements like the Black Power, Chicano movements, and other political-identity movements filled in categories like “Chicano”, “Afro-Latino”, “Black Latino”, “Aztec”, “Nahual”, and “Boricua”.

Recent scholarship has provided significant evidence of the role of the Census in creating racial categories for a variety of political reasons (C Rodriguez 2002; Dowling 2004; Kitch 2009). This is an important site of investigation and continues to shape public policy and public debate about race and ethnicity in the United States. At the same time, this discussion explores the racializing effects outside of the U.S. Census to uncover the racial identification practices of working-class and working-poor Mexican women and explore their cultural defined understandings or race.

To this end, the racializing effects and affects of the Census are not inseparable from the everyday identification practices of Mexicanas but dialogically produced with the everyday on-the-ground understandings of race and color. Tomas Almaguer asserts, “[R]acialization is not simply a unilateral process imposed by the state but also reflects the Latino population’s active engagement with its own culturally determined understandings of race” (“At the Crossroads of Race” 214).

The practice of race-management has been institutionalized to the point that it does not require the active involvement of the state. After all, institutional power and its racialized gaze can operate on the level of self-discipline and at times self-racialization (Moreno Figueroa, 2008; 2010; 2012). Study participants shared a sharp and clear understanding of the forces of racialization and the burden of racial categorization, particularly that of the racial gaze.

### **Tenuous Whiteness and Critiques of Whiteness**

The ideological contrast between U.S. constructs of race and ethnicity outlined by the Census and Latina/o ethnoracial formations shape a general confusion on how Latino communities formally identify. Are Latinos a race? An ethnic group? A culture? (Sanchez 2002). The Latina/o ethnoracial conundrum reveals the political and social deployments of state defined race. At the same time, Census data reflects the many ways that various Latino populations tap into whiteness. In his discussion about Latinos and whiteness, Nicholas De Genova asserts, “This heightened racial ambiguity is undoubtedly revealing in much the same way that Latino responses to the U.S. Census expose a definite inclination among some to tenuously embrace the elusive promise of whiteness. (*Working the Boundaries* 198).

Granted, prevailing theories of Latino engagements with the Census shape the thesis that Latinos choose the white category on the Census because they misunderstood the question (C. Rodriguez 2000). Others studies have provided important evidence on the ways that Latin American constructs of whiteness mediate the decision to identify as white on the Census (Duany 2002; Bonilla-Silva 2003, Loveman and Muniz 2007). For instance, Virginia Dominguez notes, “When given

the choice to identify themselves as either white or black, most Spanish-speaking people from the Caribbean identify themselves as white” (273). The following section explores some underlying theoretical ideas about Census categories and the intersections of institutional and cultural definitions of race.

Nelly, born in Ft. Pierce, Florida shares her understanding of the white Census category:

*I leave the race question blank because it doesn't apply to me. I don't think I have one, at least not based on these categories. I don't identify with any of these categories. It is confusing because the government considers Latinos white, I think, I don't even know how they classify Latinos who are black. Like at my job, all the children are Latinos, mostly Mexican and some from Guatemala and Puerto Rico, but they are all classified as white. Everyone goes in as W, white in our database. The Sherriff's office does that too, considers us white.*

Looked at collectively, Nelly organizes the competing classification systems that grant Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Guatemalans tenuous access to whiteness despite their social location as racialized communities. At the same time, she wonders how the Census classifies Latinos of African descent. Not surprisingly, she cites law enforcement as a central site of race-management in which Latinos are counted as white. Roxana, a native of Tampa, gains her understanding of whiteness from this similar source: *I check off the white category, I remember cops would tell us that we are white.* Despite the strained relationship between law enforcement authorities and local Mexican communities, the county's racial classification system identifies Mexicans as white. This racial classification scheme is undergirded by an oppositional white-black color line that struggles to define non-white and non-black communities. At the same time it reflects the state's uncertainty about Mexicans' racial status (Almaguer “At the Crossroads of Race”). While this binary

classification system fails to recognize the diversity of U.S. white and black communities, it definitely fails to understand the idiosyncrasies of Latino and Mexican constructs of race and color. Yolanda, a native of Texas demonstrates this bifurcation:

*When I was growing up in Texas, we were all considered white, there was no Mexicans or Latin Americans. You were either white or black. One or the other. We were considered white. My dad would always say that we were Chicanos, white Chicanos. When I filled out an application, I would check white. When I was 17 and I saw "Latin American" I would ask what is LA? Are you a Latin American? I don't know! I honestly didn't know.*

The change in nomenclature that Yolanda describes reflects the state's continual interest in managing race, particularly managing the "Mexican race problem." We also see that Yolanda gains her understanding of her racial identity as a "White Chicano/a." Yolanda elaborates her point: *Being from the United States and being a citizen, I am considered white.* George A. Martinez discusses the limits of legal race in Texas. Legally defined as white, but socially treated as people of color, Martinez finds that Mexican Americans in Texas are sometimes treated as co-whites depending on the context (2011). However, Texas law circumvented Mexican legal whiteness by segregating school children based on linguistic differences and migration patterns. What is most telling are the instances in which this binary system overlaps with a Mexican scheme of race and color. Let us make this connection through the following excerpt:

*That's interesting cuz I don't know... I guess in a sense because I have always been able to check off the white category, I guess white in a sense, but if I was had to choose I would choose white, white, but not American white. Do you know what I mean? Not gringo white, not that. Now, where I work at that, I would classify as white. When they ask you this question I feel that is asked is about skin color, so based on my skin color, I guess I would classify as white, because I am güera. But I don't think I benefit from being güera, because I have self-confidence issues, and I*

*don't fit the ideal beauty mold. The fact that I am Latina, and the area that I grew up in, body size, influences a lot.*

The terms of “racial subjectification” and “subjection” are operative here (Rodriguez-Morazzani 151). These terms reflect how “social agents are defined or define themselves as racial subjects” (Rodriguez-Morazzani 151). Here Micaela negotiates the informal Mexican category of güera that signifies her light complexion and uses it as a basis to identify as white in various contexts- but then expresses the difference between her status as güera but not “American white.” A translation and negotiation takes place between the informal and everyday label of güera and the overarching and official white Census category. She rejects whiteness for a fragile form of Mexican whiteness that she does not benefit from.

Micaela is keenly aware of the aspects that limit her from experiencing the privileges of whiteness; her embodiment, her class background, her Latina-ness. Her negotiation of state imposed categories of identity and tenuous claim to güera demonstrates an ambivalence to claim U.S. whiteness and reflects the presence and effect of more than one system of racialization. What is more, the presence of more than one form of whiteness, fractures its dominance, and destabilizes its presumed natural existence. Brenda, born in Chumbitaro, Michoacán, reflects on her racial identity and whiteness in general in the following passage:

*There is no specific category that reflects me. I am not black, I am not American, I am not Hispanic, I am not Mexican American; white seems to be the more neutral one. But on a daily basis I am not white. I feel that I am stereotyped and I stereotype them too, I feel it [whiteness] projects laziness. When I think of that, I will say wow, I am Mexican and I am proud of it. Because everybody knows we may not be smart but we are the hardest working people, and that's a big pride to carry. I guess I choose white, even though it means laziness to me, it's still more acceptable.*

Brenda offers a critique of whiteness. In comparison her understanding of Mexican identity as hard working, whiteness represents indolence. Here, Brenda flips the script on the dominant narratives of Mexicans as backwards, lazy, and licentious. In a similar vein, other study participants destabilized whiteness and offered their critiques of white dominance. For example, Beatriz, remarks:

*When I was in middle school, a white girl told me 'why don't you go back where you are from?' And I told her 'why don't you go back where you are from?' You are not even supposed to be here! You are supposed to be somewhere in England and shit! Where do you want me to go? I was born in Alabama. I guess I will go back to Alabama!*

Beatriz also flips the script and reconfigures dominant frames of belonging and inclusion. She disrupts the social equation that links whiteness, belonging, and inclusion in the body politic. Beatriz makes claims to origins in the United States to interrogate public understandings of Mexicans as perpetual outsiders. She questions her accoster's right to be present in the United States. Her indignant response, *You are not even supposed to be here!*

At times, study participants extended this critique of whiteness citing Spanish American borderland histories. Yolanda, born and raised in Texas, shares the following narrative of belonging:

*The white people are realizing that this is our country too. Like it or not. I know there is all this fight to send Mexicans back, they can fight all they want, they are gonna come back. I feel like there are more Mexicans than there are whites here (in South County). I remember reading about it in history that Texas used to belong to Mexico, but the U.S. took Texas away from Mexico. I think all of this here, because Christopher Columbus discovered America, he was Spanish. All of this America, could have been Spanish people, maybe once or twice an Englishman came and got with a Spanish person that turned into white people. All of these people could also be Spanish.*

Yolanda invokes a Spanish-Mexican history that centers Columbus's discovery of the Americas as a point to argue for the significance of Hispanics in the United States. Indicative of the various categorizations assigned to Mexicans, she interchangeably uses the terms "Spanish" to mark the relationship between Spanish America and Mexican history. Despite Yolanda's reference of what Gloria Anzaldúa calls Colón-ialism, (alluding to the role of Cristobal Colón, Christopher Columbus's Spanish name, in the colonization of the Americas) Yolanda attempts to make sense of anti-Mexican sentiments and reconfigures the boundaries of the Americas to include Mexico and the influence of Spanish America.

Returning to our discussion of Census categories, we learn of the ways that study participants define and understand the Other and Black categories. These understandings are mediated by a visual discourse of race that seeks a form of stability and intelligibility. Commenting on her views on the Other category on the Census form, Cecilia shares with me the following:

*I don't even mess with it! (Laughs) Maybe on the census, it would be important for me to mark my path. But in the doctor's office and other applications, I wouldn't even mess with it, it's not worth my time. The other category is just another person in the United States. 'Oh geez not again' (in terms of the other category). Yeah, some of them, would be like 'Oh I don't know I have never worked with a Chamorro,' (points to the census form) 'I have never seen one of those!' I feel like it does make a difference in that aspect, it makes a difference what box you check. I am not checking the "other" category, I am checking white! I rather stay on the acceptable side, usually what ends up popping out is my Spanish surname.*

Echoing Brenda's views about remaining neutral and acceptable, Cecilia opts for the white category to gain a form of intelligibility and recognition. Cecilia's engagement with sight-specific racial discourse, (*I have never seen one of those before!*) is reminiscent of the logic that inform previous Census enumeration practices

that relied on visual evidence of race. In this case, the racial gaze is now set upon Chamorros, members of a racialized community. Her investment in upward mobility mediates her alignment with official whiteness to remain “acceptable” and a knowable body in the eyes of the racial state. Yet, we see that she is aware of the limits of this practice, as her Spanish surname hinders full access to whiteness.

In terms of the Black category, study participants sometimes rely on constructs of Hispanic blackness to guide their interpretations of this category. For instance, *Tampeña*, Roxana, comments about this understanding:

*I don't consider myself African American, I never choose black once. You know how there are Latin Caribbean people? My brother-in-law is Dominican and he says he is Hispanic Black. Since we are not black, we are considered white,*

This response reflects how Roxana situates herself in between a black and white binary. This polarization makes space for Hispanic Blackness that includes Dominicans and other Latinos of African descent. Here, her understanding of whiteness is mediated by the word-of-mouth education she gains from her Dominican brother-in-law. Her non-blackness in this case, mediates her alignment with official constructs of whiteness. This discussion demonstrates the Census identification and disidentification practices of study participants. At times, whiteness is known through law enforcement authorities, other times, it is learned through everyday public understandings of whiteness that is opposition to blackness. As we see, U.S. whiteness overlapped with Mexican forms of whiteness, temporarily disrupting the hegemony of U.S. whiteness. The unifying thread in women's understanding is an awareness of the visual contours of racial discourse mediated by official race management practices. The second section of this discussion will consider the ways

that participants negotiate the racial gaze and the various visual identification practices they engage to identify themselves and others.

### **The Burden of Categorization- *What Are You?***

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. census workers were instructed to classify Mexicans as whites, “unless they were definitely Negro, Indian, or some other race” (Kitch 222). This points to the historical role of “phenotypic sight-specific difference” that centrally shaped the boundaries of race (Nelson 2006). The “visual evidence” of race and color communicate presumed immutable human qualities associated with intelligence, morality, and temperament (Alcoff 2004). For people of Mexican America, the boundaries that marked whiteness, Indianness, and blackness were blurred as they carried on their bodies the overlapping histories of Spanish-African-Indian genealogies. Often study participants encounter the question, *What are you?* This inquiry reflects a history of the visual contours of race-making and race-management practices that requires multiracial communities to proclaim and justify their existence. This racial gaze and racial questioning imposed onto the participants of this study frequently interrogate their bodies, appearances, and other markers of race of color. These interrogations often require study participant to “explain” their presence and their physical features. I share study participants experiences in the subsequent sections of this discussion.

This racial-visual logic is clearly at work in a brief CNN news segment, “What is Latino?” (2007).<sup>67</sup> Here, a reporter of Chinese and Mexican descent asks

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<sup>67</sup>. For the full video clip, please see

<http://255latinoliterature.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/2012/01/30/hello-world/>

the audience, “What is a Latino? What do they look like?” She continues to share a brief history of her family heritage complete with a visual registry depicted on the screen as a genealogical family tree.<sup>68</sup> She conveys an impressionistic message of ethnoracial diversity among people of Mexican descent, reflecting a history of *mestizaje*. The attractive reporter has a “phenotypically satisfying,”<sup>69</sup> presentation that convinces the audience that she is of Mexican and Chinese descent. Her straight black hair, almond shaped eyes, and trained reporter’s voice represent a form of “successful multiculturalism” that is non-threatening, racially ambiguous, and aesthetically pleasing (Matthews 2007).

The video, produced for a general audience cites the multiple valences of race that cites language, culture, color, and ancestry. Combining older models of racialist representation (complete with the body and profile scans of various “types” of Latinos) and an expert testimonial of Latinos “transcending race,” this public understanding of Latino and Mexican multiraciality leaves the viewer with the conclusion that race is centrally located on the body. These public understandings shape the scrutiny that study participants encounter in South County. To explain the racial-visual practice of this form of interrogation and identification, Nelly shares the following:

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68. For a similar take on multiracial and multiethnic families in the United States, see the New York Time’s online series, “Mixed America’s Family Trees.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/us/family-trees.html#index>

69. Derived from Kim TallBear’s comments during the symposium, “Blood Quantum Debate: Does ‘Indian Blood’ Still Matter?” National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C. September 16, 2011.

*They give you a once over look, they size you up. They are trying to take you in and figure you out, scanning you, scanning your body, taking a look at what you are wearing and what you look like. It's that feeling of others trying to figure you out.*

Nelly's reference to a body scan reflects the similar logic that mediates CNN's "What is Latino"? This visual registry of "racial types" operates as a guide to orient viewers and attempt to "figure out" racially suspect and racially ambiguous bodies. When I inquired about how participants made sense of this interrogation practice, Mireya responded:

*Yo? No lo pienso mucho, yo estoy acostumbrada a esas preguntas, si somos de otro pais, Filipinas, rasgos asiaticos, no es verdad porque somos de raza Mexicana. No senti ni una reaction estraña, ni incomoda, estando en este paiz estamos despueta que cual quier persona nos pregunte esto... (Me? I don't think about it much, I am accustomed to those types of questions. If we are from another country, Filipinas, with Asian features, it's not true because we are of the Mexican race. I don't feel any strange reaction, I am not uncomfortable, being in this country we are prepared for anyone to ask us about that.)*

Immediately we see Mireya try to make sense of this practice, using what Ruth Frankenberg terms as a "discursive repertoire" (2). These discursive practices, "may reinforce, contradict, conceal, explain, or 'explain away' the materiality or the history of a given situation" (Frankenberg 2). Here, Mireya attempts to explain away the visual-racial discourse that subjects her to this line of questioning. However, this does not mean she is a passive recipient of racist ideology and practice. Reading between the lines, we see that Mireya positions herself as a member of a multiracial community, using the expression *de raza Mexicana*.

The polysemic term *raza* signifies both race and family, forming a multivoiced discourse of blood lines, ancestry, and belonging (Lewis 2012). Despite, the hegemonic uses of the term *raza* that reference both Spanish colonial and Anglo-Saxon racialist discourses of race, people of Mexican America have recuperated *raza*

as an identity and coalitional term (E. Chavez 2002). Not only does Mireya position herself as a member of this marginalized community, she also tests U.S. conventions of color-blind rhetoric and post-racial sentiments in using the language of *raza*.<sup>70</sup>

When I inquired about how Griselda makes sense of the *What are you?* question, she shared a vivid example of this form of public scrutiny:

*That was an interesting night... They were fascinated by my hair, I was told I have Asian hair... white ladies were surprised to learn I am Mexican, they said I had beautiful skin although they said Mexicans usually have darker skin. They said I looked mixed, Asian and black.*

In this ethnoracial moment, Griselda is an exotic beauty that her white co-workers at the dinner party cannot immediately identify. In an act of “complimentary othering”, Griselda is read as racially mixed, even racially ambiguous, while also denigrating the “phenotypically satisfying,” darker skinned Mexican body. Jessica M. Vasquez defines this exclusionary practice as :

Complimentary othering occurs when people consider certain Mexican Americans as ‘exceptions to the rule,’ the ‘rules’ in question being racist assumptions of underachievement, intelligence, success, beauty, and so on. In this way, the speaker simultaneously downgrades a group of people on the basis of negative stereotypes while extolling the virtues of a single individual. This backhanded compliment does not consider the variance within any group of people. (212)

Here, Gris’s racially ambiguous presentation shifts and transforms into an exotic racial mixture that registers as a set of desirable physical traits. Her light skin opposed to dark skin; straight hair versus wavy hair underpinned her co-worker’s racial fascination and the supposed mismatch of Gris’s appearance with their racial

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<sup>70</sup>. Raza Studies and other Chicano Studies curriculums are under attack in the Southwest. Critics argue that Raza Studies defy American values and promote racial divisions.

expectations of what Mexicans “look like”. Reyna, born and raised in the Tampa Bay area, shares a similar experience of interrogation:

*Sometimes people think I am Puerto Rican, I take offense to it, only because they tell me that I don't look Mexican. How does a Mexican look? Oh “they are dark and this and that,” that is offensive!! They are stereotyping all Mexicans.*

In essence both Gris and Reyna encounter “complimentary Othering” because of their racial ambiguous presentations. Their lack of “Mexican” features embedded in a system of signification of dark skin color and short stature, mediate these public interrogations. These interrogations attempt to mark the boundaries between Mexican and non-Mexican. Let me illustrate this point, through Francisca’s experience of this type of boundary-making process:

*La señora de Latin Café me ha dicho que ella nunca pensaba que yo era Mexicana. Que di mi amiga y su esposo, ella sin preguntar que automaticamente sabia que ellos eran Mexicanos. Y yo, pensaban que yo era Centro Americana o Puerto Riquena. Pues yo soy igual de Mexicana que ellos, quizas mas porque ellos son de la frontera y soy de mas adentro. Yo he vivido mas de la mitad de mi vida en esta area donde ay mucho Hispano, (Cubano, Puerto Riqueno) tanto año de convivir que los Hispanos, quizas se me pega algo, ala mejor el modo de hablar...quizas... right?*

*The lady from the Latin Café has told me that she never thought I was Mexican. Without a doubt and without asking, she automatically knew that my friend and her husband were Mexican. She thought I was Central American or Puerto Rican. Well I am just as Mexican as they are, maybe even more Mexican because I am from further south. I have lived over half of my life in this area where there are a lot of Hispanics, so many years that I have lived among them, maybe something rubbed off on me, maybe the way of speaking, maybe, right?*

Francisca’s experience operates as a way to think about the stylings that mark her as non-Mexican. Francisca theorizes it may be the ways she speaks after living in South County for a long time. The final section of this discussion presents evidence from the photo elicitation study to consider the gender-race-class presentations that mediate how study participants perceive and how they are perceived.

The photo elicitation guide that I designed serves as an interpretive tool that foregrounds Linda Martin's Alcoff's notion of "visible identities" to explore the system of representations that symbolize race and color. Moreover, I offer evidence from focus group discussion in which study participants exchanged ideas about beauty, respectability, and upward mobility. This is a segment of one of the focus group discussions:

*Gris: Everybody in the novelas looks like this..(points to image in Appendix 4b #1)  
You watch the novelas and they all have the similar skin tone*

*Gris: She wouldn't even be the maid, ... (chooses image Appendix 4a #5)*

*Marisol: She would be in the *marketa* selling stuff (chooses image Appendix 4a #5)*

*Marisol: Even the maids are prettier and light skin*

*Maggie: She would be the mistress (chooses image Appendix 4a #5)*

*Marisol: She would never have a leading role (chooses image Appendix 4a #5)*

In this conversational excerpt, participants of the focus group mediate about the popular representations found in Mexican *telenovelas* (Please see Figure 6 for a roster of popular Mexican novela stars). The women identify skin color as a central factor that shapes who is cast in a leading role versus a peripheral role. The young smiling woman, (please see Appendix 4a #5 from left to right) is assigned race-class-gender significations as a peripheral and marginal character; placing her in the *marketa* (indoor and outdoor markets), the heart of working-poor Mexico. Their appraisals of beauty and human worth are shaped by Eurocentric models of beauty; however at the same time they collectively identify the young smiling woman, in the photo elicitation guide, as the "most Mexican" (Focus Group Interview).

One participant identifies the young woman's nose as an indication of her

Mexican-ness. She observes that her nose, *mas piquada, y mas ancha* (is more pointed and wide). Sylvia continues to describe similar views about the specific embodied and visual markers that signify her Mexicanness.

*I have a Mexican nose! Mine is big and round! I don't consider it to be una nariz de un moreno, (a moreno nose) but it's a typical Mexican flat nose. Tengo la nariz chata y el nopal en la frente, a round face con la nariz chata.*

In this dense and significant passage, Sylvia marks the path of a “system of bodily signs” (Candelario 230). Ginetta Candelario elaborates this idea, “[A] system of bodily signs” reveal the ways in which hair texture, skin color, size of nose and mouth operate and shape complex discursive field of racial identities and racial formations (230). Sylvia identifies the shape and width of her nose, and the shape of her face. Her use of the popular expression *el nopal en la frente* (cactus on the forehead) is used to humorously reference an individual’s Mexican-Indian ancestry (Farr, 2009). In this passage we also see that Sylvia makes comparison to a *moreno* nose. In this case, the polysemic term *moreno* is deployed to identify African American features (please see Chapter 6 for a discussion about the polysemic *moreno/o*). Sylvia uses one grid of bodily signs to position herself within a grid of Mexican embodiment.

This topic of conversation promoted more views about beauty and beauty practices among study participants. The topic of hair straightening came up as a common practice. Romana describes this beauty practice in detail:

*I straighten my hair daily cuz I think it will give me a more sophisticated look, and less of the ignorant look. I have the typical Mexican face and I feel that I will be judged, diran, “umm pinche ignorante que llego.” (look at that stupid ignorant person) I think it gives me of a more clean cut look.*

Romana’s raced and gendered presentation is informed by a system of bodily signs

that mark Mexican Indianness. Akin to Sylvia's supermarket experience (Chapter 4), Romana uses similar codes to describe Mexican Indianness- ignorance opposed to sophistication. Because she understands her own embodiment, as having the "typical Mexican face," she develops this beauty practice to improve her social standing and avoid judgment and scrutiny. Following the signposts of the race-classed code of "clean cut," the group selectively chooses a young woman with from the photo elicitation guide as one of the most attractive women in the series of photos (Please see Appendix 4a #3). Below is a section from this group discussion:

*Gris: The young woman with the highlights. Esta mas arreglada, (she is more put together) she has a very clean image, a high-tech image. She is not completely white and she is not recognized as Mexican, she is almost like Jessica Alba, who fits the mold for every theme. She is ideal for white people, she is pretty. Her and Salma Hayek, they got the color they are not pale, they have pretty, dark hair. In America, they like color in the people, I think they look at blonde hair and blue eyes as overrated. And they see as this category, OMG it's as so sexy and beautiful. It's the other way around in Mexico, we need las blancas, las güeras, naturally with blue or green eyes.*

*Ana: What do you mean by high tech look?*

*Marisol: She gets her hair done, she has nice skin, her makeup looks like sophisticated people's makeup. Her teeth are beautiful, she is not the typical girl just walking down the street, someone is influencing her and telling her you gotta do this this and this. If she is after a certain career she probably learned early on what's going to work for her.*

In this dense passage, study participants identify the codes of conduct and beauty that mark a form of racial ambiguity. Again using the codes of race-class-gender, study participants use the terms "put together," "clean" and "high-tech" to identify an idealized beauty image. A sophisticated and put-together look is a shared aspiration for most women who are influenced by dominant standards of beauty. However, in the context of women of color, especially Mexican women, they juggle

both U.S. and Mexican hegemonic standards of beauty. Gris identifies the paradox that she notices in the United States, a preference for ethnically and racially ambiguous bodies, exemplified by starlet Jessica Alba. Jessica Alba represents a form of racial ambiguity that is non-threatening, beautiful, and flexible enough to fit a variety of film roles (Beltran 2009). In this case, Alba's racial ambiguity allows for enough color to qualify as exotic but also falls outside of the controlling and racialized images of Mexicannes. As we discussed Jessica Alba, I felt a collective eye-roll coming from the group. One study participant shared her views about Jessica Alba:

*At least Salma Hayek admits she is Mexican! I just want to slap her! She stands out from the typical white girl. She is half Mexican, that's why people think she is so pretty, forget if she was full Mexican. She knows how to complement her skin color. She dresses nice. Maybe she has always been treated as white, and if you say that you are Mexican, forget it about it! But in Mexico, she would be too dark to have a leading role in a movie.*

Again, the tension between racial ambiguity and racial certainty transpires in this discussion of beauty and color. In the United States, Jessica Alba is emblematic of the future of race, one that "promises that new racial mixed subjects 'will still look white'" (Bost 1). As a whole, we see the issue of beauty emerge as a central organizing principle that marks the line between Mexican and non-Mexican. For example, study participants discussed this distinction,

*Cecilia: I am asked all the time, "Oh you are really pretty where are you from?" I am Mexican. What? You don't think Mexicans have pretty people? (Laughs)*

*Marisol: I have been told I am too pretty to be Mexican. I find that offensive because what are you trying to tell me, I am the nicest loser of them all! I guess because most of the Mexicans in the area work in the fields or Indigenous people who are shorter and darker, I don't know...I notice the same among my black friends, when they will tell someone, "Oh you are really pretty for a black girl." That doesn't feel good. Why can't I just be pretty? Why am I the prettiest Mexican?*

This distinction between Mexican and non-Mexican is indicative of the practice of “complimentary Othering.” Again this interrogation practice, presumes the lack of variance among Mexican women and subjects women to continue to “explain” their appearances. The lack of a full spectrum of positive representations of Mexican women in the public imaginary shapes this form of racial exclusion and racism. This representational deficiency made it challenging for me to construct a visual guide of the diverse range of beauty and skin colors among Mexican women. This mediated my decision to search for images from an online photo stock database instead of relying on an internet search. Interestingly, at the end of the focus group one of the participants, remarked,

*I liked that we didn't see the stereotypical Mexican that we get in this area... real dark, short, basically unattractive...*

After a lively discussion of racism and colorism the concluding observation leads us back to the familiar anti-Mexican and anti-Indian racisms that reference dark, short statured, laboring bodies. In the context of South County, an area marked by Mexican migrant labor and the people who labor in the strawberry fields, orange groves, and tomato fields; a contradictory (dis)identification practice transpires from an exploration of beauty, modernity, and progress. Study participant's perceptions of their body and race-gender-class presentations inform their beauty practices and the ways they position themselves within and against the controlling image of the dark and laboring Mexican body. These controlling images form part of a history of Mexican phenotyping and line of racial questioning that insists on “solving” the presumed Mexican “problem” of mulitraciality. Taken together, the influence of the

machinery of racial classification and race-management demonstrate a complex engagement with official and unofficial narratives of race and color. Mexican women are located at the nexus of race, class, gender representations; juggling racial interrogations and competing codes of beauty.

## **Chapter 6: MORENAS, NEGRAS y PRIETAS:**

### **EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN MEXICAN AMERICA**

Too bad mi'jita was morena, **mu**y prieta (author's emphasis), so dark and different from her own fair-skinned children. But she loved mi'jita anyway. What I lacked in whiteness, I had in smartness. But it was too bad I was dark like an Indian.

(Gloria Anzaldúa- Borderlands/La Frontera)

Tejana-Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa reflects on her ethnoracial experiences in the above epigraph. We can begin to unpack the implications of Anzaldúa's passage by looking at the polysemic ethnoracial terms used to describe her darkness. Anzaldúa uses "morena," "dark," "prieta," and "Indian" to map out a variation of racial difference. The markers of darkness and Indian-ness weave in and out of a Mexican-Chicana lexicon of race and color.

Rather than assuming that Anzaldúa used these terms interchangeably, I begin this discussion with this autoethnographic episode to think of the complex ways that Mexicana racial difference and sameness is embedded in polysemic ethnoracial language and discourse. The multiplicity of this discourse of racial difference and sameness reflects the negotiation of Mexican mestizaje(s) that is rife with dissonance and conflict. It is one that simultaneously denies and embraces Indian-ness and blackness. This multiplicity is best understood as a practice of negotiation in which ambiguity, relationality, and flexibility permit a space of ethnoracial difference among women of Mexican descent.

The focus of this chapter centers the experiences of Mexican women residing in Wimauma and Ruskin, also known as South County. I frame them from the viewpoint of an *embodied mestizaje* that negotiates and lives within the contradictions of whiteness, blackness, and Indian-ness. To demonstrate this, I employ a positioned, interpretive and conversational analysis of first person and semi-structured interviews that highlights the tensions between and among these gendered racial locations. Here, I centralize discourse and language as a major site of negotiation; particularly in the ways that women of Mexican descent speak about their racial experiences and identities. This feminist critical race approach destabilizes “pure” categories of race, interrogating one-dimensional constructs of whiteness, brownness, and blackness – often perceived as the essentialized building blocks of race in the Americas.

Fundamentally, this chapter argues that the embodied experience of Mexicana mestizaje shapes Mexicana racial sameness-difference couched in the language of blood, belonging, and family. Inherently embedded in the interdependent experience of ethnoracial sameness-difference are the competing ideological codes that frame whiteness, Indian-ness and Blackness in which these constructs are experienced simultaneously. The rejection of Indianness and Blackness is mostly demonstrated through the cultural practice of colorism that denigrates various forms of darkness-upholding a fair-skin ideal, reflecting the larger “effects of constant hegemony work” (Nelson 31). Even though fair skin was much more uncommon characteristic among my study participants, lightness and by extension, whiteness was upheld as a distant ideal that is valued but also seen as inconsequential to their everyday lives.

This discussion also maps out the relationship between Mexican constructs of Indian-ness and Blackness. It is evident from interview responses that a symbolic and material boundary exists between the terms *morena* and *negra*. This familiar boundary is reflected by the sentiment, “se dice *morena* y nunca *negra*” (approximate translation: “we say brown and never black” Interview Series, 2011).

This discursive distinction operates as a distancing strategy but also hints to a version of Mexican blackness that remains and survives despite the negative connotations associated with the term *negra*.<sup>71</sup> Not only does the specter of Mexican blackness remain, but also *morena* and *negra* intersect at various sites of enunciation and systems of representation. This overlap and blurring of the boundary between brownness and blackness serves as a space to begin to theorize Mexicana ethnoracial difference in the larger comparative conversations about Indian-ness and Blackness.

Central to this discussion are two overarching questions: What roles do skin color and other markers of racial embodiment play in the everyday lives of Mexican women? And in what ways does this lexicon of race and color operate as a form of resistance against dominant racial ideologies and racism? I set out to demonstrate the transgressive potential for ethnoracial alliance and exchange across difference that is demonstrated in the self-narration and self-definitions of Mexican women in which they align and position themselves as non-white women. I also set out to sharpen

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<sup>71</sup>. Public discourses of African ancestry in Mexico are submerged in everyday language and expressions. Recently, cultural activists and academics are claiming African descendent identities as part of *La Tercera Raiz*, a host of cultural projects such as the traveling museum exhibit, *The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present*.

color as a category of analysis to expand a theoretical and empirical discussion about color continuums and color consciousness in the everyday lives of Mexican women. I achieve this by highlighting the ethnoracial moments in which participants position themselves in submerged and neglected racial genealogies to reveal the specific ways that they forge ethnoracial identities, alliances, counter histories, community, and a sense of belonging.

These sets of embodied and discursive practices reveal the limits of dominant racial ideology that has worked to systematically erase this genealogy of mixture. These practices are undergirded in the marginalized racial ideology that reflects the cultural survival of a multiracial group of women. We can begin to reveal the limits of hegemonic racial ideology by taking into account the lived experiences of racialization of marginalized Mexican women.

There are two sections here. The first highlights the voices of study participants expressed as they make sense of the embodied language of race and color and the second addresses the practice of colorism. Specifically, in the first section I position their experiences alongside the theory of *embodied mestizaje*. The lived experience of embodied mestizaje is entrenched in a living language of blood, family, and belonging that binds Mexicans as all part of the same ethnoracial family. Although mired in a patriarchal family formation, thinking of new and transgressive ways of understanding racial embodiment is central to Mexicana ethnoracial difference-sameness. For purposes of this discussion, I define difference-sameness as the constant negotiation of a triracial mestizaje that accepts and denies difference. In this case, Mexicana ethnoracial sameness-difference frequently negotiates constructs

of blackness, Indian-ness, and whiteness- racial schemas that structure Mexican mestizaje. The dilemma over sameness-difference is battled over in everyday language that reflects the lived experience of mestizaje.

In the second section, I turn our attention to the practice of colorism and the flexibility of the Mexican racial middle ground situated in the ambiguous *morena* location. In this case, the term *morena* operates as a way to reference people of African descent and also Mexicana brownness. Here, I map out the relationship between these two ethnoracial locations. In the following section, I demonstrate the ways that respondents invoke an embodied form of mestizaje that references biology, bloodlines, and ancestry mobilizing it as a strategy of resistance used to claim a diverse and embodied ethnoracial history.

### ***Gotitas de Sangre- The Symbolics of Blood and Family***

Cecilia is 32 years old, born in Acambaro, Guanajuato Mexico and is working on earning her nursing degree. She immigrated with her mother to the United States when she was a toddler. Cecilia lived much of her life in Wimauma working with her parents in the fields, and then moved to the neighboring town of Riverview when she married. As we talked about the history of Mexican mestizaje; the following dialogue shed light on Cecilia's understanding of her ancestry and racial identity.

*I don't know much about Mexican history, but my mom would say, "en aquellos tiempos...o mira tu abuelo era alto, blanco, con los ojos azules, el era de raza de no se donde." Se lo suficiente que Mexico fue invadido de muchos lugares, y los hombres les gustaba a las mujeres que miraban, and they would have offspring, and la sangre se fue reduciendo.*

*Translation: I don't know much about Mexican history, but my mom would say, "back in the day...or look at your grandfather, he was tall, white, with blue eyes, and he was from who knows where." I know enough that Mexico was invaded from many*

*different places, and the men liked the women they saw and they would have offspring, and the blood was reduced...*

Ana: What do you mean by reduciendo? (Reduced?)

*Cecilia: La sangre se va reduciendo. Si es uno de Francia y un Mexicano.. It's two genes against one, esa gotita de sangre es menos menos menos... que ya despues 50 anos despues sale un neito con los ojos azules, y piensan, es del sancho!<sup>72</sup> La gota es tan poca, nunca sabes cuando va salir! Se asustan cuando salen con los ojos azules, y sale la bisabuela – “ay no tu bisabuelo tenian los ojos azules.”*

*Translation: The blood is reduced. If you have a French gene and a Mexican gene, it's two genes against one, that little drop of blood, is less and less and less. After 50 years, a grandson will be born with blue eyes and they think it's the milkman's son! The drop is so small, you never know when it will come out. They are alarmed when someone is born with blue eyes and then the great grandmother will attest, “Oh no, your great grandfather had blue eyes.”*

Ana: What do blue eyes represent to you?

*Cecilia: Well, My tio has the most beautiful blue eyes, mas azules y lindos que he visto, (the most beautiful eyes I have seen) I ask my mom, how come we didn't get none of that! I guess my dad's genes were stronger; my dad was really dark with jet-black hair.*

In the aforementioned account, Cecilia shares her historical recollection of Mexican mestizaje. Taken together, the language of genetics and blood that Cecilia invokes represents the continual process of negotiation of Mexican mestizaje. In this example, this language takes on a specific gendered form that genders racial blood as masculine and the gatekeepers of this history as feminine. The complexity embedded in Cecilia's statement maps out the masculinized version of mestizaje and conquest in which Spanish men sexually dominated Native and Black women.

Cecilia's account alludes to the aspect of force and domination as she describes, “men saw women they liked.” In this respect, Cecilia's account of

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<sup>72</sup>. Chicano grupero band, *La Sombra* popularized the public imaginary of the sexual exploits of Mexican/Chicano men, in their 1992 hit, “El Sancho.”

Mexican mestizaje and more specifically conquest largely describes the Spanish-Mexican practice of bride theft also known as *casamiento por robo* (Lewis 2012). This tactic of sexual conquest at times bled into the territory of ambivalent consent and desire. In Cecilia's case her rendition of Mexican history is shaped by her mother's upbringing in rural 1960s Guanajuato. Women's choices for upward mobility often relied on their marriage prospects based on their sexual purity (Gonzalez Lopez 2002). When parents did not approve of an engagement, couples sometimes eloped to marry on their own. Incidentally, the popular expression *se la robaron* (she was stolen) remains a popular expression and is often joked about despite its origins in violence, captivity, and forced marriage.<sup>73</sup>

The question of illegitimacy and respectability is hinted at when Cecilia uses the phrase, *Es del Sancho!* This expression is used to refer to an illegitimate love affair especially when a child emerges from an extramarital sexual liaison. The great grandmother works as the record keeper of ancestry who ensures that the blue-eyed son is in fact related to the family, thereby promoting respectability and integrity of the family structure.

From a Mexican colonial historical perspective, social historians Carol A. Smith and Susan Kellogg pay attention to gender, kinship, and marriage relations that regulated women roles and bodies, particularly mestiza and *casta* women (1997; 2000). Elite control of women's reproduction and marriage choices was most controlled at the upper strata of society (Smith 1997). Upper-class patriarchs were

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<sup>73</sup>. Men reserved the right to "return" women if they were not virgins- this was seen as disgrace to the woman and her family.

concerned with ensuring legitimate marriages and children, protecting family honor, and maintaining racial purity. From Cecilia's experience, her non-elite background does not exclude her from the social regulation of sexuality and reproduction.

Monica Figueroa Moreno notes that the question of family resemblance and family features is couched in women's respectability measured by their honor and fidelity during marriage ("Looking Emotionally"). Hence, Cecilia negotiates the larger history of the control of women's bodies and notions of respectability- referencing patriarchal bloodlines.

Returning to our conversation about ancestry and *mestizaje*, Cecilia also uses the language of dilution particularly the word, *gotitas* (little drops) to make meaning of hereditary variance within her family. In the case of her uncle, he inherits his blue eyes from a distant relative. In her own case, she received her father's brown eyes from his "stronger" genes. For a brief moment she expresses disappointment that she did not inherit blue eyes and then moves to acknowledge her father's darker features. These micro-moments of phenotypic disappointment and acceptance are part of the embodied experience of Mexican *mestizaje*. On one hand, European features such as blue eyes are prized and hoped for. On the other hand, the possibility of inheriting dark features is much more likely to happen. Hence, an ambivalent relationship is constructed around idealized European features and the more prevalent Mexican features.

Indeed this reading of Cecilia's understanding points us to a biological and partially essentialized version of race. The language invoked to describe dominant and recessive genes reflects a larger Mexican-American history of racialist thinking

entrenched in eugenics, social Darwinism, and *adelantando la raza* (advancing the race). Cecilia's description of her dark-featured father as having "stronger" genes falls in line with Mexican public understandings of *la sangre pesada* (heavy blood). The "genetic burden" or *la carga genetica* is believed to carry the weight of dark skin and dark features (Winders and Higgins 2005). In comparison, "lighter" or "diluted" genes will bring about blue or green eyes and other phenotypic European features. Using this line of reasoning, the language of racial blood represented through "heavy" and "light" genetic weights, it is clear that an embodied form of mestizaje is at work.

What is more: Cecilia's understanding of her ancestry points us in the direction of considering the significance of submerged racial knowledge in naming and claiming ancestry. Historically, authors of the official accounts of Mexican mestizaje made deliberate efforts to exclude and erase Indian and African ancestries. At the same time, Mexican elites argued for the centrality of ancient Indian culture and history. Here, I find anthropologist Peter Wade's work helpful because of the way that he complicates mestizaje. Wade elaborates on the lived experience of embodied mestizaje:

The very idea of mixture depends fundamentally on the idea not only of whiteness, but also of blackness and indigenusness. The idea of the mestizo nation needs the image of 'los negros' and 'los indios' (or, given the gendered nature of mestizaje, one might say, of 'las negras' and 'las indias'). The concept of mestizaje as an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion does recognise this to some extent, precisely in the possibility of inclusion, but it fails to recognise the dependence of the ideology on its excluded others (243).

In other words, the ideology of mestizaje relies on racial sameness and racial difference to give political meaning to mixture and a sense of peoplehood. In the cultural and ideological practices of mestizaje, the "excluded others" and the

*conquered* were not completely erased from the national narrative – and on a material level, were not eliminated from the affective and embodied structures of *mestiza/o* society. This continual presence is a testament to the cultural survival of subaltern and marginal populations and the set of practices that they engage in to negotiate the simultaneous experience of racial sameness and difference. From this view, the endurance of informal ethnoracial categories, terminologies, and expressions provide evidence on the ways that non-elite groups of women negotiate the contradictory history of *mestizaje*. The embodied aspect of *mestizaje* highlights the ways that aspects of “blood,” ancestry, and family play a central aspect of group identity and a sense of belonging.

These embodied markers of racial sameness and racial difference provide a window onto the ostensibly essentialist and biologicistic language of race and color that references hair, skin color, and other somatic embodied aspects of race. Considering the significance of this language recasts the mainstay of dominant versions of *mestizaje* and shifts the focus to non-elite racialized women and the ways they have “survived race” (Montalvo “Surviving Race”). Or more exactly, the practice of “color talk” or “race talk” provides a window onto the significant ways that Mexican women negotiate oppressive histories of racialization and the ways that they reconfigure and claim this language. Writing of the significance of “color talk”, Isar Godreau, asserts:

Such dismissal of everyday race-talk can deter paying attention to how people create, through language, the construction of mixed-race identities, or selective solidarities as they mark, configure, and re-configure different social postures, etiquettes of behavior, identities, or essentialized expressions of group membership, depending on the context of usage (19).

I continue this line of analysis by moving to Amalia's understanding of embodied mestizaje and her take on ancestry. Amalia is an energetic and vivacious woman born in North Carolina and raised in Wimauma, Florida. She earned her bachelor's degree in social work and is currently pursuing opening her own business. Amalia grew up as the youngest daughter of a single father, who often took her to the tomato fields as a way to encourage her to stay in school. Her father's intent worked but at the expense of a bodily trauma she endured caused by a work related accident. Despite this, Amalia maintains positive connections with her migrant labor past and maintains active relationships with current migrant workers in South County in her capacity as a school social worker. To illustrate her experience of racial embodiment and ancestry, I highlight the following exchange:

Ana: Have you ever used a term to describe your skin color?

*Amalia: No. Not that I can say 'Oh yo estoy mas prieta', (Oh I am darker) but I have noticed that my son looks like me. That he is darker, I just kind of say that to self-identify with my son. I guess that's more genetics, but my skin is genetic...*

Ana: How about your facial features?

*Amalia: Probably my brown eyes and my hair. Every time I think about this, I don't think of conversations I have, but I think of conversations I've had with others, My granddad was light skinned and had blue eyes, my grandma was expecting for me to have a light skinned, light eyed baby, because of my husband's DNA mixing with my ancestry. That didn't happen. Everyone was looking forward to having a light-skinned baby, they wanted to see my grandfather. But it didn't happen. Those are the conversations that we have. That my nose and my eyes are dominant in the kids; and my husband's hair and skin is dominant. I wonder, is it wanting to see my grandfather's features? Or wanting to see light skin and colored eyes?*

Again using the signposts of ancestry and embodiment, Amalia invokes the language of DNA to describe an instance of phenotypic disappointment. Here,

Amalia aptly captures the complex negotiation always taking place. She wonders at the end of her statement if the desire for the features of light skin and blue eyes is mediated by Euro-centrism or a desire to connect with her late grandfather. Amalia tests the social conventions of polite understandings of race and ancestry that eschew the language of blood and color. Her statement also tests public understandings of Mexican ethnoracial ancestry. From the outside, it may appear that Amalia's understanding of self and family is misguided by outdated anthropological constructs of race and color.

In a similar vein, Amalia's statement may seem as unbelievable as to the presence of European features in her family. Is it possible that Amalia is trying to advance her social status and by extension *adelantando la raza* (improving the race) by claiming a light skinned relative?<sup>74</sup> Amalia's dark skin and indigenous features conflict with the presence of European heritage in her blood. Certainly, colorism and white supremacy is always at work when Amalia and Cecilia address a form of racial-phenotypic disappointment.<sup>75</sup> Yet this complex process of negotiation cannot be neatly explained only through the lens of colorism and white supremacy.

Numerous studies have established the observed practice of colorism and the desire for European features among people of Mexican America (Montalvo 2001; Winders et al 2005; Moreno Figueroa, 2012). The acceptance of a hegemonic and idealized version of Mexican whiteness is prevalent throughout media representations

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<sup>74</sup>. In another context, Chicana film scholar Rosalinda Fregoso describes the practice of concealing Mexicana ancestry in favor of "Spanish" ancestry as a "fantasy heritage."

<sup>75</sup>. Cristina Sue defines this practice as expecting a particular "phenotypic outcome" within the family.

in and out of Mexico. What these important studies establish is the production and dissemination of hegemonic whiteness through the mass media and other avenues of racialized power. What is less known are the ways that non-elite (subaltern and marginalized) groups of people and more specifically, racialized women negotiate hegemonic whiteness and by extension hegemonic version of mestizaje.

Mexican women are not passive recipients of dominant racial ideology. I argue that both Cecilia and Amalia, members of a marginalized and racialized group negotiate and resist racial hegemony by invoking the embodied language of race and color. Most telling is that this language remains in spite of U.S. color-blindness and Mexican non-racialism that eschews questions of race, racism, and racialization. What we see in practice is a marginalized and subaltern consciousness that makes meaning of an oppressive system of racialized hierarchy. This practice is embedded within an ethnoracial form of cultural citizenship that retains the right to ethnoracial difference to provide a sense of belonging. As George Lipsitz demonstrates, “A strong and evocative tradition appealing to embodiment and ancestry has been an important form of self-defense for members of aggrieved communities” (21). Lipsitz elaborates this point:

What seem on the surface like essentialist appeals to embodiment and ancestry often turn out, on closer inspection, to be figurative ways of locating people in the present as the inheritors of historical traditions of struggle, suffering, sacrifice, and success, not as people with unmediated and unproblematic access to noises in the blood and echoes in the bone (22-23).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>. George Lipsitz draws his analysis from Carolyn Cooper’s reading of novelist’s Vic Reid’s writings on Griots in Jamaica. Griot knowledge emerges from a shared historical experience, “like an echo in the bone or a noise in the blood” (20).

In the passage that opened this chapter, Gloria Anzaldúa sheds light on the plurality of racial formations that mark lightness and darkness within her family structure. Many of Anzaldúa's writings addressed the embodied aspects and figurative meanings of race and racialization. In "La Prieta," Anzaldúa meditates on the ancestry and the "noises in the blood."

When I was born, Mamagrande Locha inspected my buttocks looking for the dark blotch, the sign of indio, or worse mulatto blood. My grandmother (Spanish, part German, the hint of royalty lying just beneath the surface of her fair skin, blue eyes, and the coil of her once blond hair) would brag that her family was the first to settle in the range country of south Texas (38).

In this extract, Anzaldúa further demonstrates the irreducible language and the multiple racial ideologies that undergird the complex history of Mexican mestizaje. Here, the markers of Indian-ness and mulatto "blood" are searched for on Anzaldúa's body. This marker of darkness is reminiscent of other racialist practices that shaped modern ideas of race and the body.<sup>77</sup> Mamagrande makes claim to a form of whiteness that permits access to land and citizenship rights. Her claim to Spanish and German ancestries operates from a mestizo logic that aspires to "absorb the Indian and African elements" (Vasconcelos). The "noises in the blood" allow for only a tenuous access to whiteness and its upward mobility given that Anzaldúa and her family lived in poverty as migrant farm workers. Anzaldúa's experience signals how marginalized people of Mexican America make claims to power through the naming practices entrenched in embodied and figurative meanings of blood and bone. These

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<sup>77</sup>. Diane Nelson describes this practice as looking for the "ultimate bodily proof" of race on the body. This marker on the body is also known the "Mongolian spot" (214).

naming practices also as operate as a way to name ancestors, claim history, and forge collective identities.

Using this line of reasoning Monica Russel y Rodriguez exemplifies this praxis of naming ancestors:

I, in my güera skin, was mistaken as white. Our antecedents were likely from Santa Clara, San Juan, Acoma and Spain por supuesto. In this mestizaje, we have African antepasados waiting to be named only some of my familia bears witness to these histories, although we all share them (“Confronting Anthropology's Silencing Praxis” 110).

These enunciations of acceptance and rejection play out on the large stage of Mexican mestizo nationalism and U.S. assimilationism. In spite of the official history of mestizaje that replays the narrative of unified subject-citizens under the sign of “mestizo,” the everyday articulations of racial difference-sameness unravel this historical process revealing the fictions of a unified and universal race-less populace. Most important, it reveals the fiction of whiteness. Returning to Cecilia and Amalia’s embodied testaments, I argue that they are listening to the “noises in the blood” to bear witness to an anomalous genealogy of hybridity, mixture, and relationality. In the uneven terrain of Mexican American racializations, the experience of an embodied mestizaje shapes the discursive practices of naming the multiracial ancestors of the past; disrupting the desire for whiteness and the widespread denigration of Indian-ness and Blackness. The ambivalent desire for whiteness is demonstrated in the tenuous embrace of European features and ancestry. In the following extract Cecilia demonstrates the role of whiteness in the embodied identification practices of marginalized Mexican women.

Cecilia describes herself as “güera pero no rubia” - the distinction between güera and rubia lie in the details. Cecilia explains:

*Las rubias son de los ojos azules y el pelo güero, y la skin. Todo combinado. Yo soy güera pero no rubia (Blonde women have blue eyes, blondish hair, and light skin. Everything combined. I am güera but not blonde).*

In Cecilia’s case, her dark(er) eye color and hair color excludes her from the status of *rubia*. In mainstream Mexican society, *rubias* are upheld as exotic beauties, particularly because they embody the trinity of Euro-centric features: blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. Popular *novelas* (soap operas) feature *rubias* with French, German, and British last names.

Let us consider the cultural work that the term *rubia* does in Puerto Rico to theorize how it is operating in Cecilia’s case. Lillian Guerra finds that the term *rubia* is used by Puerto Ricans to refer to anyone, although it is mostly used to describe attractive dark *mulatta* and black women (234). She links this discursive practice as a way to highlight Puerto Rican women’s’ racial Otherness. Guerra observes,

[C]alling a woman a “rubia” who clearly was not a blonde or even of dominant European ancestry did not actually avoid or neutralize the negative implications of her color/race. Rather, the remark emphasized her proximity to Otherness but declared it irrelevant as a signifier of her inequality, she would be accepted anyway (234).

Granted, *rubia* operates as both a descriptive and pragmatic discursive practice work to distinguish and appraise women. Wendy Roth finds that key difference between the two is that speakers can chose to use various color labels depending on context. For example, color is used as a descriptor but then is also used pragmatically to assign meanings of respect, dignity, and beauty. In Puerto Rico, calling a dark-skinned woman *rubia* can also be understood as “complimentary Othering.” Looked at from

Cecilia's case, her own awareness of falling outside the parameters of *rubia-ness* is reflects a practice of disidentifying with whiteness. In spite of the adulation of whiteness, Cecilia locates herself as *güera*, but aware that she does not meet the requirements of *rubia*. This form of identification *and* disidentification shows how whiteness is not a universal category, and not tied to one universal experience or racialized body (Winders et al 2005).

This further demonstrates the fictions and limits of Mexican whiteness as an aspired goal. I do not suggest that hegemonic whiteness does not shape the lives of working-class Mexican. My contention is that whiteness does not play a central role in their identities and self-imagining because they are *mujeres de color(es)* (women of colors). I now turn to the question of naming and assigning ethnoracial difference within the family setting. The intent of the overarching study is to examine the ways that the aspect of phenotypic difference and skin color are negotiated— framing this discussion through the lens of color.

### **Colorism and Color Ambivalence in the Mexican Ethnoracial Family**

“Don't go out in the sun, my mother would tell me when I wanted to play outside. If you get any darker, they'll mistake you for an Indian. And don't get dirt on your clothes. You don't want people to say you're a dirty Mexican.” – Gloria Anzaldúa

Always at work in studying Mexican racial formations is the accepted and far-reaching practice of colorism. Margaret Hunter observes, “Without a larger system of institutional racism, colorism based on skin tone would not exist. Colorism is part and parcel of racism and exists because of it” (7). Hunter's investigation of colorism among Mexican American and African American women reveals a shared practice of colorism in the United States. Her study provides a point to explore how colorism

survives inside and outside of institutional racism. In this case, I am interested in the migration of meaning from Mexico, a society that boasts non-racialism and by definition the non-existence of racism, to a race-conscious United States.

This migration of meaning is not a one-directional flow from Mexico to the United States. It is a process that must take into account two significant aspects. One, the native Mexican practices of colorism exist mostly outside of what we consider in the United States as institutional racism. Two, we must consider the shared role of colorism in the Mexican and U.S. contexts. A multi-level analysis of this migration of meaning shifts focus to a shared system of values that assigns negative meaning to dark skin, occupation, and social status. Tomás Almaguer observes, “The historical legacy and contemporary reworking of systems of white supremacy, both in the United States and the Latin American/Caribbean contexts, provide the common thread knitting together these historical relationships and contemporary migration processes (“At The Crossroads of Race” 207). Again, what is less known are the ways that non-elite racialized people negotiate the meanings and practices of colorism. As we will see, the negotiations of colorism within this group of Mexicanas are both critical and accepting of racial difference.

The Mexican version of racism enacted through everyday colorism, is rarely publically acknowledged but is kept alive by the mass media, everyday vernacular, and within the family structure. In October of 2012, a news story broke out revealing the material effects of colorism and by extension racism in Mexico (Gomez Licon “Case of blonde girl beggar renews debate over racism in Mexico”). A young blonde haired and blue-eyed girl was photographed panhandling at a busy intersection in

Guadalajara, Mexico. Officials immediately responded to the photo locating the child to ensure she was not a victim of kidnapping. The prompt response to a case of a blonde child in poverty came under criticism, as there is less public concern about darker-skinned children who live in the same abject poverty. Responses on various U.S. and Mexican blogs reflected a larger concern with the girl's physical appearance. A photo later surfaced on the Gawker news blog with the image of the frightened young girl. In essence, this occurrence urges us to look at the systemic contours of racism in Mexico and the racialist curiosity that mediates the shock and surprise of the possibility of a young *rubia* living in poverty.

Racism is not addressed or directly spoken about in Mexico but the language of class and culture is used as a proxy for race and racism (Sue 2009). In this sense, colorism is perceived, as an irritating vestige of the Spanish *casta* hierarchy but by definition is not understood as an organizing principle of society. Using this line of reasoning, anthropologist Marvin Harris argues that “without a clear method for distinguishing racial groups, systemic discrimination is not possible” (qtd in Villarreal 672).

The relationship between race and color marks one of the main paths of this investigation. The role of colorism in this context is embedded in both institutional and cultural forms of racism. As varied as the histories of Mexican and U.S. race-making are, these processes are inherently about the creation and maintenance of social boundaries. Wendy Roth asserts, “Color is a racialized physical attribute that is often used in Latin America in ways similar to how North Americans use race- to stratify and structure society and to value particular racialized bodies over others”

(58). The relationship between the fluid Mexican constructs of color and the more rigidly defined U.S. notions of race is one of demarcating the boundaries between groups. Angela P. Harris, writing on the relationship between color and race, asserts, “Color is haunted by race both the substitutability of color for race in the naturalization process, and also what it communicates about the human” (5). One way to examine the common thread of racism-colorism in the Mexican American context is to trace the significance of color.

Writing about colorism among Tejanas in South Texas, Sandra Garza writes, “Skin color allows an entry point from which to carry out a discussion about racialization as an historical process of power inequality that ranks difference by valuing whiteness and devaluing darkness” (2). Focus of attention on race-color illustrates how a continuum of color operates within the Mexican family structure and in everyday language. Using the family as metaphor for the nation, the acknowledgement and acceptance of variation of color within the family conveys the message of difference within the context of sameness. In other words, members of the same family may be different in terms of skin color but still belong to the same race. Widening this lens, the family unit becomes a vehicle for difference within a nation that insists on a unified non-racial subject. Stated differently, the site of the family is a central site of negotiation of Mexican racial sameness and racial difference. Again, this contention does not attempt to paint a neat picture of racial tolerance and non-racialism but does attempt to think through the ways that the history of embodied *mestizaje* is played out within the family structure. Consider Micaela’s account about the relationship between colorism and racism:

*I don't think it's denial, we are not even aware of how skin color effects us. We are so blindsided about what we are doing, I hear my cuñadas (sisters-in-law) telling my nieces "no te vayas para el sol porque te vas a poner prieta!" (Don't go out into the sun, you will get dark!) That's how I know they mean it's bad because its something you don't want to be!" It really annoys me! We need to get away from that mentality. And they look at me like I am crazy! "My daughter is not going in the sun!" If she is shade darker will it mean something?*

*I don't think they know how racial it its... they are looking at me like I am crazy because they are trying to take care of their babies... My niece is dating a black man, my family disapprove, and say stuff like "Ay pero un negro! Como se mira con un negro?" (But with a black guy? How does she look with a black guy?) Basically saying that she is too pretty to be with a black person. In our family, one of my nephews is the darkest member of our family, how would you feel if someone told him that he is dark and ugly and Mexican. "No pero mi niño esta bien bonito" (No but my baby is lovely.) Yeah because he is us. Tenemos que dejar ese pensamiento. (We need to leave that thinking behind) Beauty is in many forms and shades of color. How in the hell does my family still think this way? I don't know if it's ignorance or total lack of awareness...*

Micaela vividly demonstrates her frustration with her family's engagement with colorism and the boundaries that they entrench between us/them. In this context, the racial significant other is embodied and represented by her niece's African American boyfriend. Micaela's account helps us examine the tensions that exist between Mexicana ethnoracial sameness and difference. Specifically, Micaela helps us think through the tensions between colorism, everyday racisms, and, micro advancements of *la raza*. In his discussion of everyday micro aggressions, Frank Montalvo observes the following:

Whispers, innuendoes, off-hand and overheard comments, sudden silences, changing the subject, code words, slips of the tongue, and hiding dark-skinned relatives from public view (preferably in the kitchen) characterize some of the informal ways skin color awareness is gained and preference conveyed" ("Surviving Race" 32).

I also find the writings of Monica Moreno Figueroa useful here, because of the ways that she engages the everyday forms of racism activated through Mexican

mestizaje (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012). Writing about the logics of mestizaje, Moreno Figueroa asserts,

What a racist logic does is to disconnect the personal experience of racism from the broader social context that reproduces it and also to erase the links with its historical process of formation. In this way, the racist logic distributes the intensity of racism to become bearable and quotidian. When operating through such logic, racism loses its name and its referents, racism is distributed in everyday life becoming “just how things are” (“Distributed Intensities” 395).

The dominance of Mexican national mestizaje systematically erases race and racism from public debate; however, the material effects and affect(s) are ubiquitous. The everydayness and the cultural aspects of Mexican racism render it invisible. It seems obvious to Micaela’s relatives that they should protect their daughters from the stigma of racialization (dark skin) and its association with migrant stoop labor and low social status. Micaela’s critique leads her to ask if it matters if her nieces are a shade darker than the preferred color. Her intervention demonstrates the way that dominant racial ideology is adopted by marginalized groups of women. In this case, all of the study’s participants and most of the women of Mexican descent of this area arrived as migrant farm workers. For the daughters born in the United States, many worked alongside their parents in the fields and orchards, faced the stigma of Mexican racialization in school and in their workplaces. Hence, it is possible that a gradation of darkness may not make a difference, but to Micaela’s relatives, it may be worth the effort to attempt to lighten up a bit (*blanqueamiento*) especially when it is justified as protecting their daughters.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>. As a teenager, it became clear to me that protecting your face from the harsh sun was important, particularly for women. I gained this insight from the times I helped my parents in the tomato and

Let us continue to examine the issue of colorism by considering Beatriz's understanding of the matter.

*I was never racist, but I never wanted to be dark, I wanted to be güerita, that color where people can tell that you are some kind of Spanish, that nice golden color. I didn't want to be nasty black... My son is dark dark, I guess that's why I don't look at it the same anymore, growing up I thought that color was ugly, I didn't want to be like that. Now, I see him and I don't think it's ugly, that's his color.*

To emphasize her son's dark skin color, Beatriz uses a "reduplicative logic" to describe him as "dark dark" (Lewis 315). At a point in her life, dark(er) skin color was undesirable; now as a mother her views have shifted to accept her son's skin color. In essence, Beatriz's son permits her to interrogate the racism that mediates these distinctions. At the same time, this passage illuminates the multi-dimensional affective and discursive contours of racism-colorism. Ana Ramos-Zayas asserts, "The vocabulary around 'racism' creates a discourse of discrimination and oppression, but generally hides the systemic and ideological everyday mechanisms that make racial oppression possible and efficient" (88). Here, I argue that Beatriz's negotiations of race and color reveal the everydayness of the racism.

Widening the lens of reduplicated logics, Sylvia provides us more context to consider the significance of racism in these discursive practices:

*I think Negra is too harsh, so I say Moreno or morena. Like "la morena on the second floor." Morenos when I was younger, it was like a light skinned Mexican y los Negros eran negros (the blacks were black). You grow up learning that blacks*

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cucumber fields during spring and summer breaks. I was especially intrigued by the elaborate ways that a group light-skinned women from my neighborhood protected their faces and beauty with bandanas and hats.

*are black, purple, black. Then I realized that negro was too harsh, and moreno was a nicer term.*

The structure and practice of racism are revealed in Sylvia statement-uncovering what David Theo Goldberg identifies as the “anatomy of racism.” Sylvia reminds us that the raw material of racialization is inscribed on the body- dark skin color, signified by dark colors of black and purple. Her statement demonstrates the inner-workings of U.S. and Mexican racial ideologies that render dark bodies as inferior and racially *different*. At the same time, *moreno*, for Sylvia at one time, also included light-skinned Mexicans, but in the context of migration and movement, it now is the terrain of U.S. blackness. Working from Sylvia’s statement referencing the “*morena* on the second floor,” David Theo Goldberg further sheds light on the historical structures of anti-black racism.

Consequently, although the expression of ‘There’s a *black* woman standing over there’ seems innocuous enough in a narrow sense, it reproduces on a structural level the discursive conditions for racist expression to be perpetuated. At the same time, it must be this expression may be an empathetic affirmation in the most positive, non-valorizing sense of the person’s identity as both black and woman. Yet a racialized category like ‘black’ bears with any use the history of its significations, the irrepressible traces of its repressive modes” (“The Semantics of Race” 565).

Now, I turn to the next section to discuss the ambiguous *morena* term and its significance in Mexicana ethnoracial identity practices.

### **Mexican Morenas: Amalgamated Identities**

At times it is unclear where the boundaries between dark and *too* dark lie, particularly because of the ambiguity of Mexicana racial identifications and categories. Take for instance Moreno Figueroa’s definition of *morena* and *güera*:

“Morena is an adjective that refers to somebody with ‘brown’ or dark skin color in comparison to others – güera is an adjective that refers to somebody considered to be whiter and/or blonder and/or having fairer or lighter skin color in comparison to others” (“Distributed Intensities” 400). These definitions reveal the contextual and comparative aspect of these informal color labels. Comparisons operate as a way to distinguish, appraise, and describe skin color and other aspects of racial embodiment.

This practice of assigning color labels to each other is complicated by the larger culture of racism-colorism that is unchallenged and unrecognized. To add to the ambiguity of this practice, color comparisons and appraisals are sometimes used as ways of “equalizing” (Guerra 233). To show this, I share Micaela’s experience:

*I had a customer come in this morning and she said, “le dije a mi morena,” (referring to her daughter “I told my morena”) then she started telling me about why she calls her daughter morena de cariño (affectionally calls her daughter morena). Dice no esta morena, esta de tú color. (She said she is not morena, she is your color). She looked at me, I thought it was interesting that she referenced my skin color even though the woman was the same color as me! Why didn’t she just reference herself? Does she not know that we are the same color? She was trying to tell me that I was light like her daughter... she even showed me pictures of her!*

The textual density of Micaela’s exchange with her customer supports Puerto Rican anthropologist Isar Godreu’s observation that “slippery semantics are consistently inconsistent” (26). Slippery semantics is defined as “... [a] recurrent linguistic inconsistency in racial identification processes that takes place when people use different systems or logical grids of racial classification during a single conversation” (Godreu 7). In this instance, Mica is unclear why the customer refers to her skin color in comparison to her morena daughter. One reading of this example may lead us to the familiar conclusion of *blanqueamiento*, the cultural and ideological practice of whitening. From one moment to the next, Micaela’s customer lightens her

daughter from *morena* to match Micaela's light(er) complexion. It is possible that the customer felt compelled to explain her affectionate use of *morena* to ensure that she was not using it in a derogatory manner. Remarkably, the daughter's photograph was used as visual evidence of her skin color to make sure Micaela was convinced of her lightness. This familiar reading through the lens of *blanqueamiento* bears more analysis.

In the uneven process of *blanqueamiento* and nationalized *mestizaje*, not all Mexicans practiced and observed this cultural practice nor were they invested in upholding hegemonic racist ideologies and values (Cope 1994). The national project of Mexican *mestizaje* allowed for a sense of we-ness but inherently built into the national narrative the exclusion of racialized Others. The value placed on whiteness is not universal and not completely embraced as an accepted reality. Based on these first-hand accounts, the desire for whiteness is fragmented, incomplete, and ambivalent. The shifting of the term *morena* reflects a larger move to create racial solidarity among a group of women that vary in skin color and facial features, particularly women who belong to the same class background. The variations of *morena* embedded in Micaela's account reveal the significance of ambiguity, approximation and relationality of Mexicana ethnoracial identities. Ginetta Candalarío observes, "Ambiguity is invoked in the first place because of the various and competing ideological codes that frame blackness, whiteness, and indigeneity in the Americas" (202). In this respect, Mexican ethnoracial ambiguity operates as a way to negotiate the various groups of people that came into contact through conquest, conflict, alliance, exchange, and proximity. Despite the official accounts of

the unified and universalized *mestiza/o* histories, the ambiguous and flexible location of *morena* sheds light on the important ways that study participants resist dominant racial ideologies and recount their own diverse ethnoracial histories.

Sociologist Edward Telles maintains that the *morena/o* category is too ambiguous to be analytically useful in understanding the role it plays in mediating social relations of power (1995). However, Micaela offers evidence on the ways that *morena* is a central site of negotiation of Mexican constructs of blackness, whiteness, and Indianness. Her interaction with the customer reflects the limits of the desire for lightness or whiteness. It also reflects the tightly wound systems of racism and nationalism that permit Micaela to interpret this gesture as a way for the customer to lighten up her daughter. In turn, the customer responds to include Micaela in the conversation as one of “us.” This double-move of inclusion and exclusion captures the contradictions and affinities embedded in the discursive and embodied practices of Mexicana ethnoracial “color talk” (Sue 2009).

In this study, I argue that the term *morena* works as an inclusive ethnoracial middle ground that permits Micaela’s customer to forge a mutual Mexican-ness with her based on the expansion of the *morena* color to include everyone in the conversation Mexican; and by extension in proximity to a shared we-ness that is represented by this ethnoracial location. This idealized racial middle ground is also observed among Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (Candelario 2007; Duany *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*). I also found that women engage with this racial middle ground in two ways. First, it allowed these women to identify with their children who have dark(er) skin. Secondly, the term *morena* became a relational space for light

skinned Mexican women to identify with darker skinned Mexican women (as Micaela previously shared). In light of this evidence, I continue to unpack the significance of this race-color embodied location (*morena*) as a way to acknowledge a subjugated triracial Mexican mestizaje, particularly the neglected overlap of Indian-ness and Blackness.

Following the lead of Laura Lewis's recent ethnographic study in which *morena* is theorized as an embodied testament to Mexican triracial mestizaje (2012). I carry over her theorizations of *moreno-ness* into the Central Florida context to think of the translocal implications of the use of the term *morena* among a group of mestizo Mexican women. Unlike Lewis, participants in my study do not make identity claims to either Indian-ness or Blackness—yet the term *morena* remains and is actively engaged with them in everyday language and expression.

Symbolic and embodied Mexicana blackness and Indian-ness is gleaned from the interviews of participants of this study. In the Tampa region where Mexicans are the third largest Latino ethnoracial group, the Mexican color category, *morena* (brown skinned) shifts as a label that describes African Americans and Latinos of African descent. In other instances, *morena* is used as a Mexican idealized racial middle ground that bends and shifts to accommodate a range of skin colors and tones symbolically located in between a white and black color line. This major finding complicates contemporary theories that presume that Mexican and Latin American racial ideologies reject and eliminate black and white polarizations. I attempt to address the presence of this polarization by examining the instances in which they interface with a U.S. binary and Mexican continuum of color.

## Mexican Black-White Polarizations

Findings discussed here complicate contemporary theories that presume that Mexican and Latin American racial ideologies reject and eliminate black and white polarizations. Not only do white and black polarizations operate in this case but evidence suggests that Mexico has its own version of this polarization. For that reason we are not ready to move “beyond” black and white polarizations but in fact we must consider it to take into account the local and translocal versions of this polarization. Let us consider this polarization more in depth through the following conversation:

*Ana: What color do you think you are?*

*Mireya: morena clara. Right? Porque no soy blanca. Soy morena, pero morena mas clara. (I am not blanca, I am morena, but morena clara).*

*Ana: Where did you learn this term?*

*Mireya: De Mexico, es una forma de describir los colores, yo creo que yo soy morena clara, maybe. Right? (From Mexico, it's a way to describe the color, I think I am morena clara, maybe. Right?)*

*Mireya: Quizas el color tiene mucho que ver para toda la gente?(Maybe color means a lot to people?)*

*Ana: Usted que piensa?(What do you think?)*

*Mireya: Yo creo que si porque muchos me han dicho que yo no me veo Mexicana por “Yo no creo que tu eres Mexicana” que los “los Mexicanos estan mas morenos que tu” Para otra gente yo creo que es muy definitivo, como se define una persona, es mas por el color.. Yo no soy blanca ni rubia, ni nada de eso...(I think so because many have told me that I don't look Mexican and that they do not believe that I am Mexican 'because the other Mexicans are darker than you.' For others I think color is more definitive, how they define a person, its more based on skin color. I am not blanca, and not rubia, or anything like that)'*

*Mireya: Eso se da en las familias, y lo repetimos muy sigido con los niños, y no lo debemos de hacer... Todos sin difeneciar a ninguno, siempre nos refermeos al niño chiquito que esta mas blanco, porque nos llama tanta la attention constantemente?,*

*porque el esta blanco? Porque el esta asi? (We see that in the families, and we repeat it frequently with the children, and we shouldn't do that. We shouldn't make a distinction, we always refer to the youngest child and we notice that he is more blanco, why does that call our attention constantly? Why is he blanco? Why is he like that?)*

*Mireya: A mi hermano les decian el güero, el esta mas blanco que yo, tiene pecas, el esta el color de mi mama. Crecemos con ese imagen del color, tu tio esta muy moreno, tiene el pelo chino como afro Americano, todos le decian prieto, prieto es negro. Prieto es negro porque estaba muy moreno, mucho mas moreno- todos los demas estaban moreno, pero el estaba muy moreno. Eso se da en tu propia familia, como tu creces. Yo estaba entra la mitad, ni blanca ni morena. (They called my brother el guero, he is more blanco than me, he has freckles and he is my mother's color. We grew up with these images of color, your uncle is very Moreno, he has curly hair like African American [hair], everybody calls him prieto, prieto is negro. Prieto is negro because he is very Moreno. We see that in the family, in how you grow up. I was in the middle, not blanca not morena.)*

*Mireya: No es ninguna distincion, pero se dicen que un esta mas blanca or mas morena. (It's not a distinction, but it is said if someone is more blanca or more morena).*

*Mireya: Nunca lo creido, que hay una diferencia, simplemente se usan para describir los colores. Simplemente que uno estaba mas blanco or mas moreno. Jamas se usa discriminativo. (I have never believed it, that there is a difference, it is simply used to describe the colors. Simply if one is more blanco or more Moreno. It is never used in a discriminatory way. )*

*Ana: Prieto es negro? (Prieto is negro?)*

*Mireya: En Mexico no se acostumbra decir negro or negra, se usa mas aqui. Hasta de carino se usa mi prieto o mi prieta. (In Mexico, it is not customary to say negro or negra, it is used more here. Sometimes it is used as a term of affection, as my preito or my prieta)*

*Mireya: Jamas me he puesto pensar o analizarlo. Es de nuestros antepasados, eso nunca fue tema de discusion entre la familia. Siempre existia que ella saco los ojos y el color de quien sabe quien... (I have never thought about it. It's from our ancestors, we never talked about it in our family. I would always that so and so got her colored eyes from who knows who...)*

Taken as whole, we can see that Mireya's understanding of her skin color is mediated by two racial schemas in which *morena* operates as a relational and

comparative social location unraveling the logic and practice of *mestizaje*. Immediately, her use of the label *morena clara* (lighter *morena* in comparison to dark-er *morena*) indicates an approximation in relation to me and her own family members. In this process of approximation, she seeks confirmation of her skin color in relation to mine- as she describes herself as *morena clara*-ending her statement as a question. Again, the discursive practices of descriptive and pragmatic assignment of meaning is operative (Roth 2012). Mireya notes that Mexican color categories are descriptive at the same time she deploys *morena clara* pragmatically to approximate her coloring in relation to me and later her family members, locating herself as an “in-between” color.

Mireya responds to “complimentary Othering” (*you don’t look Mexican*) by approximating and aligning herself with the *morena* label. She also disidentifies with a form of whiteness as she does not consider herself to be *güera* or *blanca*. When describing her dark(er) brother, the grids of darkness intersect when she describes her brother’s hair texture. They also intersect when she briefly uses the term *prieto* and *negro* interchangeably, but then moves to make a distinction between the two terms, reflecting the discursive foreclosure of blackness in Mexico. To best capture the “ideological code switching” taking place in this conversation, the concept of “slippery semantics” is again useful. Writing about the multiple frames of reference that mark race and skin color, Isar Godreau, asserts:

Such grids can include the use of multiple racial terms to describe the same individual, the consistent use of binary black/white terminology, or the use of the same racial term to describe different “types of phenotypes” during a single narrative event (4).

Here, Mireya marks the path of various frames of references, darkness and lightness within her family structure. She uses Mexican and U.S. codes of race-color to describe and approximate her own skin color in relation to the rest of her family members. Being in the “middle”, in this case, of a continuum and a binary reflects the racial schemes that structure complimentary Othering, pragmatic and descriptive assignments, and disidentification with whiteness. She ends her statement in recognizing these naming practices as a way to recall and recognize her ancestry. These naming practices suggest an alternative reading of the deployments of race-color. It suggests that the social location of *morena* works as a way to approximate and relate to Mexicans of different skin colors, challenging the hegemonic project of *blanqueamiento*. Although, this practice is also mediated by various forms of racism, this anomalous practice of ancestry and belonging demonstrates the continual unraveling of whiteness and mestizo-ness.

Francisca, born in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, holds similar views about color and in-betweenness:

*Ana: Que color usted cree que es? (What color do you think you are?)*

*Francisca: “Aperlada, Mi mama tambien dicia, yo aperlada, ni morena ni güera, tambien es otro, es muy usado en Mexico, es el color de las perlas, no el blanco pero no es negro...(Aperlada, mi mom would say that too, I am aperlada, not morena not güera, this is another term that is used in Mexico, it's the color of pearls, it's not blanco but it's not negro).*

Again the literature about Hispanic Caribbean racial formations is instructive here (Roth 2012). Wendy Roth finds that her study participants use the colloquial expression “*mancha de plantano*” (plantain stain) to identify intermediate categories between black and white social locations. The *mancha de platano* also operates as a

discursive and embodied way to describe darker skin and African Ancestry in Puerto Rico (Roth 2012).<sup>79</sup> This Puerto Rican colloquial expression works in a similar way to Francisca and Mireya's descriptive and pragmatic use of *aperlada* and *morena clara*. Taking into consideration the multiple codes of whiteness and blackness overlaid within a scheme of Mexican intermediate categories, Mireya and Francisca suggest a transgressive practice of disidentification with whiteness and identification with darkness. At the same time the familiar codes of anti-Mexican, anti-Indian, and anti-Black racisms may mediate what some may consider to be the formation of "off white" categories that may be in proximity to a form of whiteness. However, what we glean from Mireya and Francisca are the ways that black and white polarizations operate within Mexican ethnoracial schemes.

Let's continue to unpack the implications of this major finding on several levels. First, the presence of a Mexican black and white color line challenges the common assumption that only the United States creates and observes such a process. Second, it disrupts the drawing of disciplinary boundaries of the studies of race-color in Afro-Latin and Indo-Hispanic America. For too long, these boundaries have assumed their discrete formations and treated these communities as hermetically sealed. At times, investigations (on both sides of the border) of these seemingly distinct racial formations rely on "looking" for "Blacks" and "Indians" based on sight specific phenotypic evidence. A vivid example of this type of visual project is found in Henry Louis Gates's recent documentary series *Black in Latin America*

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<sup>79</sup>. "I'm not blanca-blanca. I'm also not African American, negra color. I'm well plantain" (study participant qtd in Roth 36).

(2011) in which he actively “looks” for a “phenotypically satisfying” blackness in Mexico. In studying the “African Presence” in Mexico, both scholars and public audiences struggle to make sense of blackness because of the bifurcated models of identity that rely on the “visual evidence” of race. What Mexico and other societies that are exclusively studied as mestizo populations demonstrate are the systemic ways that the overlap of blackness and Indianness has been erased from public memory and discourse.

In fact, black and white polarizations are less likely to be acknowledged in Mexico because of the repression of public racial discourse, particularly the erasure of African ancestry from Mexican history. Mexico has not collected racial data since the census of 1850, therefore the primary vocabulary used to define Mexico’s population is situated within paradigms of ethnicity, culture, and class (Sue 2009). Inasmuch the semantics of race and color circulate outside the auspices of the state and the most recognized “colorline” in Mexico is the divide between mestizos and Indigenas (Villarreal 2010). Mexican black and white polarizations reveal both a refusal to address race-color and a neglected Spanish-Indian-African history in Mexico. In short, this reflects the repressed history of “entwining blackness and Indianness” (Lewis 6).

In a place such as Mexico, where institutionalized racism did not take shape as it did in the United States, race and the lived experience of racism depended on what you looked like, the clothing you wore, the language you spoke, where you lived and your social affiliations. The multiple valences that race took shape in is often used as an evidence of the absence of race and racism in Mexico. Prevailing theories of

“cultural race” and “social race” argue that they are not accompanied by the familiar codes of racism and discriminatory practices. In part due to the lack of institutionalized racism, the loosely policed white and black color line in Mexico was not as sharply defined and regulated as it was in the United States. In the U.S., Jim Crow and other forms of physical racial violence maintained the boundaries of blackness and whiteness. However, the lack of institutional racism in Mexico does not mean racism is not systemic.

Unlike Nicholas De Genova’s conclusions from his ethnographic work in Chicago, I also find that the term *morena/o* retains its nuanced Mexican meaning and is also used to reference African Americans and Afro Latinos. It does not become a “rigid generic racial category” but retains its flexibility and ambiguity. (De Genova *Working the Boundaries* 196) The multipurpose use of *morena* is demonstrated in the way that it is assigned thinly veiled racist meanings and also interpreted as a broad and relational Mexican racial middle ground.

For example, Romana shares,

*Morena is a nice brown person; morena means brown like my mom or Che Che or Marisol... I don't know how we got that term. I don't know the history, I think when we say moreno is to not necessarily say that you are completely black so let me make sure I have a word to identify negro to really say that... they want to make sure they have something. We are not going to beat around the bush... prieto is another middle word it is almost a derogatory word. Moreno is descriptive, but prieto is like ugly and prieto. We use them to identify people and place them and categorize them, and it's a whole hierarchy thing... we have to do it, there has to be a category and a way to label and identify them.*

The literature on Puerto Rican informal racial terminologies is helpful. Social scientists Mérida Rúa and Irene Lopez identify specific moments in which Puerto Rican women invoke informal ethnoracial categories such as *prieta*, *moja*, *India*, and

*negra*. These responses reference phenotype, skin color, and hair texture (*pelo bueno* y *pelo malo*; good and bad hair), remnants of “Anglo-American and Spanish colonial governmentality” (Saldaña-Portillo 506). Puerto Rican women also idealize certain “Indian” and “white” features, revealing a complex relationship to Puerto Rican whiteness and blackness, although in comparison Mexicanas symbolically embrace Indigeneity as emblems of history and authenticity (Rodriguez-Morazzani 1998). There is a general disdain for indigenous features and all things associated with Indian-ness, but it shapes a different engagement with Indian-ness. Monica Morena Figueroa points out that “Those who locate themselves as Mexicans have learned to see and praise *indigena* peoples as an essential and vital part of the national culture and landscape, giving ‘sense’ and depth to Mexican history, but they do not seem to have any desire to ‘look’ like them” (“Distributed Intensities” 393). These comparisons shed light on the shared history of “Anglo-American and Spanish colonial governmentality” and the lexicons of race and color that emerge from these shared conditions of mixed ancestry. Flexible and fluid ethnoracial categories and nomenclatures rest on the site of ambiguity and the ideological need for multiple categories.

Returning to Romana’s understanding of the terms *morena* and *prieta* we see that she understands these terms as ways to make color comparisons and appraisals. She uses the words “nice” and “pretty” to describe *morena*, and “ugly” to define the term *prieto*. Romana reflects on the ideological need for the categorization and the identification of color difference within the context of social hierarchy. In this example, we can clearly establish a preference for a “pretty” *morena* color in

comparison to the denigrated and unenviable darker color of *prieto*.<sup>80</sup> Romana's statement reflects the cross societal understandings of colorism that associates dark skin with ugliness, dirt, and undesirability (Garza 2010). The following interview excerpts offer additional evidence on the practice of recognizing the darkest member of the family and labeling her/him the appellation of *morena*, *prieta*, or *negra*.

*Romana: Mi tia, ella tenia una muchacha morenita, le decia "ay mi preitita". Como ella era la unica morena entre todos sus hermanas. (My aunt had a dark skinned daughter, she would call her Romana: "My prietita." Because she was the darkest among her sisters).*

*Marisol: My tia's husband is pretty dark, and all her kids came out light, the third kid came out the darkest, and he is around your skin color, and they call him "mi negrito" because he was the darkest in his family even though he is still around the lightest in our family. Even my mom, she is pretty light, because she was the darkest in her family, they would make fun of her. Maybe that's why she has some issues with that, she's lighter than me even on my light day!*

Immediately, we see the issue of family affection play out in these naming practices. Affection intertwines with colorism reflecting the ambivalent history of Mexican *mestizaje*. Romana reminds us that *prieto* is a derogatory word but at the same time its diminutive form *prietita/o* and its approximation *negrita/o* is used as terms of affection. In that sense, *morena* and *morenita* also blend into these other labels that describe dark(er) skin placing it in proximity a Mexican form of blackness. Indeed, the question of approximation emerges from Marisol's account of labeling and colorism. She reveals that her own understanding of her coloring is dependent on her mother's skin color and most importantly the variation depending on the season

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<sup>80</sup>. In a 2010 newspaper interview Latina-Tejana-Chicana celebrity Eva Longoria, remarked, "I have three sisters who are light skinned with light eyes and light hair, but I'm dark and was born with a full head of black hair. So I used to be called 'la prieta fea,' which is Spanish for the 'ugly dark one.'"

of the year. Marisol remarks that “she is lighter than me even on my light day!” demonstrates her inner understanding that the practice of color distinctions in her family is largely dependent on context and comparison to others.

In a similar vein, Griselda shares a story about her father, who was born in Urireo, Guanajuato.

*My dad is considered the darkest person in his family, de cariño le decian prietito, compared to his siblings. I would think to myself, I wouldn't consider my dad prieto! But compared to his siblings he was darker.*

Griselda's interpretation reflects what sociologist Andres Villarreal describes as “extreme ambiguity” (2010). In part due to the contextual and relational aspect of color designations within the family; Sarah England helps explain this continuum,

This [color variation] gives rise to a number of color categories that are not racial in the sense of presuming distinct boundaries of biological belonging or even ethnic in associating them with particular cultural and linguistic attributes, but rather are subjective evaluations of phenotype such that even siblings of the same parents may be classified differently along the continuum” (198).

Taken together, Romana, Marisol, and Griselda's interpretations of color distinctions and designations reveal the role of ambiguity in Mexican race-color label of *morena*. The flexibility of the ambiguous racial middle ground represented by the *morena* label permits Mexican women to form cross-color solidarities with each other. At the same time, the familiar codes of racism are embedded in these alliances and strategies reflecting the colonial and present-day racisms that structure everyday life and language. In explaining, the logics that undergird these practices, Monica Moreno Figueroa remarks, “Mestizaje logics are strategies of racial differentiation that permeate Mexican social life” (“Linda Morenita” 171). What is uncovered here

are the strategies of racial differentiation that non-elite marginalized Mexican women engage with to make meaning of ancestry and belonging. The negotiation of Mexican amalgamated racial identities is gleaned from the ways that color and racial embodiments are spoken about. The everyday language of race and color that Mexican women invoke reflect the unresolved tensions of Mexican national *mestizaje* and U.S. assimilationism that have worked to consolidate ethnoracial diversity and complexity.

## Conclusion: 21<sup>st</sup> Century MeXicana Color lines

*The geographical segmentation that had characterized the experiences of many Latinos in the United States- Chicanos in California and the Southwest, Puerto Ricans in New York, and Cuban Americans in Miami-serves no longer as a geocultural gauge of the connection between national identities, region, and place. -  
Frances Aparacio*

Mexican women living and working in the southern portion of Hillsborough County, Florida reflect Frances Aparacio's observation about the destabilization of prevailing understandings of *Latinidad* and *Mexicanidad*. This study, situated in a new site of Mexican im/migration reflects these new migration patterns and the culturally mediated understandings of race and color in this region. These Mexicana voices and experiences highlighted here demonstrate the new and old ways that race-color is defined, negotiated, and represented. I argue that race is articulated through U.S. and Mexican racial schemes that intersect on what I present here as *Mexicana Color lines*, a framework that centers the everyday *ethnoracial moments* of Mexican women residing in South County.

This intersectional framework, *Mexicana Color lines*, offers us a way to theorize the cultural understandings of race-color and the visual vocabularies that mediate Mexican ethnoracial colloquial and expressions. In this final discussion, I summarize key arguments and close with broad observations concerning the significance of this study and future research directions. My approach, *Mexicana Color lines*, locates the *ethnoracial moments* of study participants at the center of this analysis, that center race as a core category. These *ethnoracial moments* reveal the core of racialization that focus on the body and other markers of race, that "phenotype" the women of the study as racial Others and racial Suspects. These

visual practices deny Mexican women inclusion in this community and freedom from the everyday indignities of racism. At the same time, study participants engage in descriptive and pragmatic discursive practices that describe, identify, appraise, and compare skin color, hair color, and eye color. Both descriptive and pragmatic naming practices reflect the ongoing, incomplete, and unresolved tensions undergirded by the intersection of hegemonic racisms and community mediated understandings of race and color.

Following participants' accounts, I traced a nuanced reading of the overlap of institutional and cultural mediated understandings of race and color, dialogically produced through the interaction of U.S. state defined racial categorizations and Mexican collective cultural understandings of race-color. This intersection mediates a complex repertoire of identification and disidentification practices that situate study participants as Mexican, non-white and *mujeres de colores* (women of colors). In the agricultural, rural and Mexican space of South County, study participants experience and endure the everyday racializations that position them as outsiders and unwanted "impossible subjects" (Ngai 5).

Foregrounding my approach, *Mexicana Color lines*, redirects our attention to color as a category of analysis. For this population of rural Mexican women, who are non-white and non-black, it is imperative to study the ways that color and race are negotiated. This framework, allows for a nuanced reading of race, color, and gender that provides important insight on the role of ambiguity, in-betweenness, and *morena-ness*.

The system of signification that inscribes inferior and racialized meanings with Mexican Indianness travel with study participants, overlapping with U.S. anti-Mexican racism. As a result of this re-racialization process, study participants learn to disidentify with Chicanas and Chicanos as a strategy to claim dignity, upward mobility, and retain an intact Mexican cultural and linguistic identity. The endurance of *Mexicanidad* (Mexicaness) in South County is reflective of the influence of the social status as former migrant labors and a resistance to racial stereotyping, or to be more specific *phenotyping*. Mexicanidad is claimed as a primary site of identification regardless of generation, place of birth, and documentation status. Echoing Patricia Zavella's observations, this cross-generational trend is demonstrative of a transnational Mexican subjectivity that transpires under harsh social conditions of exclusion (2011).

This suggests the pernicious effects and affects of anti-Indian and anti-Mexican racisms. These racisms transpire from both U.S. and Mexican histories of the racial oppression of Native and Mexican communities that subjugated them based on their presumed racial inferiority. Paradoxically, the machinery of race-making and race-management identified Mexicans as Indians and Indians as Mexicans, relegating both communities as racially Authentic (stand in for racial purity) and racially Suspect (stand in for racially mixed). This awareness of the core process of racialization, informs women's understandings of *lo indio* (characteristics associated with Indianness) represented by a far-reaching system of significations such as dark skin, weather-beaten skin, and rural origins. What remains under analyzed in this

study is the relationship between mestiza women and Indigenous women living in South County.

For study participants, maintaining strong cultural and linguistic ties to Mexico operates as a way to circumvent full assimilation into dominant white society. However, under articulated here is the relationship between a system of Indian significations and contemporary Indigenous experiences and collective identity formations. This is due to the fractured and loosely formed alliances in the area among Mexican migrants, Chicanas and Chicanos, and Mexican Indigenous communities.

Following the line of thinking introduced in “Latino Florida: Race and Location,” we learned of the ways that study participants negotiated phenotyping and women’s daily interrogations that inquired into their ancestries, and very much in line with phenotyping, their racial make-up. The practice of determining racial status is strongly influenced by older models of representation that center the body as ultimate proof of racial origin and racial difference. Official practices of race-making and race-management undergirded by large-scale state projects such as the U.S. Census influence the role of the visual evidence of race in the everyday lives of study participants. At the same time, the U.S. Census is treated as an irritating part of living in the United States, and some choose to not fill out the Census at all.

What is instructive in chapter five, “Mexicana Colorlines: Theorizing Multiple Cultures of Race and Color,” are the ways that women made meaning of U.S. Census categories and how their culturally mediated understandings of race and color informed the ways they reconfigured these official categories for their own

advantage. Although tenuous at best, some participants explained in detail the appeal of checking the white category on the Census. They shared with us the informal education they gained about their fragile whiteness from family members, and most strikingly, from law enforcement officials. Mexican temporary whiteness is indicative of a history of the state's ambivalence about Mexicans' mixed race ancestries.

From the vantage point of study participants, their choice to align themselves with official whiteness is informed by a strong awareness of the role of classification in their lives. They choose whiteness as the most neutral, viable, and stable category that may provide access to job opportunities and freedom from racial scrutiny. Similar views are expressed about the "Other" category on the Census form. This category carried the stigma of undefinability and instability. Furthermore, their understandings of blackness and its official definition on the Census is also mediated by word of mouth communication in which they learn that it is in relationship to both U.S. and Hispanic constructs of blackness. This education is gained from exchanges with Afro-Latinos in which they learn that Mexicans fall in between a binary and a continuum of color.

What is also instructive in chapter five are the ways that study participants locate themselves within U.S. and Mexican frames of whiteness demonstrative through the overlap of the U.S. white category and the informal *güera* label. This anomalous overlap of whiteness suggests a destabilization of whiteness, which mediates women's decision to disidentify with whiteness all together. This finding suggests the peripheral role of whiteness in the everyday lives of working-class and

working-poor Mexican women. Directly related to the racializing effects of the gaze of the U.S. census and other state apparatuses is the ways that study participants see themselves and see others.

Discussing my findings from the photo elicitation portion of this dissertation study, I also locate their visual identification practices within a discussion of the *racial gaze*. As members of a marginalized, racialized, and racially visible community, Mexicanas demonstrate a keen awareness of their gender and race presentations in opposition to the mainstream representations of Latina-ness and Latina whiteness. The visual identification practices discussed in this section demonstrate the interplay of descriptive and pragmatic ethnoracial assignments. Study participants negotiate the “constant hegemony work” (Nelson 31) of repetitive Mexican racializations through the distancing from stereotypical Mexican women. At the same time, they understand the role of phenotyping in how they are perceived and convey strong critiques of racism-colorism. These critiques are ambiguously located within competing beauty discourses that exclude Mexican women from positive representations in various media and cultural sites.

The site of beauty transpires as an important site of negotiation for study participants in which they struggle to make meaning of how they are read and perceived in dominant culture. Struggling against dominant frame of reference that disparages people of Mexican America as “short, brown, and Indigenous,” study

participants locate themselves inside and outside of this frame of reference.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, the referencing of *el nopal en la frente* (cactus on the forehead) and *cara de Mexicana* (Mexican face-appearance) alludes to the intersections of “looking Mexican” and the ways that study participants negotiate this racializing process.

Furthermore, an analysis of colorism and the ambiguous and polysemic social location of *morena* is presented in, *Morenas, Negras, y Prietas: Embodied Identities in Mexican America.*” Here, I find that state defined racial categories and discourses of racial sameness unravel through the visual vocabulary of race and color. The ethnoracial moments highlighted in this chapter demonstrate the ways that race, color, and embodiment play important roles in naming submerged ancestries not recognized by official narratives of Mexicanidad on both sides of the border. The major site of alliance and proximity is inscribed through the ethnoracial location of *morena*. Claiming ties to this social location positions study participants in proximity and in relation to one another in terms of skin color. Similar and related skin color in this case is a way to claim a collective identity as non-white and *mujeres de colores* (women of colors).

The flexibility of this label allows study participants of various skin colors and tones to identify with one another. The *morena* label also provides a way for light skin women to identify with their darke(er) children. The relational aspect of this color label demonstrates the role of ambiguity and indefinability embedded in the

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<sup>81</sup>. In the CNN video clip that I discussed in Chapter 5, a respondent attests to the diversity of Latinas and proclaims that not all Latinas are “dark skinned and black eyed.” Study participants engaged in a similar practice.

framework of *Mexicana Color Lines*. While many social scientists contend that such ambiguity is representative of its insignificance, I contend that the instability and unclassifiability makes *morena* a transgressive space to continue everyday critiques of white supremacy. These enunciations of identity in embodied discourse are central to the lives of everyday women especially because it falls outside the purview of the racial state.

Moreover, the embodied language used to reference “noises in the blood,” operates as a way to claim submerged ancestries left out of official narratives of Mexican multiraciality. This imperfect practice cites bloodlines, and other markers of race to situate Mexican women as inheritors of a history of resistance and evading the gaze of the racial state. This contradictory practice includes remnants of past and current racisms that idealize and privilege whiteness. However, findings strongly suggest that the role and the aspiration to whiteness play an insignificant role in the lives of study participants. This ambivalence reflects their working-poor and working-class lives and their sharp awareness of the “limits of racial domination” (Cope 5), particularly in the South County context.

Most telling from this discussion of the *morena* label is the Mexican based black and white polarization. This racial scheme works as a guide that position Mexican women in-between their own version of a black and white color line. This finding demonstrates the multiple codes of whiteness and blackness that travel to the U.S. mediating an overlap of two cultures of race and color. This polarization is indicative of two main issues. First it suggests Mexico’s ambivalent relationship to blackness and the specific ways that blackness has been systematically erased from

public memory. These large-scale projects of Mexican homogenization privileged Indian-Spanish mestizaje, undercounted people of African descent, reclassified people of African descent as mestizo or Indios and strategically crafted mestizo origin stories in all aspects of public education.

The referencing of a Mexican black and white polarization also suggests the overlapping histories of African, European, and Indian cultures, or the “ongoing fact of *moreno-ness*” (Lewis 307). While nationalized versions of mestizaje upheld Spanish, Indian, and Spanish-Indian, cultures as the origins of Mexican peoplehood, the neglected intersections of Indianness and Blackness endure in everyday language and embodied ethnoracial discourse. Laura Lewis asserts, “... [B]lackness nevertheless forms part of an amalgamated identity that squares with the Mexican national one. The mestizo emerged as the cosmic race in response to European racism” (307). Study participants that cite *morena* as a relational and expansive ethnoracial location engage in a complex practice of naming ancestor or *nuestros antepasado*, who embodied various skin colors and physical features. This ancestral practice flies in the face of the common interrogation of *What are you?* Flipping the script to claim subjugated lines of ancestry, reframing this interrogation to a proclamation of *Who are your people?*

The overlapping culture of Indianness and Blackness (*moreno-ness*) in Mexico marks the path of the future directions of my research agenda. I am interested in further exploring the discourse of Mexican blackness/darkness in the popular PBS series, *Black in Latin America*. Here, I highlight the instance in which a young mestiza Mexican woman from Veracruz claims a black identity. During her

meeting with Henry Louis Gates, the young woman, proclaims, *Yo soy negra* (I am a black woman). This moment serves as a point of discussion to think about the erasure of blackness in Mexico. Specifically, this segment focuses on the role of women in claiming and articulating a form of Mexican blackness that disrupt the mainstay of an Indian-Spanish mestizaje. As emblems of national culture and identity, women's bodies play a central role in the dissemination of visual identity discourses. At the heart of this discussion is the significance of a mestiza/o, "thoroughly mixed" society claiming Afro-descendent history and culture. Also, significant in this PBS episode is an exploration of contemporary Mexican Afro-descendent and cultural and political movements. This exploration thinks through the cultural relevance and the tensions embedded in claiming and representing Afro-descendent Mexican identity through various sites of political and cultural struggle.

The PBS series reflects the cultural and theoretical work I engage with in this dissertation project. Here, I am interested in locating spaces to theorize the body without centering it as a primary site of proof of the existence of race. In this dissertation, I interrogate prevailing scholarly theories that treat Indianness and Blackness as discrete social constructs. My work necessitates the advancement of theoretical frameworks and research questions that move with and beyond the visual evidence of race. Returning to the example from *Black in Latin America*, a cognitive dissonance occurs when a visibly non-black woman claims a black identity. This moment serves as a point to theorize the historical weight of visual markers of blackness and Indianans and the ways that Mexican communities are claiming Afro-descendent histories through the sites of *Son Jarocho* music, foodways, museum

exhibits, radio shows, and other cultural sites. For example, a native of Guerrero, Mexico, comments,

I'm not one of those who buy into saying that coastal peoples are 'Afro' something because this is a historically inconsistent label and one recently imposed... There is too much of an *autochthonous* history on the Costa Chica to look for it in something as abstract and hollow as Afro-something (qtd in Lewis 306).

The task at hand is not to pursue "hollow abstractions" and *hollow sightings* of Mexican blackness; but to uncover the meaningful ways that people of Mexican America are constantly unraveling the hegemonic project of mestizaje and reclaiming subjugated ancestries.

Another direction of this research agenda takes me into an in-depth exploration of the 2012 news story that quickly spread throughout Mexico and the U.S. focusing on a fair-skinned, blonde child who was found panhandling in Monterrey, Mexico (Gomez Licon "Case of blonde girl beggar renews debate over racism in Mexico"). Officials responded immediately to identify the child to ensure she was not a victim of kidnapping. The logic that undergirded the public's fascination with this case was the color of her skin and "European" features. Commentators on U.S. blogs and news sites were curious to locate a photograph of the 5-year old girl, frequently making comments about their shock, confusion, and indifference to matter.

A photograph of the child later emerged as proof of her skin color and blue eye color. I use this moment as an introduction to colorism in Mexico and the form of racism that consistently racializes Mexicans as "short, brown, and Indigenous looking." Placing the practice of colorism with a larger discourse and practice of anti-

Mexican racism in conversation, this discussion historicizes the structures that shape these overlapping discourses, and the ways that activists in Mexico are reclaiming the language of race and color to address cultural and institutional racisms.

Furthermore, the discursive and embodied practices discussed in this dissertation project go against the grain of color-blind neoliberalism that insists that we “move beyond categories” and “live beyond labels.”<sup>82</sup> A collective contempt blocks public dialogue and vocabularies to address persistent racism and their histories.<sup>83</sup> To express her views on difference and diversity, Manuela from South County, shared the following with me:

*I think Mexican women are so devalued, or not valued enough, we are thought of as weak, unimportant, a dime a dozen. We are not thought to be unique or special. Our differences are not celebrated.*

U.S. ideologies of race have categorized Mexicans as a group of outsiders, “illegal aliens” and racially suspect (Villanueva 2002). Inherently the process of racialization homogenizes a group of people as a monolithic group of racial others.

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<sup>82</sup>. This is the title of a recent advertising campaign that features artists and musicians that promote the message: “the world can always use more art and less labels.” Advertising campaigns like this support a neoliberal and colorblind rhetoric of individualism and racial neutrality.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7Lje51Ntb0>

<sup>83</sup>. On August 19th, 2012, *The Boston Globe* published an article about Elizabeth Warren’s questioned Native American ancestry. Opponents criticized Warren’s presumed racial privilege associated with listing herself as Native American in various professional directories. Public understandings reflected in such articles skew questions of race, racism, and racialization as a matter of marginalized groups gaining affirmative action benefits over the dominant and majority group.

In the above quote gathered from an interview, Manuela identifies the key process of racialization that lumps a diverse group of women into a box, a racialized label, and stereotype that erases the heterogeneity of Mexican women. This process of racialization also marks Mexicans as ordinary, domestic, and over populous. Manuela's comment "a dime a dozen" reflects nativist and anti-Mexican sentiments that fear the "brown tide" of an ever-flowing stream of brown bodies from Mexico into the United States (Santa Ana 2002).

Historically these nativist sentiments have targeted Mexican women as "hyperfertile," "pregnant pilgrims" and women who intentionally "cross the border to secure free prenatal care" (Gutiérrez 2008). Her take on racial difference challenges contemporary models of multiculturalism and diversity that privileges "new" and "special" multicultural and multiracial populations (Smith 2011). To place these issues in a contemporary and comparative context we can look to the strategies of the multiracial movement to highlight the various contexts of the use of the Census. In comparison, evidence presented here suggests that Mexican women make frequent attempts to evade the racial state and its expansive gaze. At times, they must align themselves with state sanctioned categories of whiteness however, this is an ambivalent process.

I propose a reconfiguration of the mixed-race trope for Mexican and Latino communities. George Lipstiz partially illuminates this point: "[M]ixed race trope as a means of representing race in the United States as personal, private, individual and idiosyncratic, rather than institutional, ideological, collective, and cumulative" (20). I also agree with Rafael Perez Torres's ideas about the reconfiguration of mestizaje that

captures the political and cultural project of *critical mestizaje*. Reconfiguring the tropes of mixed race and mestizaje prepares the ground for the future engagements of Mexican racial identities and their translocal manifestations.

Through the evidence I present here, in which I center the racialized experiences of Mexican women living in South County, I propose a shift in how mixed-race is defined and studied in the U.S. to include the ways that Mexican multiraciality forms the basis of group and collective identity.

Rather than treating multiraciality as an individual episode of identity formation, I recast Mexican multiraciality through the lens of *Mexicana Colorlines* and *ethnoracial moments*, to think about the role of informal color categories in resisting and negotiating dominant racial schemes and racisms. By looking at collective identities we decenter the significance of individual personhood and mark the path for new directions in Mexican and Latina/o Studies. Specifically, my research promises to locate the migration of meaning of race-color across porous national borders.

Finally, the cultural practice of “color talk” and “body talk” acts as a form of resistance and cultural critique against monolithic models of identity and subjectivity that insist on racial and ethnic purity. Invoking the language of race and color is used as a way to counteract historical erasure and ethnoracial consolidation. Women who partook in this study are not passive recipients of racist ideology or victims. Women actively reanimate and reconfigure these historical labels to reflect their lived and embodied experience of color and color consciousness. The subjective experience of

color lies is grounded in the body that is signified on the skin and other embodied markers of race-color.

In, *Güeras, Morenas, y Prietas: Mexicana Color Lines and Ethnoracial Sameness-Difference*,” I do not aim to reproduce essentialist theories of race and identity. This engagement with color and color awareness does not reflect an essence of racial purity but highlights the *experience* and the *negotiation* of race and color. This is “the good, the bad, and the ugly,” (Anzaldúa 101) that reflects a history at least 500 years of Spanish-Indian-African violence, contact, transculturation, alliance, and conflict. It reflects the troubling presence of colorism informed by anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms; a shared vocabulary of race and color among various Latin American groups; and a distinct experience of race and racialization that is taking place all of the time, and is never complete. It is incomplete and unresolvable and reflects the continual practice of translation and negotiation that refuses and rejects racial purity, completion, and transcendence.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Tejana-Chicana, elaborates this point of negotiation:

Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically... The new Mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view...She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode- nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (101).

The endurance and use of color categories such as *güera*, *morena*, and *negra*, (approximate translation light-skinned, brown, and black) reflects a long history of refusal to accept sameness and constantly confront difference. Although, these

categories also shape a lexicon and culture and practice of colorism, the endurance of this grammar of difference destabilizes state imposed categories of identity and racial subjection and reveal how these categories are used as a form of resistance against racial homogenization. I seek to recuperate these labels from their colonial legacy of racial categorization to theorize Mexicana racial multiplicity.

At the same time, findings from this study prepare the ground for a comparative exploration of *morena-ness* among various groups of Latinas. Writing about the role of ambiguity and in-between ethnoracial locations and terminologies, Ginetta Candalaïro observes, “Ambiguity is involved in the first place because of the various and competing ideological codes that frame blackness, whiteness, and indigenuity in the Americas” (202). A translocal and comparative exploration of the polysemic *morena* is imperative to continue to understand the ways that multiracial group of women negotiate competing frameworks of race-color.

Furthermore, these temporary disruptions of power-racialization allude to what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as “punching holes in their categories” (205).

Anzaldúa further elaborates,

Mestiza, which is actually an old term, speaks to our common identity as mixed bloods. I have been exploring this as a new category, which is more inclusive than a racial *mestizaje*... The new mestiza category that threatens the hegemony of the new-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels, and theories means punching holes in their walls (205).

In conclusion, in *Güeras, Morenas, y Prietas: Mexicana Color Lines and Ethnoracial Sameness-Difference*, I investigate the complexity of the everyday and

popular language of race and color as it relates to Mexican (American) racial ideologies and culture of race-color in the southern portion of Hillsborough County, Florida. Latina/o populations lie at the center of the debates about the changing notions of race and color. Specifically, my research destabilizes the myth of “thoroughly mixed” Mexican mestizo/o populations to emphasize a history of ethnoracial survival, adaptation, and alliance among marginalized and subaltern communities of racialized and multiracial people. My research uncovers subjugated ancestries that are invoked in everyday “body” and “color” talk. These discursive practices mark a resistant and complex history of overlapping dominant and marginal racial ideologies that identify skin color, hair texture, and other markers of racial difference on the body. I argue for the reframing of these discursive practices as resistant strategies against hegemonic racial ideologies and racism, centralizing women as important actors in claiming subjugated ancestries and histories.

Fundamentally, my research agenda explores the everydayness of gendered ethnoracial discourses that reference skin color, hair texture, and other physical markers of racial difference. This focus emphasizes the figurative and resistant understandings of racial difference and racial sameness entrenched in the female body that marginalized and subaltern communities invoke. In making clear and visible the embodied and physical aspects of racialization— this research highlights the instances in which aspects of embodied racial difference are invoked, instantiated, negotiated, and mobilized as narratives of history and group belonging.

The everyday negotiations of this lexicon of embodied testaments among Mexicanas offer a window onto the movement between and among race and color

categories. These color categories are not the same as other Latina racial formations but are comparable across nation-based frameworks. The move to a comparative approach is critical at this time of heightened migration and movement that brings together Latin American color continuums with a U.S. racial binary. This dynamic migration of meaning reveals not only how identities are spoken about but also the ways that this lexicon is experienced. This study centers the *ethnoracial moments* within the context of *Mexicana Color lines* to understand how race and color are deployed to survive the material and affective consequences of racialization and oppressive racisms.

# Figures



Figure 1: Mexican states of Origin of Study Partipants

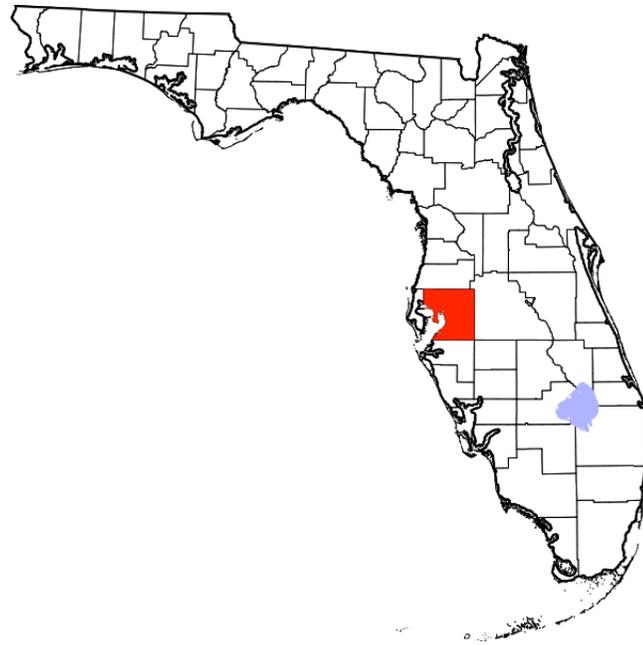


Figure 2: Map of Hillsborough County, Florida



Figure 3: Strawberry Mural in Balm, Florida with Study Participant

**LATINO ALZHEMIMER'S FUNDRAISER**  
**LOWRIDER SHOW**  
**September 24th, 2011**

**Dj Majico**  
FOOD AND LIVE MUSIC

**BEST OF SHOW**  
**BEST PAINT**  
**BEST HOP**

*stilldown*

**10-4:30**  
**\$10 Per Car Entry**

SUN CITY SENIOR LIVING  
3855 UPPER CREEK DRIVE  
SUN CITY CENTER, FL 33573

Figure 4: Local Flyer advertising Community Event

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

**8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?**

- No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
- Yes, Puerto Rican
- Yes, Cuban
- Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↴

**9. What is Person 1's race? Mark  one or more boxes.**

- White
- Black, African Am., or Negro
- American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↴

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian   | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese  | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese  | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean  | <input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian or Chamorro |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino   | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese  | <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian — <i>Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.</i> ↴ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander — <i>Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.</i> ↴ |  |

- Some other race — *Print race.* ↴

Figure 5: 2010 U.S. Census Questions #8 and #9

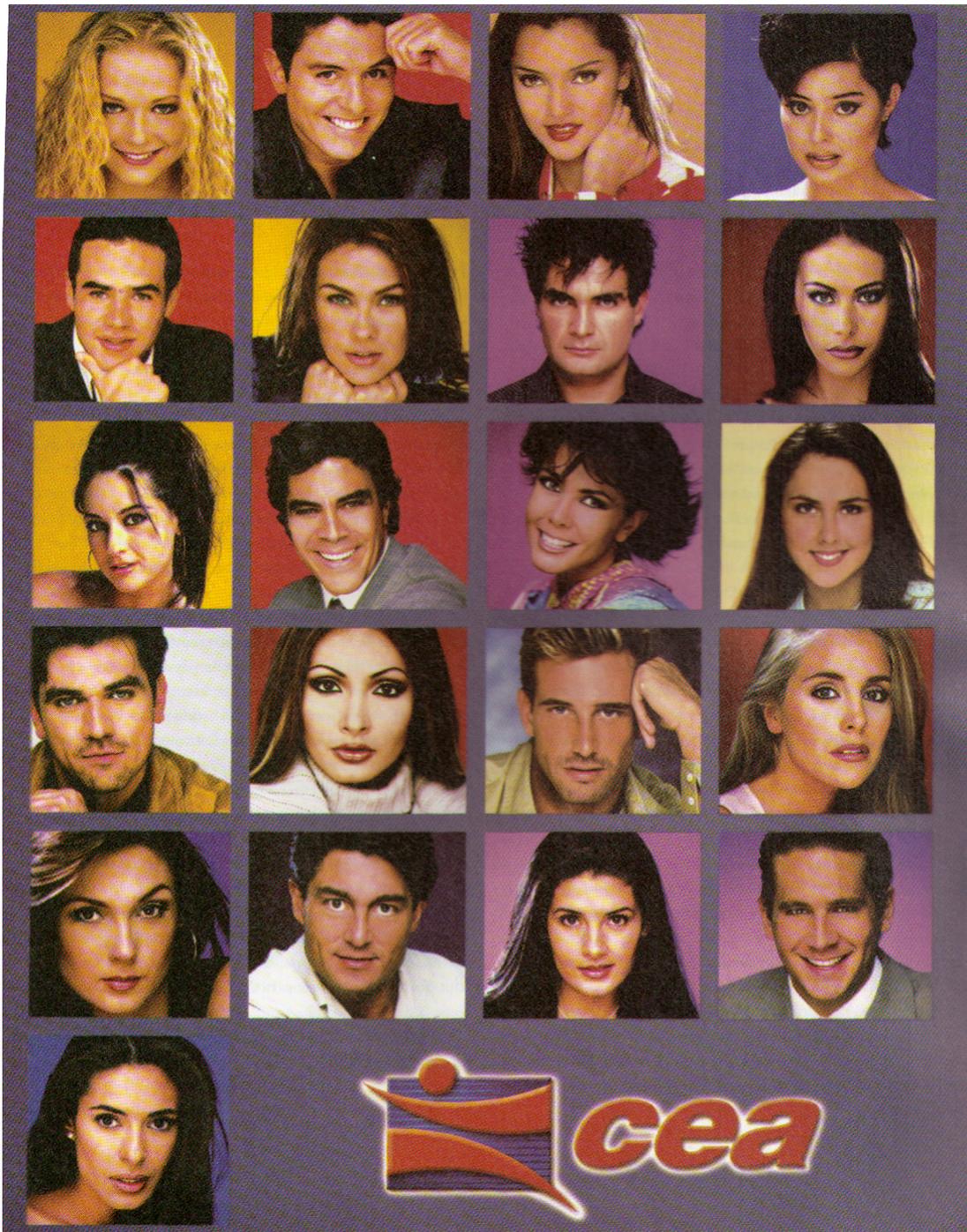


Figure 6: Popular *Novela* actors from the late 1999-present (Centro de Educación Artística de Televisa.)

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: University of Maryland IRB Approval Form

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Appendix 3: Focus Group Interview Guide

Appendix 4a: Photo Elicitation Guide

Appendix 4b: Photo Elicitation Guide

## Appendix 1



DATE: May 15, 2012

TO: Augusta Lynn Bolles, Ph.D.  
FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP)

PROJECT TITLE: [333190-1] Latina Mestizaje: The Intersections of Race, Gender, and Ethnicity  
REFERENCE #: 10-0294  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: May 15, 2012

EXPIRATION DATE: May 31, 2013  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

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

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

## Appendix 2 Interview Guide

Name  
Home Address  
Telephone  
Email  
Best Time to Call  
Date  
Place of Interview  
Age  
Marital Status  
Level of Education  
Ethnicity  
Religion  
Place of Birth (Country, State, Town)  
Occupation  
Spouse Place of Birth (Country, State, Town)  
    Year of arrival in the U.S.  
Mother's POB (Country, State, Town)  
    Year of arrival in U.S.  
Father's POB (Country, State, Town)  
    Year of arrival in the U.S.

### Life History Questions

When did your family arrive to Florida?

Where is your family from?

What type of work did your parents do when you were growing up? (Migrant workers: What types of crops did you pick?) What type of work do your parents do now?

*\*The next questions are about race and skin color and how you understand them in your everyday life. If there is anything that you don't want to talk about, just let me know, but I would really like to know what you think. There are no right or wrong answers.*

### Informal and Formal Race and Color categories

How would you describe your race on the U.S. Census? (Show participant questions #8 and #9 from 2010 U.S. Census)

How do you feel about filling out the Census when asked about race and ethnicity?

What is your race? What race do you consider yourself to be?

How do you describe yourself in everyday life or everyday terms?

### **Racial Identities and Self Perception/Representations**

Have you been confused for member of another group? How do you respond to the what are you question?

Have you ever mistaken someone as Mexican? How did they respond?

At any point have you thought of yourself as white? How about mixed race?

If not, who do you consider to be of mixed race? Why?

### **Interpretive Frameworks and Everyday Racism**

Tell me about a time that you felt discriminated based on your race, what happened? How did you respond?

How would you define racism? Could you provide specific examples of what you would consider an act of racism?

Is racism a problem in your life?

### **Mexicanidad**

Is being of Mexican descent generally important to you?

How important is it to you that people recognize you are of Mexican descent?

How important was your ethnic identity to you when you were in  
Grammar school?

High school?

Now?

Are there times when you feel especially proud of your Mexican ancestry?

Are there times when you feel ashamed of your Mexican ancestry? If so, why?

How often are you asked about your ethnic/racial background? Tell me about how you responded.

What are some of the stereotypes you hear about Mexicans? How about stereotypes about Mexican women? How have you responded to these stereotypes?

## **RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

Can you remember when you began to notice race? Tell me about that...

Has anyone ever made a comment about your race or color? How did you respond?

When did you become aware of your racial identity?

Have you noticed any divisions among Mexicans? Tell me about them

What is your experience with other Latinos? Have you ever experienced discrimination from them?

## **Identities and Labels**

In a couple of words, tell me what comes to mind when I read these words to you:

Mestiza  
Chicana  
Latina  
Hispana  
Mexicana  
India  
Negra  
Morena  
Preita  
Guera  
Tejana

Are there any other terms that you have heard of that are similar to the ones we just discussed?

## **Color Consciousness**

When have you used the terms morena? What does it mean to you? Where have you heard this term?

Are there any variations to the term morena? Can you tell me about them?

How would you define the term güera?

Do you think there are advantages to being güera?

What about negra or negrita? What does it mean to you?

What color do you consider yourself to be? Are there times when you feel lighter or darker?

Have you ever used a term to describe your facial features or hair? If so, what is it?

What other words have you heard to describe skin color?  
Physical features?

Have you noticed any comments made in your family about skin color?

Do you think skin color matters today? Do you think there are advantages to being lighter or darker?

### **Identity**

What does the term “Latina” mean to you? Is this term important to you? Do you use it to describe yourself?

What term do you use to most describe yourself?

### **REPRESENTATIONS**

In popular Mexican and/or U.S. popular culture, who in your opinion best represents Mexican women?

The least?

Is it important to you to find Mexican or Latina women that you can relate to or identify with?

### **Final Questions**

- 1) Is there anything we have missed that would be important for me to know?

- 2) Do you have any questions for me?
- 3) **Can you recommend anyone you know that might be interested in participating?**
- 4) **THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME**

### Appendix 3 Focus Group Guide

Focus Group  
Wimauma, Florida

Objective:

Thank you for coming!

Gather opinions, views, and experiences about race and ethnicity in your everyday lives.

There are no wrong or right answers- this hopefully will be an open conversation

#### 1) Mexican Racialized Difference

What does it mean to say that someone has el nopal en la frente?

What other sayings have you heard that are similar to this?

Symbolic markers of Indigenuity

2) Hilda's shares a story about how she could tell her mom was very angry. Her dad used to say "ya se le salio lo indio a tu mama." Anyone heard of similar sayings? What does this mean?

What are some of the general assumptions about indios?

How about mejorando la raza? Anything similar to this saying?

#### 3) Mixed Race Identity and Mestizaje

Show Clip about Eva Longoria: about 5 minutes long

Eva Longoria finds out the results from her test (show pie chart). What do you think about this DNA test? Would you want to have this test done?

Do you know your own ancestry? Does it make sense to you to break down your ancestry?

#### 4) Color Consciousness and Embodiment

Morena  
Blanca  
Rubia  
Guera

Prieta  
Emperlada and Aperlada

Have you heard any other terms similar to these?  
It is common for us to notice color among one another? Does it matter what color you are?

#### 5) Mexicana Representations

Who comes to mind when I say Latina? How about Mexicana?

#### **Specific Activities: Listing**

What are the three things that come to mind when the term Latina is mentioned? Take a moment and write these down on a piece of paper. When you are finished, we will share these with each other.

Out of these photos, who looks the most Latina? What makes her look Latina?

#### **Sorting Pictures and Categorizing, Photo Elicitation**

What terms have you used to describe....

Who looks Morena?  
What makes her look Morena?

Who looks Mexican?  
What makes her look Mexican?

Who looks the least Mexican? Why?

What about her did you find beautiful?  
Describe the physical features that you find most attractive.

Who is most likely to get hired? The least likely?

#### **At the End of Focus Group:**

I am planning to hold at least one more meeting, what advice do you have for me in terms of structure and content?

Is there anything that you heard here that was really important to you and you want to address before we leave?

You all have given me a lot to think about...thank you so much for your time!

Now I would like to ask about something that you said earlier

I didn't get to ask you this earlier but I was surprised when you mentioned that

Is there anything we have missed that would be important for me to know?

**Appendix 4a: Photo Elicitation  
Guide**



## Appendix 4b: Photo Elicitation Guide



## Glossary

### MAJOR MEXICAN FOLK RACIAL TERMS

Term and Approximate meaning:

Blanca/o: white, having light skin

Güera/o: having light skin, being light(er) in comparison to others, also used describe someone with light colored hair, and blue or green eyes

India/o: In the context of this study, mostly used as a pejorative term used to describe dark skin, backwardness, and rural people

Morena/o: wheat-colored or brunette; darker in comparison to others; also used as a term to describe Afro-Latinos and African Americans

Morena/o clara/o: wheat-colored or brunette; *clara* indicates a lighter version of a dark(er) morena; a term used to describe the various ranges of *morena/o*

Morena/o oscura/o: wheat-colored or brunette; *oscura* meaning dark indicates a dark(er) version of morena; a term used to describe the various ranges of *morena/o*

Prieta/o: sometimes used pejoratively to describe someone with dark(er) skin, especially in a family with a range of skin colors among family members; Often used as a term of affection

Rubia/o: having a total combination of light skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes

Negro(a): Black; rarely used as a direct term of reference; often assigned to darkest member of the family

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