

POCHOS/AS PUSH BACK: MULTIRACIAL LATINOS/AS, WHITE PASSING,
AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

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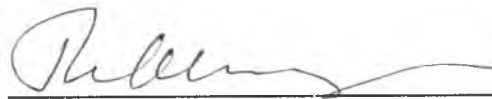
A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
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In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts
In
Ethnic Studies

by
Emily Nanea Renteria
San Francisco, California
May 2016

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Pochos/as Push Back: Multiracial Latinos/as, White Passing, and the Politics of Belonging* by Emily Nanea Renteria, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts: Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University.



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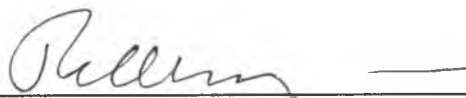
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*POCHOS/AS PUSH BACK: MULTIRACIAL LATINO/AS, WHITE PASSING, AND
THE POLITICS OF BELONGING*

Emily Nanea Renteria
San Francisco, California
2016

This work examines the ways that multiracial Latino/as with one white parent perform “race work” (King-O’Riain, 2006) in order to prove their Latino/a authenticity to people believed to have closer ties to the mother country, such as more recent immigrants or those who are working class. I examine the role of emotion in determining the lengths to which multiracials will go in order to secure feelings of acceptance by Latino groups. I assess the extent to which a light-skinned phenotype influences the performance of “race work,” and the ways ethnic markers, such as Spanish language fluency can act as stand-ins when racial claims are low (King-O’Riain, 2006). The study finds that Spanish fluency is primary, but is only one of a number of factors including phenotype and other cultural markers that influence multiracial Latino/as identity choices. Surprisingly, most multiracial participants, regardless of Spanish language ability, chose to identify more strongly with their Latino/a parent’s culture, downplaying or outright rejecting their white ancestry because of negative associations with whiteness. Every participant was critically engaged in art, activism or education to work through the unique challenges of being multiracial. It is my hope that this project will provide a fuller understanding of this underrepresented demographic within the Latino/a population.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Tomás Almaguer, Chair, Thesis Committee

May 19, 2016

Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature	8
Latino/as in the United States	8
<i>Mestizos</i>	10
Early Relationships with Whiteness	11
Political Identities	15
Language and the Cultural Toolkit	17
Autobiography	20
Passing and Chosen Identities	23
Chapter Three: Research Design and Method	30
Participant Selection	31
Strategies for Protection of Participants	31
Data Collection	32
Limitations	33
Data Analysis and Synthesis	33
Dissemination Plan	34
Chapter Four: Participant Profiles	36
Chapter Five: On the Politics of Belonging	71
Flexible Ethnicity and the View from Outside	71
Spanish Language Ability	72

Multiracials Passing as White	79
Agency and Strategy	85
Making Up for It: Redefining Latino/a	89
Chapter Six: White Passing Makes Ethnicity Optional	92
Multiracial Latino/as and White Privilege.....	92
Authenticity and Racial Essentialism	95
Pushing Back: The Right to Self-Identify	98
Coda: Implications for Future Research	101
Implications for the Latin Americanization of U.S. Race Relations	102
Complicating Flexible Ethnicity	104
References.....	107

APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
1. Appendix A: Interview Schedule.....	115
2. Appendix B: Permission Letter	116
3. Appendix C: Informed Consent	117
4. Appendix D: Recruiting Script.....	119

Introduction

This work seeks to address the unique experience of people who, like myself, do not fit neatly within conventional ways of discussing either Latino/a or mixed race identity. Existing academic literature is only beginning to reflect the full spectrum of the multiracial experience (Root, 1994; Elam, 2011). As a young reader, I scoured these texts for passages that would resonate with my experience, and many of them did: the feeling of moving between two worlds, the urge to prove one's cultural authenticity, and the ceaseless questions from others about my racial makeup. However, I did not come across any authors who wrote about the unique position of Latinos/as of mixed ancestry until Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) in my early twenties. Being that Latino/a identity is commonly understood to be multiracial—an assortment of indigenous, African, and Spanish ancestries—it was difficult to know where to begin a discussion about “more recently mixed” identity like my own. Anzaldúa offered the inspirational spark that ignited this project.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa writes of a third space, *la conciencia de la mestiza*, that is changing the way we conceptualize race and belonging as Latinos/as and *mestizo/as* (1987). The *mestiza* (mixed race) experience is more than just a search for identity: it also contains the spiritual component of reconciliation between one's indigenous, African, and European ancestries. For her, the process must take place intersectionally in spiritual, mental, and emotional registers that are always attuned to race, class, gender, and sexuality. She arrives at *mestiza* consciousness through an inventory of her own process

of accepting the ancestries she has inherited. As a young reader, I appreciated this raw, autobiographical, poetic exposition of what I now call “mixed kid blues.” It is out of her writing that my own continues to grow.

Given these considerations, my work will address the following issues:

- 1.) How do multiracial Latinos/as experience their ethnicities? How successful are their efforts? Which audiences accept their claims and which audiences challenge them?
- 2.) How do multiracial Latinos/as perform race work (King-O’Riain, 2006)? How and under what circumstances?
- 3.) How does Spanish language fluency impact multiracial Latino/a identity?
- 4.) How do multiracial Latinos/as respond to authenticity challenges?
- 5.) How does passing as white influence the ways that multiracial Latinos/as self-identify?
- 6.) How do multiracial Latinos/as (with one Latino/a and one white parent) see themselves racially?

By way of positioning: I am a person of mixed ancestry. My father is second-generation Native Yaqui, raised away from tribal lands but descended from the indigenous peoples of Northern Mexico in the state now called Sonora. Our ancestors were famed for having held off both Spanish and Mexican invaders until the year 1917—arguably longer than any other tribe in Mexico. My mother is white, but also claims Cherokee and African heritage. If you ask her, she will respond that she is “Heinz 57—a little of everything,” but culturally she is a white, working class woman. I was raised by

my mother, knowing very little about my father except his firm assertion of “Yaqui—not Mexican” ancestry. When he died in 2006, I began a quest to learn more about who I am. That process has evolved into a thesis project about people of mixed ancestry and our relationships to the Spanish language, in which neither I nor my father are fluent.

My mother taught me to meet all problems with a book, so I started to read all I could about multiracial people. I began interrogating the history of my families of origin to find out where exactly we come from. I started with *Borderlands: La Frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1987), and moved on to anthologies like *What Are You? Voices of Mixed Race Young People* (Gaskins, 1999), and *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial and Bicultural* (O’Hearn, 1998), but was still dissatisfied with the lack of representation of people who were mixed *like me*. I learned in those anthologies that the commonly-assumed faces of multiraciality are black/white and Asian/Pacific Islander/white, to say nothing of those with indigenous, Mexican, and African ancestries on one side, and European heritage on the other (save Moraga, 1979 and Anzaldúa, 1981 and 1987). Earlier writing within Mixed Race Studies centers the experiences of biracial African-American/white people and functions as a testament to the binary racial logic that governs race relations in the United States (Elam, 2011; Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Jones, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994, 2008). More recently, people who identify as *hapa*, or mixed race Asian Americans, have stepped to the forefront of mixed race literature (Dariotis & Kina, eds. 2013). Since 2000, Census figures show that California leads the nation in the percentage of people who identify as two or more races (Jones & Bullock, 2012, p. 13). However, because the definition and racial constitution of Latino identity is constantly

being reconfigured, we still have not established comprehensive ways of categorizing Latino or Hispanic racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

The 1970 Census applied a blanket term to the diverse group comprised of Mexicans, Central and South Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans. The term “Hispanic” was intended to unify Latinos/as by their “common culture rooted in Spanish language and Catholic religion” (Almaguer, 2012, p. 146). The updated 2010 Census added that the term could refer to “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” and noted that Hispanic origin can be viewed as “the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States” (Jones & Bullock, 2012, p. 2). To further complicate the matter, most Latinos/as responded to Census forms using the racial designations of their country of origin, and did not see themselves as belonging to any of the discrete racial categories offered by the U.S. Census (Almaguer, 2012, p. 149). Instead, over 40% of Latinos fall into the “some other race” category, along with multiracials (Almaguer, 2012; Jones & Bullock, 2012).

The year 2000 Census was the first to allow respondents to report one or more races, but it fell short in accounting for the population I attempt to study. Although respondents were allowed to select all racial designations that apply, those who do not select categories such as Black, white, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, were lumped into the “some other race” category, as people of “Hispanic origin” can be any race (Jones & Bullock, 2012). This means that the population of Latinos with one white parent, the subject of this study, has yet to be accounted for by the

U.S. Census, despite the data showing that people of “some other race” and white racial backgrounds are the second largest group recorded on the 2010 Census (Jones & Bullock, 2012, p. 7). However, research by the Pew Research Center shows that the majority of people defined as Hispanic--62%--consider being Hispanic part of their racial background (2015). Of those, 16.7% self-identify as multiracial/two or more races (Pew Research, 2015). Additionally, multiracial Hispanics are about twice as likely as other non-Hispanic multiracials to say that they view their mixed backgrounds are advantageous, while 36% of this group admits to passing as white and 41% says they look Hispanic (Pew Research Center, 2015).

As a group, Hispanics were more than three times as likely to report being of “two or more races” than non-Hispanics in the year 2000 Census (Almaguer, 2012, p. 146; Rumbaut, 2003, p. 26). The 2010 Census does not distinguish between multiracial, mixed race, or Hispanic/Latino populations; it does not provide a check box for either group, but instead requests that respondents write in their racial identification. This means that data is murky at best when it comes to accounting for a population of multiracial Latinos/as, such as those in this study. In the 2010 Census, the mixed race population was recorded as 3% of the total U.S. population. However, due to changes in reporting methods, Almaguer (2012) finds that multiracials and Latinos/as combined could make up as much as 18% of the total U.S. population (p. 148). Mixed Race Studies research has yet to seriously address this unique population (Bettez, 2007). My work seeks to elucidate the ways that multiracial Latinos/as who claim Latino/a and white ancestries understand themselves and their relationships to their cultural heritage. I will investigate the role of

Spanish language fluency and phenotype in influencing participants' sense of self-identity, in order to examine the priorities and challenges of being both mixed race and Latino/a.

In casual conversations with mixed Latinos/as, people expressed Anzalduan ideas about feeling between two worlds, but they also mentioned that their identities were often subject to interrogation by people who were unmixed and positioned themselves as more racially authentic than multiracials. I wondered about the ways that visual appearance, especially passing as white, made them vulnerable to this type of questioning and how they managed it. In *Pure Beauty: Judging Race In Japanese American Beauty Pageants*, King-O'Riain argues that in general, "mixed race women were made to feel inferior and thus on the defensive about their ethnicity, primarily because of their racial background" (2006, p. 114). Her study about Japanese American beauty pageants finds that as biological claims are believed to decrease due to multiraciality, race work increases. Mixed race contestants compensate by attempting to prove their Japanese authenticity through ethnic strategies, such as speaking in Japanese, adopting Japanese names, and performing "cultural displays of speech and talent" (King-O'Riain, 2006, p.114).

The purpose of this study is to examine how multiracial Latinos/as with one white parent do race work, what motivates them, and how successful their efforts are. It acknowledges that race work has to be validated by some audience, and uses Vasquez's (2011) term "flexible ethnicity" to describe a state in which race work has been accepted by a given audience. "Flexible ethnicity" is defined by Vasquez (2011) as: "the ability to deftly and effectively navigate different racial terrains and be considered an insider in

more than one racial or ethnic group,” (p. 206). This work centers Spanish language ability, specifically the ways that members of this population who are not fluent use other elements of the “cultural toolkit” to prove themselves to cultural insiders (Swidler, 1986). In particular, respondents in this study utilize education and political activism to interrogate commonly-held definitions of Latino/a identity, and to push back against challenges to their ethnic authenticity.

Review of Relevant Literature

Latinos/as in the United States

The group of people currently identified by the U.S. Census as “Hispanic” may actually encompass a multiplicity of nationalities and ethnic identities ranging from Mexican, Mexican American, Central American, South American, and/or mixed *mestizo/a* ancestry—a combination of Spanish, Native American, and African bloodlines. The 2010 Census reported that the 55 million people of Latino or Hispanic origin constituted 17% of the United States’ national population. Due to variances in Census reporting methods, this number could be much higher, especially when one considers the mixed race Latino/a population. What follows is an exploration of the history of the group called by many names: Latino/a, Hispanic, Mexican American, and later, Chicano—how they came to share an ethnic identity as products of colonization, and the ways that identity is at odds with histories of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing.

“The racial and ethnic labels that operate in one national space often make no sense when transported just a few miles north or south” (Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 174). As such, the area known as the Southwest that encompasses parts of present-day New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California, often featured “distinct regional subcultures” among early Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) settlers due to prolonged contact with specific indigenous groups, as well as because of these regions’ distance from Spanish cultural hubs in central Mexico (2009, p. 175). Given the hybrid cultures of the Southwest, status and identity were primarily organized around religion (Catholicism), property ownership,

occupation, and race (2009, p. 177). However, according to Gutiérrez (2009), until the implementation of the *sistema de castas* from the 1760s through the 1820s, the key racial distinctions were between Spaniards and indigenous peoples (p. 177). I will return to the importance of race, class and gender within hybrid cultures in the early Southwest, specifically California, in a later section. For now, it is worth elaborating on the *sistema de castas* in order to inform later discussions of race, class, gender and hybridity in California.

Gutiérrez (2009) writes that the *sistema de castas* was an elaborate system of racial classification developed by the Spanish to protect legal interests in the mid-eighteenth century (p. 177-178), while María Elena Martínez notes that the goal of the system was to preserve Spanish wealth, power, and privilege (2010, p. 2). The *sistema de castas* outlined each permutation that could result from Spanish, Native American, and African miscegenation and essentially dictated one's potential for social mobility using phenotype and parentage to assume varying degrees of racial purity (Gutiérrez 2009, p. 178). Racial status was associated with one's legitimacy of birth, and was thus of paramount social and moral importance (p. 178). For this reason, documenting a person's racial mixture had important implications all aspects of social standing, as well as "potential marital partners, honorific posts... desirable occupations, and even the Roman Catholic priesthood" (Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 177-8). Martínez notes that the system also placed legal restrictions on who could bear arms, attend university, and wear certain styles of clothing (2010, p. 3). The complex system was difficult to enforce, and in some locations descendants of pre-Columbian nobility were still recognized and able to enjoy

the privileges of their bloodline. Others whose genealogy did not grant them such high status could falsify documents, learn Spanish, or simply move to a town where one's family origins were unknown in order to have a chance at accessing class- and racially-biased privileges (Martinez, 2010). An investigation of the *sistema de castas* reveals that early records of race mixing had real implications for the social standing, class status, and opportunities of multiracial families.

Mestizos

The children of interracial unions in the colonial period came to be known simply as *mestizos*, understood as “an individual of mixed race heritage, usually assumed to be of European and indigenous American ancestry” (Lund, 2012, p. ix). One author believes the term is used primarily “as an adjective... little more than a catch-all designation meaning non-Indian and non-Spanish, sometimes implying as well an identification with Mexican national culture” (Chance, 1979, p. 153). Finally, Lopez asserts that for Chicanos, “the term *mestizo* translated technically into a claim of mixed origins, but functionally into an assertion of indigenous ancestry” (2004, p. 221). Numerous authors have noted the ambiguous and lesser social status of early *mestizos* due to their mixed ancestry (Chance, 1979, p. 159; Rumbaut 2009, p. 18). *Mestizos*, in a society where racial pedigrees determined class status, were “categorically defined as illegitimate by white settlers” (Chance, p. 159) and were “deprived of a stable place in the social order,” according to Wolf (1959). Because of such instability, however, racial passing was also deployed as a tactic by *mestizos*, who, because of their ambiguous appearance, could

sometimes access higher class status in a variety of ways (Martinez, 2010, p. 3; Chance 1979, p. 160).

I offer a discussion of *mestizo* history in order to illustrate the deep roots of racial mixing among populations in the American Southwest, part of a group often called Mexicans or Mexican Americans. There is no such thing as a racially “pure” Mexican identity—in fact, by definition, Mexicans are a racially mixed combination of Native, Spanish, and African ancestries. Although some authors are working to foreground the reality of African ancestry within Mexican populations, whiteness still holds its place at the top of the hierarchy (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 88; Bost 2000, p. 188; Ochoa, 2004, p. 71). However, until the writings of women of color feminists, few links had been made between the inherently violent elements of Spanish conquest and the encounters that resulted in, among other things, children of mixed ancestry (Anzaldúa 1987; Alcoff, 1995; Mallon 2012; Kina and Dariotis, 2013; Smith 2005, 2009).

Early Relationships with Whiteness

Mexican Americans have a complex relationship with whiteness, which has shifted over time and is largely influenced by class status, language, and phenotype, among other factors. I offer a discussion of whiteness in relationship to Latinos/as, especially Mexicans and Mexican Americans, to highlight the contentious nature of privilege and inclusion for this group. At times considered white because of partial Spanish ancestry, at other times deported and criminalized as brown “greasers” or “wetbacks,” Latino/a identity in the U.S., particularly that of Mexican Americans, has

been manipulated by State interests in order to secure a steady source of cheap labor under the guise of aspirations to citizenship. For these reasons, it is important to understand the historical Latino/a relationship to racial categories, and the compromises required of Latinos/as seeking upward mobility.

According to Almaguer's work, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (1994), European Americans who migrated to the Southwest "actually assigned Mexicans an intermediate location in the new society they imposed on the region" that elevated the status of European Americans and subordinated Asians, Native Americans, and Blacks (p. 45). In contrast, Anglo Americans did not distinguish between the racial makeup of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, further highlighting nuances in how ethnic and national identity are conceived in different geographies (Foley, 2005, p. 58). Class divisions of the Mexican period (1821-46) and later could be characterized by "pigmentocracy," in which skin color was the most salient element of race, social standing and identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 110). While Almaguer (1994) notes that during suffrage debates in early California, it was argued that "the term 'white' was a reference to European ancestry and social standing, not merely to skin color" (p. 55). Inclusion of upper-class Californios in white spaces allowed them to escape the subordination and enslavement of other non-white racialized groups (Almaguer, 1994, p. 53, 56).

From these early moves to access whiteness, we see that Mexicans were positioned with a degree of mobility in the early Californian racial hierarchy. Neil Foley's (2007) work on the case of *Mendez v. Westminster*, which challenged racial

segregation of California schools, elucidates the racial aspirations of Mexican people in the early 20th century. The families who brought their case against their school district did not do so on the basis that discrimination itself was unlawful or unethical, but because it violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights as Caucasians (Foley, 2007, p. 297). Gomez (2005) argues that “Mexicans mobilized their Indo-hispano *mestizo* heritage in a way that emphasized their European roots” (p. 1) and “vigorously sought to distance themselves from non-white groups lower on the racial hierarchy” (p. 19). Bonilla-Silva (2003), citing Chambers (2003) and Wade (1997), also mentions this distancing from darker-skinned groups, even co-ethnics (p. 108).

According to Haney-Lopez’s article, “White Latinos,” (2003) this distancing “reflect[s] the cultural premium American society placed on being white,” and often had the corollary effect of boosting one’s class status (p. 2). However, the author also says that Mexican claims to whiteness actually buttress white-supremacist racial ideology and reinforce discrimination against people of color (2003, p. 2). For this reason, he calls for Latinos/as to “assert a non-white identity as a means of fostering political opposition to racial status inequality” (2003, p. 4). In contrast, Bonilla-Silva (2002) writes that Latinos/as, some Asian groups, and multiracial individuals might be seen by dominant groups as “honorary whites,” recruited for politically strategic reasons into higher social standing by whites to “limit the likelihood of the ‘them’ becoming a numerical majority that could unite against the ‘us,’” (p. 110). If his thesis is true, he writes, this “honorary” status is “still a secondary place in America largely determined by whites” (p.110).

Due in part to their mixed European ancestry and ethnic ambiguity, Mexican

Americans were considered “white by law” according to Ian Haney-Lopez (2006). Being legally defined as white granted citizenship rights to the group through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Almaguer, 1994, p. 73; Rumbaut, 2009, p. 21), until they were rescinded under Depression-era repatriation campaign, through the 1950s with “Operation Wetback,” which deported Mexican-American citizens and non-citizens alike (Haney-Lopez, 2006, p. 27-8).

Bonilla-Silva (2002) writes extensively about the “Latin Americanization” of racial classification in the United States, in which he hypothesizes that three distinct racial categories are emerging: whites, honorary whites, and the collective Black. Under this rubric, Latinos/as can potentially fall into any of the three categories, depending on degree of assimilation, skin color, and class status (p. 4). Multiracials may also fall into any of the three categories for similar reasons, although he cautions that this “new racial stratification system will be more effective at maintaining white supremacy” rather than becoming more inclusive to Latinos/as and multiracial populations (2002, p. 13). Additionally, he reminds us that “honorary” is still conceived as secondary to white, and is largely determined by the variable attitudes of groups in power (p. 13).

Avoidance of the collective Black—comprised of Southeast Asians, darker-skinned Latinos/as, reservation-bound Native Americans, and African Americans—has deep roots among Latino/a communities even beyond the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2002, p. 110). Neil Foley (2005) writes that the acceptance of a Hispanic identity was one way that Latinos/as distanced themselves from darker-skinned groups. Mexican Americans were allowed to choose between one of two types of white on the 1980 U.S.

Census: “white non-Hispanic” or simply “white” (Foley, 2005, p. 55). “To identify oneself today as a ‘Hispanic’ is partly to acknowledge one’s ethnic heritage without surrendering one’s ‘whiteness;’ for Foley, the history of Mexican Americans in the Southwest (especially the middle class) is primarily about their becoming white, despite a mixed *mestizo* majority (p. 55). Furthermore, the process of *blanqueamiento* (“whitening”) is inseparable from the notion of *mejorando la raza*—“improving the race” by incorporating more European blood into one’s family through intermarriage. As of this writing, Latinos/as are the most likely population to wed outside their ethnic group-- 43% of Latinos/as married in 2010 married non-Hispanic whites (Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends, 2012). Being identified as white, perhaps even more so than being a citizen, provided direct benefits to Mexican Americans and other Latinos/as who were able to pass as white, rather than *mestizo* or Indian.

Political Identities

The term Chicano/a emerged in 1968 and took shape over the following decade, beginning with groups of Mexican-American students walking out of high schools in East Los Angeles (Haney-Lopez, 2003, p. 205). These activists sought to challenge the negative image of Mexican Americans established over the previous century. Stereotypes accepted as “racial common sense” implied that, as a whole, Mexicans were “dark, dirty, lazy, cowardly and criminal” (Haney-Lopez, 2003, p. 5). I highlight this movement because it represents a key shift in the way Mexican Americans viewed themselves. Rather than seeking inclusion in Anglo groups on account of their Spanish ancestry, the

Chicano/a youth of the late 1960s rejected whiteness as part of a political position (Haney-Lopez, 2003, p. 206). The history of the Chicano/a Movement is important to this project because it represents a refutation of the value of whiteness within the Mexican-American community (Lopez, 2009, p. 206). The activists' "anti-white politics accentuated the common identity of Mexicans" (Lopez, 2009, p. 209), and was part of a broader movement that centralized a "politics of recognition" as termed by Charles Taylor (1994). In his foundational essay, he writes that "due recognition is a vital human need," is "one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics" and influences most subaltern and minority movements (Taylor, 1994, p. 25-26).

The call for recognition is linked to identity, and is therefore central in the development of groups and agency. The Chicano Movement sought to redefine the ways that a group of young people, formerly understood as Mexican Americans, were recognized and represented in public discourse. For Chicano/as, recognition held key importance because of movement-era emphasis on oppressed identities, as well as the belief that misrecognition was literally injurious to oppressed groups, serving to keep them in positions of subordination through the unequal allotment of resources and the impairment of group agency (Taylor, 1994, p. 26). However, as Haney-Lopez notes, assuming a Chicano/a identity for racial justice often did not translate to gender equality, as men and women were both expected to uphold traditional gender roles in the name of the movement (2009, pp. 225-227).

Language and the Cultural Toolkit

Current research suggests that claiming culture involves a set of practices that demonstrate elements of group norms. Swidler (1986) conceptualized the “cultural toolkit,” which refers to a set of “resources from which people can construct diverse strategies of action” in which they “select certain cultural elements... and invest them with particular meanings in concrete life circumstances” (p. 281). The cultural elements she refers to can be “such tacit culture as attitudes and styles” or “such explicit cultural materials such as rituals and beliefs” (p. 281). Other authors argue that these “strategies of action” are less available to members of ethnic minorities than they are to Anglo Americans, who often take for granted the ease with which they can opt in to “situational ethnicity,” (that is, one with European origins) which they experience as “optional, intermittent, and symbolic” (Waters, 1990, p. 158).

For Japanese American women in beauty pageants, cultural belonging also involved a degree of choice for mixed race contestants, provided they were able to perform their ethnic identities in very specific ways. In *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants*, author King-O’Riain (2006) describes how pageant contestants carry out “race work” in order to gain acceptance and access to social networks (p. 22). Race work was defined as “the bodily labor that social actors perform in deportment, dress, action, language, food practices, accent, and a range of other ways in order to make claims to a physical appearance or phenotype associated with biological notions of race” (p. 23). Her study found that mixed race people were made to work harder than others to gain the same degree of acceptance from pageant judges and from

the Japanese American community at large.

Likewise, Vasquez's book *Mexican Americans Across Generations* (2011) describes the contested terrain that third-generation Mexican Americans must negotiate. Tensions between Mexican-origin respondents usually took the form of authenticity contests, in which factors including Spanish language fluency, cultural competency, skin color, class status, clothing, and behavior were used to challenge whether someone could claim to be authentically Mexican (Vasquez, 2011, p. 213). The issue of Spanish language fluency and/or dialect is a central feature of what it means to *be* Mexican. Her research suggests that if a person does not possess a particular combination of language aptitude, phenotype, surname, and cultural competency, his or her identity as Mexican can potentially be disputed. Again this links back to Haney-Lopez's (2004) critique of the Chicano Movement's rigid definitions of Chicanismo or *mestizo* identity. However, if identity is linked to language, there may be some truth to the notion that Mexicans are becoming assimilated to American culture through what Vasquez (2011) calls "thinned attachment" (p. 89). A study conducted on third-generation Mexican Americans found that Spanish speakers were experiencing "Anglicisation"—that is, losing their native language and becoming assimilated to Anglo culture—more slowly than European and Asian immigrants (Alba et al, 2002).

As Anzaldúa states, "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself." Anzaldúa addresses the issue of language for US-born Mexican Americans by highlighting the divisions among people of Mexican descent. Key work in this area is consistent with the

construction that “speaking Spanish is equated with Mexicanness” (Ochoa, 2004, p. 72). Although Vasquez’s significant work makes some reference to miscegenation among people of Mexican descent and Anglo Americans, her investigation of mixed race Mexican Americans remains peripheral. Contrastingly, as one scholar notes, Chicano/a identity in historical terms has come to be defined as “a twentieth century phenomenon characterized by bilingualism, biculturalism, and shifting economic status,” in other words, Chicano/as can be viewed as among the first wave of people of Mexican descent in California and the Southwest who do not experience economic colonization directly (González, 1995, 131). However, as González notes, previous work by self-identifying Chicanas “exhibits the tendency to assert a ‘we,’ of family, community, or ethnicity, to speak of an historical ‘us,’” which is problematic because it erases those of mixed heritage and does not account for differences in generation, linguistic ability, or other forms of cultural capital (1995, p. 135).

Existing research is sparse regarding what the paradigms of authenticity mean for multiracial Latinos/as, who are only recently mentioned in literature about race, language, and cultural identity. Vasquez (2010), Rockquemore and Arend (2002) all mention the necessity for deeper inquiry into this population, but their explorations are still forthcoming. The following chapters will attempt to conceptualize the relationship of multiracial Latinos/as to the factors of identity Vasquez (2011) believes are most salient for third-generation Mexican Americans: Spanish language fluency, phenotype, surname, and cultural competency.

Autobiography

The emerging canon of biographies, autobiographies, short stories, fiction novels, and a variety of anthologies for, by, and about mixed race people gives voice to the lived reality of being multiracial. Since the 1990's, personal narratives have come to prominence along with advancing educational curriculum about the mixed race experience. With the vast majority of people who identify as mixed race under the age of 25, it seems natural to see a veritable explosion of college social science and humanities courses on the subject (Elam, 2011, p. 30). Along with a curriculum addressing and constituting the new field of "Mixed Race Studies," advocates have begun campaigns for educational reforms that include the multiracial experience. However, as Elam (2011, p. 31) and Mohanty (1989, p. 186) argue, since the 1970's, the university been a site of the developing "Race Industry," which is responsible for the "management, commodification, and domestication of race on American campuses" (Mohanty, 1989, p. 186). As such, Elam argues, "the new crop of undergraduate courses on mixed race around the country have, to a great extent, preceded and anticipated the emerging body of critical literature on mixed race" (2011, p. 31). Often requested by students themselves, such courses often become the sites from which political identities are developed, but these sites are not at all immune to the "domestication" of race relations Mohanty observes.

In addition to textbooks and curriculum, the mixed race movement has developed deep investments in the power of personal narrative to raise awareness about the existence of multiracials and their experiences. Most writings assume some form of the

“quest” narrative, in which “the protagonist seeks identity, parentage, [or] cultural connection, culminating in acceptance/celebration of one’s multiraced self as an explicit counter to the tragic mulatto story” (Elam, 2011, p. 44). Though some have called for the creation of a separate mixed race genre of literature, others worry that such a recategorization would erase powerful contributions from the realm of monoracial/ethnic literature more broadly (Elam, 2011, p. 44; Spencer, 1999; Spickard, 2001). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of books belonging to what Paul Spickard (2001) terms the “biracial biography boom” involve a protagonist of black and white ancestries feeling as though s/he is a black person trapped in a white body (see Danzy Senna’s 1999 novel *Caucasia* for example). Spickard (2001) hypothesizes this is the norm either because a black/white construction of the issue does the least to undermine existing racial hierarchies, or because it is a “comfortable vehicle by which white readers can enter into the exotic and frightening world of blacks in the company of a domesticated, half-white guide” (p. 77). According to Spickard (2001), even though over half of Native American children have one parent that is non-Native, and numbers of mixed Asian and Latino/a children are also steadily rising, this population is only recently becoming visible in the literature (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Chai, 2007; Elizondo-Greist, 2008; Kina & Dariotis, 2013; Prasad, 2006).

The surge in so-called “mixed race literature” and its accompanying school curriculum suggests the public is enticed by these stories. This cutting-edge literature has been marketed as representing the young, hip face of the dynamic United States. Even a representative for Duke University Press stated: “we just felt this can be a hot topic. A lot

of people will buy it,” (Toorian, cited in Spickard, 2001, p. 91). Other than novelty and timeliness, stories of the multiracial experience utilize the power of autobiography to assist in “fashioning a coherent ethnic narrative” while acknowledging that racial and ethnic identities are always shifting and fluid (Spickard, 2001, p. 91). Elam (2011) writes that the narratives of mixed race people are so culturally resonant because “they dovetail with American tenets of individualism, iconoclasm, and forward-looking modernity” (p. 40). Entire lines of skin and haircare products for multiracials have also appeared, along with specialized toys, parenting handbooks, and other accoutrements marketed for rearing healthy mixed children. Even popular cereal Cheerios featured a multiracial family starring young actress Grace Colbert in a recent ad (2013). The consumer is expected to express her commitment to social justice through purchasing power. The fashionable quality of the multiracial image is marketed as synonymous with political awareness by companies branding mixed race clothing and body care lines. In response to the charge that multiracials are inauthentic, racial poseurs, mixed race (and racial ambiguity, more specifically) becomes a chosen commodity as the market urges multiracials to fashion themselves from a variety of ethnic labels and stories (O’Hearn, 1998, cited in Spickard, 2001; see also Waters, 1990). When race is marketed in this way, “as apolitical and endlessly portable,” the multiracial movement risks participating in the global commodification of race, viewing it instead as simply a matter of personal choice (Elam, 2011, p. 50; Ignatiev, 1998). Ironically, “trying on” racial identities also requires tacit resuscitation of the racial categories the movement insists it is dismantling. Furthermore, the notion that racial identity can be picked up and discarded at will reduces the severity

of embodied race, while neglecting the impacts of racially motivated prejudice for those whose appearance does not permit them to choose.

Passing and Chosen Identities

A discussion of multiracial Latinos/as would not be complete without a discussion of passing and the social priority of the visible, decipherable elements of race. While many interview participants expressed that they occasionally “pass” as white, the reasons for this were usually relegated to skin color, hairstyle, or other visible markers of race located on the body. However, participants also noted that they often performed “race work” in order to feel included in groups of Latinos/as. Race work is required to “pass,” but is not sufficient without additional physical characteristics. Passing also relies on essentialism, meaning doing race in particular and already coded ways.

To “pass,” Moynihan (2010) says, is:

to appear to belong to one or more social subgroups other than the one(s) to which one is normally assigned by prevailing legal, medical, and/or sociocultural discourses. To pass as white, if one is ‘black,’ as male, if one is ‘female,’ is to challenge assumptions that the evidence of one’s race and/or gender is always visually available by recourse to a set of physical characteristics considered immutable—skin colour, hair texture, fingernails, genitalia, and so on. (p. 8).¹

¹ I would like to take care to challenge the *considered immutable* portion of this definition. Inasmuch as Western culture places priority on the visual, those very markers can be easily altered provided one has access to the appropriate resources (Alcoff, 2006). Indeed, in this day and age, nearly any aspect of one’s appearance can be altered using artificial means--indicating that what was once believed to be ‘essential’ about a given identity, from race to sex, is now destabilized by advancements in the cosmetic and medical industries.

Racial passing has a uniquely American history. As shorthand for “passing for white,” the term’s earliest usage refers to a black/white binary, in which people ordinarily defined as racially black due to the one-drop rule of hypodescent are able to access privileges associated with being read as white, in the pre-Civil Rights United States—namely, “passing” into freedom from enslavement. In literature, “passing is typically associated with a period stretching from Post-Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement (the 1890s to the 1960s), or, even more specifically, yoked to the Harlem Renaissance” (Moynihan, 2010, p. 2). While the phenomenon of passing has been discussed quite compellingly in terms of gender and sexuality as well as race, the lens of this project is primarily attuned to racial passing (for more on passing and gender, see Butler, 2004, 2004; Davis, 1929; Dawkins, 2012; Ginsberg, 1996; Smith, 1994; Stanley & Smith, 2001).

Revealing discussions of passing can be traced through fiction writings. Among the previous century’s most notable are Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929) from the Harlem Renaissance, along with more recent novels like Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* (1998). In both instances, the protagonists conceal their “true” identities as biracial black women in order to pass as white or “off-white” Jewish (Moynihan, 2010, p. 12). Both novels expose the farce of an essentialist view of race: that it is at all times visibly calculable if only one is discerning enough. In Larsen’s (1929) novel, Irene’s internal monologue regarding the absurdity of using phenotype alone to judge race reveals her own anxieties about being “found out” by Clare Kendry at the Drayton Hotel—a whites-only establishment:

“White people were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted

that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot. They always took her for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a gipsy. Never, when she was alone, had they even remotely seemed to suspect that she was a Negro. No, the woman sitting there staring at her couldn't possibly know" (p. 16).

Irene's inner turmoil that she might be exposed for passing as white (by another passer) illustrates that "sight does not lead in a direct line to race" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 204). Still, in order to remain undetected, passers must be "visibly compatible with the norms of skin, hair, and features for white people; they are similar to, rather than different from, whites" (Davis, 1929, p. xii). Linda Alcoff (2006) reminds us that "relying on vision for knowledge is itself a dangerous practice" because it obscures its interpretive operations through a veneer of pure perception"—in other words, we might be prone to make assumptions about someone's character or intelligence based on what we see, which is itself conditioned by social context and place (p. 204).

Irene is living proof that there are some aspects of one's ancestry that may be indiscernible visually—it is her literal physical appearance that allows her to pass as a white woman, while her mannerisms, way of speaking, clothes she wears, and other markers of class status remain unchanged. In this way, the physical characteristics of the women in Larsen's story allow them to pass undetected through a society that "would allow the collapse of all shades of whiteness emanating from countless ethnic and racial groups into a *primary difference from black people*" (Davis, 1929, p. xii; italics in

original).

Michelle Elam (2011) writes that “passing is at the dead center of, rather than peripheral to, questions of racial identity, including ‘mixed race’ identity” (p. 99). However, as Elam herself argues, what is considered racially ambiguous changes with context; the body coded as unreadable under monoracial logics of the United States, for example, might be read as unambiguously Latino/a in another location. Scholar Teresa Kay Williams (1997) explains that “the social phenomenon of passing has often been one of the few strategies available to, and utilized by, multiracial individuals to escape the detrimental impact of race” (p. 166). As with the women in Larsen’s novel, multiracials often benefit from society’s inability to discern racial identity through appearance alone. This has historically meant passing for white in order to access privileges and benefits associated with belonging to that racial group.

Marcia Alesan Dawkins broadens the scope by defining passing as follows: “passing, usually understood as an abbreviation for ‘racial passing,’ describes the ‘fact of being accepted, of representing oneself successfully as, a member of a different group.’ Generally speaking, passing refers to the means by which nonwhite people represent themselves as white” (p. 1). She writes that passing is a biracial phenomenon, one in which passers choose to identify as monoracial, but that ends as an “intersectional process through which tropes, personae, and texts combine to mark social place and discursive space” (2012, p. 159). While passing may facilitate upward mobility, authors disagree to what extent it has subversive potential, as it is imbricated in the logics of the very racial system that makes it a viable survival technique (Harper, 1998; Tyler, 1994).

In the twenty-first century, passing plays on multiracial identities as a new racial formation, conflating racial progress with racial mixing and leaving more covert forms of racism unquestioned, according to Dawkins (2012, p. 160). Passers are often viewed with suspicion because of the paradox of the act itself. In a contemporary context, to benefit from passing exposes the illusion of the post-racial nation. It demonstrates the degree to which some identities are still valued over others as the construct of race remains fixed.

Deck Lee, father of protagonist Birdie Lee in Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), believes that his biracial daughter (and all those who pass as white) is the "canary in the coal mine" of U.S. race relations (p. 393). His insistence throughout the novel that "race is a complete illusion, make-believe... a costume" that his daughter can change due to her racial ambiguity underscores the contradiction in passing (Senna, 1998, p. 391). If race is at once an illusion but also a costume (emphasizing the priority on the visible), then Birdie Lee's retort to her father unmasks the incongruity in his thinking: "If race is so make-believe, then why did I go with Mum? You gave me to Mum 'cause I looked white. You don't think that's real?" (p. 393).

Insofar as passing is a multiracial phenomenon associated with double-consciousness, passers are assumed to be afflicted by hyper-awareness of the ways they are read in the world, versus the ways they see themselves. DuBois (1903) writes that "one ever feels his two-ness... two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 204). Similarly, Dawkins (2012) notes that "passing begins by presuming that [DuBoisian duality] is human and that attempting to reconcile that duality is also human" (p. 154). In Winant's (2004) reading, double-consciousness

divides one's experience and self-awareness, introjects racism into one's racially oppressed self, while also affording that self some degree of self-defense against racial oppression (p. 1).

According to Dawkins (2012), critics of passing assume that racial honesty leads to belonging and therefore well-being. The outmoded notion that the passer is a con fraught with insecurity, prone to identity crisis, who is disloyal to his or her "true" racial self, serves only to further pathologize multiracial people's autonomy over their own self-identification. Under post-racial rhetoric, race mixing is a sign that groups can coexist peacefully, where passing represents a step backwards into acceptance of rigid racial categories. However, for Dawkins (2012), advocates of colorblindness fail to acknowledge "race or racism as cultural norms" and depict race and racism as "personal private problems that are solved personally and in private" thereby absolving society of responsibility for challenges faced by multiracials or those who pass (p. 137). Further, doing so "protects our preferred narrative of racial progress as a product of racial mixing" (Dawkins, 2012, p. 137).

The paradox of passing has direct relevance to multiracial and multiethnic people. The notion that accurate self-identification on official reporting forms promotes political empowerment, and that the mixed children of interracial, heterosexual unions advance racial progress, paints passing for monoracial as backwards and a maladjustment to an equitable post-racial order. For multiracial individuals in the post-racial era, the popular assumption is that being true to one's mixed racial ancestries automatically generates immunity to racism (Dawkins, 2012, p. 136). However, as Dawkins notes, passers often

do so precisely because they society in which they live “is also passing as just, free, equal or moral” (2012, p. 156). Unfortunately, Dawkins says, multiracial people who take advantage of their racial ambiguity in order to pass cannot access the justice, freedom, and equality in their society unless they too, are passing (2012, p. 156).

For the above reasons, the issue of racial passing provides an important lens through which to analyze visibility, multiracial Latinos/as, race work, and the mixed race movement more broadly. That racial boundaries have shifted over time and across contexts speaks to their nature as entirely social and political constructs. However, even as we acknowledge that these constructs are untrue, we cannot ignore the real implications for violence enacted along racial lines across centuries of United States nationhood, and the structures that serve to privilege or disenfranchise groups according to assigned racial identity. Beyond the mixed race movement’s push for adequate representation, it has been criticized for deploying the same logics that relegate multiracial identities to peripheral status. In sum, who is legible as Latino/a, mixed race, or white has direct implications for the interviews that follow.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Method

This project examines the ways that multiracial Latinos/as use race work (King-O’Riain, 2006) and flexible ethnicity (Vasquez, 2011) in attempts to access monoracial Latino/a and white communities. Specifically, it interrogates the significance of Spanish language ability and phenotype as multiracial Latinos/as seek belonging in groups organized by racial or ethnic identity. Multiracial people of Latino/a and white ancestry are underrepresented in the literature of Mixed Race Studies, so I conducted thirteen interviews with self-identified multiracial Latinos/as in hopes of addressing these questions. Their stories will be featured in the next section. I utilize the work of Vasquez (2011) on third-generation Mexican Americans because of similarities in acculturation between her population and the people I researched. Even though Vasquez (2011) does not treat mixed race as a distinct category, my project seeks to advance her work by addressing multiracial Latinos/as specifically. This chapter describes the structure, the study’s scope, its limitations, and intended dissemination, and concludes with a cursory discussion of themes that emerged within those thirteen interviews.

This project uses qualitative research to address the nuances of race and belonging for Latinos/as of mixed ancestry. I will use the concept of “race work” (King-O’Riain, 2006) to discuss the ways multiracial Latinos/as navigate ostensibly monoracial spaces, with attention to the ways participants reinforce, expand, or reject racial boundaries altogether. I hope to identify whether a liminal social location does in fact provide any unique epistemological acumen and to what extent it politicizes subjects, if at all

(Anzaldúa, 1987; Elam, 2011).

Participant Selection

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with self-identified multiracial people who have one white and one Latino/a parent, broadly defined as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Census 2011). Here, I use the term “multiracial” synonymously with “mixed race.” Each participant had to be eighteen years of age or older, and was recruited using social media and snowball sampling. Once interviewees agreed to participate, they were offered a consent form to sign and return to the researcher before interviews could begin. Interviews took place via phone or in person, depending on the geographic location of the interviewee. The two interviewees who live in the Bay Area were asked to do in-person interviews in private group study rooms in the San Francisco State University library. The remaining participants (located in other places across the United States, with one in El Salvador) agreed to phone or Skype interviews at a time of their choosing to protect confidentiality.

Strategies for Protection of Participants

A potential risk associated with the study is the loss of privacy. Because snowball sampling was a key recruitment technique, some of the participants were acquainted with one another outside the bounds of the study. In order to prevent a loss of privacy, pseudonyms were used in an attempt to protect participants’ confidentiality. Real names

and pseudonyms are written in the researcher's interview notes and kept in a secure locked location. Interview transcripts will be stored in a password-protected Microsoft Word document.

Data Collection

This research helps illustrate how “flexible ethnicity” (Vasquez, 2011) influences identity choices for multiracial people with one Latino/a and one white parent. I examine what elements of the cultural toolkit must be present in order for “monoracial” Latinos/as to consider multiracial persons authentic, measured in anecdotal evidence during interviews. Further, I assess the extent to which Spanish language fluency is an asset in “battles for authenticity,” and whether fluency is enough to override diminished racial claims (Vasquez, 2010; King-O’Riain, 2006).

In semi-structured interview form, I discussed the following issues and questions with informants:

- 1.) Please describe your childhood. What was your relationship with your family like?
- 2.) Please describe your parents. Which one brought which ancestry to your background? What generation was your Latino/a parent?
- 3.) Did your parents ever discuss your mixed ancestry?
- 4.) Who did you mostly play with in school?
- 5.) When did you first become aware of your ancestry/race?
- 6.) Have you ever been racially misidentified? What did you do?

- 7.) How do you respond to questions like, “what are you?”
- 8.) Would you say that you notice any privileges or pitfalls associated with your race? (exoticization, discrimination, etc.)
- 9.) Has your racial/ethnic identity changed throughout your life? How? Why?

Limitations

Eleven out of the thirteen participants were either currently attending college or had obtained a college degree within the past five years. There were two exceptions: one was eighteen years old, on the college track, and anticipating acceptance letters the following spring. The other exception was a 43 year old engineer, recruited online via a forum for multiracial people. Further, because snowball sampling was a key recruitment method, many of the participants met while attending university and so happen to have similar political affiliations, degrees, and/or majors. The social sciences and humanities were overrepresented in my participant pool compared to other educational backgrounds, which likely had some bearing on the way participants interpreted their own multiracial experience. I view education level as a limitation because it narrows the participant pool. Further research should address those multiracial Latinos/as without college backgrounds, or with degrees in other areas, as well as those from a wider age range.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

I analyze data according the rubrics provided by Bonilla-Silva (2002), King-O’Riain (2006), Vasquez (2010), and Waters (1990). My goal is to analyze the extent to

which multiracials perform “race work” (King-O’Riain, 2006), and how effective it is. I use Waters’ (1990) notion of “ethnic options” and Vasquez’s (2011, 2014) work on “flexible ethnicity” to examine the ways in which multiracial Latinos/as experience their mixed ancestry, and attempt to put this in conversation with colloquial understandings of identity politics. I attempt to cross reference interview data with Bonilla-Silva’s Latin Americanization argument (2002) in order to establish whether these arguments apply to the population I studied.

Dissemination Plan

When the project is completed, I will electronically distribute copies of my research with names changed to the focus group participants. It will be published in the San Francisco State University Library so that other students in Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, and so on may access it. The Boys and Girls Club of the San Francisco Bay Area will receive a condensed version of my thesis in hopes that they will become more aware of the situation of mixed race Latinos/as and be better able to mentor the population. I will also send my findings to other organizations that serve people of mixed ancestry in the Bay Area. In addition, I will contribute a condensed version to the Asian American Literary Review’s Mixed Race Initiative, which is a month long program that helps teachers and professors incorporate mixed race theories and issues into their curriculum in literature, sociology, anthropology, and Ethnic Studies. This is an exciting opportunity because it represents a new project and one that is also on the cutting edge of scholarly work around mixed race issues. Its goal is to foster discussion and

conversation around mixed race identity in relation to all racial groups, and to articulate the unique experiences of mixed people for those who may not already have access to this community. Lastly, I will distribute selected portions of the project to people who wanted to participate, but could not due to time constraints or other limitations. It is my hope in doing this work that someone like myself, who once felt utterly lost because of my mixed heritage, may take some comfort in knowing that she is not alone.

This research offers insights about the felt dimensions of making identity choices as a person of mixed ancestry who also experiences flexible ethnicity. Even though many of the interview questions began superficially, they caused participants to reflect and share other parts of their experience that had not been directly inquired about, such as anecdotes about their identities. The felt experience of acceptance is significant in determining the boundaries and porosity of ethnic groups. For this reason, anecdotal evidence demonstrated how participants knew whether their race work had been accepted. Once known, the researcher could anticipate how the embodied elements of the person's identity contributed to the reception of their race work. The study is rudimentary, but appears to have met its goal. It demonstrates, through thirteen interviews and thorough reconnaissance of data, some of the factors that influence how multiracials choose to identify ethnically. The most salient elements of identity choices were: Spanish language fluency, phenotype (specifically, whether or not one was read as white), and cultural capital. Participants were also politicized by their experience of being multiracial. The interplay of each factor will be discussed further in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Four: Participant Profiles

This thesis attempts to chart the disparity between people with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds but vastly different relationships to their identities. In the following pages, you will read stories of the thirteen participants I interviewed using the rubric from the previous chapter. In each interview, similarities and differences emerged based on the particularities of that respondent's life experience. Participants who felt they did not fully belong in Latino/a or white communities cultivated resilience and inspirations that later blossomed into education and activism. The challenges they faced because of their mixed ancestry guided them to political consciousness. Together, the thirteen individuals map trends and norms implicated in the experience of being mixed Latino/a and white. The profiles treat themes of phenotype, white passing, and Spanish language ability. Every participant was middle class and college educated, or in the case of the youngest, Sophia Acosta, on her way to a college education. There were six people with a Mexican parent, five with a Salvadoran parent, one with an Argentine mother, and one with a Dominican mother. There were five men, one transman, and seven women. Of these, five participants identified as queer and five were fluent in Spanish. An overwhelming ten out of thirteen participants passed as white and yet rejected a white identity, opting instead to regard themselves as mixed, people of color, or Latino/a for various political reasons. Those are featured first. The final two interviewees did not pass as white and felt that they were racialized as nonwhite because of their appearance. Katherine Lara and Sophia Acosta, the opening stories at the beginning of this chapter, represent two ends of a continuity

that came to light only after completing the interviews: one who advocates being identified as a person of color, and the other who attempts to distance herself as much as possible from her Latina heritage. I present Katherine Lara first because her experience encapsulates a key theme expressed by other participants: the struggle to assume a particular self-identification in the face of misconceptions by others.

Many interviewees mentioned the sense of being between two worlds because of their mixed ancestry, particularly around Spanish language fluency, which was overwhelmingly viewed as a litmus test that could determine whether they were authentically Latino/a. Most participants opted not to identify with whiteness, choosing instead to learn about and align with Latino/a culture, even when they admitted they passed as white. However, Sophia Acosta, the only participant who did not express pride in her multiracial background, attempted to conceal it and to assimilate to whiteness whenever possible. The difference between the ways she managed her ethnic identity compared with other participants speaks to varying levels of agency and political allegiances among the population I studied. Subjects believed they should be allowed to identify however they felt comfortable, but ran into obstacles when met with the assessments of others. Here are their stories.

Katherine Lara, a 27-year old woman from Northern California who has both Mexican and white ancestry, told me a story about her experience of being read as white by a colleague. While Katherine admits to passing as white, she remains highly invested in identifying as a person of color. At a forum to discuss the exclusion of people of color at the university's LGBTQ resource center, a clash took place when her identity was

misread and then publicly debated.

“There came a point where the facilitator said, ‘I’d like to take a moment to hear from folks of color.’ So I started to speak, and the facilitator stopped and said, ‘Katherine, right now I just want to hear from people of color.’ And I had to say, ‘well, I am a person of color,’ and she said, ‘I didn’t realize that.’ What was really crazy is I’d been working with this person for over a year... It was like she just looked at my skin and made an assumption.” Katherine’s choice to identify as a person of color despite her colleagues reading her as white highlights the intersection of personal identity choice with the interpretations of others. She was further challenged by a darker-skinned woman of color attendee: “‘Don’t you realize that when you walk down the street it’s very different?’ and I said ‘I know, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’m a person of color.’ So that was the first time that I’ve ever been policed, but it’s happened.” Presumably, the person who questioned her was referring to her own understanding of skin color hierarchy operative in the United States. Katherine’s experience resembles many other study participants who expressed feeling that their identities were policed by (usually darker-skinned and/or monoracial) people of color. Informants explained that this was due to a deeply felt connection between the ability to pass as white and benefitting from white privilege, particularly in terms of class status, English-language proficiency, and freedom from racialization.

Katherine says her social positioning as a mixed Latina makes her feel, “I’m very lucky because if I was just white, I think I would not understand my privilege nearly as much. I think I would’ve had to spend a whole lot more time. And then I have that ability

to talk to other white people and explain it, because it's something I feel so deeply because I come from a person of color identity, and then when I'm in spaces with just people of color it's like, it feels really good to know—there's the classic thing of 'we have to have white allies and white allies have to reach out to people within their own communities,' and it feels really good to know that I can do both of those things."

Because of her ability to move between two worlds, Katherine was happy with the social fluidity that being a multiracial Latina afforded her, and spoke little of the sense of being an outsider that many other participants experienced acutely. She felt that her multiracial ancestry gave her an added responsibility because, "it's sort of like I can still very much claim the identity of being a person of color, but it's like any identity, there's politics with it." However, she was skeptical because she felt that too much focus on privilege and oppression could hinder coalition-building. "You have to understand your privileges and oppression within that, and so I think I understand, but it's still very much like, 'why are people trying to divide?' We have to be supporting each other and understanding different layers within our own communities, but the more we divide it, it's so much harder to get anything done. So I would definitely never want to tell somebody that I'm the same person of color that you are because it's not true." While acknowledging that her experience as a person of color was radically different than others, Katherine expressed concern about the ways identities were defined. "I think just going off of skin color is very limited... Linguistics is huge within Latino communities, or you could break it down by class, or by gender, and the more time you spend breaking it down, the more harmful ultimately it is."

Sophia Acosta, a 19-year old woman from an affluent Bay Area suburb, told me sadly, “I think twice about being Latino. It’s like, ‘Damn it, why do I have to be Hispanic, why did I get this card of being Hispanic and growing up here, what did I do?’ I can’t help who my mom fell in love with, I can’t help who she wanted to marry and have a child with, so I just suck it up and say, you know that’s how society is nowadays. Hispanics haven’t always been treated fairly. Sometimes people don’t like it when Hispanics are around, but you know I can’t help it. That’s who I am, so I kind of just laugh it off and not make a big deal out of it because I’m going to get it everywhere I go.” Sophia said she struggles to reconcile her father’s Mexican ancestry. Her mother is Italian. She says, “I like to identify with them [my mother’s family] because it helps me out around here.” Acosta was an anomaly in the sense that she embraced whiteness to evade racist attitudes expressed by her wealthy white peers.

Sophia associates whiteness with wealth or elevated class status, and seeks to distance herself as much as possible from the negative stereotypes of Latinos/as (Mexicans specifically) held by people where she lives. “Here in [suburbia] that’s mostly what you see... Very working class, some of them here don’t speak English... You see them as people working in restaurants as bussers, or gardeners, people working in stores in the back, that’s pretty much it. So you know my friends would poke a lot of fun at it [her Mexican heritage].” Sophia’s passing follows a traditional form in the sense that she tries to abandon her identity as a person of color in order to reap privileges associated with whiteness. She says she is uncomfortable with the fact that people in her mostly white town ask whether she is Latina. “They can see it on my face, because of my hair,

because of my skin, so usually I just say that's what I am, but I'm mostly Italian. That's what I get a lot from my mother's side.”

Sophia has a distant relationship with her father, who is a member of a large family from the Mexican state of Zacatecas. “They came to California with their families, and my grandpa was the youngest of 14, which is what a lot of people kind of see in Mexican families, they see a lot of kids.” She attributes her lack of Spanish fluency to “my grandma and grandpa, they never spoke Spanish to each other. Even though they’re both from Mexico, they never spoke Spanish when they met, because my grandma spoke more slang. Spanish slang. Then my grandpa was more of a formal Spanish speaker, and so he hated it when she spoke Spanish to him, they never taught their kids, never taught me, so I guess it's pretty much dead.” Sophia does not see this as a problem because she wants to distance herself from her Mexican ancestry, particularly as a mixed race woman. She says, “in middle school, there weren't a lot of Hispanics, and then there would only be like 1 or 2 other Hispanics in my class, but they weren't in my situation [they were not multiracial]. If they were, they had a lot of money and parents would be together, and so my situation was I had mixed parents who separated. So apparently my situation of having mixed parents who were split up is a little bit frowned upon.”

Because Sophia’s parents’ separation involved custody battle in court, her relationship with her father’s side of her family is tenuous. She says, “I feel like they don't like my mother, and because my mother fought my dad in court for custody, they take it out on me. So it's really unfair. I really wish I had a better connection with them, but I don't.” She says her father’s family sees her mother as “a suburban snob.” Because

of this, Sophia feels discriminated against. “I always heard stereotypes against Hispanics, but now I see it's Hispanics giving stereotypes to us, like my mom's side, but we're white, so I'm kind of seeing it the other way around from what we're used to.”

Sophia responds to the “What are you?” question by saying, “I'm Italian... but I'm a little Hispanic on my dad's side.” Sophia feels that because of her Spanish last name and her physical appearance, she has to reveal her true ancestry when asked, even though it makes her uncomfortable. “Eventually I'm going to have to come out with it and say I am Hispanic, because I can't do anything to change that, but there's still a little bit of caution when I have to say that because I don't know how people are going to react or what they're going to think.” Sophia says of her mixed ancestry: “It makes me feel like a sore thumb in a crowd.” When I asked what makes her nervous about telling people she is part Mexican, she tells me a story about being the subject of jokes with some of her friends. “I guess it's what you kind of get when you're Hispanic... Sometimes when I would drive around with my friends, they'd see a gardener and they'd be like, ‘Sophia, do you want to join them?’ or sometimes they'll say, ‘Sophia, do you know them? Are you related to them?’ It's like no, not everybody who's Hispanic is a gardener.” She was frustrated with the level of entitlement she saw in her wealthy white peers, which she attributed to their class privilege. “It kind of makes me think, what if I tell them I'm Hispanic but I have a lot of money. Does that make it any better here? I think it would. Here your race is part of your existence, but it's also your money. It depends on your job; it depends on how much money you have. So I think yeah, they might talk about me being Hispanic, but if I had a bunch of money, I would probably not be looked down on

or questioned as much. It's all about money here.”

Sophia felt strongly that her part Mexican ancestry worked to her detriment in the wealthy suburb where she lived. Her response was to attempt to conceal or downplay her Mexican background, while emphasizing her Italian side. Sophia was unusual because she was the only one of thirteen participants who said she felt outright embarrassed by being multiracial and part Latina. However, she was straightforward about the impact of class in its perceived ability to elevate multiracial people to acceptance in white circles.

Chloe Rivera-Miller is 22 years old, the daughter of a Salvadoran mother and an Irish-Italian father, and told me she identifies as “on the LGBT spectrum somewhere.” Born in New Jersey, Chloe says her family moved around frequently; she has lived in New Jersey, El Salvador, California, and New York, and was residing in El Salvador at the time of our interview. During her younger life in New Jersey, she says, “with my grandparents, age six or seven, that was the first time I realized I was *not* white.” Although she was aware that her family was “not rich,” she notes that one of the more salient elements of her upbringing was her awareness that she was “not Latina enough” for her peers with two Latino/a parents. She remembers a time in California when “in middle school this one girl called me ‘oreo’ or something, and she’s Mexican calling me that! I guess I was kind of shocked.” She actively chooses to identify with both sides of her ancestry, which can present challenges when faced with the “what are you?” question so common to mixed race people. While working in El Salvador, she says, “I have to explain I’m from the States. Salvie mom, *gringo* dad. But in the States I would get that a lot. A lot. And it’s just these clueless white kids, never really met other people, different

racial makeup people... I don't *not* tell them, I just make them work for it." Chloe explains that she responds differently when she is asked that question in El Salvador because "for such a small country they're very geographically precise, so I have to be very specific as well. Especially with the communities that I'm working in, it's really important that they know that I'm not just some *gringa* coming in to work with them, that I have a personal connection—this is why I feel motivated to come in and work." She tells me that she has felt like a cultural outsider in the United States amongst both white and Latino/a peers. "That's one of the things that was hard growing up, not just being mixed, but I was also from a very young age, very politically conscious. So that adds another dimension to this loneliness feeling." Although there is a "really strong gay and lesbian movement here [El Salvador]," Chloe admits she has "taken a minute [a break] on the dating women thing." When asked her reasons for this, she expressed hesitation about approaching women because of cultural differences she did not fully understand. In spite of this, she said moving to El Salvador is "the first time I'm not in conflict with the culture around me. Because in the States it's always—the culture is more than just white-centric, it's also capitalist-centric." She says living in her mother's home country has caused her to feel more secure in her Salvadoran identity because of the "much better organized leftist movement" there, and she highly recommends that people who are mixed explore both sides of their ancestry to the fullest extent that they can.

Chloe declared that, "as a Latina, yes, I qualify as a person of color." While she admits to sometimes passing as white, she told me that she has only begun to grow into her Latina identity more recently. When asked to elaborate about what being Latina

means for her, she responded, “My skin tone, my family... I feel like I qualify more as a person of color than as a white person... The reason why we speak Spanish so well is because we went back to El Salvador every year for at least 2 weeks to visit family and practice Spanish.” It seemed that Chloe’s choice to identify as Latina was influenced not only by what she called her seasonal “Mediterranean” skin tone and time spent in her mother’s home country, but also of having fully developed Spanish language skills and the resources with which to use them. However, she divulged that once she spent an extended period of time in El Salvador, she had to rethink the way she conceptualized her identity in the United States. “I’m kind of like a white girl here [in El Salvador]. For all the times I came to visit, and I speak Spanish... I’m not like a Salvadoran! I’m mixed! That was kind of a revelation. Even though I feel so accepted and stuff here, there’s never going to be one place where everybody else is just like me. We’re [mixed Latinos/as] always going to stick out a little bit.”

Chloe expressed feeling like an outsider because of her mixed ancestry, but appeared to have mostly made her peace with it since moving to El Salvador. She understood that she would never fit fully in any one homogenous place but said she felt lucky to speak Spanish so she could “have that connection with the motherland.” As with nearly all participants, the way Chloe identifies changes depending on context; in El Salvador she is far more willing to explain her ambiguous appearance and background, whereas in the United States with white interlocutors, she “makes them work for it.”

Martina Bell-Garcia was 18 at the time of our interview. She passes as white but self-identifies as half-Mexican and queer. Martina is a fluent Spanish speaker. She says,

“I’m struggling with myself about whether I count as a person of color, and whether it’s fair of me to go into those spaces.” The spaces to which she refers are people of color-only events hosted by student groups at her university. “It’s hard for me because I want to be there, but sometimes I don’t feel like I have a right to be there.” She says she has begun opting out of such events because she understands that “the way I look would seem like an intrusion, so... I’m just kind of stepping back.” Although she feels disappointed about not participating, she is also frustrated that she does not see people with marginalized identities collaborating because “we’re dividing ourselves so extensively.” Like Katherine, Martina believed that the emphasis on whether or not someone qualified as a person of color to outsiders was less relevant than how they chose to identify themselves. However, her personal assessment of her ethnic identity is strongly influenced by her friends, who hold conflicting opinions about whether or not she should claim a person of color identity.

Martina says she feels at home in her campus queer people of color group. “I felt like that was a different group because it was queerness *and* it was two groups that I could identify with. I felt acceptance there. But then my work schedule changed so I couldn’t go anymore.” Instead, Martina finds middle ground in a Latino/a student-focused campus group. “It’s only Latinos, so of course it’s everyone who identifies with that, so I feel like it’s a more accepting environment. But then there’s this whole dialogue going on right now that one of my friends—who’s a darker skinned Latina from the Dominican Republic—says, ‘that club is not for people like me [a dark-skinned Latina from the Dominican Republic] because most people who go are lighter skinned.’ Even

though the cultural center is a safe space for all people of color, there is kind of this distinction made between lighter-skinned people of color and darker-skinned people of color.”

Martina said her sense of ethnic identity has changed based on where she lived. During her early childhood in Boston, many of her friends had similar family dynamics—one Mexican and one white parent—so “I guess we just thought it was normal and not really talked about,” she says. Then, during first and second grade in Mexico, she realized her background was different than other kids. Because of her last name, Bell, sounding decidedly Anglo, teachers in her first grade class struggled to pronounce it. She recalls, “I knew that there was a distinction because everyone else’s name was easier to say than mine.” She says living there, “I definitely felt Mexican but it also definitely pushed my American side.” Upon moving back to the U.S., she felt rooted in both sides of her ancestry through middle and high school.

Martina’s concern about whether or not she should be present in spaces created specifically for people of color formed the majority of our interview. Like many other participants, she wanted very much to be included within the group, but had reservations about whether her half-white ancestry and light-skinned appearance made it permissible or not. The places where she felt most at home in claiming her background were a Latino/a student group and a queer people of color group at her university. Her self-understanding was largely informed by intersectionality. Like others, she feared that if she self-identified inconsistently from the way other people read her, then her authenticity would be questioned and identity policed. Despite this, she chose to step

back from identity-based spaces until she was able to self-define comfortably.

Jackson Ruiz, 19, says that growing up, he felt outcasted. “I was kind of like, forced to play a role, to be the white kid for the Latinos and vice versa.” He attended a suburban, mostly white elementary school in the Bay Area, but went to “a much more inner city middle school,” where he was “considered very white” by his mostly Latino peers. Jackson says that due to his lack of Spanish fluency, he “definitely noticed getting called out more by the Latino community than by white people.”

Jackson was 19 years old at the time of our interview, the child of a Mexican father from Guadalajara, Jalisco, and a white mom. He identifies as an ally to the LGBT community and says he often passes as white. He says, “I have pretty light skin but I guess I darken in the sun and stuff, I definitely don’t think that’s white people’s conception of what a white person or a Latino is supposed to look like.” Because of this, he says he thinks he looks “mixed,” although he can recall feeling the need to prove his Latino identity numerous times, specifically around the issue of Spanish fluency. He remembers being harassed and called “white boy” by both Latino/a and white peers in middle and high school. “I definitely remember when I was in middle school, being called a white boy and being like, ‘no, I’m serious! My last name is Ruiz! My dad’s Mexican!’” Once he made this claim, however, his peers usually responded in similar ways. “They’d be like, ‘well do you speak Spanish?’ and when the answer is no, then they’d be like, ‘well you can’t be that Latino, you must be white too, or more white than Latino.’” Jackson says he has “grown out of internalizing all that,” referring to authenticity contests centered on Spanish speaking ability. Now, he feels more

comfortable attempting to educate others about his ancestry, and even challenges others' expectations about it. "I would kind of read someone, based on the way someone would ask me, what they expected to hear... If someone Latino asked me about my heritage I would say that I was white, just to kind of, not give in, but to be like, 'I know what you're looking to hear.'"

Despite the fact that Jackson admits to passing as white, he says at this point he marks "Latino" on official forms. Yet, he understands that he does carry a degree of white privilege because of his appearance and being raised by his white mother, so he chooses not to identify as a person of color. "I definitely recognize that I've had some privileges with one half of me that a lot of people of color do not experience. I don't really try and claim that [person of color identity], just because I'm kind of wary of stepping on any toes." Jackson says he advises other multiracial Latinos/as to be who they are and not allow the preconceptions of others determine how they self-define. However, he states that he does not feel comfortable defining himself in all contexts because others may challenge his authenticity. "That's still a battle that I find myself losing. The real answer is kind of like just telling them 'no, your interpretation of what I am or what I'm supposed to be is not valid.'" Jackson's struggle for self-definition in the face of conflicting views from others was shared by many participants, who felt that the definition of Latino/a could be expanded to better account for their experience.

Andrea Hernandez was 21 years old at the time of our interview, and is making an effort to re-familiarize herself with the Spanish language despite having forgotten much of it since childhood. The child of a first-generation Mexican mother and white father

from Nebraska, she says the way she self-identifies changes depending on who she is speaking to. Despite the frequency with which it occurs, Andrea dislikes being asked “what are you?” or “where are you *really* from?” Usually, she responds to these questions by asserting that she is American, and possibly trying to educate the interlocutor about the distinction between race, ethnicity, and nationality. She believes that these types of questions are most commonly about racial or ethnic identification, rather than place of birth.

Andrea grew up middle class in Northern California and was attending a private liberal arts college on the East Coast at the time of our interview. She says the small town where she was raised was “middle to upper class, mostly white, [and] there are hardly any Spanish speaking people there.” In this context, Andrea says she is seen as “being of color, in particular within my extended family,” where she says “my brother, my mom, and I are all the brown kids within this really white mob of blue-eyed, blond people.” In contrast, at her university, she has had numerous experiences “where I’m told that I shouldn’t consider myself having an experience of someone who is of color.” Because of this, Andrea feels herself caught between two worlds: her family, where she stands out as a person of color, and her university, where she is considered white due to her light skin and middle class background. Like many of the interviewees in this project, Andrea’s identity has been challenged by her Latino/a peers. She struggles with choosing how to identify herself knowing that foregrounding her mother’s Mexican heritage is likely to cause backlash from her darker-skinned Latino/a friends.

Part of Andrea’s struggle with her identity comes from the ways that she

experiences flexible ethnicity, and that she is embedded in a social circle in which Latino/a authenticity is conceptualized as dark-skinned, Spanish fluent, and working class. She says, “I really struggle with that word authentic... I don't think you need to be from a working class, struggling community or positionality in order to be authentic.” As we will see, Andrea's choices for self-identity as a multiracial person are limited by the perceptions of others, who sometimes challenge them. She mentioned that her ethnic ambiguity was a source of curiosity for others, who often asked her about her background. To those questions, Andrea would sometimes respond with a brief genealogy or talk about her upbringing, but she also felt that she was expected to highlight aspects of her white privilege and/or class privilege. She told me, “It's always important to recognize and verbalize privilege,” but was concerned with how “that becomes like the endpoint and then people stop listening... and I think that's where it's unfortunate.” A political activist and writer, Andrea attempted to express her concerns in the school paper, in an article that garnered a great deal of criticism. “People were pissed, and they just couldn't see what was being said ultimately.” However, her intention in writing the piece was “there are all these people policing other people and themselves according to what they think is a real or authentic Latina, but what *is* a real or authentic Latina? They're such a diverse contradictory identity and community, and it's just unproductive to do that to ourselves and our peers and our community... That didn't get across.”

Ultimately, Andrea says, she thinks Latinos/as should “name privilege and move on to build bridges together.” As a mixed race Latina, she says she wants others like her

to know that, “it's an extremely diverse community, it's so contradictory, it's complex, and it's never going to be simple. Even if you do speak Spanish or you are from Mexico, no matter where you go, you're going to be told you're not enough. It doesn't stop. So there's no point to think that you can get all the requirements and feel complete, because you never will... The point is realizing it's a contradictory complex and there's no way to be authentic, there's no way to be pure, there's no way to feel real. That's a fantasy, and realizing that comes with time... and with mistakes.” Andrea's acute awareness of her positionality as a multiracial Latina offered her a great deal of insight about the ways race operates in varying contexts. While she acknowledged that she sometimes passes as white, the way Andrea understands herself as a multiracial Latina is heavily mediated by the way others categorize her.

Santiago Ortiz-King, 22, told me “choosing a real name for myself has been hard,” he says of his current name: “It’s really specific and really annoying that my parents did this, but I’m named after each of my grandparents.” Santiago is transmasculine and was preparing for top surgery when we spoke. He said “it’s been really hard for me to choose a different name, because my middle name just worked out perfectly, and it’s always been a good, gender neutral name.” He says it has been a challenge for him to break away from his given name while still honoring his past and his grandparents.

Santiago is child of a half Nicaraguan father and Italian mother. Born to a middle class family in West Los Angeles, he self-identifies as Central American or mixed because those who inquire about his ancestry do not always know where Nicaragua is. He

is fluent in Spanish and usually passes as white, which he says surprises strangers who do not expect him to speak Spanish. He is aware that he uses code-switching among different groups of friends in order to highlight or downplay certain aspects of his ethnicity. Rather than doing so in order to prove his authenticity, Santiago's code-switching seems to be about comfort and ease. He tells me, "I don't know if I do it naturally or consciously. When I'm with specific people I always say I drop down, I use more slang, I'll drop Spanish more often, and my accent changes, so I feel like I play that up sometimes more with certain people or around certain groups." Santiago likes to play with the expectations of other people. "It's kind of like, keep looking but I don't really care," he said.

From an early age, Santiago recalls being "the only white kid [in junior high school in East L.A.], even though I wasn't really white and I spoke better Spanish than everyone else." He says he had trouble finding community during adolescence. "To some extent I didn't fit in with anyone so that was a common thing, but I just didn't fit anywhere so it was fine. I just kind of floated around a lot. I was close to dropping out too." Although he sometimes self-identifies as white for the sake of simplicity, Santiago says he still does not feel that he fits fully within either white or Latino/a groups. He says of his identity: "It shifted, I think specifically from undergrad to grad, because I changed what I was studying. I did Latino Studies in undergrad, and so then it was pretty clear, and my last name is Ortiz, so it was pretty clear. But now I'm in Gender Studies, so I feel like I've kind of been less assertive about that [mixed Latino identity]." He acknowledges that his ethnic identity has changed over time and that those changes are also related to

his transition process, which felt more central to him at the time of our interview, specifically in relation to his name. However, he notes that others are quick to compartmentalize his identities as both multiracial and transgender. He told me about meeting with a therapist in order to discuss approval for top surgery. “I had to get a letter from a therapist, and the therapist has to say that you’re qualified—whatever that means—so in the conversation with that therapist I had to only focus on my transness, you know, but I wanted to use that therapist for something more. I just want a steady therapist.” Santiago expressed frustration that a single provider could not address all of his complexities. “They either just want to focus on trans, when I want to focus on something else, or they just focus on anxiety, not treating the transness and understanding how that all works together, and more specifically not seeing how mixed identity comes into that.” He echoed these sentiments when I asked him what he would like to say to other multiracial Latinos/as: “That you may have to compartmentalize yourself in certain situations but it doesn't always have to happen. You can always be yourself.”

Santiago’s experience of his ethnicity was influenced by his gender identity. Because he was preparing to have top surgery when we spoke, our interview focused on his process specifically as a masculine of center Latino. Santiago felt his intersectional identities were truncated by the capacities of others, particularly service providers, who were ill-equipped to understand him. His therapists did not realize that their insistence on compartmentalizing his gender and ethnic identities could actually contribute to the anxiety he sought their help to treat.

Caroline Sandoval was 24 at the time of our interview. She considers herself a

fluent Spanish speaker, even as she admits, “it would take me a good three days to feel comfortable speaking to anyone,” because she does not use the language regularly. A child of a Mexican father and white mother, Caroline spent the majority of her childhood and adolescence in Arizona, where she recalls being bullied by other children for her racial background. She tells me that from a young age, “I was always aware of not being white,” because “racism there [in Arizona] looks way different there than it does here [in California]. It’s not as nice. And because of that I spent a little bit of time getting beat up and a lot of time being verbally harassed for being Latina, but there you just say Mexican.” Now in California, Caroline says that she is “largely read as white. I think 75 percent of the time I’m read as white.” In spite of this, she says she has “a visceral, upset reaction to that [being read as white], because I spent so much of my early life not being read as white and getting a lot of crap for not being white. And to move to the Bay and to be read as white rather frequently is just a little disconcerting.” However, Caroline reveals that “my parents took great pains to put me in a lot of wealthier white schools,” even though they were working-class, but she was always aware that “I wasn’t like them, from a very young age... Just the way I talked, the way I looked, the money that I didn’t have in comparison, the things that I could or could not do... largely the way I dressed.”

This sense of being an outsider in relation to her white, middle and upper middle class co-students did not lead her to identify more strongly with her Mexican ancestry. Rather, Caroline admits that growing up, her Mexican heritage was “something that I fought very hard against and internalized very deeply as a source of shame.” Later on, as she was “going through these developmental stages it became something I was very

happy about. I began to recognize structural politics for the first time in my life.”

Learning about structural politics, Caroline says, made her feel like “It’s okay that I’m this way, and in fact it’s a source of empowerment.” But she admits “that’s not where I’m at anymore and it hasn’t been for quite a while.” Even though she is aware that the way she is read by others varies greatly according to context, Caroline still rejects a white identity and feels she is justified in doing so because of the way she was treated for her background growing up. When asked how she identifies now, she said: “Clearly I am a person of color. Someone can see that if they look closely enough at my skin. Or maybe they can’t.”

Caroline says her outsider perspective is a corollary of her mixed ancestry. “I think that generally being between two places makes me prone to move towards—along with economic status—less than mainstream politics or less than mainstream social ideas.” When asked what she finds most challenging about being a multiracial Latina, Caroline speculates that her answer would have been different if the question had been asked five or ten years ago. At this point, she says her biggest challenge is “navigating asserting who I am in a way that doesn’t reduce me to either a white person or a brown person who is tokenized by white people... But these are really small-scale things right now, so it doesn’t really seem like that big of a deal to me.” Although she realizes her choices about identity affect her in relatively small ways, she acknowledges that her flexible ethnicity affords her some advantages and will impact her everyday life. “I’m sure that these things affect whatever economic standing I’ll have in the future or the kind that I’ll have my whole life... They definitely affect the kind of relationships that I have,

friendly and intimate, and will, I'm sure, for the rest of my life.”

Caroline's refusal to self-identify as white is indicative of her sense of being an outsider in white spaces. Aside from mentioning that her grandparents spoke Spanish to her, she did not describe feeling like an outsider in spaces where Latinos/as predominate. She stressed that her “less than mainstream politics or social ideas” were a direct result of being multiracial and being between multiple worlds, while rarely being an insider in any given one. Further, having lived in two geographically distinct communities provided her a unique insight about how others' perception of her racial background is read in different ways depending on social and geographical context, but is also impacted by the other's perception of class status.

Julian Torres, 22, of Argentine and Anglo parentage, said his mixed ancestry helped politicize him. “I connected American ignorance of where I'm from to just ignorance of the world or complete demeaning of human life elsewhere,” and became “so against dominant society I wanted to fight it,” he said. As a result, he began to identify with Che Guevara and other Latin American revolutionaries during his adolescence. Julian's Argentine mother raised him with a strong sense of Argentinian heritage, but was herself quite invested in assimilating to American professional culture. He says, “that would usually entail her being ashamed of her accent, or very self-conscious of how she spoke even though she was generally white as many Argentines are—very light-skinned at least.” Despite her efforts, he says, “she would still be faulted in her environment by how she spoke English.” Because of this, she did not labor to ensure her son became fluent in Spanish. He said she spoke to him in Spanish “when I was first born, but then

she stopped really quickly. She really stopped speaking Spanish altogether. Only in times of great worry would she speak Spanish, which is common I guess.” Julian attributes her abrupt cessation of Spanish to her desire to assimilate more rapidly. “I think that was part of her assimilation, she really wanted to stop speaking Spanish as much as possible and start speaking English.” However, Julian says he understands her decision even if he does not speak fluently himself. “I never really acquired natural skill at speaking Spanish, but I do understand it, mainly based on her [his mother] and my experiences with my Argentine family.”

Julian’s connection to his Argentinian heritage is much stronger than his connection to his Anglo father’s family in New York. Although there was little discussion in his family about being from South America, he says Argentina was “where I had a family.” The country itself was “more where I acquired an understanding of my identity. There’s no conversation about me being *from* Argentina, but just being *there*, with my family.” However, back home in the United States, Julian remembers middle and high school experiences in which other kids would “lump me into Mexico,” once they learned he was South American. He views this as “their way of fitting [me into] their really skewed perception of the world.” Julian says he mostly hung out with Mexican and Filipino kids when he was younger, and his closest friends were Peruvian in high school. Even though he says, “In general I wasn’t really harassed enough or extremely marginalized because of my ethnic identity to the point where I would feel right enough to be offended,” he still felt frustrated by the hostility he would get when others perceived him as Latino. He felt stuck because, “If I didn’t bring it up [his ethnic identity] it would

be cool, I could pass as a white person, but when I did bring it up, because I couldn't really adjust socially, I identified more with being Argentine. Because of the hostility I would get, I didn't want to identify as being white, actually, or American, the more I learned historically about the U.S." However, he did not feel comfortable aligning himself with Mexican Americans or Chicano/as because of his class privilege, even though he associated this demographic with Latino/a authenticity. He thought: "If they were the ones being attacked the most [by the white majority] then they had the most genuine cultural identity. That's very problematic now to think about, but I was younger." At that time, he believed, "If this is your enemy then the opposition must be your friend."

Julian says he always felt accepted amongst his Argentinian family members, but he knows that "there is a little bit of a divide there," because he is from the U.S. In any case, he says despite the separation "they would still accept me; they would still treat me with a level of kindness that I usually wouldn't have experienced elsewhere." He thinks "that is what led me to begin identifying more with them." He says he would like other multiracial Latinos/as to know that "Your self-esteem can be crushed—well, not crushed—yeah, crushed... If one is alienated, it's okay. It's not always going to be this thing where you're going to come to a point where you're going to be able to understand yourself. It definitely requires educating yourself a lot and being able to move on and shape your life." He encourages others to explore their multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds. "It's ok to be confused; it actually means you're thinking. Just keep going with it and it'll be a lot more clear after a while. It's always going to be a fluid process..."

A lot of it's going to be based on other people's perceptions of you. And a lot of it's out of your hands. If you are adversely affected by that categorization it's good to also be proud—I think you should be more proud if people are attacking you. For me, it means that if folks adopting the dominant identity are attacking you, that means that there's implicitly something genuine that I'm doing... or something your people have done in the past, that you should maybe look into and take up and inherit.”

Fabiana Ortega exclaimed early in our interview, “I remember when I learned the word *pocha*, I was like FINALLY!” She laughs and sounds relieved. *Pocha*, meaning rotten or discolored, is a slang term defined in the Urban Dictionary as: “a Mexican-American female with a limited Spanish vocabulary who speaks with a clear Americanized accent.” It can be used derogatorily to refer to someone of Central or South American descent who is “whitewashed.” Like many part white and/or late-generation Latinos/as, Fabiana has appropriated the term, wearing it as a badge of pride to signify her less than perfect Spanish ability. She affirms, “I’m not Salvadoran, I’m not white. It’s not cut and dry like that.”

Fabiana was 29 at the time of our interview. She identifies as queer and responds either “Salvadoran-American” or simply “mixed,” when people ask, “what are you?” in the United States, while in El Salvador she gives a different response. Fabiana is the daughter of a Salvadoran father and white mother. Because her mother and father separated when she was two, Fabiana says she was about ten years old when she first became aware “that there was this country called El Salvador and that my father was from there.” After that, “there was always this sort of myth of my father... really wanting

to learn about El Salvador, to learn about who he was, and what that meant about who I was.” When she finally did meet her father’s side of the family, “to them, I was white. I’m from a different world... they’re like, yeah cool, you have Salvadoran in your blood but what does that even mean about you, your lived experience?” Since she is not fluent in Spanish, this was particularly challenging because she felt that her white single mother was unprepared to have complicated discussions about race. “I don’t think she’d ever thought critically about it.” As a result, before age ten, Fabiana believed her ancestry was Native American. She spoke about feeling like an outsider in relation to her mostly white middle school peers. “There were definitely feelings of isolation, and sort of wanting that sense of belonging to a community and feeling like I was straddling two worlds... Which was only in my head because at that point I was definitely in one world!” Despite the admission that she often passes as white, Fabiana says that finally meeting her Salvadoran father made her aware of “the need to push away from the whiteness.”

On the flip side, Fabiana told me about the discomforts and annoyances of being a mixed Latina. “What pisses me off is white people who can speak better Spanish than me,” she said. She felt frustrated at needing help to have discussions with other Salvadorans, and decided to commit herself to becoming a certified translator. Until then, she says her attempts at speaking with native Spanish speakers usually proceed as follows: “By appearances they’re like ‘you’re one of us,’ but then they’re like, ‘oh wait, let me go find that white person translator.’ The comfort level shifts. The familiarity shifts. People stop going off like they’re having a normal conversation. They sort of speak a little slower.” She said her exchanges with fluent Spanish speakers usually ended

with: “You don’t speak Spanish? How can you call yourself a Latina?” which was a source of consternation for her. “I go back and forth with myself on this all the time. A couple of years ago I probably would have just been like, I’ve never been white. I’ve never felt white or been accepted by a white community.” For Fabiana, Spanish fluency was important because she sensed that it was the key by which her claims to Salvadoran identity could be validated. Like Caroline Sandoval, Fabiana understood Spanish fluency as a “litmus test” of ethnic identity, but said she chose to form community with queer people of color because, “we all come with these different perspectives and experiences that keep us outside of a dominant culture, outside of a dominant privilege schema.”

Trevor Lucero is the founder of Latinos/as of Mixed Ancestry, or LOMA, and the president of the organization Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC). Trevor is the son of a Mexican American father from Texas and a German/Polish mother. “In some sense we immigrated and in the other sense we never immigrated,” he says of his family. He tells me he responds to inquiries about his ethnic background by saying, “mixed Mexican-German-Polish,” and that these questions mostly come up in his work as an engineer. “Most of the labor force in Southern California is Latino. They see me walking around, overseeing people sometimes, giving direction, stuff like that. I’m very light-skinned, I guess, and so they see this light-skinned guy whose last name is Lucero, and I try to speak Spanish but not very well, and there’s not many Latino engineers, you know, and it’s unusual for me to be in this position. It is. So they get curious. So it’s usually Latinos that I work with who want to know my background, my story.” Perhaps because of his authority in the workplace, most of the conversations he has with people

about his background are benign. He mentioned that because of his light skin, “a general person on the street, they might just see it’s another white guy walking around. If they didn’t know anything about me, they wouldn’t suspect anything about me, but I think once they get to know me, then they start getting curious, like, “What’s your story? Who are you?”” Trevor says growing up, “I don’t think I ever had a conversation with my parents about what it means to be any kind of race, it was always just how we were... Who we were. So it wasn’t really a topic of conversation. My earliest experiences were really outside of the home, you know, talking with friends. I grew up here in Southern California and I had a very diverse group of friends—Asians, Mexicans, Pacific Islanders... So it was a common thing for us to say, ‘What are you?’ and I would say ‘I’m Mexican and I’m white.’ It didn’t seem significant at the time.”

Trevor says he only began having conversations with his family about his mixed ancestry once he was in his late teens and applying for college. “Once I became more self-aware, started getting involved in these social justice-type issues, and then began to talk about it more amongst the family, and then started having conversations about it... So that’s where it starts, like coming up with the bubbles on the standardized tests, in elementary school which bubbles should I be checking off, or applying for college which box should I check, that’s more or less how it came about.” The conversations he recalls having with people on each side of his family focused on the positive aspects of each side’s ancestry. “I was having trouble when I was in college, my grades were slipping, and my aunts would say: ‘It’s time for that German part of you to buckle down and work hard!’ And I was like, ‘So Mexicans don’t work hard?’” He mentions that the Mexican

side of his family is elated when he tries to speak Spanish with them. “They’re so appreciative that my generation is trying to maintain our connection to our culture... Most of my cousins are bilingual. I’m one of the few cousins that aren’t, so I’m still trying to get in sync with them in that way.”

Finally, Trevor was baffled by the lack of representation of multiracial Latinos/as in popular discourse. He says, “It bugs me that there’s such a lack of acknowledgement of the mixed Latino population. There’s so little research... It’s so prevalent; it’s been going on for years at a much higher rate than all the other mixes.” He says the dearth of research was what prompted him to start his organization Latinos/as of Mixed Ancestry. “It’s like, ‘hey I feel you, if you feel totally alone or isolated, you’re not, you’re actually among a very large group of people, it’s just one that hasn’t been recognized. That’s why the LOMA program came into existence. Like hey, let’s share this experience, let’s raise some awareness of it, because there’s obviously a real positive aspect that can come from it if people just knew more about it. But it’s not just for the mixed people; it’s for society at large. Like how different races of people with different cultures can get together and work together. It doesn’t have to be this tension and place of struggle.”

Like so many other participants, Trevor felt that his multiracial background offered him unique insight into United States racial dynamics. Because he felt caught between two worlds, Trevor developed a kind of dexterity that allowed him to highlight or downplay either his German/Polish ancestry or his Mexican side, depending on what he felt the social context required. Trevor’s light-skinned phenotype made it easy for him to transition seamlessly into predominantly white spaces because he was usually not

perceived as visibly Latino enough to be read as non-white. Further, Trevor was passionate about representation for multiracial Latinos/as and took his political activism to the next level by participating in Multiracial Americans of Southern California and founding Latinos/as of Mixed Ancestry.

Julia Foster was 23 years old at the time of our interview. The daughter of a German-Jewish father and Salvadoran mother, Julia says she is almost never read as white because of her brown skin and dark hair. She was raised in the Bay Area of California and is fluent in Spanish.

Even though Julia does not pass as white, she is aware that being raised by a German-Jewish father has impacted her life in significant ways. “I have the advantage that my dad was white, and spoke English fluently, and had all the advantages that come with being a white male in our society, so I definitely learned how to properly behave,” in what she calls a “white-centric world.” She speculates that this orientation is related to her multiraciality. “Maybe you learn through different experiences if you were *just* Latino, like I think that the rest of my cousins had that kind of experience... I think I definitely navigate several worlds more easily because of that.” For instance, Julia’s brother was adopted from El Salvador, and he sometimes tells her: “You’re spoiled. You don’t know about real life because you’ve been in this pampered, first world country life.” Julia says she has often felt guilty around her Salvadoran family members because “It was like, ‘you didn’t go through what I went through,’ kind of a thing.” She admits that she tried to obscure her European ancestry to gain acceptance from her brother. “For a while I didn’t want to associate myself that way,” until her awareness of historical

trauma on both the Jewish and Salvadoran sides of the family caused her to come to terms with her ancestries. Julia says that eventually, “I did realize it’s really stupid,” because her paternal grandparents escaped Nazi Germany and “it would be wrong for me to try and make this part of my history a secret when really they deserve a lot of credit and remembrance for what they went through too.” Julia says her outlook changed when she realized the degree of trauma on both sides of the family: the Holocaust and Nazi Germany on her father’s side, and the Civil War in El Salvador and genocide of indigenous peoples on her mother’s side. “I think recognizing that made me realize that I should be proud to be white too, not just be proud to be Salvadoran, they all are valuable.”

Julia says she sees “total fetishizing of women who are multiple races,” in pop culture and the media. She told me that she has felt exoticized in romantic relationships for her multiracial background, and is frustrated that there are no accurate depictions of multiracial people in the media. However, “at the same time I feel like it makes me really similar to the rest of Latin Americans too because being Latino is being a mixture of three different races for the most part. So that’s why people think I’m just Latin, because people look like me when they’re already a mixture of European and indigenous and African ethnicities.” She recalls “feeling cheated” by her ancestry and wishing for blue eyes as a kid, but never wishing for lighter skin. Julia says she grew up to realize that “the only reason I didn’t ever want lighter skin is because our society does eroticize and fetishize people so having caramel-colored skin is seen as acceptable.”

“My family has always made me feel really aware of the fact that I’m of mixed

background,” says Julia. Although she struggles with her self-definition, Julia recognizes that claiming a mixed race or *mestizo* identity “can help you deny or obscure the parts of yourself that you don’t like... On a personal level I feel like I should be able to identify however I want to, but that also historically is a problem.” Julia was the only person of thirteen who mentioned anti-Black racism within Latino/a communities: that claiming a multiracial or *mestizo* identity is a common way to distance oneself from African ancestry. She says: “Maybe the most important question is: how do you let people of mixed race identity choose what they want to identify as, but without falling into that pattern of historical... walking all over that brownness and putting the whiteness on a pedestal. But that’s something that I definitely want to figure out.” The right to define oneself as one chooses features prominently in many of my interviews and in mixed race literature. Participants like Julia were acutely aware of the political implications of doing so, because it could lead to the erasure of African and/or indigenous ancestries. In closing, Julia says to other multiracial Latinos/as: “We’re the ones who have to carry the burden of falling somewhere in between. If you want, you should identify however you feel comfortable. No one should be able to tell you there’s something wrong with that.”

Tyler Aguilar is the son of a U.S.-born Dominican mother and Italian father. He was born in New York State. He was 22 years old at the time of our phone interview, identified as an ally to the LGBT community, and told me: “I definitely don’t pass as white. There may have been one or two instances in my life where somebody thought I was white.” Tyler says he responds differently to the “What are you?” question depending on the racial identity of the person asking him. “If it’s another person of color,

I really don't care, but if it's a white person asking me, I usually feel like... I understand where they're coming from, but it's irritating because it's like you're being othered in a way.” He says that up until recently, he simply identified himself as “Dominican and Italian,” but has now taken to using the term “mixed” to encompass his multiracial background. He attributes his shift in self-identification to the presence of mixed race communities and forums on social media. Tyler says he was always aware that he was multiracial because “My mom and I had really similar skin tone but my dad was really fair-skinned. When I was younger I thought my mom was black and then I guess I just noticed it, but I knew my little brother is fair-skinned, and my sister and I have the same skin tone, and I was like, ‘oh yeah! We’re mixed.’ I just figured that was why. I knew right away.” The phenotypic variation within Tyler’s family made him aware early on that his roots were multiracial. Unlike many participants whose racial identities became the subject of interrogations from their peers in school, Tyler said he never questioned his parents about his identity. “It was really obvious because we both knew. My parents were both extremely different looking, and me and all of my siblings were extremely different looking, so it was really obvious I guess. We were all really aware of it so we didn't really need to talk about it.”

Tyler says he felt isolated at his predominantly white middle school because of his Dominican background, and remembered being called names. “People always had something to say about it, like ‘You're a spic, you're a border hopper,’ just the typical stuff... the standard anti-immigrant dialogue I guess.” He says there were only two other Latina women in his grade, so he became friends with other students of color there. Upon

switching to a different middle school for eighth grade, Tyler found friendships among the handful of Latino boys at his school. “I was immediately friends with them and it's weird because I'm not a fluent Spanish speaker, but I guess because we shared similar... We were socialized the same kind of.” He says about half of his eight-person friend group went to jail after high school, and even though he has not, he still faces racialization. “In stores people have accused me of trying to take stuff before, or would watch me really closely. When I was younger I didn't really care, but now I'd probably be pretty upset.” In spite of this, Tyler recognizes that being part white has afforded him privileges that others cannot access.

The varying phenotypes of Tyler's family members gave him a clue early on that he was multiracial. However, family life did not prepare him for the racialization he faced as a dark-skinned Latino out in the world. From being followed in stores to being expected to speak Spanish, Tyler felt his mixed race identity most strongly in his lack of language fluency. Like many others, Tyler felt that fluent Spanish ability could solidify his ethnic identity as a Latino/a person.

The preceding pages highlight some key themes that emerged during interviews with thirteen self-identified multiracial Latinos/as. Participants understood that white privilege, due to their lighter skinned appearances and access to white cultural codes, helped them move through the world while they also felt it was a social liability when they wanted to be accepted among Latinos/as or people of color. I suggest that Katherine Lara and Sophia Acosta represent two ends of an identity continuum in which very

different relationships to multiracial Latino/a identity are observed. Katherine sometimes passes as white but proudly insists on her identity as a Salvadoran person of color, while Sophia only reluctantly admits to having Mexican ancestry and treats it as a burden in her life. What factors influence each person's identity choices will be examined in the following chapters.

Chapter Five: On the Politics of Belonging

“When I learned the word *pocha*, I was like FINALLY!” - Fabiana Ortega, 29

Flexible Ethnicity and the View from Outside

What began as a thesis about multiracial Latinos/as and Spanish language ability lead me to inquiries about privilege, passing, and a more intricate rendering of the cultural toolkit. The participants in my study added complexity to my preconceptions about multiracial identity by highlighting the specific ways that Spanish fluency and phenotype matter in the lives of multiracial Latinos/as. Although this did not come as a shock, I was surprised at the premium placed on belonging in people of color’s spaces. Every participant in this study negotiated his or her flexible ethnicity in ways that ranged from ambivalence, to angst, to affirmation (Vasquez, 2011). My interviews found that participants were more likely to perform race work (King-O’Riain, 2006) when they believed that some part of their Latino/a authenticity was lacking, either because of having mixed ancestry or appearing light-skinned. King-O’Riain writes: “Racial thinking can cause ethnic strategies to be used,” (2006, p. 108). The interviews revealed a relationship between “looking Latino/a” (racial thinking) and ability to demonstrate cultural competency, particularly in the form of language (ethnic strategy). A trend emerged where the more often a participant passed as white, the more invested he or she was in highlighting the Latino/a part of her background. Looks and language structured the identity choices subjects made as they moved through the world: sometimes as white, other times Latino/a, and sometimes as mixed race.

Because my goal was to understand how multiracial Latinos/as used Spanish language fluency to negotiate cultural insider/outsider status, I wanted to elucidate the factors that influenced feelings of belonging. Unexpectedly, many of the conversations turned away from Spanish fluency toward the visually available elements of race and questions of authenticity. The people in this study felt caught between two worlds at the same time as many felt their hybridity allowed them to blend into racially and culturally diverse groups. My study population shared similar dynamics such as flexible ethnicity with third-generation Mexican Americans in Vasquez (2011), and race work with the mixed race pageant contestants in King-O’Riain (2006). However, the data showed that the less Latino/a a participant believed he or she looked (usually due to light skin), the more they strove to establish cultural authenticity using race work. In those cases, participants led with appeals to Spanish language ability or cultural familiarity, but also attempted to expand and subvert the boundaries of Latino/a identity.

Spanish Language Ability

Only five of the thirteen people I interviewed said they were fluent in Spanish. However, every participant noted the importance of the role that Spanish ability played in the choices they made about their identities. Many said they felt embarrassed about not speaking Spanish fluently. Linguistic competence was one of the sites where lines were drawn among Latinos/as, both mixed and otherwise. For Katherine Lara, whose story was featured at the beginning of the last chapter, speaking Spanish seemed like, “a constant test to see who knows more Spanish. I think you’re welcomed into different spaces

differently depending on your linguistic skills.” She said this “test” was more commonplace amongst Latinos/as than white people. “Definitely more within the Latino community it comes up. For most white folks I think if you know any bit of Spanish then you know Spanish.” The only time she had been challenged by a white person about her Spanish competency was when that person was more fluent than she was, as in her graduate program in Latin American Studies. Referring to authenticity tests and Spanish language ability, Katherine said, “Overall I think it’s more folks in the Latino community that test, but when it is white folks, it’s people that have greater language skills and that’s why they’re testing.” I asked Katherine how her response varied based on who was asking her. “If it’s a white person questioning then I can just be like, ‘oh whatever, I don’t have to prove my identity to you,’ but when it’s a group that in many times has blatantly not included me, but made me feel excluded, it’s much more important to me to want to be a part of it, so it’s two very different experiences.” Her sense of exclusion from the Latino/a community because of her lack of Spanish fluency was a common theme amongst those I interviewed whose language skills were less than perfect.

“I won’t ever be a native Spanish speaker and that comes up *constantly*. Like it’s a constant test to see who knows more Spanish, and I think you’re welcomed into different spaces differently depending on your linguistic skills,” says Katherine. She reported being socially tested for her linguistic competence as early as high school, and believing the assessments of her Latino/a friends that she was not truly Latina because of her lack of fluency. In spite of the hostility she faced, Katherine occasionally tried to educate others about the larger context of California schools in which Spanish was

outlawed during her parents' generation. She said, "I tell people about my family's experience like, 'This is why we don't speak Spanish, because it wasn't allowed in schools and that's the same discrimination that goes on now,' in a bigger context so they can get it, but that's only if we're friends and I want to take the time to have that conversation." Her social positioning as a multiracial Latina gave Katherine the impetus to learn her family's history and share it with others, provided she has the patience. She said emphatically that she wanted other mixed Latinos/as to know: "You don't have to learn Spanish. If you want to, whatever your reason is for wanting to, go for it, but you should never have to feel like you have to learn that to validate your identity."

Martina Bell-Garcia explained how her relationship to her multiracial Latina identity was tied to Spanish language ability. In her second semester of college at the time of our interview, she said: "Here, I am starting to own my Latina side more. I speak Spanish with my friends and in high school I didn't have any friends that I spoke Spanish with really." She says she is even becoming proud of her Latina heritage with the influence of her peers. "I've just been finding those friends who accept me for who I am, owning the fact that I am Latina, I'm proud of it, and open about that part of me. But I am still half and half, but I've been leaning more towards Latina here [in college] actually. I speak to my friends in Spanish all the time and it's really, really nice. I definitely still introduce myself to people as mixed... But I'm figuring it out."

Interviewee Andrea Hernandez mentioned an on-campus group for Latinos/as that she felt she should not attend because of her limited Spanish ability. "I felt like I couldn't go [to the group] because I don't speak Spanish and therefore I'm not... I'm more white

than I am Latina, so I'm not going to go because I don't think I belong there." Andrea's feelings of exclusion were echoed by other participants who did not speak Spanish, but she was resolved in her decision not to attend, at least for the time being. Andrea admits that much of what she feels does not "fit" about her is her lack of Spanish fluency. She tells me she has been making more of an effort to learn in recent years but still would not consider herself up to par with her mother, a native speaker. She says, "I've always had this weird memory of speaking Spanish and knowing Spanish but then I'm not fluent and so for me it was always... I couldn't really be fully or actually Latina unless I spoke Spanish." Andrea hoped she could find a way to form coalitions with other people of color, beyond skin color or Spanish ability.

Tyler Aguilar is not a fluent Spanish speaker, despite the fact that the many of his friends in school speak Spanish. Now, a Latino/a Studies major at his university, he says the issue of Spanish fluency comes up more often. During a group project involving interviews, he tells a story of a time that a bilingual Spanish speaker opted to speak in Spanish for the interview, even though he had been explicitly informed that Tyler, who was helping to conduct the interview, was not fluent. "Although he could speak English, he just chose to speak Spanish the entire time, but afterward he would go back to speaking in English, and then go back to speaking in Spanish," Tyler recalls. The encounter made him feel insecure and question the man's intentions. He says, "I was just like, 'okay, this guy does not like me at all. Maybe he's being a jerk, I guess, or just doesn't feel comfortable in English.' But he spoke English perfectly when he decided to speak it. I don't know if he got that I didn't speak Spanish; maybe he thought I was just

weird and quiet.”

Tyler felt that his lack of Spanish fluency was a liability in his field Latino/a Studies, at the same time as he felt understood within his department. “I think the people I end up speaking with are a little bit more understanding of generational gaps... People who are in the Latino/a Studies department at school, they kind of know... They’re aware of it, that usually second- and third-generation people don't know Spanish.” Despite the understanding he feels at school, Tyler still feels deficient because he is not fluent. “I wish my mother had spoken Spanish to me when I was younger, so I knew it. She never did because my father doesn't speak Spanish, so she never really had a reason to speak at home. I can read stuff but I can't speak conversationally with people and that kind of bums me out in a way. It kind of makes it hard to identify with being Latino. Although I know I don't have to speak Spanish, it’s definitely helpful.” He says that in his life, Spanish functions as a litmus test to assess his Latino/a or Dominican identity.

Being appraised by two different contingents created friction in the lives of many people I interviewed. Fabiana Ortega bluntly declared that she was embittered by the Spanish proficiency of the non-Latinos/as she encountered on a delegation to El Salvador with an activist group. “What pisses me off is white people who can speak better Spanish than me,” she recalled about the trip, in which a white non-Latino person translated between her and other Salvadorans. The experience made her feel resentful, as though she was “less Salvie” than her more fluent peers. At the time of our interview, Fabiana was enrolled in language courses to become a certified translator. She says the choice largely came out of her frustration with Spanish fluent non-Latinos/as whose language

skills made her feel less authentically Salvadoran.

The people I interviewed were keenly aware that having visibly European ancestry required them to do more race work, and that speaking Spanish was a pivotal part of this work, especially if they did not look stereotypically Latino/a. Santiago Ortiz-King's Spanish fluency was clearly an advantage because he was almost always read as white by others. He is aware that the way he speaks is largely influenced by the ethnicity of his audience, so much so that he sometimes "drops down" and alters it consciously.

Julia Foster told me, "I'm really glad that my parents made sure that I spoke Spanish, because I think it would also be a really different experience if I looked the way that I do and didn't speak Spanish." Despite having gone to bilingual school, Julia says in El Salvador, "People definitely know that I'm not from there. Like my mom will go and she'll blend in, but with me people definitely know." Even though the experience of not quite fitting in was uncomfortable, Julia says, "Some of them [El Salvadorans] are surprised that my Spanish is really good, because a lot of people [from the U.S.] don't really speak Spanish well. I think they almost expect that to some extent, but for the most part I like being there. It makes me feel good." Her Spanish ability helps Julia thwart the expectations of El Salvadorans. She maintains connections to her heritage via language and does not fit the expected profile of a multiracial Latina raised in the United States.

In the words of Vasquez, "For Mexican Americans who do speak fluent Spanish, linguistic proficiency can be an asset in authenticity contests," (Vasquez, 2011, p. 214). This dynamic was also at play for the multiracial Latinos/as I interviewed, who felt challenged as multiracials to demonstrate their "authentic" membership in Latino/a

spaces by using Spanish, while uncomfortably admitting membership in white groups through cultural markers associated with whiteness, such as class status and light skin. Non-Spanish speaking interviewees reported feeling profoundly hurt, embarrassed, and frustrated by the assessments of their more fluent Latino/a peers, while they were simply annoyed by, and often challenged the evaluations of white people. According to Ochoa (2004), Spanish language ability is a litmus test of one's degree of association with Mexico, and by extension, functions as a marker of how authentically Latino/a someone can claim to be. Interviewee Andrea Hernandez confided that Spanish language fluency was "always my lacking characteristic" in terms of "being fully Latina." She was not alone in her feelings of deficiency due to her less than perfect Spanish. Regardless of their level of proficiency, nearly every participant in the study understood that Spanish language aptitude was a key factor that constituted his or her identity as a mixed Latino/a. Those who did not speak fluently were regretful and most were in a process of attempting to improve their skills.

The notion of Spanish fluency as a litmus test for authentic Latino/a identity dominated the interviews I conducted. Vasquez writes: "The struggle was particularly difficult for third-generation Mexican Americans who lacked Spanish language fluency. Even while arguing that limited Spanish skills did not diminish their claims to heritage, these Mexican Americans still felt embarrassed and wounded by attacks from more recent immigrants who asserted that they were not Mexican because they could not speak the language" (Vasquez, 2011, p. 215). Lack of Spanish fluency created distress for multiracial Latinos/as, who felt that their identities were already in question by virtue of

their mixed heritage. Those who were not fluent felt Spanish was the missing piece that could help them establish their right to self-definition. However, simply speaking the language did not completely ameliorate the feeling of being an outsider. The five participants who were fluent in Spanish still faced challenges moving through the world as multiracial Latin^os/as, which they attributed to their light-skinned appearance. In any case, every participant except Sophia Acosta had disinvested in a white identity, in ways that ranged from indifference to disdain.

Multiracials Passing as White

Fabiana Ortega, a 29-year-old woman of Salvadoran and white ancestry, says “so much of everything that I experience has to do with passing.” Fabiana says that passing as white grants her class, educational, and social privileges that darker-skinned monoracials cannot access. Fabiana, like others in my interviews and in studies by Bettez (2007) and Storrs (1999), rejected a white identity while still maintaining ties to her white family. When asked about how she identifies now, Fabiana says: “Now it’s more about taking care of the different communities around me, whether that is white community—more to the point, white family members—as opposed to just trying to alienate myself from them. Trying to be like, ‘no, these people have my back.’ I think because there was so much unexamined racism on the white side of my family... Once I was looking for it, looking to have an actual critical perspective on who I was, where I was, and why I was there, I just sort of felt repulsion and anger towards them, toward white power and white privilege altogether. Now I think I’m more accepting of my power and my privilege.”

When Fabiana mentions privilege, she is referring to passing as white at least some of the time. “Being able to pass visually in both worlds I’m sure has done wonders for me,” she says. She observes that the debt accrued while obtaining her Master’s degree is a function of her privilege as a white middle class person. “The fact that I now have a luxury car’s worth of debt, and I can do that and be like, ‘okay, nobody’s going to pay off my loans for me, but I feel like somehow I’m going to make it work,’ which I don’t think is a privilege that many people can do, be like, ‘yeah, I’ll ride that much debt.’”

Other participants also cited class and education as places where they most felt the advantages associated with being part white. Katherine Lara describes her Salvadoran father as “lucky” for being accepted to an Ivy League university, but mentioned that members of her white mother’s side of the family have been attending prestigious University of California institutions for generations. She attributes her educational privilege to the advantage held by her maternal side. This data correlates with the work of Elam (2011), which found that race and class remain in close statistical relation: multiracials with partial white ancestry are more likely to attend better schools, live in wealthier neighborhoods, and have higher socioeconomic status than mixed people of color (p. 18).

Julia Foster, who does not usually pass as white, noted that white passers “could enjoy a lot of benefits and advantages over other people.” She felt that passing was “problematic because it makes it easy for you to hide your other parts... It’s a delicate balance.” Most participants described an ability to feel at home in multiple social contexts, which could be experienced as a source of pride or make them feel more

outcast. Julia says: “I definitely was aware of the fact that I was different, including there was a period of time in my life that I actually wanted to hide the fact that I was white, which I think people would assume that it would be the other way around, that you would want to hide your brownness, but because of where I am and where I live [the Bay Area] it was the other way around.”

Trevor Lucero mentioned the role of phenotype in his life experience compared to other Latinos/as, including me, his interviewer. He mentioned that his lighter phenotype gives him a pass in some sense because very few Latinos/as he encounters expect him to speak Spanish. “I don’t want to bias your research, but because you have a darker phenotype versus my lighter phenotype I wonder if maybe it’s those expectations. Like, ‘oh are you mixed or higher class,’ or there’s something else there that maybe explains why they’re more acculturated or assimilated than someone else.” Here Trevor is referring to the fact that he does not experience any backlash for not being fluent in Spanish (unlike the majority of non-fluent participants), and he believes his phenotype performs the explicatory labor for him.

Eleven out of thirteen participants said that they were read as white some or all of the time. Those who were not remained aware that they nevertheless benefitted from white privilege because of their white parent. As a result, many participants felt an acute need to argue for their Latino/a group membership over and against the perceptions of others. However, most understood that by virtue of visible white ancestry, they benefitted from privileges associated with whiteness—particularly class status—even as they defended their right to self-identify. Further, most “passers” reported having had their

identities policed by others who identified as simply Latino/a. Data from my interviews suggests that phenotype and the perceptibility of racial otherness, both to the white gaze and to people of color, could at times be more salient in influencing feelings of belonging than Spanish ability. Because of this awareness, notions of white privilege and racial passing foregrounded conversations about the role of Spanish language, which was deployed as a key resource when ethnic or racial claims were low.

Delpit (1995) argues that “members of any culture implicitly transfer information to co-members” (cited in Bettez, 2007, p. 234). As such, multiracial people with one white parent often have access to the “codes of the culture of power” via their white family members (Bettez, 2007, p. 234). In this way, passing as white is not only about skin tone, but “requires an understanding and demonstration, to some extent, of white cultural ways of being” (Bettez, 2007, p. 234). Bettez calls her multiracial participants “border crossers” for this aptitude (2007). “They are both uncomfortable admitting participation in the culture, yet also able to recognize its power... [they] occupy a dual position of operating both within and outside of the culture of power in relation to race” (p. 235). Recall Julia Foster’s statement from the previous chapter: even though she does not visually pass as white, she is still aware that she benefits from white privilege because of class status, acculturation, and English-language fluency, which she attributes to her white father.

Participants who passed as white noted that they did not experience overt racism in the same way as they understood their darker-skinned or monoracial peers to experience it. While many noted that microaggressions were a routine part of their lives,

a few were influenced by tales of racist encounters from friends of color. Stories of what friends with darker phenotypes had experienced—usually far more egregious than the microaggressions faced by white passers—influenced the racial claims interviewees felt qualified to make. Martina Bell-Garcia says that when she hears about “things people face on the daily” she feels shocked that “people experience these problems every day, every day of their entire lives, and... Well, people think I’m white, so there’s a disconnect.” Like other participants, Martina’s admission led her to question the most appropriate way to self-identify, and she wondered whether it was acceptable for her to participate in events designated as people of color-only spaces within her university. The majority of white passing participants had misgivings about how to relate to the Latino/a side of their ancestry, and were anxious about whether the types of social exploration they were engaged in would be perceived as wrong or racist.

Those who did not pass as white were racialized by white people. Julia Foster told me about being exoticised for her looks when a white man she was dating mentioned that he specifically pursued women with her skin tone. “I was so appalled. I was like, ‘oh my God, you did not just say that to me.’ But that’s what comes to mind, certain people that’s what they think is beautiful is something to do with you being mixed race. I thought that was super gross and creepy. Also them just expecting that you are a certain way because of what you look like.” Julia acknowledges that, “If it happened again I would definitely be more angry about it... I know he’s not an outwardly, overtly racist person, it’s just that our society makes a comment like that almost normal, like he didn’t think that was a messed up thing to say.” In contrast, those I interviewed with whiter features often

wished they were darker in order to be accepted by Latino/a peers.

Because of the perceived social benefits in her suburban town, Sophia Acosta felt the need to choose a side of her ancestry to identify with more strongly. She chose her mother's. "I bet you a million dollars if I had their last name [her mother's family name], I would definitely be treated differently, because when they think of a Hispanic girl, they think, 'oh she doesn't understand a lot, she doesn't come from anywhere.' They just don't think highly of us." Recall her admission from the previous chapter: "Some people do try to ask me, 'what race are you?' and I would say, 'I'm Italian... but a little Hispanic on my dad's side.'" She was reluctant to share her true background because she feared the prejudice of white suburbanites where she lived. In particular, she associated her Mexican background with not having as much money as her white peers. Sophia was unique because she was the only subject of thirteen who chose to outright reject or devalue her Mexican ancestry. Both she and her best friend (who is also mixed Mexican and white) choose not to identify with their Mexican backgrounds because, Sophia says, "we just don't see the point."

Being aware that one passed as white made participants more likely to perform race work in order to demonstrate their ethnic authenticity. Respondents attempted to use flexible ethnicity to "negotiate for more inclusive boundaries of non-whiteness," but their claims were not always accepted, particularly by people of color (Storrs, 1999, p. 200). From taking a stand against racist comments or worldviews, to standing in solidarity with people of color, an overwhelming majority of participants used the "unique epistemological acumen" they gained in being multiracial to push back against

racialization more broadly (Elam, 2011). In doing so, they also advocated for themselves as multiracials with a right to self-definition. Subjects attempted to raise awareness of the complexities within Latino/a groups and communities of color, asserting that their experience also fit within those narratives. Growing up multiracial led respondents to question the assumptions behind static notions of race, ethnicity, and nationality because their experiences deviated from common expectations. Curiously, only one respondent chose to self-define as white, while others struggled to be accepted as authentic Latinos/as. In the next section, I will delineate some of the stakes of self-definition, and attempt to place them into context with the state of racial categorization as it applies to multiracial Latinos/as.

Agency and Strategy

While it is clear that light-skinned multiracials benefit from the privileges they inherit through whiteness, all but one of the passers in this study chose to push back against those privileges when they felt it was safe to do so. The rejection of ways of being associated with whiteness was central to the interviews I conducted, even as participants knew the very system they rejected also offered them perks. Whiteness, white ancestry, and white passing provided more flexibility and agency in terms of identity choices than was available to darker-skinned respondents. Though not explicitly stated in every profile, the interviewees were mindful that freedom from racialization helped them in daily life, whether because of looks or familiarity with white cultural codes. In turn, some chose to use their class and educational privilege to deepen their consciousness of

themselves and their histories. Those participants studied in departments like history, Latin American Studies, and Gender Studies, and became involved with Latino/a organizations and causes, such as immigration, the U.S./Mexico border, and literacy education. Eight out of thirteen of them had traveled to their Latino/a parent's country of origin. Combined with education, traveling instilled a greater sense of not just pride but competence in their backgrounds, while it also presented an opportunity to supplement their Latino/a identities in strategic ways.

Participants who passed as white understood that they benefitted from white privilege through class status, education level, and freedom from racialization. Despite the admission that he usually passes as white, Julian Torres' ethnically ambiguous appearance was sometimes the subject of inquiry from his peers. "People would always say 'you look a bit... ethnic.' When people would talk to me they would always have to ask what I was, like 'you look a bit different in some way.' Not often, not to the point of where it was harassment, but yeah, I often would be asked, because people would presume I wasn't white." In response, he says he would "just say I'm Argentine, and then explain what that was. Usually they wouldn't know, but wouldn't care. Sometimes it was just a habitual question so they can fit you in a box." He says the times he was called a slur of some sort, "it was usually associated with being Chicano," but would only happen when he brought up his ethnic identity.

Julian remembers this discrimination happened most among other Latinos/as. "It would always be the families of the people that had some money or were somewhat educated that would come and establish their lives here, demeaning the folks that came or

were working there from very close geographically and that didn't come with economic privilege, who came just to get work. That was always the divide." Being middle class and upwardly mobile, Julian's class privilege could have insulated him from the prejudices faced by people from other Latin American countries commonly associated with economic struggle. Instead, Julian rebelled and says he "adopted the whole Third World-ist, liberationist image and values. Almost Maoist values, like serving the people, being hyper ascetic, and not consuming massive amounts of things, the training, the militant type of things." He says, "That was more my ideal form of my identity I wanted to emulate. I would say that affected me more positively because it allowed me to escape the world I was in, and start thinking of alternatives—that there *were* alternative worlds."

Every participant did research, made art, wrote poetry or essays, or otherwise engaged their mixed race identity in very intentional ways. One subject in particular took his activism to the next level and founded an organization by and for multiracial Latinos/as. Trevor Lucero, the oldest subject in my sample, was unique because his investment in multiracial identity prompted him to organize Latinos/as of Mixed Ancestry (LOMA), specifically to address the needs of this underrepresented population. LOMA and its affiliate, the Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC), even host the annual Mixed Remixed festival in Southern California, where multiracial writers and artists from diverse backgrounds come together to present their work. Trevor says his organization's original goal was to form community and advocate for better Census reporting methods to address a population for which there is very little data. He says, "We put a lot of energy into the LOMA project, and the Census is planning some changes

for 2020 that could just rock everyone's world, so it's like start getting ready now, because life is going to come and if you're not ready for it you'll be left behind, so to speak.”

Martina Bell-Garcia wrote a term paper about her identity, in which she worked through some of the stages and issues she associated with being a mixed Latina. At the time of our interview, she had plans to create a piece of visual art related to her experience. She was also enrolled in numerous Latino/a Studies courses through her university. Sharing the paper with friends and family helped Martina to work out some of the half-formed ideas she had been struggling to articulate, as well as inspiring conversations about mixed identity. Additionally, one friend encouraged her to submit her work to the cultural center at her college, giving her access to a broader audience, whose opinions in turn guided her identity development.

The desire to belong in a community defined around race, culture, or ethnicity was nearly ubiquitous amongst the participants, whose search for stable racial identity lead them to become politicized about racial issues. Rejecting claims to whiteness, Julian said, “it’s kind of like, if this is your enemy, then the opposition must be your friend.” His journey into political awareness began as a direct result of his multiracial identity and the feeling of being between two worlds. Most participants agreed that their “less than mainstream politics or social ideas,” in the words of Caroline Sandoval, were related to their experience of being multiracial and having a marginal relationship to the mainstream as a result.

Despite the challenges faced by participants in my study, the overwhelming

majority (twelve out of thirteen) respondents observed that their positionality as multiracials played a pivotal role in their politics, specifically with regard to race and social justice. Insofar as their political loyalties involved rejecting whiteness and its privileges, many were critically engaged with art, education, and organizing around racial justice and border identities in the United States and abroad. The overwhelming majority told me that their dedication to their respective causes was explicitly informed by their personal experience of race as a nonessential, socially constructed, unequal system of allotment that privileges whites over people of color, indigenous people, and immigrants. Subjects chose to align with people of color because they did not want to participate in a racist system, which they often saw play out within their own mixed families. These informants sometimes saw themselves as liaisons to unchecked racism in white family members, sometimes in rebellion against their own white privilege, and were critical of the system of white supremacy more broadly. Many of them developed an international perspective early on because of family histories and visits to their Latino/a parent's country of origin.

Making Up for It: Redefining Latino/a

The overwhelming majority of interview participants (ten out of thirteen), spoke about the ways they attempted to subvert stereotypes in order to reconfigure the parameters of Latino/a identity. The group deployed a diversity of tactics to destabilize others' preconceptions, including educating themselves and others, selectively, in attempts to expand the boundaries around authentic Latino/a identities. The interview

subjects admitted that their responses to stereotypes varied depending on who inquired about their identities. Because multiracial Latinos/as in my interviews did not fit assumed parameters of Latino/a identity, they thwarted others' expectations and resisted racialization. In doing so, they attempted to stretch the boundaries of authentic Latino/a identity into one where they, as multiracials, could fit.

Andrea Hernandez' focus on immigration history and assimilation within Latino/a Studies helped her realize that what made her stand out—lack of Spanish fluency—was actually quite common: “That’s when I started looking at Latino culture in the U.S. and realizing that you know, Latinos in the U.S. don’t all speak Spanish, don’t all look a certain way, don’t all come from the same place, and that’s when I really started realizing ‘That’s right! That sounds like me!’ I was also looking at immigration history, and themes of assimilation started coming up, and I was really curious about that theme and how it’s perceived in the past and now, so assimilation was a really big thing for me... So all those sorts of things got me thinking about how I feel too, and there’s this idea in my head that I don’t think that I fit, but I actually do fit that ideal.”

Educating herself was one way that Andrea resolved the incongruity between her actual experience and what dominant narratives told her it should be. She said she felt exhausted by the imperative to constantly name her privilege as a part white person, thereby differentiating herself from other Latinos/as. “Sometimes it can be blindsiding and that’s all people want to hear, they just want to hear you say you're middle class and you can pass as white if you wanted to, and because of that you’re lucky, and your problems or your difficulties are insignificant compared to mine or hers or these other

communities, and I don't think you should even talk... That's why I think that it can be problematic, because I think that we all have similar struggles, and I do think that this fixation on naming privilege can get in the way of moving on to build bridges together.”

Andrea's political consciousness was informed by her inability to fit within the norms and standards applied to Latino/a culture. Although she understood the necessity of naming her privilege among audiences of color, Andrea struggled with the ways she felt her opinions were discounted because of it. The last quote highlights her belief that too much emphasis on naming privilege is counterproductive. She rejected doing so particularly because the categories she had to navigate were at odds with the way she believed people of color viewed themselves. Instead, Andrea wanted to focus on the commonalities and shared community among people of color, regardless of whether or not they were mixed race.

The emotional dimension of being multiracial guided participants through the world with a felt sense of being an outsider. However, while some embraced their oppositional identities, others sought to move through and interrogate the commonly held assumptions about Latinos/as, thereby challenging the notion that they fell short. The preceding pages attempt to illustrate some of the ways that multiracial Latinos/as transformed “mixed kid blues” into constructive activity. Participants threw themselves into learning, creative work, and forged political organizations that were more inclusive of their identities, thereby creating community dialogue. In attempting to counterbalance their sense of racial identity deficiency, subjects created space for themselves and for other multiracial Latinos/as to be seen, understood, and to belong.

Chapter Six: White Passing Makes Ethnicity Optional

Multiracial Latinos/as and White Privilege

At the completion of these thirteen interviews, phenotype emerged as more impactful in influencing participants' identity choices than Spanish language fluency. This caused me to posit an inverse correlation between racial and ethnic claims, meaning: the less qualified a participant believed she was to make racial claims due to phenotype, the more she felt compelled to make ethnic claims by reference to Latino/a background, choosing self-expression in Spanish instead of English (when possible), or seeking inclusion in Latino/a or people of color-specific spaces. Participants also felt the need to expand and interrogate common presumptions about Latino/a identity. However, their agency was enmeshed with perceptible structural privileges. Although participants acknowledged that they benefitted from white privilege in class, education, and familiarity with "white cultural ways of being" because of being raised with a white parent, they rejected a white identity and desired very strongly to be included in Latino/a groups and communities of color (Bettez, 2007; Storrs, 1999). This sometimes led to friction as they asserted their identities over and against others' perceptions. However, as subjects struggled to determine the most appropriate way to identify ethnically, they faced challenges from others about their cultural authenticity. In this section, I will elucidate these relationships in further detail, as well as offer a discussion of their significance and implications for future research.

Passing as white positioned multiracial interviewees to develop flexibility around

their racial identities. Respondents were able to choose from a range of self-identifications, from mixed, to multiracial, to Latino/a, to white, or eschew facets of their white identity when the situation befit them. This trend is an example of flexible ethnicity in the unique context of multiracial Latinos/as (Vasquez, 2011). Multiracials experienced a great deal of agency—apparently more than monoracial whites or Latinos/as—around how they identified. Although their claims were not always accepted by people of color, all but one respondent chose to foreground their Latino/a roots as a source of pride and to abandon associations with whiteness, which was seen as a proxy for racist attitudes, privilege, and ignorance.

Katherine Lara says she “definitely” passes as white, but is sure to “make people aware of what my identity is.” She knows that identifying as a person of color is very much a choice for her, and admits she benefits from white privilege in the realm of higher education. Still, she says, “I would be very upset if someone tried to tell me I wasn’t a person of color, even though I know when I interact with any given person in a public setting, I know I don’t have to deal with what it’s like to experience racism against black people, I don’t have to experience what it’s like to have racism against indigenous folks, I know that.” Katherine’s ethnicity is flexible in the sense that she chooses to align herself with one side of her ancestry at the same time as she acknowledges that the presence of the other side is what positions her to do so.

Sophia Acosta and Jackson Ruiz talked about being racialized because of class-based assumptions about their Latino/a backgrounds, whereas Julia Foster and Martina Bell-Garcia told stories about being exoticized by male partners. Sophia Acosta was an

outlier because she was the only participant who expressed shame for her Mexican background, even going so far as attempting to pass for full Italian, which comes from her mother's side. She associated Mexican identity with working class status and her absent father, and was teased by her wealthy white peers for her mixed background. Given her social context in an affluent, mostly white Bay Area suburb, it does not seem surprising that she felt disdain toward her multiracial ancestry; she saw little to no positive reinforcement about her part-Mexican identity. Because of this, Sophia experienced her mixed background as an unfortunate fact of life, rather than growing into a sense of pride or self-knowledge about it. The remaining interviewees made little mention of the negative consequences of racialization during our talks, except regarding expectations of Spanish fluency where they fell short.

The effects of racialization were primarily social, and did not impact subjects' life chances in a structural sense as detailed in Candelario (2007). Participants saw flexible ethnicity as a skill that was ultimately positive, as "respondents are 'insiders' in multiple communities" (Vasquez, 2011, p. 207). Even Katherine Lara, who was questioned by her colleague about identifying as a person of color, acknowledged that she expected the woman to understand her racial identity because of earlier conversations between the two, rather than because it was visually obvious. She said that at her former job, "we talked about our identities constantly," and was disheartened that her coworker did not recognize her the way she wanted to be. Katherine's allusion that her racial identity could be hidden unless she chose to disclose it illuminates one way that light-skinned multiracials benefit from white privilege—it renders their ethnicities "symbolic, costless,

and voluntary,” unless they take it on as a cause (Waters, 1990). Further, the notion that one’s racial identity can involve choice and may shift over time is a founding principle of the Mixed Race Movement, as exemplified in “The Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage,” (Root, 1993). Contrastingly, people of color are racialized in ways that prevent similar modes of flexibility.

Authenticity and Racial Essentialism

The preceding section illustrates the paradox of multiracial Latino/a identities. The people I interviewed accepted that “central elements of Mexican-origin in-group struggles over authenticity” such as “Spanish language fluency, cultural competency, skin color, class status, clothing, and behavior” could bolster their claims to an authentic Latino/a identity, while they simultaneously argued for more porous criteria (Vasquez, 2011, p. 213). A conflict between Andrea Hernandez and her first-generation Mexican friend illustrated this dynamic as she explained: “He comes from a working class, single mom, who emigrated from Mexico, and he’s seen... he has a different experience than I do.” Andrea described her family as middle class, with “a pretty privileged lifestyle,” and did not share the experience of struggle, “imagined as lower-class, urban, and often violent—and male as well,” commonly thought to characterize authentic Latino/a identity (Bettie, 2003, p. 48). Andrea said: “I think he attributed being more authentically of color or more authentically Latino to having an experience similar to his, which I don’t. I disagree with him on that. I don’t think you need to be from a working class, struggling community or positionality in order to be authentic.” Her friend described a highly

racialized, first-generation, single parent experience, whereas Andrea's second-generation, part white, dual-parent upbringing was significantly different than his, particularly in terms of class.

Within her family, at school, and while studying abroad in Cuba, Andrea is often called to account for her ethnically ambiguous appearance, to explain where she comes from, why she speaks Spanish, and so on. She says: "what's hard is it's annoying having to be—feeling like you belong to different places at different times but only because of what people are telling you. And not necessarily where you think you belong, or how you feel, or how you want to see yourself, it's always about how other people want to see you, and that changes all the time." Her perspective on the significance of social context was influenced by her mother, who intervened in Spanish with her opinion. Andrea told me: "My mom was saying that brown people are actually have been here since the beginning and are constantly, always asked to justify why they're here and why they belong. And even within the Latino or brown community, we do that to ourselves, within our community, to one another. What's unfortunate about it is it's ultimately how the white man or these white power structures have viewed and understood brown people, not how we understand ourselves. So it's unfortunate that we're using the same tools and the same point of view, we're using the white man's point of view to understand ourselves and our communities and police those individuals within our community, but that's never how we've understood ourselves, it's always how power structures have identified us."

Spanish language fluency was a key piece of the authenticity puzzle. Although only five out of thirteen interviewees considered themselves fluent, those who did not

speak the language (or were in the process of learning) expressed a great deal of insecurity about what their lack of fluency meant in terms of their claims to culture. Fabiana Ortega recalls a visit to El Salvador (not her first), where she finally felt she “had some legs to stand on” in Spanish. Despite feeling competent when she arrived, she still felt ostracized by the native Salvadorans she encountered. Recall her embarrassment at having a white translator during the trip. These moments fed uncertainty about whether or not she should actually call herself Latina, and again she cited linguistic ability as the barometer. “You don’t speak Spanish? How are you going to call yourself a Latina?” she asks out loud, mimicking her internal dialogue. “I go back and forth with myself on this all the time.” The five participants that did consider themselves fluent in Spanish acknowledged that language helped them prove their authenticity to other Latinos/as and other people of color.

Multiracials in this study accepted much of Vasquez’s (2010) criteria for Latino/a authenticity, such as Spanish language ability, but rejected others that they viewed as essentialist, such as the association with Latinos/as and working class status or single parent homes. Ironically, even as participants rejected the validity of some authenticity criteria, they still clung to Spanish fluency and skin color as legitimate barometers of connection with Latino/a roots. Subjects’ evaluations of themselves as both Latinos/as and multiracials were influenced by their exposure to Latin American and Latino/a Studies programs while in college, as well as by family members and Latino/a peers whose opinions they cared about. Multiracials, lacking a stereotypically Latino/a phenotype, appealed to cultural competencies such as Spanish language fluency to bolster

their claims to Latino/a in-group membership, even as they acknowledged the criteria was not real. The five participants who did speak Spanish revealed that language functioned as a trump card beyond which their racial claims could not be refuted. For the remaining eight interviewees, the less than perfect Spanish ability was believed to be their “lacking characteristic,” in the words of Andrea Hernandez.

Pushing Back: The Right to Self-Identify

The emphasis on the right to self-identify, first articulated in Root’s “Multiracial Bill of Rights” (1993), was a central concern for the participants in this study. However, the friction between their personal identity choices and the way others read them (or insisted they should categorize themselves), created moments of angst among the participants. For the multiracial Latinos/as in this study, the process of identity construction facilitated social adaptability along with uncertainty and frustration. Participants expressed annoyance with constantly having to explain their ethnically ambiguous appearance or why they were not fluent in Spanish, and their responses varied according to the perceived ethnicity of their interlocutor. In the previous chapter, we saw that subjects used those uncomfortable moments to advocate for an expansion of the categories of Latino/a identity to include them as multiracials. Participants also channeled their discomfort by pursuing formal education about their backgrounds, using history and Latino/a Studies curriculum to investigate and challenge the authenticity criteria applied by others. Education and activism led to a reinvigorated sense of confidence in multiracial Latino/a identity. It also provided tools to respond to the onslaught of

questions and challenges about their backgrounds.

Autonomy around self-identification was of paramount importance to multiracial Latinos/as in this study, consistent with early Mixed Race Studies literature. Subjects felt it was important to identify with their Latino/a racial backgrounds *because* doing so was a choice. Waters (1990) writes that “all ethnicities are not equal, all are not symbolic, costless, and voluntary” (p. 160). The option to adopt a situationally appropriate, symbolic racial identity is not available to all Latinos/as or people of color generally because of restrictions around phenotype and language ability. In fact, “the ‘symbolic ethnicity’ or ‘ethnic option’ that white ethnics enjoy—they may practice elements of their ethnicity with no detrimental effects—is evidence of white privilege,” writes Vasquez (2011, p. 208). The data from my interviews demonstrates that light-skinned and white passing multiracial Latinos/as also encounter their ethnicities as optional, even as they verbally assert multiracial Latino/a identity and scorn the associations they have with whiteness as a system. This unanticipated finding mirrors the work of Bettez (2007), whose mixed race subjects “could choose to not enact cultural whiteness without serious repercussions” (p. 281). She affirms: “There is privilege in that choice. There is privilege in knowing cultural whiteness and there is privilege in being able to reject cultural whiteness” (Bettez, 2007, p. 281).

Participants spoke about the ways they became acquainted with white cultural codes of power, articulated by Julia Foster as “learning how to properly behave” in a “white-centric world,” because of being raised with her white father. Similarly, multiracial women in Bettez (2007) “have learned many codes of the culture of power

from their white parent and perhaps other white family members. The majority of them have learned enough to be perceived as white by others,” (p. 234). This interesting point illuminates the ways that multiracials—even those who do not look phenotypically white—can benefit from white privilege because of their access to white cultural codes and signifiers. The life chances of interviewees aligned with the findings in Elam (2011), Candelario (2007), and Bonilla-Silva (2002), who found that lighter skinned Latinos/as and mixed race children with one white parent were more likely than other groups of color to “live in better neighborhoods, attend better schools, and have higher socioeconomic status than their nonwhite peers” (Elam, 2011, p. 18). Further, lighter-skinned Latinos/as are disproportionately represented in the “Managerial and Professional” or “Technical” categories of employment, locating their incomes at 40-100 percent higher annually than Latinos/as with darker skin (Bonilla-Silva, 2002, p. 7).

Despite the resemblance to symbolic ethnicity, multiracial Latinos/as in this project did not consider their ethnicities optional. While they admitted to benefitting from white privilege because of their ability to pass as white and their familiarity with codes of the culture of power, interviewees themselves did not see identifying with their Latino/a side as arbitrary. Many felt they must identify with their Latino/a backgrounds as a tribute to their parents and as an indicator of their political alignments and priorities.

Self-identification was discussed at length by every participant. This speaks to the notion that multiracial identity production is a lifelong process, where the terms of the journey may shift according to a variety of factors. The right to self-identify (and to change one’s identity over time) is one of the key tenets within Mixed Race Studies

literature and advocacy. Self-identification brings up issues of agency, offering useful insight into the ways multiracial Latinos/as experience race, and the state of race relations more broadly. If racial identity is a matter of choice, then one's racial identity can be picked up or discarded when appropriate, beneficial, or potentially advantageous. Scholars Rockquemore and Arend (2002) term this phenomenon an "inversion of passing," wherein "mixed race individuals, who understand themselves as white, *pass for Black* in order to receive social, economic and educational opportunities" (p. 60; their italics). The key distinction between the biracial (black/white) people in their study and the multiracial Latinos/as in this one is that multiracial Latinos/as I interviewed did *not* understand themselves as white, even when their peers did; they considered themselves either mixed and/or part Salvadoran, Mexican, and so on. However, the majority of multiracial Latinos/as in this study deemed it necessary, rather than optional, to assert a mixed race or Latino/a identity, despite their connections to white privilege. The need to belong was inextricable from the need to acknowledge both sides of their ancestry, and to connect with communities of color where they felt most at home.

Coda: Implications for Future Research

This work contributes to the existing literature available by and for multiracial Latinos/as. However, because of the limited scope of the thesis format, additional work about this population is needed. This project strives to be as inclusive as possible of people with a variety of identities—queer, trans, socioeconomic class, parent's generation in the United States, age, education, and so on—but inadvertently occurred along

predominately cisgender, middle class, light-skinned, college educated lines. Because the overwhelming majority of interviewees had college degrees and were in their twenties, further research could center the experiences of older multiracial Latinos/as and/or people without college degrees. Another project could be organized comparing subjects who pass as white to those with darker phenotypes. Future research should foreground the contributions of multiracial Latinos/as who are transgender, as I suspect that processes of identity formation gain complexity when subjects are forced to navigate assumed binaries around both race and gender. A different project might interrogate more deeply the relationship between queer sexualities and multiracial Latino/a identities, to show which identities had more traction in different circumstances. A starker comparison could be drawn between how the queer participants negotiated their mixed race identities, and whether this bore any resemblance to the heterosexual interviewees—or how they diverged. The five interviewees who identified as queer in this study appeared to have more latitude in terms of social groups because their authentic queerness was rarely disputed, in contrast to their ethnic authenticity.

Implications for the Latin Americanization of U.S. Race Relations

Exploration in this work was heavily informed by Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization thesis, in which he suggests that light-skinned Latinos/as and most multiracials will come to be considered a "buffer class of honorary whites" by society at large (2002). However, his assertion that multiracials will take their place in a group characterized by its ability to derail racial conflict was complicated by the findings from

my interviews. In fact, the multiracial participants in this project were politicized by their unique experiences of race and attempted to act as allies to Latinos/as and other people of color against structural racism. Consistent with scholars Rockquemore and Arend (2002) and Delpit (1994), my study finds that while multiracial Latinos/as have access to the culture of power, their access is conditional as it is determined and limited by dominant groups.

Participants in this study deviated from Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Rockquemore and Arend (2002) in unexpected ways. Rockquemore and Arend's (2002) article, investigating Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization thesis (2002), features case studies of two biracial (Black/white) college students who employed an "inversion of passing" (p. 60). However, in contrast to the case studies therein, none of my respondents conceptualized themselves as white, but were at all times aware that others typically read them as such. Although the inversion of passing resembles the symbolic ethnicity exemplified by Anglo Americans in Waters (1990), it differs because Rockquemore and Arend's (2002) participants did experience moments when their ethnicity had consequences, however minor. Consistent with Vasquez (2011), my work finds that when ethnic identity was unpleasant, multiracial Latinos/as experienced "social discomfort, identity crises, racial stereotyping, and confused allegiances" (p. 207). When it was pleasant, it offered the chance to fit into "two or more cultures and communities, cultural translation, increased empathy, ethnic representation, and ethnic cultural capital" (Vasquez, 2011, p. 208). This interesting facet of multiracial identity foregrounds the ability to shift and choose one's racial identity in ways that benefit the multiracial person

based on context. However, the benefits my participants sought to derive were primarily social and had to do with belonging in a given group formed around cultural identity.

Complicating Flexible Ethnicity

Recall that “the ability to deftly and effectively navigate different racial terrains and be considered an insider in more than one racial or ethnic group” is called “flexible ethnicity,” and is regarded as the hallmark of third-generation Mexican Americans in Vasquez (2011, p. 208). Multiracials in this study utilized their flexible ethnicity to move between social groups and to access social and structural privileges in white and Latino/a contexts. In exchange, they expanded the parameters of Latino/a identity and challenged monological views about race. Unlike the third-generation Mexican Americans in Vasquez (2011), who risked judgment, alienation, and loss of resources, disclosing multiracial Latino/a identities was relatively costless, but denying them risked chosen community, family, and pride in oneself. For this reason, the people I interviewed felt they were uniquely positioned to speak out against white privilege and conventional views of race.

Multiracial Latinos/as in this study experienced a great deal of freedom in terms of their identities, even as they felt unsettled about navigating them. This project also investigated the degree to which multiracial Latinos/as “experience their ancestry as an ethnicity—diluted in each generation and ultimately an ‘ethnic option’ (Waters, 1990), as opposed to experiencing it in terms of “separation, subordination, and racialization” (Vasquez, 2011, p. 6). My work finds a correlation between the third-generation Mexican

Americans in Vasquez (2011) and multiracial Latinos/as whose phenotype provides access to white privilege. Their self-identification as multiracial Latinos/as was precluded by the racialized and class-based assumptions of others, who often categorized them in ways that were incongruent with their personal sense of self. Because they exhibited variability in their interactions with whites versus Latinos/as, participants became acquainted with flexible ethnicity, even though they were not always aware of using it (Vasquez, 2011). Successfully being recognized as an authentic member of a racial group required race work (King-O'Riain, 2006). However, even as they earnestly enacted race work and flexible ethnicity, their claims were not always viewed as legitimate by the intended audience.

Interviewees strove to be classified as people of color or Latino/a whenever possible. The “reformulation of whiteness as visible and as a social disadvantage is a generational expression, structured by current racial politics” that suggests there is something unique about the current moment for multiracial people (Storrs, 1999, p. 194). Optimistically, it is also possible that multiracial Latinos/as in particular are shedding light on the changing state of race relations, in which it is suddenly desirable and even advantageous to disavow whiteness. Further, participants had difficulty acknowledging that the gazes of others might not be consistent with the way they self-identified, and some went to great lengths in order to ensure the correct racial classifications were made. In doing so, they argued for more fluid definitions of Latino/a identity, paradoxically utilizing conventional criteria such as language and phenotype to do so.

Philosopher Linda M. Alcoff writes that people of color in the United States are

“bonded not only by social oppression but also by the opportunity for social insight” (cited in Elam, 2011, p. 179). My interviews suggest that while participants expressed “unique epistemological acumen,” multiracial Latinos/as remain beholden to whiteness because of the freedom from racialization it grants them. Even as they acknowledge that Latino/a identity is not monolithic, participants intuitively understood that their experience with discrimination was radically different than their peers of color. It seems promising that instead of aspiring to become fully assimilated to honorary white status, as Bonilla-Silva predicts (2002), the multiracial Latinos/as I studied aligned themselves with the collective Black because of their allegiance to racial justice. Storrs says this is because “difference is no longer perceived as deviant or deficient, but something that is highly prized” (1999, p. 198).

A conversation about multiracial Latinos/as and whiteness can open up spaces to talk about skin color and privilege in relation to racial justice more broadly. While publishing this thesis in the era of Black Lives Matter, it is my sincere hope that further exploration of multiracial identity will be attentive to the ways it can be used to subvert, counteract, and undermine demands for justice by people of color. While it seems obvious, it bears stating that darker-skinned people of color—whether or not they identify as multiracial—are subject to violence, coercion, and discrimination at much higher rates than people who look white, regardless of ancestry. As a multiracial Latina, I call upon others who have thought critically about race to continue the activism exemplified by the participants in this study. We must stand with those for whom race is not optional and who are subject to palpable structural discrimination.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Questions for Latinos/as of Mixed Heritage with One White Parent

1. Please describe your childhood. What was your relationship with your family like?
2. Please describe your parents. Which one brought which ancestry to your background? What generation was your Latino/a parent?
3. Did your parents ever discuss your mixed ancestry?
4. Who did you mostly play with in school?
5. When did you first become aware of your ancestry/race?
6. How do you think strangers see you?
7. Have you ever been racially misidentified? What did you do?
8. How do you respond to questions like, “what are you?”
9. Would you say that you notice any privileges or pitfalls associated with your race? (exoticization, discrimination, etc.)
10. Has your racial/ethnic identity changed throughout your life? Why?

APPENDIX B
PERMISSION LETTER

12/9/13

Office of Human and Animal Protections (OHAP)
San Francisco State University
471 Administration Building
1600 Holloway Avenue,
San Francisco, CA 94132

To The Office of Human and Animal Protections,

Emily Renteria has my permission to recruit subjects from my classes: LTNS 376 and LTNS 505 to conduct research for her study on *Pochos/as Push Back: Multiracial Latinos/as, White Passing, and the Politics of Belonging*. The details of this study have been explained and I support the research.

Please contact me for any further questions at (415) 338-6160.

Sincerely,

Tomas Almaguer
Professor
Department of Latina/Latino Studies
College of Ethnic Studies, SFSU

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Pochos/as Push Back: Multiracial Latinos/as, White Passing, and the Politics of Belonging

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research is to explore how multiracial Latinos/as experience their identities based on Spanish language ability and phenotype. The researcher, Emily Renteria, is a graduate student at San Francisco State University conducting research for a Master's Thesis in the College of Ethnic Studies. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Latino/a of mixed heritage and you are over age 18.

A. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research, the following will occur:

1. You will be interviewed for approximately one hour about your upbringing, family life, and racial identity.
2. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
3. The interview will take place either on campus or at a coffee shop of your choosing. If neither of these is convenient for you, the interview will be conducted over the phone or via Skype.
4. The interview will take place in January of 2014, at a time and place that is convenient for you.
5. The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers for approximately one month after the interview.
6. Total time commitment will be one month.

B. RISKS

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or identities will be used in any published reports of the research. Only the researcher will have access to the research data. There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the nature of the questions asked; however, you will answer only those questions you choose to answer, and can stop participation in the research at any time.

C. CONFIDENTIALITY

The research data will be kept in a secure location and only the researcher will have access to the data. All research data will be stored in an encrypted document on a password protected computer.

Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed at the end of the study. Recording equipment and data will be kept in a locked cabinet in Tomas Almaguer's office at San Francisco State University. The audio data will be transcribed into Word documents and stored in a password-protected folder. The audio files will be destroyed when the study is completed.

D. DIRECT BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to the participant, but benefits may include an increased knowledge/awareness of the subject matter.

E. COSTS

The only cost to participants will be transportation to the research site.

F. COMPENSATION

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

G. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in the research.

H. QUESTIONS

You have spoken with Emily Renteria about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at nanea@mail.sfsu.edu or you may contact the researcher's advisor, Professor Almaguer at tomasa@sfsu.edu.

Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to the Human and Animal Protections at 415: 338-1093 or protocol@sfsu.edu.

I. CONSENT

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your present or future status at San Francisco State University.

Signature _____
Research Participant

Date: _____

Signature _____
Researcher

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: RECRUITING SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Emily Renteria. I am a graduate student at San Francisco State University in the College of Ethnic Studies. I am conducting research on mixed heritage Latinos/as, and I am inviting you to participate because you are enrolled in Latino/a Studies. I am hoping that some of you may have one white and one Latino/a parent and be over 18 years of age.

Participation in this research includes being interviewed for approximately one hour at a Bay Area location of your choosing. If an in-person interview is inconvenient, we can also do it via email, phone, or Skype. I might contact you up to one month after the interview for any clarification or follow-up questions. Your total time commitment to this project will be one month, but there will be only one interview that lasts an hour.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 209-985-5807 or nanea@mail.sfsu.edu.

Thank you for your time.