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Mestiza Spaces: A Three Paper Study of Ethnic Identity Development Among Latinas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Marilyn Monroy Castro

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December 2024

The dissertation of Marilyn Monroy Castro is approved.

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Mestiza Spaces: A Three-Part Study of Ethnic Identity Development Among Latinas

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ABSTRACT

Mestiza Spaces: A Three-Part Study of Ethnic Identity Development Among Latinas

by

Marilyn Monroy Castro

This dissertation explores Latina identity formation through three interconnected studies examining how young Latinas navigate, construct, and redefine their ethnic-racial identity across various contexts. Drawing from both traditional developmental frameworks and Chicana feminist epistemology, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of mestiza consciousness and borderlands, this research provides insights into identity development in transborder contexts. Through critical ethnographic methods and narrative analysis, the study examines identity formation in three distinct yet interrelated spaces: a dual immersion middle school, adult life transitions, and youth softball participation.

The first study follows young Latinas in a dual immersion school, revealing how they develop sophisticated cultural dexterity while navigating multiple linguistic and cultural spaces. Findings demonstrate that the dual immersion environment facilitates unique identity-relevant experiences that support ethnic-racial identity development. The second study traces one adult Latina's identity journey through college, marriage, and motherhood,

illustrating how ethnic-racial identity development continues well into adulthood. This narrative challenges traditional developmental timeframes while highlighting the role of intergenerational dynamics in identity formation. The third study examines how Latina youth in softball create what Anzaldúa terms "third spaces," where physical movement becomes cultural expression and family presence provides spiritual grounding.

Together, these studies illuminate how Latinas transform historically exclusionary spaces into sites of cultural celebration and identity affirmation. The research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications: for developmental psychology, it suggests frameworks must expand to capture spiritual and embodied aspects of identity; for Chicana feminist thought, it demonstrates how theoretical concepts manifest in everyday spaces; and for educators and community leaders, it provides insights into creating environments that support rather than suppress complex identity work.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: A Love Letter to My Latina Identity

Eres La Estrella **[You Are the Star]: Breaking into the American Consciousness**

Few things capture the American spirit like Super Bowl Sunday. It is an annual showcase of ostentatious proportions, a display of America's unquenchable thirst for sports, media, and consumerism—all carefully curated together in a three-hour experience. It is an American cultural phenomenon, attracting more than 100 million viewers worldwide, making it the most-watched broadcast in the United States annually. Described as a modern-day mythical spectacle (Real, 2003), the National Football League's (NFL) championship game consistently bakes itself into the American consciousness. For this reason, in 2023, Super Bowl LVII espoused a refreshingly unique take on its presentation and ingratiation toward the American public--one that was uniquely Latino and, for that reason, historic. In an unprecedented move, the NFL commissioned a Xicana and Indigenous artist Lucinda Hinojos: "*La Morena*," as their marquee resident artist for the big event. Paying homage to her roots and her brownness, her signature vibrant hues covered the game day tickets and contributed to the day's artistic vision. In all its surrealist glory, images of the Vince Lombardi Trophy could be seen framed by a dynamic radiant pink sky, a deeply purple mountain range, turquoise fields, green shades of *nopal* [cacti], and the buzzing gaze of a hummingbird. The hummingbird, a native symbol of light, was a nod to Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec God of War and Sun. It was a sight to behold for Latino and Indigenous communities--a visual medley of Mexican, Indigenous, and American culture-- an interconnectedness not typically celebrated, or rather marketed, on such a grand scale.

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Hinojos, however, was not alone in this cultural tribute. Staying in line with the NFL's "La Cultura" initiative, the league reached yet another milestone for its Latino fanbase. This time, it came in the form of a Super Bowl ad. In this commercial, the audience is introduced to Diana Flores, flag football world champion and quarterback for the Women's Mexican National Flag Football team. For one minute and thirty seconds of highly coveted air time, Flores brings spectators alongside her for an immersive experience. Donning number thirty-three on a sleek black uniform with the Mexican flag stitched front and center, our eyes are locked on Diana as she sprints across changing backdrops, masterfully evading a montage of NFL athletes, who, one after the other, fail to capture her flags. In one moment, legendary Billie Jean King pops up, assisting her escape. But, right before the commercial concludes, we see Diana enter her mother's kitchen. She slows her pace. They exchange a few words in Spanish, and just as her mother lunges, joining the league of stars before her, Diana jets off – it is a sentimental and lighthearted moment. In the last few seconds, the camera pans away from Diana as more flag football athletes join her onscreen. A final dedication appears to all women pushing the sport forward. It was a clear attempt by the NFL marketing engine to blend multicultural messaging with its venture in flag football. However, in many ways, this was a skillfully executed homage to *La Cultura* and, beyond that, *las mujeres* mestizas.

Anyone who had the slightest intrigue in the "Run With It" commercial starring Diana could easily find an NFL-sponsored, behind-the-scenes video of her and her loved ones watching the historic commercial for the first time. This time, all the attention was on Diana's close-knit family. The camera focuses on her father, who, behind smiling tears, tells Diana, '*Eres la estrella'* [You are the star]. He recounts her tremendous impact on the sport,

her mother hugs her with *orgullo* [pride], and with tears welling up in her eyes, her sister

enters the scene:

> *Es muy lindo ver a mi hermana, pues sí, verla brillar. Y con ese último mensaje,*
>
> *como que sí te llenó el corazón, pues porque sí lo entiendes. ¡Ay no, es muy bonito!*
>
> [It's so beautiful to see my sister, yes, to see her shine. And with that last message, it
>
> really did fill your heart, because you truly understand it. Oh my, it's just so lovely!]

Diana's mother, filled with emotion, watches the tender exchange between the sisters. As a

second-generation Mexican American, I have rewatched this numerous times with a reaction

and sentiment similar to Diana's family. Being introduced to Diana like so many millions

have been over the last few months, I cannot help but watch with *orgullo*, pride. I do not

know her personally, but the sentiment of her story is so very personal. Every time I watch,

my eyes well up. As Diana's sister describes it, a gentle tug moves the heart. And just like

her, I understand it. I get it. And it feels overwhelmingly beautiful.

Walking the Borderlands: A Personal Journey

Like many Mexican-Americans watching, I felt this moment viscerally. Hinojosa,

"La Morena," and Flores, "La Campeona," embody identities that have long been relegated

to the margins, or borderlands, of the American and Mexican experience: neither here nor

there, but somewhere más allá (beyond). As a researcher who grew up in Ocean Oaks, a

predominantly Latino coastal city in Southern California, an enclave of Mexicanness, I

recognized in Diana's fluid movements between worlds - from professional athlete to

daughter speaking Spanish in her mother's kitchen - what theorist Maria Lugones calls

"curdling". To curdle means to inhabit spaces (psychological, physical, spiritual) where we

refuse–resist– to separate our multiple identities into neat, manageable categories.

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Yet it wasn't until I began this research that I came to fully understand the historical weight and significance of these everyday acts of curdling and resistance. Ocean Oaks traces its origins to a not so distant time that indulged in the systematic exploitation of Mexican families. Founded in 1898 around the American Beet Sugar Company (ABSC), the city's founders and civil leaders carefully constructed spaces that relegated Mexican laborers to neighborhoods that lacked basic infrastructure such as running water and electricity. The railroad tracks that cut through the city became more than physical infrastructure, they were boundary markers of racial hierarchy, with the west side reserved for white-anglo residents and everyone else delegated to the east; where I gew up. Incorporated as a city in 1903, housing differences between Mexican factory workers and White factory supervisors were stark and clearly demarcated along racial lines.

Racially restrictive covenants engineered this segregation, explicitly prohibiting the selling, purchasing, and owning of housing properties by "Negroes, Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans, or Indians" (Garcia & Yosso, 2013). These policies thrived within a broader landscape of discriminatory practices targeting Mexicans, many of which originated from the naturalization of Mexican nationals as American citizens following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. To the dismay of many Anglo-Americans, this treaty legally granted Mexicans full citizenship. In response, creative and systemic efforts emerged to suppress and disenfranchise Mexican-Americans, depriving them of equitable access to housing, education, and economic opportunities. This systematic marginalization was especially severe for Mexican women, whose experiences and contributions were too easily erased. Even as U.S. policies "welcomed" Mexican laborers through initiatives like the Bracero program, white-Anglo community members actively resisted them as neighbors and

citizens. Education officials of the time went so far as to label Mexican children as "handicapped," viewing them as burdens and liabilities to Anglo-American students.

These racial relations were not just historical accidents but ecological factors that profoundly influenced the ethnic socialization and identity formation of those living in Ocean Oaks. Like many California cities, Ocean Oaks came to represent another *frontera,* a place defined by displacement. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "*La frontera*" [the border] represents "*una herida abierta*" [an open wound] where worlds collide, "hemorrhaging before a scab can form" due to iterations of abuse (1987, p. 25). For Mexican-Americans living in Ocean Oaks, this border formed in the psyche, creating a "borderlands," a space of continuous transition and transformation for survival's sake.

Today's Ocean Oaks, while still bearing these historical scars, has become a uniquely exceptional space for examining how Latinas navigate and reclaim historically denied spaces. Ahistorically situated, the voices of Mexican American women have long required excavation, a conscious undoing of centuries of being "disabled as historical actors" (Ramírez, p. xv). However, like two bookends, Diana Flores and Xicana artist Lucinda "*La Morena*" Hinojos represent a new range of visibility for Latinas infiltrating traditionally exclusionary spaces. Their presence - brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking, culturally proud - stands in stark contrast to centuries of erasure that Mexican-origin women have endured. Yet, there they stand, now firmly etched into the American consciousness.

From Shadows to Light: The Rise of Chicana Consciousness

This visibility, or rather, this movement from invisibility has deeper historical roots stemming from before the Spanish colonization of women in the Valley of Mexico in 1521. Before the Spanish conquest of Mexico, indigenous civilizations like the Olmecs honored

female deities such as *Coatlicue*, "Lady of the Serpent Skirt," who embodied powerful dualities: light and darkness, death and life (Anzaldúa, 1987). The erasure of these feminine powers began long before the U.S.-Mexico border was drawn. In the three centuries that it took the Aztecs to migrate from the mythical homeland of Aztlán to Tenochtitlán, egalitarian traditions had ceased to exist under the practices of the Aztecs. The male-dominated warfare that characterized their dominance elevated patriarchal systems. By the time Hernán Cortés arrived, the Aztecs had oppressed and alienated a multitude of indigenous tribes, including women and the poor, leaving them susceptible to the Spanish conquistadors. The birth of the mestizo in 1521, which marked a new race of Indian and Spanish blood, had thus inherited an oppressive lens toward women. As "offspring of those first matings" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 27), Mexican-American women inherit that legacy.

Fast forward to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which ignited a rising of political consciousness amongst Latinos who were tired of their second class citizenship (Vera & De Los Santos, 2005). While crucial in developing ethnic pride and unifying political interests amongst the marginalized class, this "Chicano Renaissance", as it came to be known, failed to elevate women. For example, "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" which emphasized nationalism through a male-defined discourse, failed to recognize Chicanas as agents of liberation. This cultural exclusion was also reflected in the formal spaces of Academia. As poet raúlsalinas noted in his "Homenaje al Pachuco" (1980), even as '*pachucos*' became symbols of resistance, '*pachucas*' remained "ANONYMOUS" in academic texts. This systematic invisibility gave rise to Chicana feminist thought, an inward critique of both the broader society and the movement's internal *machismo*.

Drawing from this rich history, my research journey mirrors what Anzaldúa describes as developing a "mestiza consciousness," a way of existing that transcends binary thinking and embraces complexity. These three studies trace not only different spaces of identity formation but also my own intellectual mestizaje. I blend together traditional developmental frameworks found in developmental psychology and educational contexts with Chicana feminist thought, to create new ways of understanding identity formation.

Forging New Narratives: Three Studies in Identity Formation

The progression of these studies reflects what Lugones (1994) terms "the art of curdling," or refusing to separate different ways of knowing into pure, manageable categories. Through three interconnected studies, this research examines how Latinas living in Ocean Oaks, two generations since the eradication of racist convenants, navigate their ethnic identity development:

1. The first study explores the ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development of early adolescent Latinas in a Spanish-English dual immersion school setting. Employing a critical ethnographic approach grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology, the research utilizes Umaña-Taylor and Fine's (2004) Model of Ethnic Identity Development among Adolescents as a theoretical framework. Data was collected through classroom observations, pláticas, individual interviews, and the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS). The study focuses on three main participants. Findings reveal the complex interplay between ERI processes and content, highlighting how the dual immersion environment facilitates identity-relevant experiences and peer ethnic-racial socialization. This study contributes to the evolving conceptualization of ERI development, emphasizing the importance of qualitative, narrative-based approaches

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in understanding the experiences of Latina adolescents in majority-minority educational settings. Their experiences point toward the need for a more holistic lens that can capture their many ways of knowing and enactment of their ethnic identity.

2. The second study explores the ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development of Zulma, an adult Latina, across various life stages and contexts. This study intentionally "curdles" academic approaches through Zulma's narrative, weaving together ERI developmental frameworks with Chicana feminist literature. Through her story, we see mestiza consciousness in action. This study addresses a critical gap in ethnic-racial identity research by demonstrating that identity development continues through adulthood, and is shaped by experiences of college, marriage, motherhood, and faith. By integrating traditional ERI frameworks with qualitative analysis, the research offers a holistic perspective on ethnic identity formation in transborder contexts. Findings reveal the significant influence of life transitions, intergenerational dynamics, and the intersection of multiple social identities on ethnic identity development.

3. This third ethnographic study examined the developmental outcomes for Latina youth participating in softball, with particular attention to how cultural factors shaped their athletic experiences. This study follows nine Latina athletes (ages 11-13) during their 2023 All-Star season, and draws from both the Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development and Chicana feminist perspectives, specifically Lugones' concept of "curdling". The findings suggest that when cultural expression is welcomed, sports participation can serve as a vehicle for positive youth development that builds upon, rather than competes with, cultural values and family

relationships. This study contributes to the limited literature on Latina athletes' experiences while offering implications for creating culturally sustaining sports environments that support both athletic and identity development.This study brings together mind, body, and spirit on the softball diamond, where young Latina athletes create what Anzaldúa terms "third spaces." Here, physical movement becomes a form of cultural expression, family presence provides a spiritual grounding, and daily interactions demonstrate sophisticated identity navigation. Neither fully Mexican nor American, these athletes create something powerfully new through their integrated experience of body, family bonds, and cultural pride.

These studies map the diverse terrains of identity formation while reflecting my own intellectual mestizaje.

Methods of Resistance: A Chicana Feminist Approach

Operating under a Chicana feminist epistemology requires more than just studying Latina experiences, it demands a complete reimagining of how research itself can be conducted. As Delgado Bernal (1998) notes, this epistemological stance acknowledges researchers are inextricably linked to their research, contributing their own embodied experiences and ways of knowing. In each study, traditional academic boundaries between researcher and subject, between theory and practice, between observer and participant, had to be consciously "curdled."

In the dual immersion study, my own experiences as a Spanish speaker who once navigated similar linguistic borderlands informed how I conducted pláticas with the young Latinas. These weren't just interviews, they were sacred spaces of shared meaning-making, what Fierros and Bernal (2016) describe as opportunities to "witness shared memories,

experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations." Over pizza and casual conversation, these Latina adolescents revealed sophisticated understandings of their ethnic identity that traditional developmental frameworks alone couldn't do justice.

For Zulma's narrative, this epistemological approach allowed for what Anzaldúa calls "theories of the flesh": knowledge created from lived experience. Her story isn't just data to be analyzed; it's a testimony of how adult Latinas actively construct and negotiate their identities across various life stages. This methodology honored her practical wisdom as a mother, her intellectual acuity as a professional, and her spiritual insights about identity and belonging. This approach challenges traditional academic assumptions about what counts as knowledge and who gets to create it.

The softball study perhaps best exemplifies what Cruz (2006) calls the "messy" work of Chicana feminist research. As both former player and researcher, I brought what Delgado Bernal terms "cultural intuition" to understanding how these young athletes transform the diamond into a space of cultural celebration. Walking the same fields where I once played, I recognized in their experiences my own early negotiations with identity. The methodology had to be flexible enough to capture both the structured aspects of athletic development and the fluid, creative ways these players expressed their cultural identity.

This work contributes to the larger project of making Latina experiences visible in academia by demonstrating that our ways of knowing whether through pláticas, testimonios, or embodied understanding are as valid and rigorous as traditional research methods. Like Diana Flores weaving through defenders on the Super Bowl screen, this research moves fluidly between different ways of knowing, refusing to be confined by artificial academic boundaries.

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CHAPTER TWO

Ethnic Racial Identity Development in a Dual Immersion School: A Narrative

Analysis

Introduction

Overview of the study: theoretical and empirical ERI scholarship

This research dives into the content and processes underpinning the ethnic identity development of 7th and 8th-grade Latina early adolescents. Employing a developmental lens, this study considers evolving conceptualizations of ethnic-racial identity (ERI) formation to guide a narrative-rich exploration of how ethnic identity manifests in the lives of early adolescents. A middle school math classroom serves as the backdrop for observing this phenomenon, providing a natural, everyday context for exploration. This work is grounded in a Chicana feminist epistemology and employs a critical ethnographic perspective that blends traditional inquiry methods with an organic, evolving methodological approach. This flexible strategy allows for an insightful analysis of ERI development as it unfolds organically in the daily experiences of these early adolescent Latinas.

Rationale of the study

While robust literature exists on ERI development, a call remains to explore the diverse contexts and experiences that serve as the basis for constructing ethnic identities (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). The process of constructing meaning in ethnic identity development is highly temporal and contextual. Therefore, there is an ever-present need to examine how unique relationships, communities, and sociocultural factors interact with individual characteristics to create identity-relevant experiences, which in turn shape ERI

development (Williams et al., 2020). Identity-relevant experiences are events or interactions that prompt individuals to reflect on and assess their ethnic-racial identity (ERI). These encounters serve as catalysts, encouraging individuals to examine, question, or affirm their sense of self in relation to their ethnic and racial background (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Research has shown that ERI development is a developmental competency that impacts psychosocial adjustment for ethnic minority adolescents (Neblett Jr et al., 2012; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2012; Yip et al., 2006). Social contexts serve as conduits for ERI formation during this developmental period (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). In one study, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) found that for Mexican-origin adolescents, the relationship between ERI exploration and self-esteem varied depending on the ethnic composition of schools. In schools with a low percentage of Latino students (less than 20%), adolescents who reported high levels of ERI exploration also reported higher levels of self-esteem. This suggests that in contexts where ethnic groups are a small minority, actively exploring one's ethnic identity may serve as a protective factor, potentially helping adolescents develop a stronger sense of self in an environment where they may feel different from the majority.

Quantitative methodologies have dominated the existing literature on adolescent ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development, with researchers primarily using quantitative data and statistical analyses to examine contextual factors and identity-relevant experiences, such as encounters with discrimination or exposure to ethnic socialization. This prevalence of quantitative approaches has shaped our current understanding of ERI, paving the way for measurable variables and standardized scales (Pahl & Way, 2006; Seaton el al., 2009; Williams et al., 2020). This study expands on this foundation by qualitatively investigating

the ethnic identity formation of early adolescent Latinas in a unique educational context: a Spanish-English dual immersion school with a Latino student majority. Utilizing a critical ethnographic approach centered on personal narratives, this research seeks to understand the ethnic-identity experiences and meaning making of early adolescents embedded in an environment where they are the minority-majority.

This study is situated at a K-8 dual immersion school. Dual immersion programs are educational models that aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in two languages alongside multicultural understanding. Dual immersion programs have been found to produce many positive outcomes for students. One study conducted on Latino 5th-8th grade students found that honing the native language allowed for stronger connections among family members, helping build intergenerational relationships and strong communication skills (Linton, 2007). This qualitative exploration enhances existing findings by offering a developmental lens to provide further insight on the mechanisms behind these outcomes.

Research question(s)

RQ1: What identity-relevant experiences do early adolescent Latinas (7th and 8th grade) in a K-8 Spanish-English dual immersion school identify? What meanings do they attach to these experiences, and how do these experiences and meanings reflect their ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development?

RQ2: To what extent do their narratives align with or diverge from their measured ERI statuses?

Significance of the study

This research contributes to the ongoing effort to merge two key aspects of ERI development: the journey of how ethnic identity forms over time (the process) and the

characteristics of that identity at any given point (the content) (Schwartz et al., 2014). Additionally, it contributes to efforts to diversify methodological approaches to capture the dynamic nature of ethnic identity formation. The critical methodology used in this study revels in a slower pace of research, where unscripted inquiry makes room for complexity, ambiguity, and what ethnography refers to as "getting lost" (Geertz, 1973; Fitzpatrick & May, 2022). This flexibility makes way for a give and take, a dance between literature and lived experiences (Ball, 2012). Lastly, this study fills a niche gap in research by examining the synchronicity of ethnic identity development and dual immersion education- all through the lens of one vibrant middle school math classroom. This is significant given the systematic eradication of dual immersion education in the United States, and more specifically within the state of California.

Rooted in social control and xenophobic ideology, restrictive language policies in California have had a long and complex history, reflecting a broader struggle concerning identity politics. These policies have historically targeted immigrant communities, attempting to suppress their native languages and, by extension, their cultural practices, traditions, and ways of life (Wiley & Wright, 2004). By constraining language use, these nefarious policies have sought to establish English monolingualism at the expense of the rich linguistic diversity that has long characterized the state. Language is not merely a communication tool, but a fundamental aspect of cultural identity, shaping worldviews, preserving ancestral knowledge, and maintaining community bonds across generations (Zentella, 1998).

California's legislative landscape has been at time perilous for immigrants, with propositions like Proposition 63 (1986) establishing English as the official state language

with a 73% majority, Proposition 187 (1994) attempting to deny public services to undocumented immigrants, and Proposition 227 (1998) restricting bilingual education for 18 years (MacKaye, 1990; Wiley, 2019). These measures, at the time, reflected broader national trends of linguistic discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiments, driven by assumptions that bilingualism threatened societal stability. The passage of Proposition 209 in 1996, opposing affirmative action, further exemplified these discriminatory tendencies. However, the approval of Proposition 58 in 2016 with nearly 74% voter support, which effectively ended restrictions on bilingual education, signaled a shift in public opinion towards embracing linguistic diversity.

Dual immersion programs provide fertile ground for generating ethnic-relevant experiences through socialization processes. While research on implicit and nonverbal ethnic-racial socialization processes is well documented, it is infrequently incorporated into research on ERI development (Rogers et al., 2020). This is significant given the lack of narrative inquiry on Latina adolescents in ERI formation scholarship.

Literature Review

This study employs a theoretical framework that provides an ecological perspective on ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development. While not explicitly stated, this framework is flexible enough to accommodate evolving constructs in the field, particularly the dominant conceptualization of ERI (process and context) in developmental and educational research. ERI content encompasses an individual's thoughts and feelings about their ethnic group membership, whereas ERI process focuses on how these thoughts and feelings develop over time. These two 'dimensions of ERI' are intrinsically linked and house various components. For approximately the last two decades, as noted by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014), these

interconnected aspects of ERI have been the collective focus of evolving scholarship in the field. This framework allows for an integrated examination of ERI development, considering both the what (content) and the how (process) of ethnic-racial identity formation. Notably, it is highly contextualized, recognizing the significant influence of specific environmental and cultural factors, and acknowledges the temporal nature of identity development.

A Comprehensive Theoretical Framework: Model of Ethnic Identity Development among Adolescents

Umaña-Taylor and Fine's (2004) Model of Ethnic Identity Development among Adolescents forms the theoretical basis of this study. It is modeled after Knight et al.'s (1993) Ethnic Identity Model of Latino Children. This 1993 model was groundbreaking in its approach, as it integrated the multilayered effect of family dynamics, environmental contexts, and socialization processes on the ethnic identity formation of Latino children. It proposed that broad societal factors (macro) and intimate environmental factors (micro) influenced the socialization behaviors of various familial and non-familial sources, who in turn, influenced the ethnic identity formation of their youth.

While emphasizing this cascading effect, Knight et al. also recognized children's cognitive abilities as playing a key role in their ethnically based behaviors. They noted that children's cognitive development influenced meaning-making and moderated how they interpreted and expressed their ethnic identity. This model laid the groundwork for Umaña-Taylor and Fine's (2004) subsequent investigation into ethnic identity development among Mexican-origin adolescents.

Umaña-Taylor and Fine's theoretical model maintains the core principles of Knight et al.'s (1993) model but introduces several modifications to better address the unique

circumstances of adolescent development. Figure 1 illustrates Umaña-Taylor and Fine's

(2004) Model of Ethnic Identity Development among Adolescents. Each component of the

model is detailed below, unpacking how it differs from its original inspiration to lay the

theoretical groundwork for a comprehensive conceptualization of ERI formation in this

study.

Figure 1

A Comprehensive Theoretical Framework: Model of Ethnic Identity Development among
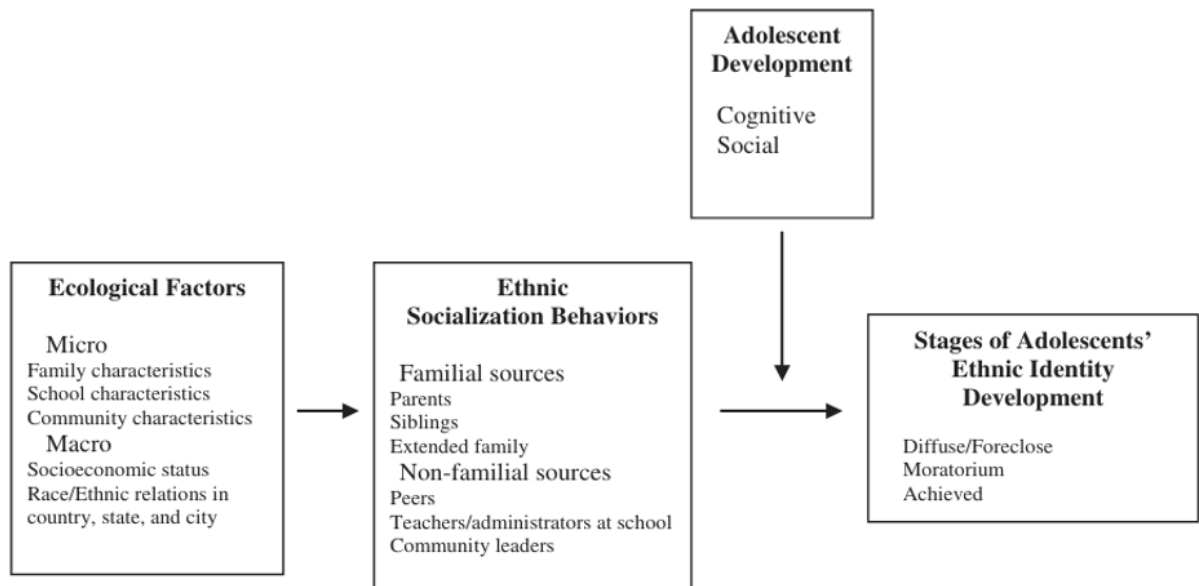
Adolescents

Note. Model of ethnic identity development among adolescents. Reprinted from "Ethnic
Identity Among Mexican-Origin Adolescents," by A. Umaña-Taylor and M. Fine, 2004,
Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 26(1), 41.Copyright 2004 by SAGE Publications.
Ecological Factors

This model's first component recognizes the myriad of ways environmental elements,

directly and indirectly, affect ethnic identity development. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's

(1989) social-ecological theory, researchers have demonstrated that ethnic identity is shaped

by both individuals and their environment (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bámaca, & Guimond, 2009). Therefore, ERI scholars stress the importance of studying ERI processes and content within the various contexts of individuals' lives.

Bioecological models help in examining the interplay between individual, family, and community relationships while considering developmental trends, societal influences, and historical context. These overlapping layers inform the processes of ethnic-racial identity formation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Research has shown that certain aspects of ERI, such as how prominent ethnic identity is to one's self concept in any given moment, also known as saliency, can shift under different circumstances; ERI is thus, anything but static and is informed by factors seen and unseen (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). For instance, the ethnic composition of a neighborhood, as discussed earlier, can influence how salient ethnic identity is for children and adolescents. Saliency is different from exploration. While exploration is part of the process of developing ethnic-racial identity, saliency refers to the actual content of that identity and its contextual relevance. Some studies have theorized that ERI saliency for ethnically minority youth can be minimalized in contexts where they are the ethnic majority simply because their ethnic identity is not constantly being brought to their attention (Lee, 2003). A sort of default can occur when no contrasting groups exist. In such environments, ethnicity may become a less distinguishing feature for someone's self-concept, thus reducing salience.

Conversely, in contexts where these youth are in the minority, as seen in Umaña-Taylor et al.'s studies, their ethnic identity may become more prominent as a distinguishing characteristic of their sense of self. Saliency can fluctuate across settings and time. Given this in-flux nature, more research is needed to understand how the construct of saliency may

vary at the convergence of socialization efforts, school composition, and normal developmental changes (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). This ecological perspective, therefore, provides the groundwork needed to understand ERI development and its many subcomponents.

Ethnic Socialization Behaviors

The second component of the model focuses on racial and ethnic socialization - the process by which parents transmit information about race and ethnicity to their children (Hughes et al., 2006). This concept aligns with Erickson's (1959) idea that social identities are shaped by daily social interactions with individuals. As highlighted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, immediate family members are positioned to play an influential role in children's and adolescents' ERI. As close contact socializing agents, parents inevitably help shape their children's cultural orientation and equip them with values and behaviors to navigate various social contexts (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). It's important to note, however, that family does not solely influence ERI development. Non-familial agents such as peers, teachers, and coaches also play significant roles in this process, as further demonstrated in this study (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004).

Adolescent Development

Umaña-Taylor & Fine (2004) modified this portion of the model to include the cognitive *and* social abilities that emerge during adolescent development. Much of the literature on ethnic identity development has been conducted during adolescence. That is because this developmental period initiates cognitive *and* social maturity, leading to greater personal discernment of preferred values, behaviors, and social identities such as ethnic identity. Early adolescence is the developmental period of 10-14 years old, and is

characterized by physical changes of puberty, changes in social demands, and a steep

progression of introspection and abstract thinking (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2013). Adolescents

undergo a cognitive maturity that allows them to think autonomously and abstractly, often

leading to questioning and distancing from their parents' ideologies.This developmental age

also lends itself to exploring different social hierarchies and meanings. Meaning-making

through group membership is therefore incredibly influential for ethnic minority adolescents

(Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004), making this developmental stage ripe for studying ERI

formation (Calderón-Tena, Knight & Carlo, 2011; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Stages of Adolescents' Ethnic Identity Development

   The final component of Umaña-Taylor & Fine's (2004) model focuses on ERI

processes. It adapts the seminal work of several influential identity theorists who have paved

the way for conceptualizing identity processes, beginning with Erikson (1959), who

proposed that identity development was a lifelong process, evolving with age and

experience, with adolescence being a critical formation period. According to Erikson,

individuals construct their identities through internal processes such as role confusion,

identity crises, continuity, and change. The social environment also plays a crucial role in

shaping identity, echoing the relational nature of identity formation as captured by

ecological models. Complementing Erikson's work, Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory

emphasized that individuals' self-worth and esteem were closely tied to their sense of

belonging in social groups, again emphasizing the meaning-making tied to group

membership. Tajfel posits that these group memberships fundamentally shape one's self-

concept.

Building on Erikson and Tajfel's work, Marcia (1966, 1980) introduced two key concepts to identity formation: exploration (initially termed crisis) and commitment. These concepts have become central to our understanding of identity development processes today, particularly concerning ethnic identity. Exploration refers to the period of actively searching and questioning identity alternatives, while commitment refers to the degree of personal investment in a given identity. Marcia (1980) operationalized these concepts to produce four distinct identity statuses, as seen in the far right of the model: (a) *Identity diffusion*: characterized by low exploration, low commitment; (b) *Identity foreclosure*: defined by low exploration, high commitment; (c) *Identity moratorium*: represented by high exploration, low commitment; and lastly, (d) *Identity achievement*: typified by high exploration, high commitment.

These statuses were created to capture the developmental processes of identity formation, specifically by combining different stages along the continuum of exploration and commitment. Table 1 illustrates how these statuses are applied in an ERI context. It's important to note that these statuses, or stages are not fixed, but rather fluid and amenable to change over time as individuals continue to develop and have new experiences (Marica, 1980).

Table 1

Marcia's (1980) Identity Statuses Applied to Ethnic Identity Processes

Identity Status	Exploration	Commitment	Example in ERI Context
Diffusion	Low	Low	Shows no interest in their heritage
Foreclosure	Low	High	Strongly identifies with their ethnic background without questioning it
Moratorium	High	Low	Actively explores their ethnic identity but is unsure of its meaning
Achievement	High	High	Has explored their heritage and integrated it into their sense of self

Note. This table provides examples of the four identity statuses theorized by Marcia (1980) and applied to an ERI context.

The Ethnic Identity Scale: An Evolving Measurement

Considering Marcia's operational framework, many researchers began applying these processes to racial/ethnic identity development (Janet Helms, 1990). Phinney (1992), for example, became notable for developing a universal measure of ethnic identity development applicable across different ethnic groups, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). It was this measure that prompted the development of Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2004) Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS).

Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) assesses three components of identity development: exploration, resolution (or commitment), and affirmation. While the first two components are operationalized based on Marcia's identity status model, affirmation is a novel inclusion. This added construct captures the affective dimension of ethnic identity, measuring whether individuals view their ethnicity positively or negatively—an aspect not addressed in Marcia's original framework. By incorporating

affirmation, Phinney's model extends beyond the cognitive and behavioral aspects of identity development to include emotional attitudes toward one's ethnic group.

This measure, however, was critiqued for utilizing one subscale, and conflating the meaning of these three separate constructs to yield a single score. Specifically, Phinney's MEIM assumes that an achieved ethnic identity equates positive identification with one's ethnic group, which is not always the case. The private regard aspect of ethnic identity, which captures one's personal feelings as measured by affirmation in Phinney's model, conflates positive affect with achievement. The measures used in his model to capture achievement and affirmation are designed to reflect positive feelings, such as ethnic pride, which can distort the concept of achieved status. As a result, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) noted that this did not capture a neutral, achieved status– or the state of assurance of what one's ethnic identity and group membership means to them. That is especially true for those who do not hold positive sentiments and affiliations toward these identities. For example, one can have an achieved identity and yet display a negative affect toward their ethnic identity after thoroughly exploring what that identity means to them. Consider the scenario where one has explored, undergone moratorium, and resolved what their ethnic identity means to them; however, the nuance lies in that they harbor negative to ambivalent feelings toward their ethnic group membership and thus do not consider that identity as salient to their self-concept.

The Ethnic Identity Scale, therefore, was designed to address these limitations by measuring these three distinct components with three separate subscales. While components of the ethnic identity scale continue to produce validity, after nearly two decades, the affective component in this scale is facing pushback (Umaña-Taylor, 2024). Recent

literature challenges our current understanding of affect in ethnic-racial identity.

Psychometric studies (Meca et al., 2021) and quantitative meta-analyses have examined the

significant variability of affect and its impact on social adjustment (Gale et al., 2020; Rivas-

Drake et al., 2014). These studies suggest that the current linear conceptualization of affect

is flawed. Instead, affect may be better understood as two distinct components: positive and

negative. This new perspective proposes that positive and negative feelings about one's

ethnic-racial identity can coexist, rather than existing on a single continuum.

The emerging shift in the literature prompts a reevaluation of coding methods and

interpretations in previous studies (Umaña-Taylor, 2024). However, rather than viewing this

as a limitation, the current study leverages the outcomes of the Ethnic Identity Scale as a

comparative baseline for the captured narratives. This approach not only acknowledges the

evolving understanding of ERI but also provides an opportunity to further elaborate on its

reconceptualization. This reconsideration of affect in ethnic-racial identity (ERI) research

underscores the dynamic nature of ERI as a metaconstruct, necessitating adaptable and

innovative interpretative approaches.

Elaboration of ERI Process and Content

While the ethnic identity scale captures the ERI process of exploration and

commitment, the affirmation construct falls within the ERI dimension of content. As

discussed earlier, ERI constructs can be categorized into one of the two ERI dimensions:

process and content, with content answering the question: "What does ethnic identity look

like?" A challenge when investigating content is the myriad of ways in which it has been

operationalized across studies (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). To address these challenges, the

Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group was formed (Umaña-Taylor et

al., 2014), with the aim of synthesizing the vast literature on ethnic and racial identity across various fields, providing guidance for conceptualizing and operationalizing ERI components, and aligning this research with current understanding in human development.

The Study Group has identified several constructs central to youth ERI development. Process components include exploration/search and commitment (as captured by the ethnic identity scale), which capture all facets of information seeking or exposure to one's ethnic-racial group; negotiation; elaboration; internalization of cultural values; and collective self-verification. Content constructs, on the other hand, encompass various aspects of how individuals perceive and relate to their ethnic-racial identity. These include certainty, which extends beyond ethnic-racial labeling to encapsulate an adolescent's critical thinking about their ethnic identity's meaning; saliency, which "refers to the extent to which one's ethnicity-race is relevant to one's self-concept in a particular situation" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 26); and centrality, which "refers to the extent to which a person considers his or her race to be an important aspect of his or her self-concept" (p. 26). Additional content constructs include affect (as discussed above), which pertains to feelings toward one's ethnic-racial group; public regard, which refers to perceptions of how others view one's ethnic-racial group; and identity self-denial, which may emerge when individuals attempt to hide or minimize their ethnic-racial background due to low public regard. The school context can play a pivotal role in the formation of these ERI constructs, influencing both process and content aspects of ethnic-racial identity development.

Methodology

Research Design

In critical ethnography, research questions are guided by theory, which cycles through context and allows context to inform the modes of inquiry. This approach safeguards theory from overriding the experiences of communities. The "critical" in critical theory refers to the critiquing of a wide range of social and political contexts; it questions positions of power, issues in inequity, and ethics and encompasses many forms of social injustices (Noblit, 2003). This study pays tribute to the empowering context of dual immersion schools, drawing upon my lived experience and embodied knowledge of language and ethnic discrimination faced by Latino youth in this geographic location. Scholars in this field pose that while critical ethnography is intentional in its objection to abuses of power, it also heavily hinges on the theoretical orientation of the inquiry (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022). The theoretical orientation of this study is grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology, aligning with my own identity and positionality as the researcher.

Critical ethnography seeks a reciprocal relationship between the field, theory, and one's ontological orientation. Researchers must seek a synchronization between these elements, which also extends to writing. It is not about finding answers and truth or closing inequities and correcting injustices; it is about deep exploration, continued engagement, and earnest understanding- all elements which complement the ongoing evolution of the ERI literature.

Population and Sample

This research was part of a broader two-year study funded by the Spencer Grant Foundation, which focused on the experiences of Latina students in math classrooms. The study site, Raíces del Rio Academy, is a unique public K-8 school with a dual immersion program, serving only 682 students. The school's demographics are striking, with a 98.7%

minority enrollment rate, of which 98% identify as Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, 57% of the student population comes from low-income backgrounds. These characteristics set Raíces del Rio Academy apart from other middle schools in the area, making it an ideal location for investigating the specific experiences of Latina students in a predominantly Hispanic, dual immersion educational environment.

Before the study began, there were numerous meetings involving the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, math teachers from the district's middle schools, and a research team led by two university faculty members. After securing willing participation from a 7th-grade and an 8th-grade math teacher, respectively, Raíces del Rio Academy was selected as the research site. Over the span of two years, rounds of interviews, observations, and field notes were taken of 7th and 8th-grade students across multiple math periods taught by participating teachers. This specific study, however, narrows its focus to the experiences of Latina students in three of Mr. Little's math periods - one 7th-grade class and two 8th-grade classes. The participants were identified over the two-year period as students who were comfortable and willing to share their thoughts and experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Students interested in the study were required to return signed parental consent and assent forms before participating. All participants were either assigned or given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Human subjects approval was obtained through the university. Data was collected using a variety of methods, including field observations in the classroom, surveys, pláticas, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Field observations provided a feel for the classroom and broader school

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environment. These observations spanned several math periods of Mr. Little's 7th and 8th grade classes and included all students and instructors, as well as one student teacher.

Three group discussions, known as pláticas, were conducted in Mr. Little's classroom. Pláticas capture the power of storytelling and sharing knowledge through mundane conversations (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). Chicana feminist scholarship emphasizes the power of narrative in shaping Latina identity and discourse. Saavedra and Salazar Pérez (2014) emphasize that Chicanca feminist methodologies such as pláticas, are "more than tools for obtaining data; [such] methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being" (p. 78). These conversational excerpts are windows into how these early adolescent Latinas make meaning of their experiences, a rich ethnographic insight. Flores (2000) writes that Latinas hold control in how they choose to express themselves, and how they choose to engage in dialogue, thus, by highlighting what they choose to share, and how they choose to dialogue with one another, important processes are captured (Castro, Mireles-Rios, & Cecchine, 2023).

Three pláticas were conducted with female participants, each representing one math period. Each group had roughly 8-14 participants, and lasted anywhere from 30-40 minutes. Each Latina student was invited to participate in only one plática to ensure diverse perspectives across the sessions without duplicate attendance. This structure allowed for a comprehensive exploration of experiences across different grade levels and class periods while maintaining a manageable group size for meaningful dialogue. Topics ranged from opinions on attending the school, their experiences as bilingual learners, and as math learners in Mr. Little's classroom.

To create an organic and intimate atmosphere for the plática, participants were invited to share a meal while platicando, a practice aligned with cultural norms and recommended by Fierros and Bernal (2016). Naturally, the meal of choice was from a favorite pizzeria located a mile down the road. The space quickly filled with friendly banter in Spanglish, reflecting the bilingual nature of the students' experiences. Having spent two academic years building rapport with these students, I, the interviewee, aimed to foster trust and openness by sharing my own background. I disclosed that I had never attended a dual immersion school, using this admission as a "relationship building component" (Fierros & Bernal, 2016, p. 103).

Each girl was asked to complete the ethnic identity scale prior to their participation in the pláticas. Following these pláticas, one participant was selected for an in-depth, one-on-one interview to gather further insights. One-one-one interviews were conducted on-site in the school administration building. Participants were asked questions that probed various domains of interest, ranging from their families, their co curricular involvement, their feelings on math, their perceptions of their math identities, their dual immersion experiences, and their ethnic and cultural identities. All individual interviews were either videotaped or audiotaped. They lasted between 30-55 minutes, and were conducted in person.

Instrumentation

Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS). Each participant's ethnic identity status was measured using Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez's (2004) 17-item ethnic identity scale, which assesses three separate components of ethnic identity: exploration, resolution, and affirmation. The exploration subscale is composed of 7 items total (e.g., "I have participated

in activities that have exposed me to my ethnicity"); the resolution subscale contains 4 items (e.g., "I have a clear sense of what my ethnicity means to me"); and lastly, the affirmation scale is comprised of 6 items (e.g., "I am not happy with my ethnicity"). Each subscale contains statements framed in both positive and negative terms. These items, or statements, were scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 4 (describes me very well). Responses were coded so that higher scores corresponded to increased levels of each subscale being measured: exploration, resolution, and affirmation. It's important to note that this scale was distributed and scored as originally intended prior to scoring adjustments offered by the authors, in response to changing constructs as offered by Umaña-Taylor (2024)

Data Analysis Methods

A narrative (Syed & Azmitia) and deductive approach was utilized in the data analysis. As noted above, research questions were informed by theory and adjusted to meet the needs of the context. A priori codes taken from Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2014) integrated conceptualization of ethnic identity development, were used during the first level of coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). A master list of potential codes and definitions was therefore developed prior to coding. Once the first level of coding was completed, a content analysis of the ERI dimensions were conducted. These dimensions included ERI Process (contestation, elaboration, negotiation, internalization of cultural values, exploration/search, and collective self-verification) and ERI Content: public regard, ideology, affect (affirmation, private regard), salience, centrality, importance, understanding of common fate/destiny, identity self-denial, certainty). Fieldnotes were used to provide descriptive profiles of the early adolescents and an overall understanding of their dispositions.

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Ethical Consideration

Critical ethnography concerns itself with the ethical alignment of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of research, or what scholars such as Barad (2007) refer to as "ethico-onto-epistemology." This methodological framework acknowledges that researchers are inextricably linked to their research and, as such, contribute to any project with their own embodied experiences and ways of knowing (Geerts & Carstens, 2019). As a self-identified Chicana researcher, it is important to recognize that my lived experiences growing up in the neighborhood surrounding Raíces del Rio Academy inform my perspective, research orientation, and analysis.

A Chicana perspective operates under a social justice framework informed by cultural intuition. This cultural intuition serves as the foundational base of a Chicana feminist epistemology within educational research (Calderón, Bernal, Huber, Malagón, Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal (1998) argues that Chicana researchers carry with them a "cultural intuition" similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) concept of theoretical sensitivity, "a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data." (p. 563). Therefore, as a researcher and *vecina* (neighbor) to these early adolescent girls, I recognize that Latinas are architects of knowledge, and thus their words can be analyzed meticulously. Strauss and Corbin make a case for varying existing degrees of theoretical sensitivity, all of which are informed by varying combinations of the following: i) one's personal experience; ii) one's professional experience, iii) the existing literature, and iv) the analytical process one engages in. Delgado Bernal (1998) argues that those four sources of knowledge also inform cultural intuition for

Chicana researchers and lay the foundation of a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research.

Results

The results are organized into three main sections, each centered around a plática and an individual participant's narrative. First, a transcription excerpt from the plática with the initial group of 8th grade girls is presented, followed by a deeper narrative of Xochitl, one of the participants from this group. Next, a transcription excerpt from the 7th grade plática is provided, followed by Alex's narrative. Finally, the transcription excerpt from the last plática with the second group of 8th grade girls is presented, concluding with Flora's narrative. This structure allows for a comprehensive examination of both group dynamics and individual experiences across different grade levels.

Plática w/ 8th grade girls (group 1)

To create an organic and intimate atmosphere for the plática, participants were invited to share a meal while platicando, a practice aligned with cultural norms and recommended by Fierros and Bernal (2016). Naturally, the meal of choice was from a favorite pizzeria located a mile down the road. The space quickly filled with friendly banter in Spanglish, reflecting the bilingual nature of the students' experiences. Having spent two academic years building rapport with these students, I, the interviewee, aimed to foster trust and openness by sharing my own background. I disclosed that I had never attended a dual immersion school, using this admission as a "relationship building component" (Fierros & Bernal, 2016, p. 103). For the first plática, the students to shared their unique perspectives and wisdom on attending a dual immersion program, resulting in the following exchange:

Student 1: I feel like it's knowing that you have something- another thing you can use against, or not against, but like something you can use in the world that other people do not [have].

Student 2: I feel like you can get more opportunities for jobs and like, work. More opportunities, like in the world for like being bilingual.

Student 6: You get to learn two languages.

Building on these initial responses, they were asked if coming to a school such as this one taught them about their culture, to which they replied:

Student 3: I feel like it does teach us about our own culture because we're surrounded by Hispanics whereas, like a non-dual immersion, there would be more like other ethnicities.

Student 1: It's like, yeah, I feel like we share a lot of things, like the types of clothes that we wear.

Student 4: And traditions.

Student 1: Like music, we have music—some of us listen to— most of us listen to the same music when it's in Spanish. And in other schools with maybe different ethnicities, it'd be weird for them to feel comfortable [around Spanish music].

Student 5: You share your culture and you feel like you're able to be yourself.

Student 3: It could be the same ethnicity, but it could be from different parts of places, so everyone has their own style and how they like their food and traditional things. That's the thing that we can share with everyone…..

Student 4: It feels like welcoming.

Student 2: And then you can like relate to them.

Student 1: Like a lot of us are from the same places. Like me and her [*points to student*] are from Michoacan. And then, I don't know about student 3, but…

Student 3: Michoacan!

Student 1: Si, *Vez*, there's a lot of people from the same places and their families just bring all the children together.

This plática continued to touch on topics that included their math classroom vibe, their math identities, and stories of anticipation of their freshman year of high school. It concluded with everyone sharing one word to describe their emotions in math, an ode to the math classroom we occupied and the original context of the larger study. This *despedida* elicited gratitude for existing in community and acknowledging the saliency of feelings in the room (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). A few days later, Xochitl, identified as student 1 in the first plática, agreed to be interviewed.

Student 1: Xochitl (Achieved Positive Typology)

Xochitl uses she/her pronouns. She is a first generation 8th grader who identifies as Mexican. She excels in Mr. Little's 7th-period math class, proudly sharing that she "always [has] an A, never a B or C, always an A in his class." As a result, Mr. Little has recommended her for AP math next year as a freshman in high school. Xochitl identifies with the Achieved Positive typology as outlined by Umana-Taylor et al.'s (2004) ethnic identity scale. She has actively sought to learn about her Latina ethnic identity and has developed a clear sense of what being Latina means to her. Her attitude toward her ethnic identity is positive, viewing it as an asset. Below are examples of her Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) process and content, each composed of distinct constructs identified in her narrative.

Xochitl's ERI Process

In terms of the ERI Process, Xochitl demonstrates **negotiation, elaboration** and **internalization of cultural values**. Her **negotiation** is evident when asked about her bilingual education:

> I feel like [it's] really good, cause when I'm out of school, and I have like other friends that are from different schools, they're like, 'your school teaches Spanish and English?' And we're like, 'yeah.' Once we get out of the school, we like come out with a certificate that we speak both languages. So once we're in college or university or like any work, they'll be like, 'Oh, she can speak Spanish and English and is certified.' So they're probably going to pick us better.

Xochitl's response is an example of ethnic identity development through the **negotiation process.** Xochitl's **elaboration and internalization of cultural values** is evident in her discussion of hard work within her community:

> Oh, I feel like every ethnicity has like a different thought of things. I feel like Hispanics think they have to work harder to get things done. Because of like our background and how they got here and everything. I feel like they think they have to work harder than others to get things done. And I think that's true. I think they feel more empowered by doing more than the others and feel better and more positive about themselves and their culture by doing more... .Well, a good example is construction. A lot of parents work in construction because it's like math, a hard subject. And if you get construction right, a lot of people will want you more than other people. You know, like if you're really good at building a house, let's say, they ask you more than the other person. So it's more like about hard work then any other thing.

This quote illustrates the **elaboration** process of expanding or deepening one's understanding of their ethnic-racial identity. It involves gaining more knowledge about one's cultural background, history, and traditions. This perspective highlights her cultural assets through discussion of the **cultural values** tied to her ethnic identity.

Xochitl's ERI Content

Regarding ERI Content, Xochitl's ethnic identity holds high **saliency** and **certainty** in her life. The **saliency** of Xochitl's ethnic identity is apparent in her description of her school:

I think of how small it is, like the size and both the language we learn. Since we were children, they would ask us, what language did we start with? And usually most of us say Spanish because we come from like a hispanic family and we were taught Spanish and came here and learned both languages. So yeah, I think of the size and the amount of like, culture that's in the school....like how small it is. Most parents will only enroll their children here if they want like them to continue speaking Spanish or if they want them to learn Spanish and English. And there's like less diversity in ethnicity because it's mostly just Hispanic and slightly white, but that's it.

The **salience** of her identity is also beautifully illustrated in her creative use of cultural metaphors to understand and express her experience in the math classroom. In this specific quote, Xochitl is conveying her frustration with how quickly math topics are covered:

Yeah yeah, it's like, it's like when you learn, you see a problem, right? You want to learn it, and you're getting the hang of it. And when you try it out, it's like the tortilla thing [motions like she's heating tortillas on a *comal*].You try it out, you flip it and you get the other side of it, you get the entire problem. But then when we move on to

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another subject, it's like another whole subject and a session on it. Like you have to get a new tortilla and try-out how to flip it, then you got to figure it out... . I feel like that's like how a lot of subjects are. Mostly because like we do it almost every day, like it's like food. It's like an everyday thing.

Lastly, Xochitl demonstrates a strong sense of **certainty** about her ethnic identity when explaining why she identifies as Mexican.

Because my mom is from Chacan [Michoacán], and my biological dad is from Mexico, too. So it all comes from there and all of my family's from Mexico and all of our traditions and our celebrations, it all comes from there. And I feel like if I put a different ethnicity, like if I put Argentinian, it'd be way off because they speak way differently. Their cultures are different, they party differently, so it'd be wrong to say another thing other than Mexican for me.

Certainty encapsulates an adolescent's ability to think more critically about what their ethnic identity means to them.

Plática w/ 7th grade girls

This plática followed the same open-ended format as the first one. Pizza was delivered, a delicious tribute to our beloved pizzeria down the road. On any given day, this cherished spot is alive with the joyous clamor of families and friends, celebrating birthdays, cheering on their favorite teams, gathering for family reunions, enjoying post-mass meals, and boasts the best salad bar in town. It's a place where I would later encounter one of the girls from this plática celebrating her 13th birthday.

Facilitator: Okay, so my first question is how do you guys feel about being in a dual immersion school?

Student 1: I like it. I think- yeah, it gives you a lot of advantages.

Student 2: You can translate

Student 5: You can travel wherever you want

Student 6: It gives you benefits.

Facilitator: do you guys find yourself translating for people?

Multiple Students at once: For my parents

Student 1: For my grandparents

Student 3: For my friends, family

Facilitator: okay, and you mentioned benefits, so what are some benefits of being bilingual?

Student 4: The AP thingy

Student 7: Maybe if you get a job they'll pay you more

[Many students nod their heads and agree to this response]

Further inquiry was made on whether activities facilitated by the school taught them about their culture.

Student 1: Um, I don't know, personally with me, I'm in the Mariachi, so I get to like see a lot of Mexican cultural backgrounds like we did Dia De Las Madres, but it was on May 10 it was like um, that's for Mexico so we did that.

Student 7: [*Whispers to Student 1, the word 'Mexico' in Spanish*]

Facilitator: So, wait, what happened there?

Student 1: so, he [points to student 7] corrected me because I don't like to say Mexico [*said with an English accen*t] because to me that sounds a little bit like you're saying it in an American way to me, and Mexico [*said in Spanish*] is like you're saying it more like [*gestures with her arms open wide, emphasizing gusto or entusiasmo]*

Student 7: It's like your country

Student 1: It's like *[continues gesturing with her arms, giving an oomph to her statement]* your background

Student 7: family

Student 2: I do both once in a while *[referring to saying the word in Spanish and English]*

Student 4: Either or

Student 1: Um. It's changed from me, but like, in a good way. Because when I was in kinder and preschool, I was in a private school, like where they only spoke English. And they didn't really celebrate anything like here. And so I used to think I was like, only American. And then I came here and I knew more that I was like with a Spanish background. So it, like taught me about my culture a little bit more.

Following this plática, I invited Alex, identified as student 2 above, to interview with me. The research team and I had agreed that I, and solely I, would ask to interview Alex. Alex had a quiet demeanor, and our rapport had grown over the two years.

Student 2: Alex (Diffuse Positive Typology)

During our interview, Alex, a seventh-grader, shared that he prefers to be identified as he/him. Alex did not disclose his generation status, but did share that he self-identifies as Mexican, which will be discussed further below. When asked about his extracurricular involvements, he expressed not wanting to engage in any: "I just want to go straight home cause like I'm already tired by seventh period. Just like all the running around constantly. Like, being fed information by like teachers and stuff." However, he did share, "I read when I get home…you know like, what Four Nights at Freddy's is? The horror series?" Alex goes on to share that he's trying to collect all of the books, and is currently waiting to make an

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online purchase. Alex presents an intriguing case of ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development. His narrative reveals a Latino adolescent still in the early stages of exploring and understanding his ethnic identity.

Alex's ERI Process

Alex's ERI Process partially aligns with the Diffuse Positive typology, as indicated by his scores on the ethnic-identity scale. This classification is characterized by low levels of exploration and commitment. Despite these low levels, as posited by the scale, Alex maintains a positive attitude towards his ethnic identity. This now defunct understanding of affirmation is further supported by Alex's overall apathetic private regard toward his ethnic identity. His lack of exploration is evident when asked about the utility of learning both Spanish and English, to which he simply responds, *"I have no idea."*

Alex's ERI Content

Additionally, when asked to describe his school, Alex's curt response, " It's cheap. Literally all the paint and stuff is just falling off" demonstrates that when it comes to his schooling experience, the cultural and linguistic components of the school are not prominent factors, or at the very least, not in that moment. Alex's ethnic identity holds low **centrality** in his life. This is evident in his response when asked why he self-identifies as Mexican:

> It's just like almost everybody here's Mexican. And I don't really care about like, about my ethnicity and culture and stuff. That was not really a big part of my life. But I don't know about my parents... we barely like talk about it and stuff, so I don't know...like culture and ethnicity.

However, when asked about gender identity, Alex shared:

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That's like… I don't really know. But like, I like, I like my female body, you know? Like, I don't really want to change anything about it. Like if someone asked me if I ever want to, like transition to like another gender, like, I don't want to go through like all that to like, you know, get surgery and cut off my boobs. But like, I do like being called a boy…There's like this game called Roblox and since it's like Pride Month, of course, there's gonna be like a lot of LGBTQ stuff….So basically, there's like this game I sometimes play. Basically, it's like, it's like a hangout game where you just like, talk to people who are like you, like a part of the LGBTQ community and stuff, and just like hang out and stuff. Yeah. So. So like, sometimes people like, come up to you going, Hey, what's your pronouns? And what do you identify as?

In this case, Alex expands and exhibits exploration of his gender identity; a stark contrast to his ethnic identity exploration.

Plática w/ 8th grader girls (group 2)

The final plática was conducted with the second cohort of 8th grade Latinas. Consistent methodological approaches were employed to maintain continuity across all pláticas.The shared meal of pizza once again proved instrumental in creating a relaxed atmosphere, encouraging candid conversation among the girls.

Facilitator: So the first question is actually, how do you, so since this is a dual immersion school, how do you feel about being bilingual?

Student 3: I feel like it's something that will really help us in the future. And we're helping our parents right now. So, I feel happy that I'm able to help. Both of my parents don't speak English. So I help them translate papers or like talking to someone else.

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Student 2: They can help us communicate with our family because our family can be like, Spanish speaking only, so it helps us learn more vocabulary in both languages.

Student 3: I feel like in the future, we'll have more job offers since there's a lot of different cultures and other peoples that migrated, especially here in the United States since there's more Hispanic culture coming here. Latin culture.

Student 1: Well, this school gives me more of like a culture. Like It gives a lot of our culture, it just shows you like to not be afraid of where you come from.

Student 3: We have more of a strong community since we [attend a school]–where all the students may have a similar past, I guess.

Facilitator: What are some activities that you guys do here at school that make you feel connected to your culture?

Student 1: The multicultural dance

Student 3: Mhm, like right now, some of us dance Folklorico, which is a traditional dance.

Student 4: There's a Spanish and English spelling bee.

Student 3: I did Spanish. You can do both as well.

Student 1: And so, Spanish AP was offered- offered for the first time.

Student 3: Spanish AP as well!

Student 5: There are some people that come from our culture that come to present to us.

Student 6: We had a person talk about—not talk, but he did some art about the movie Coco, which is about Dia de los Muertos.

Student 1: I have cousins that didn't go to a dual immersion or anything, and their moms speak full Spanish, but they don't talk like Spanish or like they have trouble like- they understand it, but they don't talk it. They don't really understand- they don't have the

connection to the religion, which just recently they started to get into it because their mom has been making them, and it has caught their attention, but it hasn't…like they always say, "Oh you know more Spanish because you went to a dual immersion school."

After this plática, Flora, identified as student 3 in the plática, volunteered to be interviewed.

Student 3: Flora (Achieved Negative Typology)

Flora, a first generation 8th grade student, uses she/her pronouns, and ethnically self-identifies as Mexican-American. She stands out for her enthusiasm and confidence, particularly in math class. Flora takes her schooling seriously, and has communicated on more than one occasion that she hopes to attend college one day, emphasizing being the first to attend a four-year college, "Well, both my parents didn't make it past high school because they started working really young… I just gotta keep going. I'll also be the first one to graduate at a university if I make it all the way up there." In spite of Flora's classification as Achieved Negative according to the EIS typology, her narrative reveals active cultural engagement, strong family connections, and an overall positive affect toward her ethnicity.

ERI Process

In terms of ERI Process, Flora demonstrates high levels of **exploration**. She actively participates in cultural traditions, stating, "Me and my family have a tradition of putting up an altar for Day of the Dead." Her involvement extends beyond family practices to knowledge of community events: "I know that also in Oxnard, downtown, they put on parades for Day of the Mother, Dia De Los Muertos…". Flora's participation in Folklorico dancing further deepens her cultural connection. She reflects, "I feel like I'm a bit more connected with my culture and I can talk more about the dancing," and "It makes me feel happy because I get to learn other things about my culture, I feel connected."This

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engagement also allows her to participate in **collective self-verification**: "Like if they're also part of dancing Folklorico, I like to share our moves and show how good we are," demonstrating her participation in cultural knowledge exchange with peers.

ERI Content

Regarding ERI Content, Flora's ethnic identity holds high **centrality** in her life: "My parents don't know English, my dad's trying, so I speak to him in English as much as I can," and "I've been helping my parents since I was young, translate papers that they might not know." Interestingly, she adds, "My primary language is Spanish. So, I feel like if I don't know it, I feel like I'm bad at it nowadays because I'm forgetting it."

Her cultural **ideology** explains why she identifies as Mexican-American: "Because of my family's culture, what we usually do a lot relates to Mexican, but then sometimes we try to combine American culture with Mexican culture so something we do is Halloween and Day of the Dead." Her religious identity also plays a significant role, as evidenced by her knowledge of cultural religious traditions such as, "Cineza, nos ponen la cruz de cineza during pascua", "Nuestro Primera Comunión, our First Communion" and "then all that ties to if you want to get married in the church." The visible symbol of a cross necklace she wore during the interview further underscores the importance of religious symbols in her cultural identity.

Discussion

The pláticas, identity-relevant experiences in and of themselves, provide real-time insights into peer ethnic-racial socialization within their dual immersion school environment. Early adolescence is marked by significant cognitive and social development, with environmental contexts playing influential roles in their day-to-day meaning-making,

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as pointed out by Umaña-Taylor & Fine's (2004) model. By facilitating these conversations in a familiar setting and using an open-ended, conversational approach that touched on everyday experiences like math class, these dialogues capture the natural interplay between socialization processes and local context in producing identity-relevant experiences.

Pláticas

Plática 1

The transcriptions, albeit fragments of pláticas, provide rich illustrations that "allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). ERI processes are evident through several key constructs. Exploration is demonstrated in Student 3's recognition of diversity within their shared ethnicity, saying, "It could be the same ethnicity, but it could be from different parts of places." There is nuance in the regional differences they embody. Rather than essentializing their experiences as a group, this student exhibits thoughtful exploration of their uniqueness. Negotiation is apparent in Student 1's reflection on bilingualism as a unique advantage, stating, "I feel like it's knowing that you have something... you can use in the world that other people do not." Elaboration and internalization of cultural values are evident in students' discussions of shared music, traditions, and clothing styles. Collective self-verification emerges through comments like "You share your culture and you feel like you're able to be yourself" and "It feels like welcoming." The overall dialogue suggests a process of affirming and validating their ethnic identity within their school context. ERI content is equally apparent, manifesting in the centrality of ethnic identity to daily experiences, positive public regard for their bilingual skills, and private regard expressed through feelings of relatability. The students

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also articulate ethnic behaviors and knowledge, referencing specific places of origin like Michoacan. These examples collectively illustrate how the dual immersion school environment facilitates identity-relevant experiences and thus ethnic identity development for this group of Latinas.

Plática 2

This plática consisted of 7th grade Latinas. The interaction between Student 1 and Student 7 regarding the pronunciation of "Mexico" reveals a deep-seated linguistic pride and awareness of cultural nuances. This is an example of the ERI process: negotiation. Student 1's preference for the Spanish pronunciation, viewed as more authentic and respectful to their heritage, is gently reinforced by Student 7's correction, demonstrating how peers can support and strengthen each other's ethnic pride. The emotional connection to their heritage is palpable in Student 1's physical gestures, with arms opened wide to emphasize the enthusiasm and pride in pronouncing "Mexico" in Spanish; this demonstrates the ERI construct of affect. This pride extends beyond mere pronunciation, as evidenced by the students' comments equating Mexico with "your country," "your background," and "family", demonstrating internalization of cultural values. These statements demonstrate a strong sense of identity affirmation, closely associating the country with their personal and collective identity. The way the students build upon each other's statements shows a shared understanding and collective pride in their heritage, further reinforcing their ethnic identity and sense of belonging, or the ERI content construct of collective self-verification. This analysis shows how the conversation encompasses both ERI processes and ERI content aspects of Ethnic-Racial Identity development, while simultaneously demomstrating the powerful effect of peer ethnic racial socialization.

Plática 3

This third plática, interestingly, touches on similar sentiments and themes as the first plática. This is notable given that these two groups are both made up of 8th grade students, potential areas of inquiry may look at small changes in meaning-making between 7th and 8th grade. Similarly to the first group, ERI processes of negotiation in regards to their language abilities are expressed, along with collective self-verification. Student 1 comments, "Well, this school gives me more of like a culture. Like It gives a lot of our culture, it just shows you like to not be afraid of where you come from", to which student Student 3 adds, **"**We have more of a strong community since we [attend a school]–where all the students may have a similar past, I guess." In addition to these similarities, one unique element presented in this group dialogue was the beginnings of articulating how language is connected to cultural-religious practices. An inextricably linked factor in the Latino community. Student 1shares: "They don't really understand- they don't have the connection to the religion, which just recently they started to get into it because their mom has been making them, and it has caught their attention, but it hasn't…" This statement reveals the beginnings of understanding of how language proficiency can impact deeper cultural connections, such as religious practices. It suggests an internalization of cultural values where language is seen not just as a communication tool, but as a gateway to fuller cultural and religious participation.

These pláticas offer critical insights into the role of peer socialization in Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) development. These dialogues unveil a dynamic process where students collectively explore, negotiate, and affirm their ethnic identities through shared experiences, language practices, and cultural knowledge. Unlike the well-documented

effects of diverse peer groups on ERI development (Rivas-Drake et al., 2017), these conversations illuminate the nuanced ways in which ethnically homogeneous peer interactions shape ERI processes and content. Students reinforce each other's ethnic pride, engage in sophisticated discussions of cultural nuances, and collectively verify their identities, demonstrating the profound impact of shared ethnic background on identity formation.

Individual Narratives

Xochitl, Alex, and Flora offer an exploration of ethnic-racial identity development through the lens of Umaña-Taylor and Fine's (2004) model. This approach seeks to bridge theory and narrative, using storytelling as a tool to create a more holistic understanding. This method honors both the academic framework and the deeply personal nature of identity formation, inviting readers to witness the intricate dance between theory and lived reality.

Xochitl: "Orgullo Bilingüe y Bicultural" (Bilingual and Bicultural Pride)

At the macro-ecological level, Xochitl's understanding of work ethic in relation to immigration history demonstrates how broader societal contexts influence ethnic identity development. Her awareness of the need to "work harder" due to one's immigration background aligns with the framework's emphasis on the role of larger societal narratives in shaping individual meaning-making. As Xochitl expands on an example of what she means by having to work hard, she references her math class (our shared natural setting). She connects her view of math as being difficult with the hard work involved in construction, a common form of manual labor among many Latino parents. Instead of seeing this as a disadvantage, she embraces the cultural value of hard work. She draws a parallel between

the effort she puts into her math class and the strenuous manual labor she observes in her community, viewing both as challenging yet material ways to project value.

Despite being situated in a predominantly Latino area, the unique characteristics of her school setting (in contrast to non-dual immersion schools) contribute to the saliency and thus prominence of her ethnic identity. As Xochitl describes her school and its ethnic makeup, she makes a direct connection between language and culture. This finding adds nuance to our understanding of how specific institutional characteristics can influence identity development, even in environments where one's ethnic group constitutes the majority (Lee, 2003; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). For example, Xochitl distinguishes her school by its unique linguistic feature, despite other local middle schools residing nearby. This further supports Umaña-Taylor and Fine's emphasis on the importance of environmental context in identity formation, highlighting how local community composition can facilitate ethnic identity exploration.

Familial ethnic socialization is evident in Xochitl's comments about her parents' choice of school for language retention. This demonstrates the critical role that family plays in shaping ethnic identity, a key component of the theoretical framework. Furthermore, Xochitl's internalization of the value of hard work, comparing parental occupations to her own academic efforts, illustrates the influence of community socialization in ethnic identity formation.

Xochitl's cognitive and social development is particularly noteworthy. Her use of cultural metaphors for understanding math concepts demonstrates advanced cognitive abilities. Xochitl utilizes a metaphor of how quickly she feels she has to learn new math topics compared to how often and quick one must be with hot tortillas, an everyday cultural

food. This demonstrates the salience of her ethnic identity within the context of her learning math and other academic subjects; she draws from her Latina knowledge and behaviors to anchor this reflection of her academic work. Xochitl's ability to critically evaluate and articulate the advantages of her bilingual skills within a broader social context reflects a high level of social cognition and supports the framework's consideration of developmental factors in ethnic identity formation. Xochitl negotiates with peers from neighboring spaces, areas known for having a predominantly affluent White population compared to her hometown, about the value of her bilingual abilities, which are an extension of her cultural identity.

Overall, Xochitl's narrative illustrates how a dual immersion school setting can provide unique opportunities for ERI exploration and affirmation, particularly through language skills and cultural knowledge. Lastly, her explanation of how she self-ientifies ethnically demonstrates her refined understanding of what binds her to her specific culture, providing nuance in how her Mexican identity differs from other Latin American cultures. This narrative reveals a Latina adolescent whose active engagement in cultural practices, strong academic performance, and positive affirmation of her ethnic identity coexist harmoniously. She is an example of an achieved positive identity as defined by the EIS typologies; however, she embodies much more. While her ERI constructs can be categorized into Umaña-Taylor et. al's typologies, her experiences embody much more: "Orgullo Bilingüe y Bicultural" (Bilingual and Bicultural Pride).

Alex: "Buscando Mi Camino" (Finding My Path)

In Alex's case, ecological factors include the dual immersion program environment and a predominantly Mexican student population. However, neither one of these contextual

characteristics have prompted Alex to show evidence of exploring his ERI. His response of "I don't know" to being asked about the utility of learning two languages suggests Alex has not critically considered the impact of his bilingual education on his identity or life experiences. Alex is an avid reader as observed over the last two years; his vocabulary is expansive, yet he chooses not to expand.These factors interact with socialization processes, which for Alex involve minimal familial ethnic socialization. As he states, "We barely like talk about it and stuff, so I don't know...like culture and ethnicity," highlighting the limited ethnic socialization at home.

Alex does not actively express or consider his ethnic identity, as it's not yet a resolved or central part of his self-concept. His ethnic identity shows low salience and centrality in his daily life, this resonates with a Diffuse Positive status, characterized by low exploration and commitment (as measured by the EIS scale). This aligns with previous research on ethnic minority adolescents in the Diffuse status, however, elements of positive affect were not captured through his narrative. This supports further inquiry into the construct of affect in measures such as the ethnic identity scale (Umaña-Taylor, 2024).

Notably, his elaborated gender identity status suggests that Alex has the tools to explore and share his experiences. He demonstrates the ability to articulate complex identities, particularly regarding gender. Alex has thought about this gender identity, yet his ethnic identity remains unexplored and not salient at the time of his interview, which, to reiterate, can easily change with time. He identifies as Mexican because his school primarily comprises Mexican individuals. His self-label is influenced by this specific school characteristic, which speaks to his indifference.

His story is characterized by a quiet presence and a complex journey of self-discovery in Mr. Little's 7th-grade math class. Rather than looking at Alex's experience as lacking, he embodies someone that is "Buscando Mi Camino" (Finding My Path). Alex's gender identity is an evolving, and related aspect of his ethnic identity, the two exist alongside one another, and will intersect, to which degree remains to be seen. Hernández-Truyol (2003) writes, "Gender identities are rigorously and authoritatively delineated and enforced within *la cultural Latina.* These parameters are then used as tools of oppression and pressure to marginalize those *mujeres* (and *hombres*) who do not conform to culturally designated gender and sex roles and norms" (p. 57). As Alex grapples with the meaning of his gender identity, he remains situated within a society that will inevitably racialize his body and language. This dynamic illustrates the critical need to consider multiple intersecting identities in early adolescent development, particularly for marginalized youth (Crenshaw, 1991; Ghavami et al., 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Flora: "Orgullo Bicultural con Fe y Ambición" (Bicultural Pride with Faith and Ambition)

Flora demonstrates ambition and a clear vision for her future, aspiring to be the first in her family to attend a four-year university. Her ethnic identity development is profoundly shaped by strong familial ethnic socialization. She describes strong family connections evident in cultural practices, stating, "Me and my family have a tradition of putting up an altar for Day of the Dead." Her role as a language broker for her parents, translating papers since she was young, further emphasizes the family's influence on her ethnic identity. Religious traditions passed down through her family, such as "Cineza, nos ponen la cruz de

cineza during pascua" and "Nuestro Primera Comunión," also contribute to her cultural socialization.

Flora's ethnic identity narrative and EIS typology presents a seemingly paradoxical picture. Classified as Achieved Negative, she demonstrates high levels of exploration and resolution regarding her ethnic identity, yet her EIS affect score implies that she maintains a negative affect toward this self-identification. This apparent contradiction challenges the conventional understanding and measurement of affect in standardized scales like the EIS. Umaña-Taylor's (2024) article on reconceptualizing the measurement of affect in Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) research highlights the limitations of current measurement approaches and proposes a more nuanced understanding of affect. Flora's case demonstrates a disconnect between quantitative measures and qualitative experiences. This discrepancy underscores Umaña-Taylor's point that current quantitative measures may not accurately capture the complexity of individuals' lived experiences. Flora's narrative reveals various positive emotional experiences related to her ethnic-racial identity (e.g., feeling happy and connected when dancing Folklorico), alongside potential challenges (e.g., concerns about forgetting Spanish). This aligns with Umaña-Taylor's argument that affect is multidimensional and can't be adequately captured by a single positive-negative continuum.

Flora's Self-Concept is characterized by the high centrality of her ethnic identity in daily life, a strong connection between her ethnic and religious identity (as evidenced by her wearing a cross necklace), and the importance she places on being a cultural and linguistic bridge for her family. Flora's narrative implies positive social and cognitive outcomes, including positive self-esteem related to her cultural knowledge and abilities, a strong sense

of family obligation and responsibility, and motivation for academic achievement tied to her family background.

Flora's ethnic-racial identity is more accurately captured by the label "Orgullo Bicultural con Fe y Ambición" (Bicultural Pride with Faith and Ambition) rather than the "Achieved Negative" typology. This culturally relevant descriptor encapsulates her bilingual abilities, cultural integration, religious affiliations, and future aspirations. The "Achieved" classification, while asset-based, is culturally subjective, failing to reflect Flora's living narrative. This discrepancy underscores the limitations of standardized measures in capturing the nuanced experiences of individuals. The proposed label offers a more holistic and culturally sensitive representation of Flora's identity.

Future Directions and Limitations

This paper adapts existing ERI stages and typologies to capture ERI developmental trajectories through a narrative format, making these concepts accessible beyond academic spaces and aiding community members in understanding their own ERI development. While these terms were not created specifically for identity theory, Marcia (1980) adapted them to describe different states of identity development. The use of "foreclosure" and "moratorium," in particular, are influenced from legal and business language, which Marcia repurposed for psychological concepts.

Re-wording these terms into culturally relevant descriptors represents a forward moving evolution of ERI literature. By using narratives to explore ERI development among early adolescent Latinas, the study demystifies ERI terminology, making it applicable to everyday experiences, and demonstrating a rich spectrum of ERI development. Chicana feminist scholars like Flores (2000) emphasize the importance of centering Latina

narratives, which inherently capture the processes of negotiation—deciding what to share, expand upon, or omit." As Pérez Huber, Veléz, and Malagón (2024) suggest, "Chicana Feminisms consider how experiences within these institutions become inscribed upon our bodies, minds, and spirits." In a study that underscores the power of language, it is crucial to factor in the significance of re-naming and ascribing descriptions that stem from participants' voices, and not academia rhetoric.

A limitation of this study is that it is not longitudinal, meaning it does not track the changing ERI process over time. Additionally, the results are not intended to be generalizable to other populations. Due to time constraints imposed by the school, interview times and observations outside the classroom were limited to avoid disrupting the students' daily activities. Finally, within the context of ethnic identity development, it is challenging to separate gender identity from the students' self-concepts, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to ERI.

The Ethnic Identity Scale expands the identity status measure and its three distinct components (exploration, commitment, affirmation) by including a score for each and one additional consideration: whether each is *positively* or *negatively expressed*. This created the eight typologies illustrated in Table 2. This table provides hypothetical examples of Latina adolescents demonstrating each typology based on the Ethnic Identity Scale.

Table 2

Ethnic Identity Typologies as delineated by Ethnic Identity Scale

Typology	Exploration	Commitment	Affirmation	Hypothetical Examples
Diffuse Positive	Low	Low	Positive	Maria, 13, knows she's Latina and feels good about it but hasn't thought much about what it means. She enjoys her family's traditions but hasn't explored her heritage deeply.
Diffuse Negative	Low	Low	Negative	Sofia, 14, doesn't know much about her Latina background and feels somewhat embarrassed by it. She hasn't explored her heritage and wishes she could fit in more with her non-Latina friends.
Foreclosed Positive	Low	High	Positive	Isabella, 13, is proud to be Latina and feels sure about what it means to her, based on what her parents have told her. She hasn't explored much on her own but accepts and values her family's cultural practices.
Foreclosed Negative	Low	High	Negative	Valentina, 14, has a clear idea of what being Latina means based on stereotypes she's heard, but she hasn't explored it herself. She feels negatively about her ethnic background and tries to distance herself from it.
Moratorium Positive	High	Low	Positive	Camila, 13, is actively learning about her Latina heritage through books, movies, and talking to family members. She feels positive about being Latina but is still figuring out what it means for her personally.
Moratorium Negative	High	Low	Negative	Gabriela, 14, is researching her family's history and Latina culture, but feels conflicted about her findings. She's unsure how she fits in and currently feels negatively about her ethnic background.
Achieved Positive	High	High	Positive	Lucia, 14, has spent time learning about her Latina heritage, has a clear understanding of what it means to her, and feels proud of her ethnic background. She actively participates in cultural events and educates others about her heritage.

Achieved Negative	High	High	Negative	Elena, 13, has extensively researched her Latina background and has a clear understanding of her ethnic identity. However, due to experiences with discrimination, she feels negatively about her ethnic group membership despite her deep knowledge.

*Ethnic Identity Typologies as delineated by Ethnic Identity Scale*Note*.* This table provides hypothetical examples illustrating the eight typologies Umana-Taylor et al. constructed (2004).

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CHAPTER THREE

Navigating Cultural Borderlands: A Case Study of Ethnic-Racial Identity Development in Adulthood Through the Lens of Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Introduction

Overview of the Study

This study explores the ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development of an adult Latina named Zulma, focusing on how she navigates and constructs her identity through varied life transitions and circumstances. Using a narrative approach and Chicana feminist epistemology, the research provides insights into the ongoing process of ERI development in adulthood, addressing a significant gap in existing literature. The study examines how Zulma's experiences, from her childhood through college and into her roles as a wife and mother, shape her understanding of her ethnic-racial identity. By integrating traditional ERI frameworks with Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of mestiza consciousness and borderlands, the research offers a holistic perspective on ethnic identity development in transborder contexts. This case study highlights the role of holistic perspectives in adult ERI development, suggesting the need for more comprehensive, culturally grounded research methodologies.

Research Question

RQ: How does one adult Latina navigate, construct, and redefine her ethnic-racial identity across various life stages and contexts, and what insights does her narrative provide about the ongoing process of ethnic-racial identity development in adulthood?

Significance of the Study

This study's significance lies in its nuanced exploration of ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development throughout adulthood, which has been identified as sorely lacking by the

ERI developmental literature (Williams et al., 2020). By examining how ERI evolves through various life transitions and intersects with multiple social identities, the study broadens our understanding of identity formation as an ever-changing, ongoing process well past the developmental periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood. This study offers insights into intergenerational dynamics, intersectional identities, and the influence of ERI on major life decisions. This research bridges traditional ERI frameworks with Chicana feminist epistemology, particularly drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of mestiza consciousness and the borderlands. Anzaldúa's approach is deeply rooted in personal narrative and lived experience, contrasting with the more quantitative methods often used in ERI developmental research. This qualitative focus allows her to challenge binary thinking (e.g., American vs. Mexican), advocating for a "third space" or new consciousness that transcends traditional categorizations. In doing so, Anzaldúa's work offers a nuanced perspective on identity formation that resists the simplified classifications sometimes found in traditional ERI models. By bridging these complementary yet often separate traditions, this study offers a holistic and culturally relevant examination of ethnic identity development for Latinas. This synthesis not only enriches our understanding of ERI processes but also demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches in conceptualizing (and measuring) the complexity of identity formation (Umaña-Taylor, 2024).

Literature Review

Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) Development

Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) refers to an individual's sense of self as a member of an ethnic or racial group, encompassing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to their ethnic-racial background (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). While many studies have examined

ERI development during adolescence, less focus has been given to ERI development past emerging adulthood. Williams et al.'s (2020) lifespan model of ethnic-racial identity provides a comprehensive framework for understanding ERI across the entire lifespan. This model posits that ethnic identity development begins in infancy with racial priming and may continue through the developmental stages of early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

The lifespan model expands on Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2014) integrated Ethnic and Racial Identity (ERI) model. It introduces five dimensions across the lifespan: awareness, affiliation, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge. These dimensions house the various ERI components outlined by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) and The Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group. ERI components are "snapshots" of identity development at a given time (Williams et al., 2020). ERI components, such as ethnic-racial salience (how often one thinks about their ethnicity/race) or private regard (personal feelings about one's ethnic-racial group), provide specific insights into an individual's ethnic-racial identity at a given point in time (Sellers et al., 1998; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). While these components change across developmental stages, this study focuses on those relevant to adulthood.

A key concept in this model is identity-relevant experiences, defined as events, interactions, or situations that prompt individuals to reflect on, question, or affirm their ethnic-racial identity, otherwise activating these components (Williams et al., 2020). For younger populations, research has shown that contextual factors and identity-relevant experiences, such as changes in school demographics or school transitions, can prompt shifts in ERI development. However, less is known about these experiences and processes in

adults. The life model, grounded in an ecological framework, posits that identity-relevant experiences are uniquely shaped by the intersection of three key influencers: individual characteristics, surrounding contextual factors, and the normative social/cognitive developments associated with each stage. These influencers collectively shape the trajectory of ERI development.

Throughout an individual's lifespan, ERI components may fluctuate in salience and significance, often evolving in meaning (Knight, Carlo, Mahrer, & Davis, 2016; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). The broader ERI dimensions offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding and comparing these components' implications across diverse contexts and populations. Consequently, this study will utilize both components and dimensions to capture the nuanced and holistic nature of ERI development.

The Dimension of Ethnic-racial awareness involves understanding the existence and importance of different ethnic and racial groups in society, including others' perceptions of these groups. In adulthood, this awareness is primarily reflected through the components of *salience* and *public regard*. *Ethnic-racial affiliation* measures the strength of one's connection to their ethnic/racial group(s), often assessed through *constancy* and *certainty*. *Ethnic-racial attitudes* encompass personal feelings about one's ethnic/racial group and membership, including *private regard*, *affirmation*, *affect*, and *centrality*. *Ethnic-racial knowledge* refers to understanding cultural customs, values, and traditions, while *Ethnic-racial behaviors* involve actions and processes taken to express or explore one's ethnic/racial identity. This last dimension includes components such as *contestation*, *elaboration*, *negotiation*, *internalization of cultural values*, *exploration*, and *collective self-verification* (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020). While the Lifespan model provides a

comprehensive framework for ERI research across developmental periods, Williams et al. (2020) emphasize the need for further research on ERI development in adulthood, including innovative methodologies to enhance our understanding of processes underlying this developmental period.

ERI Development through the Lens of Mestiza Consciousness

Intersecting ERI developmental research on Latinas with theories from Gloria Anzaldúa offers a more nuanced and culturally grounded understanding of identity formation. Anzaldúa's concepts, such as "*mestiza* consciousness" and "borderlands," provide a theoretical framework that taps into the meaning-making behind the complexity of navigating multiple cultural identities, languages, and social contexts - experiences central to many Latinas' lives. This intersection allows researchers to move beyond linear models of identity development and embrace a more fluid, multidimensional approach that acknowledges the unique challenges and strengths of living between and across cultures. Furthermore, Anzaldúa's work emphasizes the importance of lived experience and personal narrative in understanding identity, which can enrich ERI research methodologies and interpretations. By incorporating Anzaldúa's theories, ERI research can better account for the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural factors that shape Latina identity development throughout the lifespan.

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Methodology

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Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Epistemology involves the production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge. A Chicana feminist epistemology, therefore, thoughtfully anchors the experiences of Chicanas through their unique ways of knowing (Bernal, 1998; Calderón et al., 2012; Huber

et al., 2024). Vera and De Los Santos (2005) note that while not all Mexican American women choose to identify themselves as Chicanas, the term "Chicana" refers to a Latina who is aware of her historical and sociocultural context and the forces that shape her life experiences. Furthermore, the authors note that influential theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga consistently employ the term "Chicana" to denote the formation of both personal and collective identities that embody a politically conscious worldview.

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work is foundational in offering a new vision and paradigm from which to experience and document the world around us. She illuminates how one can decolonize the intellectual and spiritual, merging all systems of knowing-'bodymindspirit'. These paradigms challenge Eurocentric epistemologies based on notions of objective truth and positivist scholarship (Helen Vera & Esmeralda De Los Santos, 2005). Chicana feminist ways of knowing have roots in indigenous ways of life, including praise of cosmic deities such as *Coatlicue*. This deity embodies all that is dualistic, including religion and philosophy, an early reiteration of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Thus, Chicanas innately acknowledge the central role that spirituality plays in one's psychological and physical well-being.

When institutions of higher education deny the importance of spiritual needs, fragmentation of the being occurs. This compounds the social fragmentation society imbues on Chicanas (Hurtado, 2003). As a result, Hurtado references Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981) book, *This Bridge Called My Back* and reiterates their claim that fragmentation and hybridity (albeit not as we understand it) best capture the lived experiences of Chicanas. Additionally, theory should stem from these experiences. Hurtado (2003) draws a parallel between Father Hidalgo's "Grito de Independencia" in 1810, which called for Mexico's

liberation from Spanish rule, and Chicana researchers' efforts to liberate research

participants from being viewed merely as "data" by Academia, emphasizing a more holistic

and respectful approach to studying human experiences.

Hurtado further asserts that feminists of color need not only deconstruct theories that

are exclusionary to their lived experiences but also take it a step further to construct their

knowledge, a postmodernist epistemological blueprint rooted in social justice.

"Consequently, many feminists of Color are much more likely to use postmodernism to

deconstruct and then shift to an endarkened epistemology by using various strategies such as

mestiza consciousness" (Hurtado, 2003, p. 219). Chicana Feminist Epistemology thus offers

a powerful lens for meaning-making, a culturally specific way to reexamine and enrich our

understanding of Ethnic-Racial Identity (ERI) development for Latinas. This approach

embraces and addresses the fragmentation that has long plagued ERI literature by grounding

its historical shortcomings and weaving a holistic, integrative perspective.

Research Design & Participants

This paper is part of a larger exploratory study examining the developmental

outcomes of adolescent Latinas participating in a youth softball league governed by the

Amateur Softball Association (ASA). While much remains to be explored on adolescent

Latinas in sports, this study dives into the narrative of one mother and her identity journey as

a first-generation Mexican immigrant. Guided by Chicana feminist epistemology, this study

prioritized a single life story's rich, nuanced details over a broader, less detailed sample. This

methodological approach serves as a counterpoint to traditional research paradigms,

including the practice of gathering large sample sizes for generalizability. Instead, this study

offers a deeply contextualized analysis of the development of one Latina's ethnic identity.

By focusing on one participant's experiences, the study allows for a more immersive and accessible understanding of ethnic-racial identity development (Dhunpath, 2000; Wright, 2019). Zulma was selected for this study from a team of active and engaged mothers due to her unique family dynamics. Her close relationship with her first-generation immigrant parents offers a rich illustration of familism, a core value in Latino culture (Knight et al., 2016). Additionally, her parents' deep integration into her daily life, coupled with their exclusive use of Spanish, provides a compelling example of ethnic-racial socialization (Ayón, Ojeda, & Ruano, 2018). This familial context offers valuable insights into how ethnic-racial identity develops and evolves across generations, particularly for individuals straddling multiple cultural worlds.

Data Collection Procedures

Participant recruitment was conducted through a larger study, following approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. Informed consent for one-on-one interviews was obtained. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, a rapport-building period of 6-8 months preceded the interviews. This period included informal interactions at the softball field, where the larger study took place, during weekday practices and weekend tournaments across the state, allowing for the establishment of trust and comfort between the researcher and potential participants. Zulma, the focus of this case study, participated in two separate open-ended interviews, each lasting approximately 3 hours. These interviews were conducted after the conclusion of the girls' softball season at a mutually agreed-upon location in the neighborhood, chosen to ensure privacy and uninterrupted discussion. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol that explored cultural elements of Zulma's identity and her experiences growing up, as well as her roles as a daughter, mother,

and wife. While the interviews were conducted in English, the interviewer's fluency in Spanish facilitated an understanding of Spanish references and cultural nuances.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The audio recordings and transcripts were stored in a secure file accessible only by the researcher to maintain participant confidentiality. Field notes were taken throughout the rapport-building period, which informed the preparation of the interview protocol and provided contextual information for data analysis. The researcher's bilingual capabilities and familiarity with the community context enhanced the depth and authenticity of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a narrative approach (Syed & Azmitia, 2011) integrated with deductive coding methods using NVivo. Initial coding utilized a priori codes derived from two key frameworks: Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2014) integrated conceptualization of ethnic identity development and Williams et al.'s (2020) Lifespan model. This first-level coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2000) aimed to comprehensively map the participant's ethnic identity experiences onto established theoretical ERI components.

To ensure coding consistency and reliability, a comprehensive master codebook with detailed definitions was developed before the analysis phase. The coding process involved multiple iterations, with regular inter-coder reliability checks to maintain analytical rigor. Following the initial coding, an in-depth content analysis was conducted to categorize the identified components into their respective themed constructs. This phase focused on the recently generalized categories of ERI Awareness, Affiliation, Attitudes, Behaviors, and Knowledge (Williams et al., 2020). This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of

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how different aspects of Zulma's experiences aligned with broader developmental trends. The coded data was then synthesized using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology to construct a holistic narrative of Zulma's ERI meaning-making process. This synthesis involved identifying patterns, interconnections, and potential developmental trajectories within her ethnic identity formation. Finally, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted with Zulma, allowing her to review and provide feedback on the researchers' interpretations of her experiences.

Results

The results section of this study begins with a description of the local context, setting the scene at a softball field where the researcher first encounters Zulma. The narrative then dives into Zulma's individual factors, including her background as a first-generation immigrant from Mexico. The bulk of the results are organized around significant contextual shifts in Zulma's life, such as her college experience, transition to spousal and parental roles, and engagement with Catholicism. Within each of these contextual shifts, the study presents identity-relevant experiences that highlight different components and dimensions of ERI development.

Local Context

Researcher's fieldnotes on first meeting Zulma:

> *Fieldnotes, Saturday, March 2023: The sun baked the field today. The metal bleachers felt like a comal. The heat seared through my jeans as I watched the 12U girls' game this afternoon. Softballs hitting leather gloves filled the air. I love that sound. A conversation behind me cut through the noise. I spotted Zulma talking with her dad, her face partially covered by a baseball cap and large dark sunglasses.*

Their Spanish dialogue caught my ear, reminding me of conversations with my own

mother. I noticed Zulma's more formal Spanish, contrasting with my own casual

style. My immediate thoughts: this must be Natasha's mom; I really need to brush up

on my Spanish skills.

Zulma was a constant presence at the park. She moved with purpose, her energy palpable. She was always in motion, a whirlwind of energy and purpose. In a blink, Zulma would transform from a multitasking professional—fresh from work or her son's practice—to a laser-focused mom perched on the edge of her seat. Her eyes never left her oldest, Natasha, tracking every fluid motion as she pitched from the cirlce.

Anywhere Zulma was, her parents were, forming a tight-knit trio of support for Natasha. Her parents, friendly faces I would come to know, were permanent fixtures at the ballpark. Zulma's presence at the games were more than just spectating. Zulma was a nurturer, always armed with snacks and water bottles. What follows are excerpts from our conversations, distilled from hours of sharing.

Individual Factors

Individual factors refer to a person's social background, including their social class, gender, ethnicity, and physical traits to which society attaches meaning. These elements shape how individuals are perceived and socialized from childhood, influencing the development of their ethnic identity (Williams et al., 2020). Zulma's self-introduction highlights many of these personal characteristics, offering insight into the key factors that have shaped her identity:

I am 36, born in Mexico, but raised here. So I got here- I think I was two years old. And then grew up with mom, dad, and one brother. So, it was a household of four.

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And we kind of just grew up with each other, so no cousins, no nothing. So, my dad instilled a lot of the 'be independent, do things on your own' kind of values. 'You can do it on your own,' you know, trying to strengthen my mind; 'I don't need anybody.'So, I also have that with my kids. Like, 'I did it myself and grew up with it. And I know that you can, too.' But [I'm] the first one to go to university here in the States, but my parents actually went to university in Mexico. So, they are considered professionals. My dad was an accountant in Mexico, and my mom was a social worker type counselor, which my mom ended up doing that here. And my dad ended up being, like, a computer dude. So he's the head of computer IT at Ocean Oaks, the City of Ocean Oaks. So I don't know, yeah, a lot of my values came from watching my parents' behaviors, not necessarily like what they would say, because my dad was a man of few words. You know, my mom would say a lot. But she was hardworking, too. So they both came over and started working in strawberry fields and then went to do like Technicolor. So back in the day, there was like huge *fabrica*, like a warehouse in Oakhills, where a lot of, like, the more, I guess, first-generation families would go and work. And so I don't know, just hard working my parents were. And I kind of feel like that's why I am hardworking….But that's why I think my experience has been very different than others. So, you don't have a lot of first-gen professionals come over. And so their upbringing is completely different than someone else's upbringing. And then their focus, they got themselves into school right away, you know. I mean, my dad was teaching math for an adult education program. That was one of his jobs. My parents are very driven individuals.

And I think that's what they passed on to me, too, where I've just been driven as well.

But I mean, I don't know if it's a cultural thing, but just the drive, persistence.

As a first-generation immigrant and college student, Zulma's ethnic identity is profoundly shaped by her experiences with immigration, shifts in social class, education, and cultural values instilled by her parents. However, she elaborates on the implications this has had on her self-concept, which she acknowledges has been difficult to reconcile:

> I grew up in a home that was very different. So, as I grew up, I realized I didn't grow up as Mexican as I thought. And I think that's why I (pause), my identities, like weird…. I think because my parents came from Mexico, we felt very different than Mexicans who have been here. But I think culturally, it's different too. I mean, just because they grew up professional.

Zulma's migration history forms a salient part of her identity, serving as a foundation for understanding her ethnic identity development. Notably, her family's professional-class background places her and her parents in a social stratum that diverges from common perceptions of Mexican immigrants, adding a unique dimension to their integration experience and Zulma's self-concept. The following narratives explore Zulma's complex ethnic identity journey. Through her reflections, we gain insight into the identity-relevant experiences that have shaped her evolving sense of self. These experiences, as conceptualized by Williams et al. (2020), emerge from the interplay between Zulma's individual factors and various contextual elements, including her changing social identities. Her account reveals the challenges she faces in defining her ethnic identity and highlights the nuanced nature of identity formation for first-generation immigrants.

Contextual Shift: College Life (the local context)

Shifts in contextual factors, particularly the adoption of new social roles like that of a college student, can catalyze identity-shaping experiences. That's the case here. Zulma's narrative reveals a pivotal shift in her ethnic-racial identity awareness. Growing up in a predominantly Mexican-American community, her sense of cultural identity remained largely unexamined. It wasn't until she transitioned to college that she began to critically engage with questions of her ethnic-racial identity:

> **Dormant Ethnicity Awakened** *(An Identity-relevant experience)*. What's crazy is that maybe because I grew up in an area where there were a lot of Mexican Americans, and so I never got made fun of. I never was called anything. It wasn't until- I never, even when I was like out on the street. Like I felt like I was never, oh my God, what's that word? Like, where they treat you different? I never felt that. Like all throughout high school. I never felt it, like racialized, yeah, I never really felt discriminated against. So I think maybe that's another reason why I didn't feel as strong as a Mexican American as others. Because to me, I didn't have to fight it. I didn't have to show it. I didn't have to, you know, I just was, and it wasn't until college that I started noticing the differences like oh, shoot, like, am I not Mexican enough? Like, I'm not Mexican enough to be in this group. But I'm definitely not white. I'm not Black, I'm not these other you know. So, it wasn't until college and even like my name Zulma, like, I never got made fun of ever. Some people [in college] would ask me like, 'Oh, are you mixed? Are you this or that?' And I'd be like, 'No, I'm Mexican.' But I never got made fun of. So again, I never really had even the thought of cultural identity. Nothing got questioned until college.

Zulma's reflection illuminates how her local community context initially insulated her from identity-invoking incidents, such as racial discrimination. However, the significant contextual shift of entering college triggered a heightened awareness of her ethnic identity. This narrative primarily captures the *ERI Awareness* and *Behaviors dimensions*. Within the Awareness dimension, we see elements of ethnic-racial *salience*, as Zulma reflects on how her ethnicity became more noticeable in college and *public regard*, as she considers how others view her ethnic-racial group. The Behaviors dimension is prominently featured through several processes: *exploration*, as Zulma actively considers her ethnic identity in college; *negotiation,* as she tries to determine her place within different ethnic groups; and *contestation*, as she questions whether she's "Mexican enough." The narrative also touches on the *Attitudes dimension*, specifically *centrality*, as Zulma reflects on how her ethnic identity wasn't central to her self-concept until college challenged her to consider it more deeply. The following identity-relevant experience elaborates on this phenomenon:

> **The Latina Sorority as Identity Anchor.** I felt very separated from being Mexican going into college. And so I tried to put myself into different groups that were supposedly like Mexican, and then I realized, okay, no, I'm not like brown pride, like not that far off. Like, I need to find my little spot in the middle. And that's why I joined a Latina sorority, because I needed to fulfill my need of, like, 'who am I?' to find my identity, Mexican. You know. I just needed to find myself.

Zulma's search for cultural clarity and a sense of belonging in her Mexican community illustrates active engagement with the *Behavioral dimension* of ERI development. Her *exploration* is evident in her efforts to "put myself into different groups" and join a Latina sorority, actively seeking experiences related to her ethnic-racial background. The

negotiation component is demonstrated as she navigates between different cultural practices and expectations, determining her place within the Mexican community and acknowledging she's "not like brown pride." Both exploration and negotiation fall under the Behaviors dimension, as they represent processes involved in trying to gain a sense of her ethnic-racial group. These processes reflect her growing ethnic consciousness and how she relates to others in her community.

> **Sports and Ethnic Spotlights.** In every sport I played, I did notice certain ethnicities, which I thought was interesting, too. But for me, I think I was just so used to it. I didn't care. But I think, like, people would point it out to me. I think I was used to half Hispanics and then half something else. I think that's what I was used to. But I never connected to any particular ethnicity. So, for me, it didn't matter anyway. So, when I was on the lacrosse team, it was majority Caucasians. When I was on the UCLA taekwondo team, it was majority Vietnamese and Chinese, and they were all Asian: Vietnamese Chinese and from Thailand…I think I was just so used to being around different people there. I don't know, oh, even Filipinos. There were Filipinos in taekwondo too, but it wasn't till I joined the sorority that they were the ones that kind of were mentioning it, because my sorority is Latina based, and then they would be like, 'Hey, you're the only Mexican.'I'm like, 'Oh yeah, I am,' but they would still come and watch me and support me. I don't know; there are just a lot of things I didn't notice until someone else kind of brought it up. For me, I just would put myself in a bunch of stuff. And in the Latino world, everyone was tripping out that I was in martial arts because no one else in the Latino world was in martial arts. And they're like, how is this sorority girl like also a black belt, you know?

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Zulma's narrative reveals a complex interplay of ERI dimensions, as Williams et al. (2020) described. Zulma's statement, "But I never connected to any particular ethnicity. So, for me, it didn't matter anyway," reflects the low *centrality* of ethnic identity to her self-concept, part of the *Ethnic-Racial Attitudes dimension*. Her awareness of others' reactions, "And in the Latino world, everyone was tripping out that I was in martial arts because no one else in the Latino world was in martial arts," demonstrates *public regard* within the *Ethnic-Racial Awareness dimension*. Zulma's shifting awareness of ethnicity across different social settings, from sports teams to sororities, demonstrates how context influences ethnic-racial identity *salience.*

> **A Lone Latina in STEM.** So many people could not believe that I changed my career; I did it kind of late. And even my dad was like, 'But you're a math person. Like, why would you do that?' And I just kept telling them, 'Just something is missing.' And I'm in all of these math programs and engineering programs. And you know, I'm the only Latina; I'm the only female. At UCLA, it was legit, just White and Chinese, like that's it. So, like, I even felt almost- just out of it, you would do group projects, and right away, you would get together with a group. No one would ever pick me, and then I started questioning my own intelligence: Am I not that smart? Is that why no one's picking me? I think it was just a lot of things. Like I said, UCLA just really broadened, like, who am I? What am I doing? Why am I doing it?

Zulma's narrative illustrates multiple components of the *Awareness, Attitudes, and Behaviors dimension*. Her recognition of being the "only Latina" and "only female" in STEM classes demonstrates increased *salience* or heightened awareness of her ethnic-racial identity. The questioning of "Who am I?" suggests a reevaluation of *centrality*, considering

how crucial her ethnic-racial identity is to her self-concept in relation to her academic

identity. Her experiences of exclusion in group projects and subsequent self-doubt reflect

her perception of *public regard* for her ethnic-racial group in this academic setting.

Throughout, Zulma engages in *exploration*, questioning her place and purpose in STEM

fields. These interrelated aspects of ethnic-racial identity development—salience, centrality,

public regard, and exploration—highlight how her experiences at UCLA prompted a

complex, multifaceted engagement with her ethnic-racial identity in an academic context.

This narrative particularly highlights how the Awareness and Attitudes dimensions

can interact, with increased awareness of one's ethnic-racial identity in a specific context

leading to changes in attitudes about oneself and one's capabilities. It also demonstrates how

these experiences can influence Behaviors (major and career change) and affect one's sense

of Affiliation within academic and professional spaces. While not explicitly mentioned,

there may also be elements of the Knowledge dimension at play, as Zulma's experiences

likely informed her understanding of what it means to be a Latina in STEM fields.

> **Culture Clash: A Dating Wake-Up Call.** [I]t just wasn't-it was a cultural shock for
>
> me. And it was like, okay, I don't know, I'm not connecting anymore like I was
>
> connected before. But now that we're bringing in like family and I just wasn't, like,
>
> connecting, and I broke it off with him. And I remember telling him, 'You know,
>
> you're a great guy. I'm just not connecting to you. I don't know what it is.' And I feel
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> to this day that it was like a cultural thing. I don't know. So, I know the cultural part
>
> is huge, but it's still hard for me to define. And I think dating that German guy just
>
> kind of amplified like, oh, shit, like, no, I need my culture.

Her realization, "Oh, shit, like, no, I need my culture," demonstrates increased *salience (Awareness dimension)*. The statement "the cultural part is huge, but it's still hard to define for me" relates to the component of *certainty (Affiliation dimension)*. Despite being sure of its importance and perceived high *centrality (Attitudes dimension)*, Zulma expresses low certainty in defining her culture. This suggests that ethnic-racial identity can be central to one's self-concept even when it's not fully defined or understood. This lack of certainty likely motivates continued exploration, illustrating the interplay between these two components. From a developmental perspective, while certainty often increases with age, this statement shows that adults may still grapple with uncertainty about aspects of their ethnic-racial identity. This dynamic between exploration and certainty highlights the ongoing nature of ethnic-racial identity development, where individuals may cycle through periods of questioning and clarity as they navigate their cultural identity.

Contextual Shift: Spousal and Parental Roles

Zulma's ethnic identity development narrative evolves from her experiences as a college student to her current roles as a wife and mother. This transition in social identities opens up new avenues for identity-relevant experiences. Her changing life stages and familial responsibilities provide fresh contexts for exploring and redefining her ethnic-racial identity.

> **The Generation Question.** So now, who am I now is wife, and mother of 2- a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old. I'm still, and sometimes, when this question comes up, it still confuses me. Some people have asked me like, 'Are you considered first generation?' You know, 'Who am I?' That's all identity. I still consider myself like zero generation. I was born in Mexico but raised here. So it's kind of weird. But I do tell people that my kids should be considered first-generation, and this is all new to

me. This is new to my parents; I didn't have what a lot of people have as guidance. Like, I figured it out with my parents. So that's why I feel like my kids do have a little bit more than what I have. But we're still beginning, like generationally, here in this country. I still feel we're fresh or new. I do feel we are ahead of the game compared to other families in the same position. But still, I'm like, 'No, no, we're still figuring this out.'

Zulma grapples with understanding and defining her place within generational categories of immigration. The components- certainty/uncertainty, centrality, and salience- interact dynamically, with the *salience (Awareness dimension)* of her ERI prompting ongoing reflection, which in turn reinforces its *centrality* (*Attitudes dimension)* in her self-concept, even as she grapples with some *uncertainty (Affiliation dimension)* about specific aspects of her identity.

Cultural Catch-Up: A Mom's Ethnic-Socialization Reboot. Culturally, I'm trying to do more cultural things now that even I didn't grow up with, like Dia de Los Muertos, you know, I have my little *ofrenda*. I think it's a beautiful cultural thing I didn't grow up with. But I see the reasoning behind it and how you need to think about those who have passed and bringing their memories back, and I want to instill that in my kids. So, that's something that even my parents were like, 'Well, we didn't do that,' and I'll say, 'I know mom, dad, it's okay. Like, I get it. You know, you guys were working so hard to just survive that a lot of what you guys grew up with you didn't you know [pass it on]- it was hard, and I get it,' and so they like it; my parents are all for it now. Yeah. But let me see, during Christmas, you know, doing a *piñata*

that's usually fun. Oh, the January 6 *Reyes Magos*. Oh, yeah, I grew up with for sure.

Yeah, and that was something that I was like, my kids are gonna get that for sure.

Zulma's narrative exemplifies multiple ERI components across various dimensions. Her *exploration (Behaviors dimension)* is evident in seeking out new cultural practices like Dia de Los Muertos, which involves knowledge acquisition and *internalization of cultural values (Behaviors dimension)*. She demonstrates strong *affirmation* and *positive private regard (Attitudes dimension)* towards these traditions, indicating their growing *centrality* to her identity. The narrative also highlights a *negotiation process (Behaviors dimension)* between her parents' practices and the new ones she's adopting, showcasing ethnic-racial meaning-making across generations, an area of study in need of more attention. Her maintenance of childhood traditions alongside new practices reflects *ethnic-racial constancy (Affiliation dimension)*, illustrating a stable yet evolving sense of ethnic-racial identity.

Mixing and Matching Cultural Myths. I don't get the Santa Claus story, but this one makes sense to me. So this one is just something that makes sense. I think we tried to- Joe [my husband] never remembered, but I grew up with *El Raton*- the rat. So, the Tooth Fairy apparently doesn't exist in Mexico, but a little rat does. So, I think it's so funny because I think Mexico is more logical, so it was literally like a rat. You know, same thing. You put your tooth under the thing, and the rat will come, *El Raton*, and they'll exchange it for a coin, ya know. And it's because the rat would rather have the bone to create whatever versus money, and they have money to exchange for teeth all over the world. Yeah, so that's what they do. Joe said 'No, it has to be the Tooth Fairy because that doesn't make sense to me. ' And I was like, 'OK, fine, we'll do the tooth fairy.' But yeah, I think the majority of the traditions

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and stuff, we're kind of just going with the flow, picking and choosing, and we're

going with it. We'll see what they continue with.

Under the *Behaviors dimension*, we see *exploration* as Zulma actively compares and

considers different cultural traditions (El Raton vs. Tooth Fairy). This dimension is also

highlighted through *negotiation*, as she balances her Mexican cultural background with her

husband's preferences and American norms, and an *elaboration* of cultural understanding,

comparing the logic and practicality of the El Raton myth to the Tooth Fairy concept. The

Attitudes dimension is represented by *affirmation*, shown through Zulma's positive affect

towards the *El Raton* tradition ("this one makes sense to me"), and *centrality* as she

deliberates on implementing these cultural practices in her family life. The *Affiliation*

dimension is reflected in her sense of belonging to her cultural group. This narrative also

demonstrates ethnic-racial flexibility and adaptive ethnic-racial socialization, as Zulma is

willing to "pick and choose" traditions, reflecting a dynamic approach to integrating

multiple cultural influences in her family's life.

> **The Great Earring Debate.** Oh, the earring thing! That was a cultural thing. You
>
> know, that was huge. And at first, for me, too. I was like, Natasha looks like a boy.
>
> 'What do you mean, we're not gonna put earrings?' Joe was like, 'We're not gonna
>
> pierce her ears.' And at first, I was even like, 'What do you mean? Like, that's what
>
> we all do. That's a Mexican thing.' Like, you know, you're born, and you're a girl,
>
> and you put the earrings on. And, then he started saying things that I was like, 'Oh,
>
> my God, that makes sense.' He said, 'I'm not gonna poke holes in my daughter if she
>
> doesn't want to. What if she grows up and she didn't want earrings? And we just
>
> forced it on her because that's just what we do.' And I was just like, oh, my god, I

never thought about it that way. I didn't. So after that, we were telling my parents and

his parents, and everyone was offended. Everyone was so mad. But I told everyone I

actually agree with Joe on this. Like, it makes sense. What if Natasha doesn't want

earrings'…But it's beautiful because now we created this thing where it's like, it's

your body; you say what you want done to it. And that was not something that was

done culturally… But like with many other things, like we're just kind of going with

the flow. And I think that was logical. It made sense to us, and we didn't go by what

everybody else wanted.

Under the *Attitudes dimension*, we see *centrality* as Zulma initially assumes they should

follow the Mexican tradition of piercing baby girls' ears, showing how her ethnic-racial

identity influences her decision-making. The *Behaviors dimension* is represented by

exploration, contestation as Zulma critically examines and challenges traditional practices,

and *negotiation* as she navigates between Mexican cultural norms and her husband's

acculturated perspective.

School Shopping. Ever since the kids got out of daycare, I was very nervous to

make any decision on what school we were going to choose and why. And I

considered all of that. What's there? What races are there? And I, it was nerve-

racking because I kept thinking like, this is gonna shape who she is, wherever she

goes, where are we going to put her, and we have to consider like all of these factors,

you know, the teachers, how are they going to treat her as a Mexican-American?

How are they going to, you know, are they going to allow her to grow? Or are they

going to be like 'hmmmm' (expressing suspicion), you know? And so for daycare

based on a need, we did put her in a private school, and then Diego, too. And then

when we chose an elementary school, we actually chose the newest school that is

here. So it's all the way to the end. And you go to that school, and even though it's in

this neighborhood, you would never, I mean, black, white, Asian, Mexicans are still

a majority. But their mix is very, very, very mixed. So, I feel it will be less of a

shock for her in the future. So, if and when she goes to university, same thing with

Diego, like I think it'll be less of a shock.

Her school selection process is primarily driven by the *centrality (Attitudes dimension)* of

her ethnic-racial identity, which heightens the *salience (Awareness dimension)* of racial and

ethnic factors in her decision-making. This heightened awareness leads to active *exploration*

(Behaviors dimension) of various school options, considering their racial/ethnic

compositions. Zulma's concern about how teachers will treat her daughter "as a Mexican-

American" reflects her consideration of *public regard (Awareness dimension)*, which in turn

influences her *exploration* behavior. Throughout, Zulma engages in *negotiation (Behaviors*

dimension) as she balances choosing an environment where her children can develop a sense

of belonging while also preparing them for diverse future settings.

> **Breaking the Period Taboo: 'The Talk.'** I think in our community, it's really hard.
>
> Well, from what I'm noticing. I grew up with it, too. Daughter to mom. I'm sorry,
>
> mom to daughter, regarding like, your period. I didn't [receive the talk], but I
>
> definitely had it for my daughter. So, I do parent workshops, and we just finished
>
> this last session. I asked the parents, 'What things do you guys want to talk about?'
>
> We created this awesome community where they open up and talk about everything.
>
> And one mom said, 'Can we talk about how we can bring up conversations with our
>
> kids about their changing bodies?' And so the school I'm at is elementary, so it's

kinder to fifth grade. So that's a perfect time because nowadays I'm realizing the girls are having their periods sooner. It could be hormones. I'm reading, like, it could be a bunch of stuff. So, I asked them quickly, like, 'Have you guys had conversations with your, you know?', and they said they didn't know how to even start. Oh, my God. What did they tell me? They said there's a saying, I guess, in Spanish, which I don't even get. I think she said, *La Flor se le esta creciendo* or, something like that, or *La Flor se le exploto* or something crazy. Where I was just like, 'That's what you say?!' That sounds alarming. That doesn't even sound like- so I don't know, yeah, I didn't have that conversation, but we prepped Natasha, and something that's different, that I know is hard for my mom to understand too, is that we always bring in Joe in the conversation too, and even Diego. So I think it's been hard for my mom because she even was like, 'Well, what does Joe have anything to do with telling your daughter about women's stuff?' and I said, 'Well, we just want to make it as normal as possible. We're trying to make it seem like, if you have it, it's okay to mention it to Dad, because then he knows, like, 'Oh, she's on her period. She might be weaker, she might feel moody,' you know, just so that he's aware. And so I think when I told my mom that Joe and I were having that conversation with Natasha, she was like, freaking out, but I even told my mom, like, 'I don't know why you're freaking out. You didn't have a conversation with me. Like, how was I even supposed to know what to do with Natasha? You know. What's the right thing to do?'

In this narrative, Zulma's *exploration (Behaviors dimension)* of cultural practices around puberty education is driven by the *centrality (Attitudes dimension)* of her ethnic-racial

identity in parenting. This exploration leads to *contestation* of conventional norms and *negotiation (Behaviors dimension)* between traditional and modern approaches.

> **Cultural Pride on the Field.** I love color. So I'm always telling Natasha, you know, wear color. When the girls were wearing the [traditional Mexican] dresses [at the Softball State Parade to represent their team], and she noticed all the colors, I was like, 'Do you see the colors? Like that's just a part of where we come from.' The *ofrenda* also has a lot of color, so I tried to share that part, which is [the] color, [the] food, the drive, and [the] perseverance. You know. Be strong in who you are, I think that was instilled in me. And I definitely have tried to instill that in my kids. You know, be confident in who you are; everyone is different.

Zulma's strong *affirmation* and *centrality (Attitudes dimension)* of her cultural identity drive her *exploration* behaviors *(Behaviors dimension)* as she actively shares cultural elements with Natasha. This exploration is informed by and reinforces her *internalization of cultural values (Behaviors dimension)*, which she then transmits through ethnic-racial socialization. Her positive *private regard* and cultural knowledge fuel her efforts to foster *collective self-esteem (Affiliation dimension)* by encouraging her children's confidence in their identity.

> **Breaking the Obedience Chain.** I don't force my kids to kiss. I don't force my kids to spend time with someone. Even if it's family, especially if it's family… I emphasize gut feeling. Like if you have that gut feeling about someone, stay away, whether it's a friend, an adult, or anybody. And that's why I emphasize not fearing someone in authority. Because I don't want my children to feel, 'Oh, that person is an authority I have to do whatever they say,' like I'm huge on that… I just don't want my kids to ever be in any situation where they feel they have to do something

because someone has power over them. That's a big cultural thing too. When they were little, it was hard on my in-laws, "What do you mean you're not going to make them give me a hug?!"

This is a continuation of the *Behaviors dimension*. Within this dimension, Zulma demonstrates several key components: *contestation* as she challenges traditional cultural norms about children's interactions with family members and authority figures; *negotiation* as she navigates between her own parenting values and the expectations of her in-laws; and *exploration* as she actively engages with and modifies cultural practices related to family interactions and respect for authority. This encapsulates Zulma's efforts to redefine family dynamics and personal autonomy, challenging cultural norms around obedience and authority. It highlights the tension between traditional expectations and her evolving approach to parenting and cultural identity.

Modifying Traditional Recipes. And so they already know, 'Mom, I'm sick, can you make me some *sopita*?'...cooking culturally, I grew up cooking so differently than how I cook now, but it's because of all the knowledge I have. Like, I don't do lard. I won't do olive oil. I won't do certain oils. Oh, I do a lot more vegetables now than I did before. So back then, it was just like rice, beans, and meat. Oh, and a cheese, that's it. Now, I do more salads, so it's just different. We're creating our own little world. It's very different than what I grew up with.

This reflects multiple ERI processes unfolding under the *Behaviors dimension.* It demonstrates Zulma's *internalization of cultural values* while adapting to new information. Zulma's *exploration* of modified cultural cooking practices is driven by her *elaboration* of cultural knowledge, as she incorporates healthier options while maintaining traditions like

sopita. This exploration process involves *negotiation* between traditional practices and a new health awareness, demonstrating ethnic-racial flexibility.

> **Identity Under Construction.** But yeah, I think the majority of the traditions and stuff, we're kind of just going with the flow, picking and choosing, and we're just going with it. We'll see what [our kids] continue with…But yeah, cultural [identity]. Yeah, it's, it's hard. And I'm still defining it. Yeah, I'm still defining it now.

This reflection illustrates the ongoing processes of ERI development in adulthood. In the *Behaviors dimension*, we see *exploration* as Zulma selects traditions, demonstrating flexibility in her "going with the flow" approach. This exploration is directly linked to *negotiation*, as she navigates cultural practices and acknowledges she's "still defining" her identity, reflecting evolving *certainty (Affiliations dimension)* well into mature adulthood.

Contextual Shift: Catholicism

For many first and second-generation Mexicans, Catholicism is deeply intertwined with ethnic identity, providing a continuity with their ancestral homeland and connection to the broader Latino community in the U.S. Religious practices and ethnic traditions are often transmitted through family socialization, creating a context rich with identity-relevant experiences that shape ERI formation.

> **Rationalized Faith.** But even religion, so I believe in God, a higher power. I dislike the whole, like Christian/ Catholic [dogma], and I don't like organized religion. I'm somewhat against organized religion…So my mom actually grew up by herself in a convent. Yeah, with *madres* and stuff like that, pastors. And my dad questions everything. And so he went into a seminary once not because he wanted to be a father, but he's like, 'Okay, I need answers. And no one's giving me answers.' He's

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very inquisitive. So both of my parents have this strong Catholic background, yet, they didn't instill that in my brother and I. And I asked them, and my parents are very different….Like, for example, in the Catholic religion, you're supposed to say your sins to a priest, right? My parents are totally against it. My parents also don't believe in praying to saints because they're like, 'No, you pray to God, you know, and that's all you need to pray for; you don't need to pray for, you know, this one, or whatever.' So even that's different.… And so when we go to organized religions, even Christians, because Joe tried to get me to a Christian church, and I was just like, 'Oh no, I can't do this either. [However] I do consider myself a Logical Catholic. I'm very logical. I love how they have sacraments. So I love how they have the first communion and the confirmation because I truly believe that someone shouldn't just be a part of the religion just because they're born into the religion. They need to go through schooling and understand what they're doing. And I feel the Catholics do a really good job. When you go to catechism, you learn about the history and learn about what you're doing, and you know, baptism, you do it when you're a baby, but yeah, I'll have to just bypass that one, but like confirmation, you can only do it if you're a certain age here in the United States. So you have to be like a teenager to confirm your faith in that religion, so I really liked that.

Her *exploration (Behaviors dimension)* of different religious practices and beliefs, informed by her ethnic-racial knowledge, leads to the *contestation* of certain aspects of Catholicism. This contestation, coupled with the family socialization that provided a foundation of Catholic upbringing, prompts a process of *negotiation* where Zulma critically evaluates and selectively adopts religious practices. This negotiation results in a unique

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resolution/commitment to what she terms "Logical Catholicism," reflecting both *affirmation (Attitudes dimension)* of certain Catholic elements and rejection of others.

> As I mentioned before, you know, when I was finding who I was at UCLA, the only thing that I regret not having was GOD, so maybe my balance wasn't there, and I think I would have been more balanced had I had that spirituality during that time, because I was lost. I was working out, you know, and I was going to school, I just, I felt like something else was missing. And I think finding myself -like I think if I would have had God as a foundation to at least know God was with me or to think of God or I don't even know, but I definitely would have- I think it would have been better.

The salience of religion in her life is evident in this reflection, albeit the unconventional road that led her there.

Discussion

This study provides a nuanced examination of the interplay between individual experiences, social environments, and cultural contexts in the formation and ongoing development of ERI. From the early contextual influences to the college transition, the study traces Zulma's ERI development through various life stages. However, it is in the examination of adulthood that this case study makes a particularly significant contribution, addressing a critical gap in ERI research. Zulma's narrative illuminates several key aspects of adult ERI development, demonstrating that this process is ongoing and dynamic, even in mature adulthood. Her statement, "I'm still defining it now," challenges assumptions that identity formation is completed in earlier life stages and highlights the need for more research on ERI processes in adults of all ages.

This study illustrates how significant life transitions and the intersection of multiple social identities can prompt ongoing reevaluation and refinement of ERI from young adulthood through later adulthood. Zulma's experiences as an undergraduate Latina in STEM demonstrate how the transition to college serves as a critical period for ERI development. This process continues and evolves as Zulma transitions into new roles as a wife and mother. Her approach to cultural traditions with her children - "We're kind of just going with the flow, picking and choosing" - demonstrates the ongoing nature of ERI development in the context of parenting. Similarly, her navigation of cultural practices within her marriage highlights the complex interplay between ERI and other aspects of adult identity. These examples underscore how major life events and role transitions throughout adulthood can catalyze ERI exploration and negotiation.

Furthermore, this study sheds light on the complex dynamics of ethnic-racial socialization and intergenerational differences in adult ERI development, as conceptualized by Williams et al. (2020). Zulma's experiences demonstrate how adults actively engage in ethnic-racial socialization as both recipients and agents, a bidirectional process that involves ongoing personal exploration and intergenerational transmission. Her efforts to incorporate cultural elements into her parenting, such as celebrating Dia de Los Muertos or adapting while preserving traditional recipes, exemplify how adults continue exploring and internalizing aspects of their ethnic-racial identity while simultaneously passing these cultural practices on to their children. This dual process represents a unique aspect of adult ERI development, highlighting the potential for intergenerational differences. Zulma's navigation of cultural practices often involves negotiating between her parents' traditions, her own evolving identity, and her children's experiences. For example, her decision to

celebrate Dia de Los Muertos, a tradition she didn't grow up with, illustrates how adults may actively seek to expand their cultural knowledge and practices, sometimes diverging from their childhood experiences while still maintaining core cultural elements. This intergenerational negotiation and adaptation of cultural practices underscores the dynamic nature of ERI development in adulthood, suggesting a rich area for further investigation.

Zulma's narrative also touches on the role of community engagement in adult ERI development. Zulma's involvement in parent workshops at her children's school, where she discusses cultural topics with other parents, suggests that community involvement can be both a context for and a manifestation of adult ERI processes. This points to the potential importance of community spaces and roles in shaping adult ERI development. Notably, the context of youth sports emerges as another significant community space for ERI expression and development. Zulma's narrative about her daughter's softball team illustrates this: "When the girls were wearing the [traditional Mexican] dresses [at the Softball State Parade to represent their team], and she noticed all the colors, I was like, 'Do you see the colors? Like that's just a part of where we come from.'" This experience demonstrates how community events, such as youth sports, can serve as platforms for adults to engage in ERI development and ethnic-racial socialization of their youth through cultural pride transmission.

Another significant insight from this study is the role of critical consciousness in adult ERI development. Zulma's reflections on school choice for her children, considering factors such as racial composition and potential discrimination, demonstrate how adults may engage with broader societal issues related to race and ethnicity as part of their ERI development. This suggests that adult ERI processes involve not only personal identity

negotiation but also engagement with systemic and societal factors affecting one's ethnic-racial group.

Moreover, this case study provides insights into how adult ERI development can influence major life decisions and daily practices. From career choices to parenting strategies, from cultural celebrations to same-ethnic partners. Zulma's narrative demonstrates the pervasive influence of ERI in various aspects of adult life. This highlights the need for research that examines the broad-ranging implications of ERI in adulthood beyond psychological outcomes typically studied in younger populations.

By providing a detailed account of Zulma's ongoing ERI development as an adult, this study demonstrates that ERI development doesn't plateau in adulthood but continues to evolve in response to new roles, responsibilities, and life experiences, influencing various aspects of an individual's life. This nuanced exploration of adult ERI development not only addresses gaps in traditional developmental research but also aligns with paradigms such as Chicana feminist epistemology, offering new ways of researching ERI that acknowledge the complex, fluid nature of identity formation in transborder contexts.

For example, the ongoing struggle Zulma expresses in defining her cultural identity resonates deeply with Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the "*mestiza* consciousness" as explored in *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). A Chicana is a mestiza; she is of mixed race, indigenous and European, and Mexican and American. She lives in a minefield of social, cultural, and psychological contradictions. She is malleable, learning the lay of the land, maneuvering on the margins. She complies for survival's sake. Nevertheless, in doing so, her psyche evolves, "Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101). Over time, she

becomes stealth, intentional, less afraid, and more connected to the soil. Anzaldúa states that a collision of phenomena occurs:

> In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness- a *mestiza* consciousness- and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 102)

Anzaldúa's work illuminates the complex, fluid nature of identity for those living in cultural borderlands, much like Zulma's experience as a "zero generation" immigrant going "with the flow". Zulma's statement, "I'm still defining it. Yeah, I'm still defining it now," echoes Anzaldúa's notion of the continuous process of identity formation for those straddling multiple cultural worlds. This aligns with Anzaldúa's description of the *mestiza* who must constantly negotiate between different cultural logics, never fully belonging to one or the other but creating a new consciousness in the interstices. The approach of "going with the flow, picking and choosing" cultural traditions that Zulma describes mirrors Anzaldúa's concept of "crossing over," where individuals actively engage in creating new cultural syntheses. This process of selective adoption and adaptation of cultural practices reflects the *mestiza's* ability to operate in a pluralistic mode, taking and leaving elements from multiple cultures to forge a unique identity. Furthermore, Zulma's uncertainty about what cultural elements her children will continue aligns with Anzaldúa's emphasis on the transformative nature of borderland existence. It highlights the ongoing, intergenerational nature of identity formation in multicultural contexts, where each generation must navigate and redefine its cultural identity.

Zulma's emphasis on trusting one's gut feeling and challenging traditional notions of authority exemplifies Anzaldúa's concept of *"la facultad"* - an intuitive form of knowledge that arises from marginalized experiences. *La mestiza* yearns to find peace in the ideological battleground she's inherited. She learns to navigate landmines, she develops *la facultad,* a sensibility ignited by fear and acute awareness of imminent danger. Those that have sat on the margins, experienced ostracization by society, or perpetual displacement, are able to develop and increase their *facultad.* Her approach to parenting, which prioritizes her children's autonomy and instincts over cultural expectations of obedience, demonstrates the "psychic restlessness" Anzaldúa associates with *mestiza consciousness.* Zulma's narrative reveals a conscious effort to break the obedience chain, a decision that stems from her lived experience and sensibilities navigating compromised boundaries. This perspective aligns closely with Anzaldúa's notion of developing a "new mestiza consciousness," where individuals critically engage with and reshape cultural norms. Zulma's statement, "I don't want my children to feel 'Oh, that person is an authority I have to do whatever they say," reflects a deliberate attempt to instill in her children the ability to question authority and trust their instincts - key aspects of Anzaldúa's theory of empowerment through self-awareness. By encouraging her children to trust their intuition and resist blind obedience, Zulma is fostering in them the development of "*la facultad*" from an early age. This approach not only aligns with Anzaldúa's theoretical framework but also extends our understanding of how ERI development can be consciously and subconsciously shaped and transmitted intergenerationally. Zulma's narrative provides a rich example of how Anzaldúa's concepts inform the meaning-making behind the empirical and complex, ongoing process of ERI development in adulthood.

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Zulma's reflection on her experience at UCLA, particularly her sense that something was missing without a spiritual foundation, aligns with Anzaldúa's holistic approach to identity and consciousness. In *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Anzaldúa emphasizes the importance of integrating mind, body, and spirit in the formation of the mestiza consciousness. Zulma's statement, "I think I would have been more balanced had I had that spirituality during that time," resonates with Anzaldúa's concept of "spiritual mestizaje." This idea suggests that a complete sense of self requires not just intellectual and physical development, but also spiritual grounding. Zulma's feeling of being "lost" despite her academic pursuits and physical activities (working out) mirrors Anzaldúa's critique of Western dualistic thinking that often separates the mind from the body and spirit.

The notion that having God as a foundation would have provided better balance echoes Anzaldúa's emphasis on spirituality as a crucial component of navigating the complexities of a multicultural identity. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa and her co-contributors often discuss the role of spiritual practices in providing strength and guidance for women of color navigating complex cultural landscapes. Zulma's retrospective understanding that spirituality could have anchored her during a time of intense identity exploration aligns with Anzaldúa's vision of a holistic, integrated self. The description of her as a "Logical Catholic" encapsulates the inherent duality and contradictions in her lived experiences. This juxtaposition of rationality and faith mirrors the complex, often conflicting aspects of identity that Anzaldúa explores in her work. The reference to *Coatlicue*, the Aztec goddess representing both creation and destruction, further emphasizes this duality. In Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, *Coatlicue* symbolizes the ability to reconcile opposing forces within oneself. By maintaining ties to *Coatlicue*, she demonstrates her capacity to

embrace and navigate the contradictions inherent in her identity, embodying the *mestiza* consciousness that Anzaldúa describes as a state of multiple consciousness, where seemingly incompatible aspects of identity coexist and form a new whole. This realization demonstrates the ongoing nature of identity formation, where individuals continually reassess and reintegrate different aspects of their experience – including the spiritual – into their evolving sense of self.

In essence, Zulma's narrative illustrates the complex interplay of mind, body, and spirit in the formation of ethnic-racial identity, reinforcing Anzaldúa's assertion that true consciousness and self-understanding emerge from the integration of all these elements. It underscores the idea that ERI development is not just a cognitive or cultural process, but a holistic journey that encompasses all aspects of the human experience. This integration of traditional ERI research with Chicana feminist epistemology could lead to more comprehensive and culturally grounded measurement tools, capable of capturing the complex, lifelong process of ERI development. For example, research has demonstrated that ERI affect cannot be adequately captured by simple positive-negative dichotomies (Umaña-Taylor, 2024). This work continues to disrupt our linear conceptualizations of emotional duality, suggesting a more nuanced and multidimensional approach to understanding sensibilities, such as *la facultad*. By embracing this innovative lens, researchers can think intuitively and conceptualize new ways of understanding and assessing ERI across the lifespan, particularly for Latinas.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Finding Home: The Softball Diamond as Mestiza Third Space

Introduction

Overview of the Study

The projected growth of the Latino population in the United States will require specific attention to the healthy development of adolescent Latinas. According to the literature, a wide range of positive developmental assets and competencies can be accrued through participation in sports, which in turn may contribute to adolescent Latinas' healthy and holistic development. Unfortunately, much research in this area has focused on adolescent girls as a monolithic group, disregarding the range of outcomes that sports may produce for girls of color.

Research Question: What is the range of positive developmental outcomes for a group of Latina youth participating in the sport of Softball?

Rationale of the Study

Global entities such as the United Nations acknowledge the critical role that girls play in the health and prosperity of societies. By working to empower girls and women around the world, their concerted efforts have targeted gender inequities in areas critical to their development and growth. For this reason, at the 20th General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), equitable access to physical education was declared a fundamental human right, Lunamed necessary for the healthy development of *all* persons. This outstanding proclamation served to highlight the essential role that physical activity plays in the development of healthy girls and women (LaVoi, 2018).

Significance of the Study

       Research on Latina collegiate softball players demonstrates that athletic participation not only promotes a well-documented range of positive developmental outcomes but also has the potential to foster cultural and ethnic identity development. Studies of Latino youth consistently show that a strong sense of ethnic identity correlates with increased self-esteem and greater resilience against psychological challenges, making sports a potentially crucial setting for nurturing these protective factors. Therefore, this study seeks to broaden our understanding of assets by highlighting the roles of familism and ethnic identity in one softball recreational league.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Sports Participation Among Latina Youth

       Despite the well-documented benefits of sports participation, research has consistently shown that Latina girls participate in sports at lower rates than their White counterparts. For example, only 21.9% of Latina high school students meet recommended levels of physical activity compared to 27.9% of White females (Tucker Center Report, 2018). This disparity stems from multiple intersecting barriers that systematically limit their access to participation in sports and physical activity, putting them at a disadvantage in developing important psychological, social, and physical assets offered through sports. These assets are life skills and competencies that are transferable in multiple settings (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). These include but are not limited to positive self-perceptions, mature moral development, social and career capital, leadership, and movement literacy (Castro, Mireles-Rios, & Cecchine, 2022). Competencies that develop as a result of movement thus play substantial roles in the holistic development of healthy girls.

Unfortunately, Latinas are labeled "have-nots" in sports and physical education (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; LaVoi, 2018).

Structural barriers represent the most immediate challenges, including financial constraints, lack of access to facilities, language barriers, and transportation issues (Tucker Center Report, 2018). Beyond these structural challenges, cultural factors create additional complexity in Latina sports participation. For instance, traditional cultural values and family expectations, such as marianismo beliefs in some Latino families, prioritize family care over self-care activities like sports (McGovern, 2021). Studies have shown that Latina girls often have significant family obligations, including caring for younger siblings, which can limit their time for sports participation (Telzer, Gonzalez, & Fuligni, 2014). The limited participation of Latinas in sports both reflects and perpetuates a broader pattern of invisibility, as evidenced by the scarcity of research focused on their experiences. This knowledge gap is starkly illustrated in the research landscape. For example, out of 85 studies published over the last 40 years, only 14 had a specific focus on Latina athletes (Alanis et al., 2022).

Developmental Benefits and Asset Building Through Sport

Sports participation offers a powerful pathway for positive youth development, particularly for Latina youth who require additional developmental competencies that assist with their ethnic identity. The Tucker Report (2018), through Wiese-Bjornstal and LaVoi's (2007) Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development, identifies three crucial categories of developmental assets that can be traditionally cultivated through sports participation: psychological, social, and physical assets.

For Latina youth specifically, psychological assets take on heightened importance given the cultural and social challenges they often face. These assets include the development of self-efficacy and confidence that can help counteract traditional gender stereotypes prevalent in some Latino cultures. Sports participation fosters positive self-perceptions and body image, which is particularly valuable in a cultural context that often emphasizes traditional feminine roles. Additionally, it builds leadership skills that transfer well beyond the sporting context, helping Latina youth develop the resilience and motivation needed to persist in physical activity despite potential familial pressures (Castro, Mireles-Rios, Cecchine, 2022).

The development of social assets through sports provides Latina youth with crucial support systems and opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible. These include the formation of supportive relationships outside the family unit, the development of teamwork and conflict management skills, and access to social capital and networks. Research shows these social connections can help prevent risky behaviors while improving academic outcomes, which is significant given the educational disparities faced by some Latina youth (McGovern, 2021).

Physical assets gained through sports participation address critical health concerns within the Latino community. Regular physical activity helps improve overall health outcomes in a population with higher risks of obesity and related health conditions. Beyond immediate health benefits, sports participation develops motor skills and physical literacy that can promote lifelong wellness and active lifestyle habits (Tucker Center Research Report, 2018).

When girls are provided opportunities to play sports and be physically active, they can develop multiple interconnected assets that contribute to their overall well-being and future success. For Latinas, this includes the development of assets not captured by traditional sports literature: cultural assets such as familism and the activation of one's ethnic identity. Ethnic identity plays a critical role in the social adjustment of people of color. Understanding how these assets develop for Latina athletes is crucial for creating sustainable pathways for their continued sports participation and overall development. Sports that successfully build these assets can provide critical protective factors for this vulnerable population; therefore, exploring the many mechanisms through which physical activity leads to life skill development for Latina youth is imperative.

Cultural Factors and Identity Development

The Latino culture operates under a collectivist frame of reference, where positive interpersonal relationships and family-oriented values such as familism take priority. As a result, Mexican Americans who value familism prioritize family needs over their individual needs and frequently engage in their family members' emotional, physical, and financial support (Calderón-Tena, Knight, & Carlo, 2011). Due to the centrality of familism in the Latino culture, it is critical that this cultural dimension be studied in tandem with Latinas' sporting experiences. Unsurprisingly, few studies exist that further our understanding of Latinas' familial sporting socialization and support systems. Darvin, Cintron, and Hancock's (2017) study provides a rare look into the sporting trajectory of NCAA Division I Latina student-athletes, who arguably find themselves in the most elite level of play for their respective sport. They found that the participants' long-term success and engagement in the sport of softball was a result of a stable, nuclear family unit with an emphasis on supportive

fathers and brothers. Filling a gap in the literature regarding elite-level Latina athletes, this study sheds light on the importance of family for Latinas in the sports arena. This finding also points to a more active and progressive shift in the relationship between Latino fathers and their daughters, an incredibly important finding worth unpacking (Darvin et al., 2017).

While the study of familism in the sporting context is largely absent from the literature, researchers in the field of adolescent development have extensively studied the impact of familism on adolescent Latinas (Stein, Gonzalez, Cuptio, Kiang, & Supple, 2015). For example, Calderón-Tena, Knight, and Carlo (2011) looked at the function of culturally related values in promoting prosocial behavioral tendencies amongst adolescent youth, specifically, the role of familism in Mexican American families. Results indicated that Latino adolescents who grew up with strong familism values developed sensitivity to others' emotional needs and a readiness to respond to requests for help or crisis situations. Additional studies that have researched the influence of familism on Latino adolescents found that it serves as a protective factor for Latino adolescents facing various stressors. However, while familism has been directly associated with producing positive outcomes like fewer depressive symptoms and greater school attachment, it does not fully buffer against the negative effects of discrimination, economic stress, or acculturative stress. These findings suggest that while familial cultural values promote positive development among Latino youth, they are insufficient to counter the nefarious and detrimental effects of discrimination. This is a pressing issue, given the aim of developing holistically strong Latinas.

Latino adolescents face the highest risk for mental health disorders; more specifically, Mexican-origin youth have been shown to have the highest levels of depression

compared to their White, Asian-American, and African American counterparts (Ayón, Ojeda, & Ruano, 2018; Calderón-Tena, Knight, & Carlo, 2011; Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Anti-immigrant perspectives and policies have compounded and contributed to this alarming trend. The current political climate has amplified anti-immigration sentiments and perpetuated discriminatory behaviors toward the Latino community (Ayón, Ojeda, & Ruano, 2018). Research has shown that the development of ethnic pride in racial adolescent minorities has been shown to reduce depressive symptoms, feelings of isolation, and negative self-esteem caused by experiencing discrimination. For example, a study by Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff (2007) that looked at 273 adolescent Latinos of primarily Mexican descent found that youth who reported having stronger self-concepts of ethnic identity also reported higher self-esteem.

Research is notably scarce regarding both how Latinas' cultural values like familism shape their sports experiences and how athletic participation influences their ethnic/racial identity development. Jamieson's (2003) study of mestiza consciousness offers an unprecedented look at how Latinas' racial/ethnic identities unfold via sporting experiences, which has paved the way for this research. Her paper positions sport, and specifically softball, as an ideal cultural space for observing the enactment of multiple, shifting subjectivities. These subjectivities are components of an evolving ethnic identity. Anzaldúa (1987) labeled these under the umbrella of a mestiza consciousness (mixed identity as Indigenous, Mexican, and American). As a highly racialized and gendered institution, sport serves as an arena where Latina athletes must navigate, resist, and reconfigure dominant ideologies. Softball, in particular, may serve as a platform for Latina athletes to engage with

and resist the social categories and power structures that seek to define and contain their identities, including racial and ethnic subjectivities.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Latina Athletes' Experiences

The theoretical understanding of Latina athletes' experiences benefits significantly from Chicana feminist scholarship, particularly concepts of mestizaje and resistance to categorical thinking. This challenges essentialist notions of identity and calls for embracing the multiplicity and contradictions that Latina athletes may experience. Jamieson's (2003) groundbreaking work emphasizes the importance of recognizing Latina identities' inherent hybridity and fluidity rather than trying to fit them into static categories. This perspective aligns with Anzaldua's (1987) concept of mestizaje, or mixed identity, which provides a valuable lens for understanding the complexities of Latina identities and subjectivities.

Lugones's (1994) concept of "curdling" offers another crucial theoretical tool, highlighting how Latina athletes resist classification into mutually exclusive identities. Rather than choosing between being American, Latina, or an athlete, they embody all these identities simultaneously. This "curdling" represents a rejection of fragmentation and a commitment to occupying a "middle space" that defies neat categorization (Anzalúa, 1987). Lugones extends Anzaldúa's mestizaje concept, framing it as political resistance against Western thought's "logic of purity." She argues that societies valuing purity inherently favor dominant culture, marking anything outside dominant norms as impure. For example, choosing to fully assimilate as an American while ignoring the impurity of living by the hyphen or as a Mexican-American. This framework functions as a tool for control and has particular relevance in sports contexts, where questions of belonging and authenticity often intersect with cultural identity and citizenship.

These theoretical perspectives support understanding sports participation's role in identity development for Latina youth. Research shows that sports participation offers multiple benefits: building physical and mental well-being, developing social skills, strengthening cultural connections, and helping participants develop a stronger sense of self both individually and within their ethnic community. Understanding how Latina youth navigate traditionally White-dominated sports like softball through these theoretical lenses can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms by which sports participation leads to positive developmental outcomes.
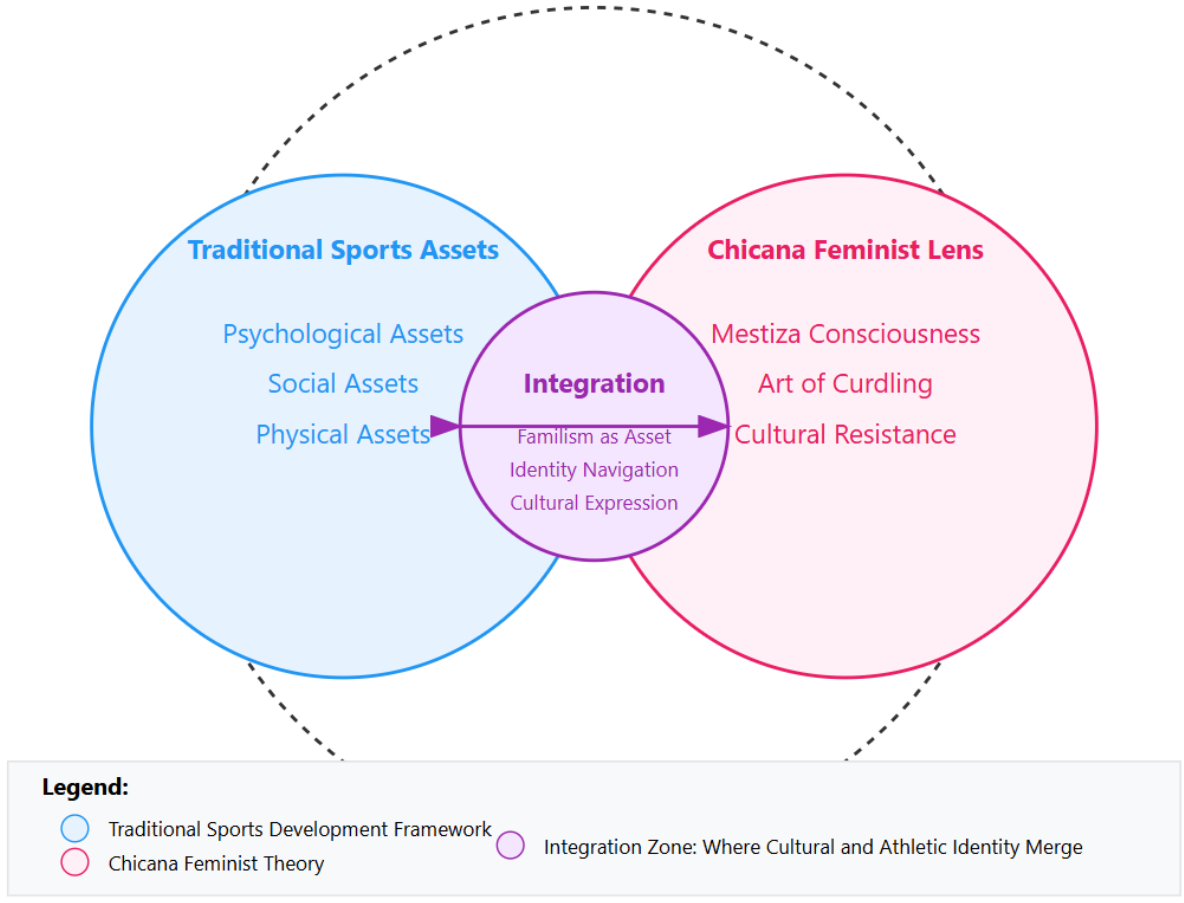
Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical integration that guided this study, demonstrating how traditional sports development frameworks intersect with Chicana feminist perspectives to create a comprehensive understanding of Latina athletes' experiences. The left circle represents the Traditional Sports Assets Framework (Wiese-Bjornstal & LaVoi, 2007), encompassing the psychological, social, and physical assets typically developed through sports participation. The right circle represents Chicana Feminist Theory, particularly concepts of mestiza consciousness, cultural resistance, and the art of curdling (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 1994). The overlap between these theoretical perspectives creates an integration zone where three key elements emerge: familism as an asset, identity navigation, and cultural expression. The bidirectional arrow at the bottom indicates the dynamic interplay between these frameworks, suggesting that traditional sports participation and cultural identity development mutually influence each other. This integrated framework provides a more nuanced lens for understanding how Latina athletes develop both athletic competencies and cultural identities within the softball context, while highlighting the

unique ways these young athletes resist fragmentation of their identities through sport participation.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Diagram

Integrated Framework: Sports Assets and Cultural Identity Development

Traditional Sports Assets
- Psychological Assets
- Social Assets
- Physical Assets

Integration
- Familism as Asset
- Identity Navigation
- Cultural Expression

Chicana Feminist Lens
- Mestiza Consciousness
- Art of Curdling
- Cultural Resistance

Legend:
- ○ Traditional Sports Development Framework
- ○ Chicana Feminist Theory
- ○ Integration Zone: Where Cultural and Athletic Identity Merge

Methodology

Research Design

Framed by a Chicana feminist epistemology, this qualitative study employed an ethnographic approach to examine the experiences of young female softball players in a

predominantly Latino community. The research was conducted during the 2023 softball recreational season, focusing on the El Sol ASA Fastpitch 12U Division in Oxnard, CA.

Researcher Positionality

As a Latina researcher and league alumna, I embody both insider and outsider perspectives, navigating the borderlands between academia and community. My connection to these fields where I once played, where brown girls like me learned to swing, to pitch, and to dream, runs Lunap. This dual identity as a researcher and former player allows my mestiza consciousness to bridge past and present, observation and understanding. My intimate relationship with both the research site and population enhanced my ability to identify meaningful and layered developmental outcomes necessary for Latina athletes. However, this closeness also demanded rigorous attention to reflexivity throughout the research process to preserve the study's integrity and prevent the imposition of personal biases.

Population and Sample

The selection of the El Sol ASA Fastpitch 12U Division was intentional, given both its service to a predominantly Latino community and its reputation for competitive excellence. The league's known track record for developing college-bound caliber athletes made it an ideal setting for examining young Latina athletes' experiences in competitive softball, a traditionally White-dominated sport. The division comprised five teams, with approximately twelve players per team. The final sample consisted of nine participants from the All-Star team, all of whom self-identified as Latina and represented varying generational statuses in the United States. This focus on Latina athletes was particularly significant given softball's position as one of the most popular sports for Latina participation at higher

competitive levels (NCAA, 2024). The selection of these participants, specifically focusing

on players who made the All-Star team at the end of the regular season, provided an

opportunity to examine how young Latina athletes navigate and succeed in this space while

maintaining their cultural identity. Table 1 expands on their ages at the time of their

interviews, the age at which they started playing competitively, and their participation in

sports outside of softball. This illustrates an active and talented group of Latina adolescents,

from which, at a glance, embody Latinas rarely covered in sports and developmental

research.

Table 1

Demographics: Softball Participants

Current Age (n)	Age Started Softball (n)	Number of Other Sports (n)
11 years old (3)	3-4 years old (3)	0 (4)
12 years old (3)	5-6 years old (5)	2 (2)
13 years old (3)	7-8 years old (1)	3+(3)

Data Collection Procedures

The study received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board. Given

the participants' minor status, both parental consent and participant assent were obtained. All

identifying information was stored in password-protected files separate from the data, and

pseudonyms were used to protect participant confidentiality. The researcher first obtained

approval from the league president and team coaches to conduct the study. After completing

the required volunteer documentation, including background checks and safe sports training,

the researcher attended regular season practices once per week to understand the figured

world of softball within the specific division and build rapport with the community. During the All-Star season, observation frequency increased to twice per week, including attendance at games and tournaments.

Nine participants engaged in semi-structured individual interviews conducted midway through the All-Star season. These interviews, lasting approximately 30 minutes to 120 minutes, took place during practice times at the softball fields. The individual interview protocol included questions about participants' day-to-day experiences as softball players, their relationships with teammates and coaches, and family involvement in their sports participation. One focus group was conducted with the participating athletes at the conclusion of the season. The focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and was held at a favorite local pizzeria. The discussion incorporated themes that emerged from the participants' interviews. All interviews and focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed with participant and guardian consent. Participants were informed they could opt out of any part of the study at any time without consequences. The research was conducted at various locations within the El Sol community, including Rio Plaza, Rio Del Mar fields, and Rio Mesa softball fields.

Data Analysis

A narrative and deductive approach was utilized in the data analysis. Data analysis occurred in three distinct but interconnected layers, utilizing NVivo qualitative data analysis software to organize and code the data. The researcher conducted initial coding independently, with emerging themes and interpretations validated through member checking with participants to ensure an accurate representation of their experiences.

The first layer involved analyzing interview transcripts and focus group data using a priori codes outlined in Wiese-Bjornstal and LaVoi's (2007) Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development to identify the presence of positive social, psychological, and physical assets among participants. Through iterative readings of the data, these individual assets were refined and organized into three broader thematic categories. Following Jamieson's (2003) analysis of Latina athletes' experiences, particular attention was subsequently paid to how participants discussed their families' roles in their sports participation and how their athletic identities intersected with familial and cultural values. The final analytical layer examined instances of what Jamieson (2003) terms "curdling," or moments when participants articulated the merging or negotiation of their cultural and ethnic identities within the softball context. This analysis was guided by Chicana feminist scholarship, particularly concepts of mestizaje and coalescing, to understand how participants navigated and made meaning of their multiple identities as both Latina youth and competitive athletes. This layered analytical approach yielded a comprehensive examination of the interconnected assets, cultural values, and identity negotiations involved in participants' softball experiences.

Results

Assets

Drawing from the Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development and guided by Chicana feminist scholarship, the analysis revealed five distinct yet interconnected categories of assets developed through softball participation. Beginning with traditional sports-based outcomes, we examine the psychological, social, and physical assets that emerged, before exploring two categories unique to this population: the power of familism

and the art of curdling as assets that showcase how these young athletes actively integrate their athletic and cultural identities.

Psychological Assets

Physical activity not only promotes physical health and social adjustment but also serves as a powerful vehicle for positive psychological development (Tucker Report, 2007). In this study, softball scholars reported numerous psychological benefits from their involvement in the sport. These benefits included ***mature moral development***, as illustrated by Natashalene who shared how softball shaped her identity,

> It helps you, like, be able to develop those types of skills that you're going to need for the real world, and it also teaches you about failure and winning, how to take a loss, and how to come back from it. It also teaches you, like, nothing comes easy. You have to work for it, and you can't just, like, expect results when you don't put the work in…It also teaches you about leadership.

Nina shared the following reflection at the end of her storied season:

> The most important lesson I learned was that you always have a chance to make a change for the better, even when it seems like you're not in the position to. For example, even if you weren't playing as well or playing the position you wanted to play, the team still needed your positive energy to do well.

Players also experienced feelings of ***empowerment***, as shared by Luna, who had the following to say after sweeping the District tournament: "The experience showed me that I was capable of winning big in softball and could accomplish my goals." Additionally, participants demonstrated growth in their mental game and defensive abilities. Natashalene spoke about improved focus: "Whenever I play, I'm always focused. Since I'm more mature,

I kind of understand that aspect of it more. And that's what makes it better for me." Isabel emphasized strategic thinking, noting the importance of "just being sharp for everything. Remembering who's on what, who to throw to." These examples demonstrate a range of developing cognitive abilities and *optimal cognitive functioning*. While participants reported a range of psychological benefits, three core assets were consistently discussed across all participants, including: *enjoyment and motivation for continued physical activity*; *positive self-perceptions*; and lastly, *stress management, mental and emotional health*. Below are excerpts from individual interviews that highlight these common themes and sentiments.

   Enjoyment and Motivation for Continued Physical Activity. Every participant expressed enjoyment of softball through both gameplay and social experiences. Pausing thoughtfully, Victoria smiled as she described her affection for the game:

> I feel like it's such a fun sport because it's not too complicated. I don't know. I just feel like it's fun. Like, when I make the out in the game or whatever, that's really fun. Like, going up to bat and hitting a bomb and just running the bases… I remember I was in the State tournament, and I did this line drive slap. And I was so proud of myself because that was, like, the first really good slap of the season. Yeah. And I was really excited. It felt good.

Beyond the game itself, the social and traditional elements of softball create lasting memories and motivation to continue playing. Nina's excitement is palpable as she describes what she is looking forward to the most at the National tournament:

> I have two things. So, one is taking it all. And the second is the parade and pin trading! Each year, pin trading is like so exciting. And I just love it. So, each team

comes with a pin that represents them. So ours says El Sol All-Stars, and it has a certain design. And so they're little metal pins…to really mark your presence….Oh, I remember this team. I got like these super cool pins. I got a pin from a team in Hawaii, which was crazy. So yeah, I got pins from Oregon teams, Washington teams, and Utah and Arizona. Yeah, different states. And I thought that experience was really, really cool.

Positive Self-Perceptions. In addition to enjoying the game, all of the participants exhibited strong positive self-perceptions through their softball experiences, particularly in how they processed achievements and recognized their value to their team. Natashalene's reflection on defeat after a long-fought battle at the State tournament illustrates her perception of resilience and achievement:

> I feel accomplished, I feel proud. I don't feel like ugh. Like, why didn't we win. I felt like from our pick in our draw from what we had to do just to get to the championship, I think was a lot. And I feel like we did amazing…Okay, we did good. We made it to Nationals. We got 4th.

This sense of positive self-worth is further illustrated through Nina's understanding of her role and value to the team. Speaking about her position as catcher, she demonstrates clear awareness of both others' confidence in her abilities and her own capacity to meet expectations:

> This all star team, I feel like they [coaches] think very highly of me since I've been like the main catcher these past six seasons, like last year, I was the only catcher. And I was like, a catcher like every single game. They thought very highly of me. And so I feel like I live up to those expectations from them.

Her positive self-image extends beyond internal validation, as she recalls an especially meaningful moment that reinforced her sense of accomplishment:

> When my team was playing a tournament in Simi Valley and I was catching. Behind me, I heard girls from another team watching our game and talking about how "powerful" and "good" El Sol looked. For girls to look up to us really warms my heart and really makes me passionate about playing the game.

Stress Management, Mental and Emotional Health. Alongside positive self-perceptions, a recurring subject matter, was the role softball had in helping the participants regulate their own emotions. According to the first Tucker Report produced in 1997 in collaboration with the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, regular physical activity can mitigate the impact of stress and depression for girls. Participants were open about the cathartic role softball played when dealing with their own daily stresses. For , this manifested in finding solace on the pitcher's mound: "In the pitcher's mound, that's my happy place. Like, it's like my fortress where I can just be myself. And with each pitch, I can just draw like my anger in it." The therapeutic value of softball becomes particularly evident in Nina's description of how the sport helps her manage academic pressure:

> Um, well, I like that softball could kind of take all my worries away, because I work hard in school. Like, I'm like a really neat freak at school. And so softball just kind of takes all those school worries away and gives me something else to put my mind on.

She elaborates on the intense academic pressure she feels and how softball provides necessary respite:

I think that at school for some reason, I feel like my school gives so many projects

and like all I want is straight A's. Like whenever I get a B or I do bad on a test, like I

just start worrying I like turn frantic. So just, just taking those worries off of my like

my mind about my grades really helps me.

The sport's ability to provide emotional release and social connection resonates strongly in

Natasha's reflection on what draws her to the game: "I just liked being around girls that like

the same thing as me. And like, I was always fast. Like, I was always the fastest on my

team. So I just really liked running." She goes on to describe the powerful sense of escape

the sport provides:

And then like, just like, I got this, I always get this feeling when I play like,

everything goes away. Like I'm just focused on. I don't care like what other problems

I have. Like, I was just feeling softball. So it was like, that's sort of things that I like

about softball, because I don't have to worry about anything else like school or

parents."

Social Assets

It goes without saying that girls, similar to Natasha, enjoy sports and the supportive

relationships that develop as a result of that participation (Dixon et al., 2008; Dorsch et al.,

2015; Kane et al., 2007). Unsurprisingly, the social benefits of their participation were

plentiful and salient in every facet of their participation. The three social benefits below

emerged as critical components to their participation, success and motivation to keep

playing: ***supportive relationships with peers***; ***learning from effective instructors***; ***and

social capital.***

Supportive Relationships with Peers. "Dimensions of sport friendships include factors such as self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, things in common, companionship and pleasant play...Peers in this sense serve as coping resources for each other during this learning process" (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2007, p. 12). This is vividly illustrated in the participants' varied experiences, beginning with Carmen's appreciation for her teammates' emotional support: "They're nice. And when I'm down, they always hype me up. Like, they would just say, Don't worry about your hit, or a bad play you made or the coaches telling you stuff. Just forget them and just just play."For many participants, softball relationships provided a crucial support system during challenging social situations. Luna's experience particularly highlights how softball friendships can serve as a refuge from difficult peer dynamics at school:

> I don't know if my mom told you. But I am going to a new school for eighth grade year. I was getting bullied as big as I am. I was getting bullied by other girls my age. It was a group of girls and they turned my friends against me... That's why I wanted my mom to put me in a school where I had softball friends for my eighth-grade year.

Similarly, Natasha's story demonstrates how softball relationships can provide positive alternatives when navigating challenging social choices during adolescence:

> I'm very social. Like I have a lot of friends. And I stay away from bad stuff. Like I know, not to do bad stuff. So that's actually how I ended it with some of my best friends. So I've been best friends with a couple girls since third grade. A couple of them got into like smoking. And I was like, didn't really want to be a part of that.

She describes how softball provided new, positive friendships during this transition:

And it was hard. It was a hard time for me. Because even though they were doing

that, I still really cared about them. And like they've been my friends since third

grade. But like, I found new friends, that's how I actually found Vivi because we

were together on the team. So it was easier for me to connect with her because it was

this year.

The value of long-term softball relationships becomes especially clear through Nina's

comparison of her experiences with different teams. Drawing from her time in both

recreational and travel ball, she provides insight into how established friendships affect

performance and team dynamics:

Well, the relationships I have, a lot of them I've known since I was six years

old...like now that I'm looking at them, more than three-fourths of this team I've

known since I was six years old. So just like having that friendship, where we've

been with each other for so long. It's just good to have on a team that's so

competitive, you know?

She contrasts this with her experience on a travel team where she felt like an outsider:

So, I went travel, and I played travel ball. And I was the odd one out because

everybody came from a different league...And so I felt like just having friendships,

like, kind of helped you. And I feel like you play better when you have friendships,

because I felt like even though I was on a competitive team, and I was doing okay, I

just didn't have that extra click, like, click to boost me up. Because I had no real like,

old friends.

When she elaborated further, it became clear how this sense of disconnection seeped onto

the field:

It's kind of like the whole entire experience. Like, for example, when I'm up to bat,

and they're cheering for me, I just, sometimes and I'm struggling. I don't feel like it's

a real cheer. Like they're not actually trying to pump me up. I think it's just because

the coaches tell them to, because, like, I don't know, just the tone. Like I could sense

it. [When presented with the option to stay with my travel team] I said no, I'm gonna

play with my friends. Take me to All-Stars.

Her reflection culminates in a simple but powerful statement that encapsulates the value of

these long-term bonds: "My favorite part of being part of my championship team was having

the girls I grew up with playing softball be part of the team."

Learning from Effective Instructors. The participants also emphasized the

importance of specialized instruction and training in developing their softball skills, often

seeking guidance beyond regular team practices. Rosa demonstrates this commitment to

improvement through her dedication to catching instruction: "When I can go to catching

lessons. I do. We do as much as we can." Her pursuit of excellence extends beyond position-

specific training to include comprehensive physical preparation at a specialized facility:

"Well, right now, I go to redline... I go, I get my workout in. We like, stretch we do

everything before we actually get into like weights, like running." She values the structured

approach and professional guidance, noting, "There's just like, so that's something I would

like to do, like teaching kids. Because there's like trainers there that tell us the instructions so

that we know." The commitment to this training is significant, as she explains:

I try to go like before practice or maybe like when I don't have practice. [Each

session is] an hour, but it's half an hour like warming your body up and like half an

hour like actual weights. [I've been going for] like a year and a half. It actually like it

helps my body.

The transformative impact of skilled instruction is particularly evident in Victoria's

experience with learning to slap hit. Through her trainer's perceptive guidance, she

discovered and developed an entirely new offensive skill set:

> I was with my trainer, and the kind of trainer he is, is like, everything, like fielding,
>
> like an extra practice....And he was like, you have speed, why don't you try slapping.
>
> And I was like, 'what the heck is a slap?'

She describes the systematic progression of her training:

> The first one he really taught me...how to like just to bunt lefty and then he taught
>
> me how to do the footwork. And then once I got better at the footwork and he taught
>
> me how to power slap.

This specialized instruction has led to increased versatility and confidence in her hitting

approach:

> Honestly, if it's a fast pitcher, I do slapping if it's a slower pitcher, I do hitting. But I
>
> usually go up to bat righty first. And then my second at-bat I do slapping. This year I
>
> get to decide when I switch.

Social & Career Capital. The participants demonstrated an awareness of how

relationships and experiences in softball could create valuable connections and opportunities

for their futures. Nina describes how her softball involvement has created meaningful

relationships with potential mentors:

> I feel like my mom and my dad have been really big supporters. And then I also have
>
> a coach on the high school team at St. Bonaventure, in Ventura. The softball coach,

he, he loves my brother and so and he coaches a softball team, so when he heard I

play softball, he likes to come out and watch us and he, I just feel like he really

supports me. He makes me feel good when he comes out.

These connections sometimes extend to high-level athletes who can provide both inspiration

and practical guidance, as Nina further explains, she describes a particularly influential

relationship that has shaped her aspirations:

And I dream to play college. Specifically at Oregon, because I actually had a coach,

hitting coach, a catching coach, and she played for Oregon. And she ended up

playing for team USA. So she set-so she's an Olympian now. So she set a goal for

me.

The value of these experiences and connections becomes particularly evident in how they

shape players' understanding of what it takes to succeed at higher levels. Luna's experience

at a college softball camp provided crucial insights about the importance of versatility: "So,

I'm an all around player. But my main main positions are pitcher and third base. But

wherever they put me I can play. If there's nobody at short, I'll play short." This exposure to

college-level requirements has influenced her approach to the game:

Because when we went to the [college] camp, I sort of understand more that you

needed to be an all around player to make it to college softball, because if you're not

top level material, and you're not all-around player, you might not make it because

they're looking for a player that can play first, short, third, and catch. Just seeing all

the girls at all different D1 one schools playing more than three positions.

These meaningful connections and experiences serve a dual purpose: inspiring the players' dreams of competing at higher levels while simultaneously providing them with practical wisdom about the comprehensive skillset required to achieve those dreams.

Physical Assets

Physical Activity Competencies. Participants demonstrated a wide range of physical activity competencies. For example, the girls both vocalized and demonstrated their versatility and comfortability playing multiple positions on the field, with more than half of the girls describing themselves as either utility players, all-around players, or having the ability to "play anywhere" on the field. More than half of the girls shared that they were involved in other sports beyond softball, which included basketball, volleyball, flag football, soccer, gymnastics, and cheer. Of the four girls who were not involved in other sports, they further contextualized this by stating they either wanted to try other sports in the near future or were simply too invested in softball to think about other sports. Nina had the following to say,

> I only play one sport, which is softball. And I was encouraged to do other sports. I just couldn't because I thought about me with school, and me with softball and I said, 'I'm done. I'm going to stick to these two things. Leave me alone.'

This sentiment was echoed by Rosa, who mentioned, "I feel like, I cannot picture myself playing anything else". She further elaborates,

> I don't get as many breaks as I want because it's, like, regular season is the beginning [of the year]. Then, if we make All-Stars, it's like the beginning and, like, the middle of the year, right. And then if we want to do fall ball, that's towards the end of the year. I only get like, two months of a break. Well, fall ball ends like on Halloween.

Then I just get November, December, and maybe…towards the end of December,

going into January, we start practicing rec. And that's like two months of practice

before the regular season. And that's like when select happens, too.

Rosa describes how physically active and demanding the softball season(s) are, providing a

window into the physically active lifestyles of these girls.

Motor Skills Competencies. This intensive schedule allows players to develop

sophisticated motor skills across various aspects of the game. Carmen succinctly captures

the physical demands of the sport, noting that "there's a lot of movements and diving." The

development of these motor skills requires both dedication and progressive mastery, as

illustrated by Rosa's description of her evolution as a catcher: "My favorite thing to do as a

catcher? I'm getting more comfortable with blocking, knowing that if I have runners on base,

knowing like if I block the ball. They can't go no where." She reflects on her growth in this

skill:

I used to be really scared. Like I wouldn't do-I wouldn't block at all. [They key is] to

have it hit your chest. But sometimes when the ball has a spin maybe it will go this

way or that way. But the key is to always try to like keep it in front of you so that

you can easily just get up and if they go, you throw it as fast as you can.

Her satisfaction in developing these complex motor skills is evident when she reflects on

her weekend performance, "I felt good. I got some hits, my catching, my blocking was

better. My frames were better." The mastery of these motor skills requires not just physical

practice but also technical understanding, as Luna explains fielding and pitching:

One thing I love about those positions is that you get to really work hard because

they take a lot of energy and effort to be good at playing them. for example you need

to learn different mechanics and different styles. You have to adjust on different

parts of pitching and one important thing is you need to throw strikes as a pitcher and

you need to work on your accuracy every day.

Performance-related Physical Fitness. The development of these complex motor

skills

is supported by dedicated physical conditioning and preparation. Jimena describes a

comprehensive approach to building both strength and speed:

I do weights. I use the dumbbells. I use the bar. I also run to help my speed. And then

I'll just like do other things, like, oh, there was this one thing my dad had me doing

like new. It was like a little square thing, and I had to push it, so it's also helping my

speed so I get faster.

Despite the demanding practice and game schedule making it challenging to maintain this

additional training, she remains committed: "I haven't been going to the gym lately, because

I've been so busy in practice, and then games every week. So then I think I might actually go

tomorrow." This attention to physical preparation is particularly evident in how players

approach their specific positions. Rosa, building on her earlier comments about catching

skills, emphasizes the importance of proper preparation and endurance for her role: "I try to

drink a lot of water. I make sure that I stretch really good. I make sure I throw." Her

dedication to building stamina and gaining experience is clear as she notes, "I prefer

catching a whole game if we have multiple games, so it gives the others breaks. And it gives

me more reps. This desire to train and compete was the norm and not the exception on this

team. All of the participants described moving through an annual cycle of regular season,

All-Stars, select, travel ball, and fall ball, mixing and matching respectively. These athletes

demonstrate not only diverse physical activity competencies and sophisticated motor skills, but also a mature understanding of how dedicated conditioning and purposeful practice contribute to their athletic development.

Familism as an Asset

The Lunap familial involvement exemplified how familism—prioritizing family relationships and mutual support—was a powerful asset in these young athletes' softball development. This cultural emphasis on family connection manifested particularly strongly in transmitting athletic traditions across generations, as evidenced by the rich sporting backgrounds of many players' parents and their active engagement in their daughters' softball experiences.

Intergenerational Athletic Legacy. Six of the nine participants provided detailed descriptions of their fathers' athletic backgrounds, predominantly in baseball and other team sports, while four of the nine mothers were described as playing sports like soccer and lacrosse. Two girls recalled that their mothers could not play sports due to financial constraints during their youth. Natasha described extensive family athletics: "He [Dad] played football ever since, like, when he was younger... baseball... football... wrestling. My mom played lacrosse... at UCLA, softball, and soccer…she also did taekwondo." Jimena noted her father's diverse sports background: "My dad played a lot of sports... football... basketball... hockey," while her mother faced financial barriers: "She couldn't play sports because her parents didn't have enough money." Other athletic backgrounds include 's parents, who "Both... played soccer," Rosa's parents who both played soccer, and Victoria's mother, who "played soccer and lacrosse."

Seven of nine players credited their fathers for introducing them to softball. This included : "I think my dad did" and Carmen: "My dad because he used to play baseball." At the same time, Victoria uniquely added, " [I] introduced myself because like I was the only person that played softball in the whole family," and Luna, who was inspired by family: "I would see my cousins and like my sister, my older sister Yazzie." This highlights that intergenerational influence extends beyond parent-child relationships to include sibling influence. Jimena's observation of her younger sister exemplifies this pattern:

> My little sister, she's two and does not play anything. I feel like she will play lots of sports because she likes doing a lot of things like soccer. I could tell. She likes hitting because whenever I try to practice she tries to get Rosang with it, too.

This quote illustrates how older siblings are athletic role models, creating an additional layer of familial influence in sports participation. Family athletic traditions also manifested tangibly through jersey number selection. Natasha initially wore #5 for T-ball because it was her dad's number, but she later adopted her mother's #10, which she explains: "My mom's number is 10. And I just really liked the number 10. Like, I just loved it. So I just stuck with the number 10."

Similarly, Rosa chose "24! It's cause of my dad. When he played baseball, he was 24," while Luna notes, "I switched to nine because it is my dad's old football number." Carmen currently wears #55, continuing a family tradition as she explains, "My whole family was 55 (Dad and two brothers)." These number choices represent tangible connections to family athletic traditions.

Family Support Systems. Consequently**,** all nine participants benefited from having both parents deeply invested in their softball journeys, with fathers taking particularly active

roles in their technical and strategic development. The depth of father engagement

manifested in uniquely supportive ways for each player. shared an especially close softball

bond with her father through their shared dedication to improvement, enthusiastically

describing how "It makes me really happy that he cares about me. He always wants to

practice." Natasha's father's extensive involvement as a coach throughout her career has

helped develop her game, as she acknowledged, "he's a really good coach... he teaches like

good techniques, and he understands girls, and he knows stuff, like a lot of good stuff and

just about games in general, your mindset." Jimena appreciates how her father's attentive

coaching helps optimize her performance: "he helps me, like, stay focused...." Victoria's

father exemplified how paternal support can extend beyond individual development to

benefit the entire team, having installed a hitting cage at his workplace that her teammates

could use for practice. Looking toward the future, Rosa and her father shared an inspiring

vision of continuing their softball journey together: "That's something my dad wants to do...

he's always said once I retire, I would like to open a facility where, like, it could just be

hitting." Nina's father demonstrated how behind-the-scenes support could be just as

valuable, working as "a manager... he does all the lineups... all like the behind-the-scenes

work," giving her space and allowing her to focus on playing. Every participant had a father

who was actively engaged and contributed positively to their daughters' softball

development, demonstrating their Lunap investment in their daughters' success. While

fathers often took active roles in technical development, both parents emerged as crucial

emotional anchors in these young athletes' lives.

Players' responses about their "biggest fans" revealed the complementary nature of

parental support. pointed to a multi-generational male support system, sharing that "My

biggest fan is my dad. And my grandpa. My dad's dad," while Isabel gravitated toward

maternal emotional support: "I would probably say, either my mom, because you know,

she's always there for me." This maternal foundation of support was further exemplified

through Natasha's mother's consistent encouragement: "Whenever we come back to the

dugout after the inning, she'll always like be there, and she's like you're doing so good."

Mothers emerged as steadfast pillars of support across all nine players' softball journeys,

demonstrating dedication through both emotional encouragement and practical support.

Luna's mother exemplified extraordinary commitment, as Lunad escribed how "She

was always at every practice" because she prioritized attendance when her work went

remote. Her mother's dedication extended to detailed documentation: "She captures

moments with recording... She records the whole game. So me and my dad could go watch

it." This level of engagement deeply affected Luna, who recognized, "It feels good. Because

a lot of kids' parents are not like that." Natasha's mother balanced a full-time job with being

a team mom, though sometimes financial strains created challenges: "She has a full-time

job, So it's very hard for her." This consistent maternal presence created a sense of security

for players like Natasha, who noted, "I don't worry about that. Because I know at least one

or two people will be there to see me." For Victoria, her mother's absence was notably felt:

"Sometimes I get like, sad when, like, my mom can't make it," highlighting how integral

mothers' presence has become to these players' softball experiences. This maternal

involvement, whether through consistent game attendance, emotional support, or practical

assistance, formed a crucial complement to the fathers' technical engagement in these young

athletes' development.

Siblings were frequent fixtures at both games and practices. Many siblings befriended each other and developed close relationships. Natasha noted that her brother didn't always watch her games, even though he was present at most of them: "My brother? Not really, because he always plays with the other brothers. He's best friends with them. I bet you right now, if my brother wasn't at practice, he would be playing with one of them. They're always together". Natasha's brother had become great friends with Victoria's siblings, and while most of the time the entertainment was on the field, the siblings were curating their own. More than half of the players had younger siblings of various ages, and these siblings could be found either cheering, socializing with each other, and, more often than not, off in the distance, organizing games of their own. Voices and chatter of siblings playing nearby could be picked up in most interviews of the girls that were held on the softball field. Additionally, many parents had developed close relationships with each other and their respective kids. The close-knit nature of these relationships is exemplified by Luna's description of Joe, her teammate Natasha's father, who serves as one of her coaches:

> Joe is like another dad to me. We've known him for years and years my parents went
> to school since elementary with them. Yeah, he's just like, he expects a higher
> standard like he would for Natashay…I'm always eating with them. I'm always with
> Natasha. And so he treats me like his second daughter. It feels nice to have another
> dad to come to, but he also yells at me for doing dumb stuff.

Every single player also described the consistent and normalized presence of extended family at games, such as: "My mom and dad, my tías, my ninos. My grandma, my grandpa, different family members that come down from like Bakersfield or live in South Carolina." (Luna). Victoria also elaborated on the extensive nature of her family attendance:

So mainly my whole family comes. My siblings, my parents, and it's usually my grandma who comes. But sometimes she doesn't make it because she has to help my tía take care of my cousin. But last week, during Districts, I had family visiting from the Bay Area. It was like, my cousin my- it was just a bunch of people.

Cousins, friends, and old teammates were a regular sight in attendance; however, for those who could not make the trek, modern technology, such as game changer the app, allowed extended family involvement beyond physical presence. Rosa notes how absent family members stayed connected: "If they can't make it, they watch me through game changer." Several parents on the team streamed the game, while dozens of family members watched the girls play formidable opponents across the state of California.

Notably, tournament participation also created significant financial pressure for families, with travel and food costs presenting substantial burdens. Participants noted that their parents made sacrifices in the midst of layoffs, multiple siblings' athletic commitments, and rising gear costs but never failed to show up. Luna illustrated this by saying this about her mom: "[she] doesn't have to be going to like Lancaster and going to Sacramento, Bakersfield... but she does." For these families, softball became more than a weekend activity—it evolved into a way of life they wholeheartedly embraced, undeterred by the financial demands it placed on their households. Nina's words captured how the sport's demands, rather than straining family bonds, ultimately strengthened them: "Softball has brought my family closer together because of how much quality time we spend together when I play and all of the support that they give me." This demonstrates how softball transcends individual athletic pursuits to become a family-centered activity that strengthens bonds and creates shared experiences across generations.

The Art of Curdling as an Asset

The study revealed multiple expressions of intersectional identity across different roles and spaces.

Community Ethnic Socialization Through Sport. The softball community demonstrated various forms of cultural transmission and celebration across generations and roles. One striking example was the representation of Latina umpires who actively challenged traditional notions of sports authority while amplifying their cultural and feminine features. These officials wore professional umpire gear while incorporating distinctly feminine elements such as hoop earrings, long hair, and gold chains. Their aesthetic choices, from Vans shoes to backward Dallas hats, created a hybrid presentation that modeled how to maintain cultural identity within athletic spaces for younger players. Another example was the State tournament parade. The intergenerational transmission of cultural pride was evident, given the parents' influence on the team's State tournament parade presentation. As Luna noted, "the parents wanted the Folklorico" theme, illustrating how their parents sought to instill cultural traditions through the State tournament stage. One player elaborated on the anticipation of this event:

> So, every team lines up on a big field. And there's like a 'Welcome to States', and you get a little plushie, and it's like a big ol' ceremony, and then you walk through and everybody gets to see your costumes. And it's like, so exciting.

Each girl wore a colorful Mexican dress that marked their individual and collective team identity.

Nina reflected:

To me, the whole entire All-Star run made me feel proud of my heritage. Seeing a

group of Mexican girls come together and show off our skills with everybody

watching made me feel confident. Also, being the only team with nice tans who

didn't turn red under the sun made us stand out (laughter).

These quotes demonstrate what Lugones describes as "the art of curdling," ways of

embracing complexity and cultural mixing as a form of resistance to the dominant culture's

attempts at fragmentation. The players actively incorporate their cultural identity into their

athletic performance, refusing to separate or fragment these aspects of themselves.

Individual Expression. Athletes also demonstrated a myriad of ways they

incorporated their cultural identity into their own individual athletic expressions. Through

the selection of individual walk-up songs, Isabel explicitly chose to represent her Mexican

roots by playing a song in Spanish: "My walk-up song is Pepas…I kind of chose that song

because I wanted a little something different from just like English music and to show my

nationality, you know, where I'm from, so it'd be a little different". Similarly, Victoria paid

homage to her family with her song choice, a cultural hallmark played by a Mexican folk

band:

My walk-up song is La Chona (laughs). And I remember my dad first played it when

I was around eight years old. It was like during COVID. So we were just outside

listening to Spanish songs, and then that song came up, and my dad taught me how

to dance. And I love that song.

These expressions of cultural identity extended beyond individual musical choices to more

permanent and visual displays. Much like their colorful walk-up songs, players found

creative ways to mark their complex identities through the use of vivid symbols. For

example, the use of flags on helmets served as cultural identity markers that many girls happily displayed on their custom softball gear. The following back-and-forth between two teammates captures the complex identity navigation that underscores these visual representations:

Teammate 1 (JD): Well, I mean, I have a Mexican flag on the back of my helmet. My mom bought the stickers. I also have a Puerto Rican flag on it.

Facilitator: Are you Mexican and Puerto Rican?

Teammate 1 (JD): Yeah, and the USA one, just because, why not?

Teammate 2 (EF): Cause we're in the middle.

Facilitator: In the middle, what do you mean by that?

Teammate 2 (EF): Well, like, half Puerto Rican, half white, and then half Mexican

Teammate 1 (JD): Right?! That's crazy. I just know that, like, if you were born in the United States, you're technically Caucasian. You're Caucasian! (startled voice)

Facilitator: Tell me how you learned that.

Teammate 1 (JD): I was on a website where I could search for my grades. I went on demographics, and I looked at your race or whatever. And it was, like, Mexican and Caucasian. I was like, What the heck? So I searched it up, and it was like, if you're born here, you're considered Caucasian.

This exchange exemplifies what Lugones describes as existing "in the middle of either/or" (p. 459). These teammates actively resist institutional attempts to categorize them into neat and racial/ethnic boxes "cause we're in the middle." Their conversation moves from embracing multiple identities through their choice of flags to questioning official categorizations. The topic of race was salient. Luna's experience as the only Afro-Latina

athlete on the team revealed unique insights about representation and mentorship. She had the following to say about a fellow Afro-Latina softball player:

> So she's one of my mom's really close friend's daughters, and she's been following me since she started playing softball a couple of years ago. She's now in 6U. And she wants to, specifically her, to be like me. You don't really see a lot of girls with a darker skin tone out here… I feel like there's a lot more representation of, like, Latinas or Black females playing either soccer or basketball. I see a lot of them out there, and I don't see them into softball. I play for the girls that look like us.

Luna's experience exemplifies what Lugones calls "within-structure-inarticulate powers" (p. 469). By maintaining visibility in a space where she sees few athletes who look like her, she creates new possibilities simply through her presence.

Navigation of Cultural Labels. Athletes also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how their community is perceived and labeled. For example, Luna shared the following insights into how she picked her walk-up song:

> So they [other teams] are scared of you, I picked a song that sounds gangster. It pumps me up. And so, like, a song that pumps you up, but also, since we're considered like a ghetto team because we come from this area where people will think we're ghetto because of, like, where we live and all that. They just get scared about the songs even though the songs don't mean anything.

This shows how Luna embraces what the dominant culture sees as "impure" (their neighborhood identity, their music choices) and turns it into a source of power. This theme was further explored in a discussion about the term "ghetto":

Teammate 1: I live in the ghetto. It's bad.

Facilitator: How do you know you live in the ghetto?

Teammate 2: Because you hear gunshots

Teammate 3: Ok, It's not that serious!

(everyone laughs)

Teammate 2: The definition of ghetto is a lot of people.

Teammate 3: Yeah

Teammate 1: The reason why- Okay, so my mom explained it to me. So it's like, this whole thing. Okay, so the ghetto is if there's a lot of people. Like, where I live, it's usually like ghetto with Mexicans. So, a lot of Mexican families have, like, other random people come live in their house. And they do that because they don't have a lot of money, so they'll rent out their house, but they'll look together like the person across the street. They rent out their house sometimes. And, um, when there are a lot of people, it starts getting old and trashy, and it just looks worn down.

This dialogue reveals what Lugones would call a "curdled" understanding of their community. Starting with stereotypical associations (gunshots), they quickly transition through humor and collective understanding to reach a more nuanced explanation grounded in their lived experience.

The extensive findings presented above illuminate an array of experiences that unfold on and around the softball diamond. Through careful examination of seemingly mundane daily interactions we see how softball serves as a vital space where young Latina athletes develop, express, and integrate multiple aspects of their identities. These day-to-day moments, though ordinary on the surface, carry profound meaning as sites where psychological assets are strengthened, social bonds are forged, physical competencies are

developed, and cultural identities are celebrated and negotiated. The following discussion examines these findings through the lens of Wiese-Bjornstal and LaVoi's (2007) Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development, while also drawing on Chicana feminist theoretical perspectives to understand how softball serves as a unique space for developing both traditional sports-based assets and cultural strengths.

Discussion

The extensive findings of this study provide valuable insights into how participation in softball contributes to a range of positive developmental outcomes for Latina youth. Through the lens of Wiese-Bjornstal and LaVoi's (2007) Assets Framework for Positive Youth Development, alongside Chicana feminist theoretical perspectives, the results illuminate how softball serves as a unique space for developing psychological, social, and physical assets while simultaneously fostering cultural identity and familial bonds.

Development of Traditional Sports Assets

The study confirms previous research findings regarding the positive developmental outcomes associated with sports participation. Participants demonstrated significant growth across all three asset categories identified in the Tucker Center Report (2018): psychological, social, and physical. Particularly notable was the development of psychological assets such as stress management and positive self-perception, which are especially crucial given the higher rates of mental health challenges faced by Latina youth (Ayón, Ojeda, & Ruano, 2018). The participants' narratives about using softball as an emotional outlet and stress reliever align with previous findings about the protective role of sports participation in mental health.

Social assets emerged as a critical component of the participants' experiences, particularly emphasizing peer relationships and mentorship. Forming long-term friendships through softball provided important social support during adolescence, confirming previous research about the value of sport-based peer relationships (Dixon et al., 2008). The findings regarding the importance of established friendships for team cohesion and performance extend our understanding of how social bonds influence athletic development.

The development of physical assets among participants was also particularly noteworthy, characterized by sophisticated motor skill development and sustained physical activity engagement. The year-round participation pattern observed, cycling through the regular season, All-Stars, select, travel ball, and fall ball, demonstrates a level of physical activity commitment that far exceeds the typically low participation rates reported for Latina youth in previous research (Tucker Center Report, 2018). Participants' mastery of complex position-specific skills, such as catching techniques and strategic fielding, Rosang with their development of broader athletic competencies, challenges the traditional "have-not" narrative often associated with Latina athletes in sports literature (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; LaVoi, 2018). Moreover, the participants' commitment to supplementary physical conditioning and their understanding of its importance for performance improvement suggests the development of sustainable physical activity habits that could have long-term health benefits.

Cultural Assets and Familism

Softball serves as a powerful nexus for family connection, operating across multiple interconnected dimensions. It strengthens immediate family bonds through daily practices and games while drawing in extended family through tournament attendance and

celebrations. The sport transcends physical presence through technology, allowing distant relatives to participate via livestreams and game-tracking apps, thus maintaining family connections across geographic boundaries. Perhaps most significantly, softball creates intergenerational bridges, linking past athletic legacies to present achievements while nurturing future aspirations, as seen in parents' dreams of opening training facilities with their daughters or continuing their involvement in the sport together.

Perhaps most significantly, this study reveals how softball participation can foster what might be termed "cultural assets" or developmental benefits for Latina adolescents specifically related to cultural identity and familial relationships. The strong presence of familism in participants' softball experiences challenges previous assumptions about traditional Latino cultural values, serving as barriers to sports participation (McGovern, 2021). Instead, familism emerged as a powerful asset that enhanced players' sporting experiences and success.

The intergenerational transmission of athletic legacy, particularly through father-daughter relationships, represents a progressive shift in traditional Latino family dynamics. This finding builds on Darvin et al.'s (2017) research highlighting the importance of supportive fathers in Latina athletes' development. However, this study extends that understanding by revealing how mothers' emotional support and practical assistance create a comprehensive family support system that enhances athletic development while strengthening cultural bonds.

Identity Navigation and Resistance: The Art of Curdling

The findings reveal how these young athletes engage in what Lugones (1994) terms "the art of curdling," not merely as a survival strategy but as an intentional practice of

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"festive resistance" (p. 478). The walkup song choices demonstrate what Lugones calls "the art of curdling" through cultural mixing and code-switching as forms of resistance. When Isabel deliberately chose Spanish language music "to show my nationality," and Victoria selected traditional Mexican folk songs connecting to family memories, they engaged in what Lugones describes as active resistance to cultural fragmentation.

Luna's experience as an Afro-Latina softball player exemplifies Lugones' concept of mestizaje consciousness and illustrates how individual athletes can embody resistance to racial/ethnic categorization while creating new possibilities for future generations. By maintaining visibility in a sport where she sees few athletes who look like her, Luna embodies what Lugones calls "against-the-grain creativity" and "the power of the impure" to transform spaces (p. 469). Her role as inspiration for a younger Afro-Latina player realizes what Lugones terms "within-structure-inarticulate powers" or creating new possibilities simply through presence and representation (p. 469). Rather than allowing herself to be limited by racial/ethnic expectations about which sports certain athletes typically play, Luna's presence in softball represents active resistance to what Lugones calls the "control through unity" (p. 464) that tries to place athletes in neat categories. Through her presence and mentorship, she demonstrates how "mestizaje defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts" (p. 460).

The team's conversations about identity markers reveal a sophisticated engagement with mestizaje consciousness. The discussion about helmet flags demonstrates what Lugones calls "categorial blurring and confusion" (p. 478). The exchange begins with a seemingly simple discussion about flag stickers but unfolds into a sophisticated negotiation

of multiple identities and institutional categorization. Similarly, their complex navigation of the term "ghetto" exemplifies what Lugones describes as the power of those who are "in the middle of either/or" (p. 459). Starting with stereotypical associations (gunshots), they quickly move through humor and collective understanding to reach a more nuanced explanation grounded in their lived experience of Mexican-American community life. When one player interjects, "Ok, It's not that serious!" followed by group laughter, we see what Lugones calls "practicing trickstery and foolery" (p. 478) or using humor to challenge stereotypes while maintaining community bonds.

This sophisticated identity navigation culminates powerfully in one player's reflection on the All-Star experience: "To me, the whole entire All-Star run made me feel proud of my heritage. Seeing a group of Mexican girls come together and show off our skills with everybody watching made me feel confident. Also, being the only team with nice tans who didn't turn red under the sun made us stand out." This statement celebrates their multiplicity - being both skilled athletes and Mexican, using humor to embrace what makes them different while asserting their belonging in the space. Rather than trying to fit into traditional athletic molds, they're creating something new that can't be reduced to single categories - exactly the kind of productive "impurity" that Lugones celebrates.

Implications for Research

This study yields several important implications for conducting research with Latina athletes and examining their intersecting identities. First and foremost, researchers must move beyond deficit frameworks that position Latino cultural values like familism as barriers to participation. Instead, studies should examine how cultural values can function as

assets that enhance athletic experiences and development. This requires methodological approaches that allow cultural strengths to emerge rather than assuming cultural constraints.

A crucial consideration is the recognition that sports contexts actively contribute to ethnic and cultural identity development, rather than treating athletic and cultural identities as separate domains. This suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can capture the dynamic interplay between athletic participation and cultural identity formation. Such frameworks must be capable of capturing the complexity of "curdling" - the sophisticated ways athletes navigate and integrate multiple identities rather than fragmenting them. This might include narrative approaches that allow participants to articulate their own understanding of how various identities coexist and strengthen each other.

Researcher positionality emerges as a critical methodological consideration in studies of Latina athletes. This study demonstrates the value of researchers who can function as cultural bridges, understanding both the athletic and cultural dimensions of participants' experiences. This positioning helps researchers recognize and interpret the nuanced ways cultural expression manifests within sporting contexts. Additionally, investigation of family involvement in Latina athletes' development requires expanded conceptual frameworks that can capture multiple forms of support and connection - from direct participation to remote engagement, from immediate to extended family influence, and from practical to aspirational support.

Theoretical frameworks from Chicana feminist scholarship prove particularly valuable for research with Latina athletes, as they can adequately capture the complexity of identity navigation in traditionally white-dominated sporting spaces. These frameworks recognize resistance and cultural pride as positive developmental processes rather than

obstacles to assimilation. This theoretical grounding allows researchers to examine how athletes actively construct and negotiate their identities rather than passively receiving them.

These implications collectively suggest the need for more nuanced and culturally-informed approaches to studying Latina athletes' experiences. Rather than applying traditional frameworks that may miss or misinterpret important cultural dimensions, researchers should develop and employ methodologies that can capture the sophisticated ways Latina athletes integrate their athletic, cultural, and gender identities. This means moving beyond simple explanations of barriers and access to examine how sports participation can contribute to positive identity development and cultural pride. Future research in this area would benefit from mixed-method approaches that can capture both the breadth and depth of Latina athletes' experiences while remaining grounded in theoretical frameworks that honor the complexity of their identity navigation.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. The focus on successful athletes in a single recreational league limits generalizability. Future research should examine the experiences of Latina athletes across different competitive levels and geographic regions. Additionally, longitudinal studies could help understand how these various assets contribute to long-term development and success both in and beyond sports.

This study demonstrates that softball participation can provide Latina youth with traditional sports-based developmental assets while simultaneously strengthening cultural identity and family bonds. The findings suggest that when cultural expression is welcomed rather than suppressed, sports participation can serve as a powerful vehicle for positive

youth development that builds upon, rather than competes with, cultural values and family relationships. Importantly, as researchers who can identify adolescents' early growing mestizaje consciousness, we can begin to cultivate spaces and encourage further inquiry into their complex lives while supporting their comfort with these complexities. This recognition and nurturing of young Latinas' multifaceted identities during a critical developmental period can help instill confidence in a historically vulnerable population. By creating environments that celebrate rather than fragment their diverse identities, we can support these young athletes in developing both athletic excellence and cultural pride.

The findings suggest that recognizing and supporting the development of mestizaje consciousness in youth sports contexts can serve as a protective factor, helping young Latina athletes navigate the challenges of adolescence while building strong, integrated identities. Future research should continue to examine how sports participation can enhance positive development for Latina youth, with particular attention to creating spaces that affirm and celebrate their complex cultural identities.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Concluding Thoughts

Illuminating the Stars: Implications and Future Directions

The significance of this work extends beyond its academic contributions, it represents what Anzaldúa might recognize as an act of spiritual activism, where research becomes a tool for both documentation and transformation. For too long, Latina experiences have been either completely erased from academic spaces or fragmented into manageable pieces that fit neatly into existing frameworks, rendering us nearly unrecognizable. This dissertation challenges that tradition by demonstrating how different ways of knowing can be "curdled" together to create a richer understanding of identity formation.

Like the moment when Diana Flores' father proclaimed '*Eres la estrella*,' this research illuminates the stars that have always been present but often overlooked. In Ocean Oaks, where railroad tracks once drew stark lines of segregation, young Latinas now navigate dual immersion classrooms with sophisticated cultural dexterity. Where Mexican women's contributions were historically erased, mothers like Zulma actively shape their ethnic identity through life transitions, passing on both tradition and transformation to the next generation. On softball fields that were once sites of exclusion, Latina athletes and their families create vibrant spaces of cultural celebration.

These findings have important implications for both theory and practice. For developmental psychology, they suggest that understanding ethnic-racial identity formation requires frameworks flexible enough to capture the spiritual and embodied aspects of identity. For Chicana feminist thought, they demonstrate how theoretical concepts like mestiza consciousness and borderlands manifest in everyday spaces of learning, family life,

and athletic competition. For educators, coaches, and community leaders, they provide insights into how to create environments that support rather than suppress the complex identity work Latinas undertake.

Most importantly, this research speaks to the next generation of Latinas who, like me, are searching for frameworks to understand their experiences. It suggests that the power of their identity lies not in choosing between worlds but in their capacity to create new ones. As Anzaldúa writes, "In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts" (1987, p. 102).

This dissertation is ultimately a testament to the power of what Lugones calls "festive resistance," the joy and creativity that emerge when we refuse to fragment our identities. Through these stories of young students, mothers, and athletes, we see how Latinas in Ocean Oaks transform spaces of historical erasure into sites of cultural pride and identity affirmation. Their experiences remind us that visibility isn't just about being seen, it's about claiming the power to define ourselves on our own terms.

When Diana Flores sprinted across screens during Super Bowl LVII, she did more than showcase her athletic prowess. She demonstrated what becomes possible when Latinas refuse to fragment their identities. In that kitchen scene with her mother, speaking Spanish while wearing her professional uniform, she embodied what this research documents: the sophisticated ways Latinas transform spaces through their capacity to exist fully in multiple worlds simultaneously. Like Lucinda "*La Morena*" Hinojos' vibrant artwork that adorned the Super Bowl, featuring the Vince Lombardi Trophy against a backdrop of turquoise fields and the watchful gaze of Huitzilopochtli's hummingbird, Latinas are increasingly making visible what has always been true: our power lies in integration, not separation.

As we look toward the future, this research suggests new directions for understanding identity development that honor the complexity of Latina experiences. In Ocean Oaks and beyond, young Latinas continue to create what Anzaldúa calls "new mythologies," or ways of being that transcend historical boundaries and limitations. Their stories remind us that ethnic identity formation isn't just a developmental process to be studied, but a living, breathing testament to the resilience and creativity of those who learn to thrive in the borderlands. Through these experiences, we glimpse what Anzaldúa envisioned: a future where the ability to navigate multiple worlds isn't a burden to bear, but a power to celebrate.

Finding Our Way Home: A Historical Guide

When asked about my ethnic identity, my response often depends on the moment, the space, the audience. Sometimes I am Mexican-American, other times Latina, and in moments of political consciousness, Chicana. This fluidity that many of us experience isn't indecision or confusion - it's *mestizaje* in action. Like Diana in that Super Bowl commercial, we move fluidly between identities not because we're lost, but because we contain multitudes.

For the next generation of Latinas, understanding this historical legacy offers both context and possibility. Today's Latinas inherit this rich legacy of resistance and transformation. When we navigate multiple worlds, speaking Spanish at home and English at work, celebrating quinceañeras and graduations, praying to La Virgen while pursuing advanced degrees, we are embodying what Anzaldúa calls "theories of the flesh." Our daily acts of cultural synthesis, whether conscious or intuitive, demonstrate mestiza consciousness in action.

The power lies not in choosing the "right" label but in understanding the legacy each one carries. When we say "Mexican-American," we echo the complex history of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which redrew borders but couldn't redraw identities (Castillo, 1990). When we claim "Chicana," we invoke the spirit of resistance that emerged in the 1960s, when students walked out of East L.A. schools demanding dignity (Bernal, 1998), when women challenged both external oppression and internal *machismo*. When we say "Latina," we recognize our connection to a broader community of resistance and resilience.

Our history runs deep. It flows from *Coatlicue*, the Aztec goddess who embraced duality before patriarchy demanded separation (León-Portilla, 1992). It echoes in the voices of *pachucas* who refused to be invisible, in the poetry of raúlsalinas who noticed their absence, in the writings of Anzaldúa who gave us new ways to understand our complexity.

Whether you recognize yourself in Diana's athletic grace, in Hinojos' vibrant art, or in the quiet resistance of mothers and grandmothers who kept our culture alive, know this: your identity isn't something to be solved - it's something to be lived. The "*facultad*" Anzaldúa speaks of, that intuitive knowledge born from navigating margins, already lives within you (Keating, 2000). Your ability to exist in multiple worlds isn't a weakness to overcome but a strength to embrace.

Para todas las guerreras y estrellas [For all the warriors and all-stars] still finding their way home - may you harness the silent wisdom and timeless courage deep within you.

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