

A Narrative Inquiry into the Life Stories of Latinx Students in the Spanish Heritage Language
Classroom from a Decolonial Trauma Lens

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Abstract

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Although experts in the Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) field acknowledge the discrimination faced by Latinx students in the United States, their complex environments have not been conceptualized as potential sources of trauma in this discipline. Using narrative inquiry as the methodological approach, this study attempted to explore the life stories of four Latinx students in the SHL classroom from a decolonial perspective on trauma (Comas-Diaz, 2021; Zembylas, 2022). The study also sought to identify the ways in which these students coped with the adversities they have encountered. In line with research conducted in the psychology field, the study revealed the participants had, at some point in their lives, doubts about their Mexican authenticity, questioned their belongingness and experienced second-class treatment. The study also indicated that the participants relied on active forms to navigate the adversities they have endured. Yet, despite their resilience and strength, the findings still underscore the presence of shame, guilt, and a sense of inadequacy in the participants' stories, leading to serious emotional harm. In order to recognize the significance of attending to these emotional wounds, the study concludes then with pedagogical implications for the SHL curriculum and instruction.

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Dedication

To the Latinx youth in the United States, especially those who have, at some point, carried the weight of guilt or shame for their identity and distanced themselves from their true essence. Your experiences are valid and significant, your feelings are not irrational and your voice matters.

Acknowledgements

I once heard the phrase “behind every achievement, there is a God who made it possible”. Having now reached the culmination of my work, I would also add: “Behind every achievement, there is a whole team of special human beings who made it possible”. I am fully aware that this endeavor could have not been done without the inspiration, guidance and support I received throughout this nine-month journey.

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Chapter One

Introduction, Positionality & Purpose

The origin of this thesis work is intimately tied to some personal reflections that were awakened a few years ago during my first experience living in the southeast region of the United States. By then I was working as a Spanish instructor in a small town called Monticello in the south of Arkansas. As a Latin American, my closest bonds were mostly with other Latin people with whom I felt a strong connection. As soon as I started speaking Spanish with them, I could feel our conversations adopted a different tone, warmer, funnier, a feeling that is difficult to explain and one that I can hardly experience when interacting in English. As those friendships became closer and closer, I got to know more about my friends and their families' life stories. In all of them there were heroes and heroines who had overcome tons of obstacles since their arrival to the "land of opportunity", but deep inside those heroic figures, there were also ordinary human beings with aches and pains in their hearts. My first insight from all of those stories was that being a Latinx immigrant in the U.S proves to be much harder than I could have ever imagined.

I had always been aware that leaving one's place, people, traditions and customs must be emotionally overwhelming. Yet, it was during those conversations with my friends when I came to realize the terrible ordeal that many immigrants had to go through to enter the United States. Even if their lives are in danger when crossing the border, many of them still decide to migrate with the hope that they will provide their families with a better future on this side of the border. However, oftentimes their expectations are not fully fulfilled since the world that they had imagined is not as ideal as it seemed to be. Yet, any situation they have to face becomes far more complex in a country in which their home language is marginalized and rejected by the people who are supposed to be part of their new community. I found that this is the sad reality that many

Latinx immigrants living in the United States have to face throughout their entire lives. They are exposed to verbal and physical violence by people who believe that speaking Spanish in public places is a lack of respect, they are tagged with derogatory stereotypes about their personalities, and many of them —especially second-generation Americans— are criticized by members of their own families for speaking the language “incorrectly”. While listening to those stories, I remember thinking about how hard it must be to be surrounded by cruel judgements coming from everywhere about who you are and how you should speak or behave.

Once my teaching experience at the University of Arkansas was over I moved to Seattle to begin a Master’s program and to work as a Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) instructor at the University of Washington. This time my connection with the Latinx community was mainly through my students, whose stories once again touched my heart. In most of them, there was at least one moment in which they felt discriminated against by a member of their family or community, bullied at school for “not knowing” either Spanish or English, or ridiculed by a teacher who believed that their language variety was not considered proper Spanish. I could not help feeling a sense of helplessness every time I saw my students blushing with embarrassment for not remembering a particular word in the target language or for not pronouncing a particular sound “correctly”. I could perceive their sense of shame as if there was a constant voice inside their heads telling them “I should know better”. Touched by the immigration stories I referred to earlier and by the situations I experienced myself as an instructor, I felt curious to delve deeper into Latinx students’ life stories and explore how their family, educational and social-political environments have shaped their relationships with their heritage language and culture. During all these years, I have been asking myself: Is there any hidden trauma in those personal histories? And if there is, are we, instructors, expecting our students to leave their trauma at the door?

My curiosity was further fueled when I noticed the lack of research conducted on the socio-emotional dimension within the field of SHL education. This psychological dimension has been given scant attention compared to the other aspects of language teaching. Although it is true that scholars in the field (Beaudrie and Ducar, 2005; Tallon, 2009; Potowoski, 2012) recognize the linguistic insecurities, language shyness, anxiety, and intimidation that students experience in these courses, I question whether these terms alone adequately capture the depth of what Latinx students truly undergo. Beneath those insecurities and anxieties, isn't there a profound pain that persists in silence? And if so, where does this pain come from?

When I started exploring the research conducted on this affection dimension in the SHL field, I observed that while students' environments are acknowledged as stressors contributing to their low self-esteem regarding their language skills and negative perceptions of their own dialects, this complex context has not been conceptualized as a potential source of trauma. In fact, most of the studies seem to focus their attention on what is wrong with these students instead of delving deeper into why they feel in certain ways in the heritage classroom. I then thought that moving the attention to the causes that led these students to experience those negative feelings may give me, as an educator, a better understanding of what wounds students bring with them and what they emotionally need in order to truly thrive, not only in these courses but also in their lives.

In the light of those personal motivations and professional inquiries, the goal of this study is to explore how trauma is present in the life stories of Latinx students in the Spanish heritage Language classroom at the University of Washington. This study also attempts to identify how they dealt with the adversities they have encountered throughout their lives. It is important to acknowledge, at this point, that this work does not attempt to label these students as traumatized

individuals but rather to recognize that certain experiences could have negatively shaped their relationships with their heritage language and culture. In line with this, the central premise of this work is that understanding how these students might have been impacted by the environments they have been raised in is an essential step we need to take if we want to empower our Latinx youth generation, and help them feel truly connected to its roots and immensely proud of them.

Limitations

It is important to address some of the limitations that this study has. First, the sample is limited to four Latinas of Mexican origin with no representation from other Latin American countries. Thus, it is not possible to generalize these findings to all Latinx students at the University of Washington. Second, during the time when the study was conducted, the participants were students, which creates an imbalance in power between myself as the researcher and the students as the participants. This power asymmetry may have influenced the participants' sense of agency when it came to reviewing their narratives. While they were encouraged to make any desired changes to their stories, the presence of this power dynamic could have potentially intimidated them, affecting their perceived freedom to modify their narratives. Finally, the third limitation this study presents is the lack of time devoted to the data analysis and interpretation. Due to time constraints, this process took shorter than what the ideal scenario would be, which implies that more insights could have been gained if there had been more time devoted to this process.

Organization

This study is organized into six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study including my positionality as the researcher and motivations to conduct the study, the

purpose of it and its limitations. The second chapter summarizes the existing body of literature on the topic and the theoretical framework through which data was analyzed and interpreted. The third chapter describes the methodology chosen for the study including how the data collection, analysis and interpretation processes were carried out. The fourth chapter offers the four narrative accounts that were co-created with the participants. The fifth chapter reports the findings of the study and explains its significance in relation to the existing body of literature. The sixth chapter presents the conclusions and implications in the light of the insights that were gained. A final section of thoughts and reflections is included in this chapter to express the personal and professional transformation that I have undergone after this academic journey.

Chapter Two

This chapter explores the existing literature on racial discrimination and prejudice against the Latinx community in the United States and the modern forms in which racism is manifested. Subsequently, the chapter elaborates on the adopted theoretical framework on which this study is grounded, and presents the research questions that this study seeks to answer.

Literature Review

A history of immigration: Overcoming discrimination

The United States has a long history of immigration. For decades, the country has been the promising land where immigrants aspire to find more opportunities, more stability, and a better life (Armenta et.al, 2021). However, for most immigrants of colour, their lives in the U.S are not necessarily as bright as they probably imagined before their arrival. For example, Latinxs, such as Mexican-origin immigrants who constitute the largest Latinx group in the U.S (Beaudrie & Fairclough, 2012), continue to experience pervasive discrimination in their daily lives (Rivera et al., 2010). For years, Mexicans have been associated with a low-socioeconomic status and poor levels of education (Valdés, 1996), and they have been tagged with negative stereotypes about their personality such as laziness, alcoholism, illegality and delinquency (Potowski, 2012). These harmful and unfair generalizations have fostered a prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S, particularly toward the Mexican-origin population (Sissoko & Nadal, 2021). The term hispanophobia, for example, emerged to describe the concern felt by certain Americans that Latinxs could pose a threat to the American societal framework (Zentella, 1997).

Yet, although the racial discrimination and prejudice is suffered by the whole Mexican immigrant community, there is an important distinction to make between Mexican-origin persons and Mexican-Americans or Chicanxs (Valdés, 1996). Valdes (1996) identifies the latter as immigrant minorities and the former as caste minorities on the basis of their sense of identification with the home country. While the first group usually feels an attachment to Mexico, its culture and values, the second group —Mexican-Americans— does not necessarily have such a strong identification and they usually feel different from both Americans and from Mexicans (Valdés, 1996). This, however, does not mean that they are not subject to discrimination; in fact, they are still associated with “members of a low-status and stigmatized group” in American society (Valdés, 1996, p. 26). This group is also likely to face criticism from their own ethnic community either because “they are not Mexican enough” (Sissoko & Nadal, 2021) or because they are “traitors” for betraying their heritage by adopting values of the U.S mainstream culture (Pratt, 1993).

In order to better understand the discrimination suffered by racial immigrant minorities in the U.S, the subsequent section will provide a summary of recent research which explains not only the type of aggressions but also the impact that they have on individuals’ mental and emotional health.

Contemporary Racism: How is it Manifested?

Although racial discrimination against marginalized groups is recognized as a significant issue in the United States, there is scant research on the experiences that these individuals usually face (Sissoko & Nadal, 2010), and how they impact their well-being (Rivera et al., 2010). Scholars agree that more research is needed in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how racism operates and the effects it can have on individuals (Rivera et al.,

2010). Some years ago, a team of researchers (Sue et. al, 2007) specializing in multicultural psychology published an article in which they argued that racism was undergoing a shift from an old-fashioned form, in which it is consciously and intentionally exhibited, towards a more subtle and overt form that is more difficult to identify. Prior to their research, there had not been any literature on how this implicit face of racism operates in everyday life. Based on their studies and the clinical experiences the team accumulated, Sue and his colleagues (2007) proposed a taxonomy of ten racial microaggressions, which they defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). It is important to note that microaggressions can happen at both an interpersonal and systemic level, and the term 'micro' refers to the subtle ways in which these attacks occur rather than their impact on individuals (Sissoko & Nadal, 2021). These imperceptible forms of aggression can be particularly powerful, as their invisibility can make them challenging to identify and easy to perpetuate (Sue et al., 2007).

The studies carried out by Sue and his team have focused on microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans and Black Americans, and demonstrated some resemblances and disparities between the two groups. Due to the lack of studies focusing on Latinxs, Rivera and his colleagues (2010) replicated the study to comprehend more fully the type of microaggressions experienced by Latinx Americans. Their findings reveal that Latinxs, as Asian and Black Americans, commonly experience microinsults such as "ascription of intelligence", "second-class citizen", "pathologizing cultural and communication styles and assumption of criminal status", and microinvalidations that made them feel as "aliens in their own land" (Rivera et al., 2010). However, contrary to the other racial groups, Latinxs reported instances in

which they were explicitly attacked through a hurtful comment or discriminatory action, which shows that immigration seems to be a problem that makes Latinxs perfect targets of discrimination (Rivera et al., 2010).

Both studies mentioned before (Sue et al., 2007; Rivera et al., 2010) focused more on identifying the stressors and to classify them based on the type of attack itself rather on exploring the impact that it has on the lives of these groups. In their work, Nadal and Sissoko (2021) expanded the original taxonomy of racial microaggressions, and proposed eight themes including information of the generational status of the target, the potential perpetrators, examples of the microaggression and its underlying message. Along with their classification and explanation of each theme, the authors (2021) presented three fictional cases that illustrate not only many of those themes but also portray how those microaggressions impact on individuals. The case descriptions reflect an array of different feelings such as isolation, misunderstanding, hopelessness, misery, shame and guilt. The scholars (2021) concluded that overall speaking microaggressions can bring about a negative effect on the mental health of racial minority immigrants, resulting in depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. They can also impact on their identity, career and personality development, and even on their physical health (Sissoko & Nadal, 2021).

Furthermore, their work provided an important insight about the Latinx community showing that microaggressions do not necessarily occur by outgroups but rather usually happen within members of the immediate family or culture. Going back to Valdés's (1996) distinction explained earlier, the group who are subjected to face discrimination from their own community are those who identify themselves as Mexican-Americans or Chicanxs. This group is likely to suffer insults and derogatory terms such as whitewashed (Pyke & Dang, 2003) or beaner (Rivera

et al., 2010) which suggest that they are erasing their Mexican heritage in order to conform to the U.S mainstream values.

Cultural Resilience: A Form of Coping with Traumatic Oppression

Despite the myriad of challenges and daily obstacles that racial minority immigrants face, research has shown that they incarnate *cultural resilience* (1992), which is defined as “a set of strengths, values, and practices that promote functional strategies for coping with traumatic oppression” (Elsass in Comas-Díaz, 2021, p. 131). This strength becomes a crucial resource for Latinxs to handle stressful experiences and systemic problems such as the ones mentioned above (Bryant-Davis, 2019).

Along similar lines, Yosso (2006), whose work is grounded on Critical Race Theory, proposed the concept of *Cultural Wealth* to refer to “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). According to the author (2006), there are six forms of cultural wealth: aspirational, navigational, linguistic, familial, social, and resistance. The studies conducted on Latina youth showed clear instances in which Latinas exhibited each of these capitals (Bryant-Davis, 2019). These findings have suggested that their resilience, which is a product of the adversities they have gone through, has allowed them to persevere, to have confidence in themselves and to remain determined to fulfill their dreams (Bryant-Davis, 2019).

However, it is important to acknowledge that, despite their strength and resilience, a high number of Latina youth are still subject to mental health challenges (Bryant-Davis, 2019). As mentioned earlier, studies continue to show that perceived discrimination has a profound effect on the health of people of colour (Bryant-Davis, 2019; Rivera et al., 2010). According to Bryant-Davis (2019), whose work focuses on multicultural feminist therapy, some of the most

common psychological problems that have been identified in Latinx adolescents are: depression, suicide attempts, eating disorders and symptoms from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Theoretical Framework

This section will look deeply into how the concept of trauma has evolved throughout time, why and how it connects with the experiences faced by racial minorities in the United States, and what it means to examine trauma from a decolonial lens.

History of Trauma

The origin of the word trauma is rooted in the field of surgery, in which the term was used to refer to a physical injury (Aydin, 2017). In 1980, the medical diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) appeared as the first attempt to define the set of psychological symptoms experienced as a result of a specific traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). The three overlapping symptoms of PTSD identified at the time were: hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction (Wolpow et al., 2009), and they were evidenced in Vietnam War veterans. As suggested by Courtois (2008), this initial diagnosis proved useful for those professionals interested in examining combat trauma as well as for those who were starting to research other forms of trauma such as “rape, domestic battering and child abuse and neglect” (p. 87).

However, further advances in the field and clinical experiences demonstrated that the diagnosis of PTSD did not prove effective to reflect the developmentally adverse impact evidenced in victims of child abuse, domestic violence, and other forms of trauma that involve repetitive episodes (Courtois, 2008). Individuals who suffered from multiple, chronic and prolonged traumatic events experienced problems that were not necessarily described in the diagnosis of PTSD (Courtois, 2008). In response to those findings, professionals in the traumatic stress field proposed a new conceptualization known as complex PTSD (Courtois,

2008), or also labeled in some studies as complex trauma (Cook et al. 2005) or developmental trauma disorder (van der kolk, 2005).

Contrary to the diagnosis of PTSD, the impact of complex trauma is multifaceted, affecting across seven different domains: attachment, biology, affect regulation, dissociation, behavioral control, cognition and self-concept (Cook et al. 2005). Researchers also found that the level of severity can vary depending on the developmental stage in which the trauma occurs, the frequency of occurrence, and the type of relationship that the victim has with the aggressor (whether it is of an interpersonal or impersonal nature) (Pressley & Spinazzola, 2018). Some of the most common experiences— mostly interpersonal— include: abandonment, neglect, emotional, verbal, sexual or physical abuse, domestic, school and/or community violence (Courtois & Ford, 2013).

Yet, these are not the only possible stressors that can lead to traumatic experiences. In the United States, scholars specializing in issues related to people of color have identified racism as a significant source of trauma (Comas-Díaz, 2021). As Carter (2007) explains, race-based trauma emerges from experiences with racism on individual, institutional, and cultural levels. Recognizing racist systems and behaviors as a source of trauma has been a substantial step forward. However, the question that some scholars (Zembylas, 2022; Zapata, 2021) have recently raised is: Can race-based trauma be defined within psychological and medical frameworks, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

The Urgent Need to See Trauma from a Decolonial Lens

Zembylas (2022) critically examines the tendency to define trauma in psychologized and medicalized terms and its alignment with the diagnosis of PTSD. The author (2022) asserts that based on this conceptualization, trauma is seen as “an event that cannot be processed by the

individual because it is too overwhelming and incomprehensible by the human mind” (p.4). As Zapata (2021) explains, this perspective highlights a Eurocentric understanding of trauma, where it is primarily defined as an event that “disrupts the Western way of being” (in Zembylas, 2022, p.5) while the hardships faced by marginalized groups, who are often labeled as "others" by the Western world, tend to be overlooked or disregarded.

Carter (2007) makes a similar point by highlighting the problem of associating race-based trauma with symptoms of PTSD, as it pathologizes racism itself and frames it as a mental disorder. This approach places responsibility on individuals for circumstances beyond their control. Instead of labeling trauma as a mental disorder, Carter (2007) suggests a more reasonable perspective that views it as a psychological injury, acknowledging the external factors that contribute to its occurrence. Carter (2007) draws upon Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary to elaborate on this notion asserting that when individuals experience an injury, it means that their rights have been infringed upon, which gives them the right to pursue legal action for the harm caused by these violations. In this way, “injury characterizes the reactions that are linked to specific aspects of racism as nonpathological external and situational factors that affect one’s mental health rather than as a mental disorder” (Carter, 2007, p.17).

Similarly, scholars (Ginwright, 2016; Venet, 2021) who are particularly interested in trauma studies in the field of education have also challenged the exclusive psychoanalytic lens through which trauma has been explored. For example, Ginwright (2016), who works with youth of colour in urban communities questions the term PTSD mentioned earlier by arguing that there is nothing “post traumatic” in what these students experience, instead, their traumatic experiences are ongoing and persistent. In fact, Ginwright (2016) proposes the term PTSE (persistent traumatic stress environment) in order to shift the attention away from seeing trauma

as the result of isolated events that happen throughout someone's life and rather focusing on the systemic problems that are installed in the contexts where those young people live in. Likewise, Venet (2021) affirms that this narrow perspective on trauma leads to the perception of it as an individual problem affecting certain individuals. As a result, trauma is then treated on an individual basis without making the connection to the structures, systems and inequalities that cause trauma in the lives of those students (Venet, 2021) .

Although this new perspective on trauma has been explored by scholars in the field of education, the most extensive body of research comes from psychologists and researchers who focus on the mental well-being of racial minorities in the United States. The subsequent section will present the conceptualizations of trauma within this field, which are in line with the aforementioned scholars in education.

Trauma Studies in Psychology

The study of trauma has gained considerable attention within the realm of Liberation Psychology (Comas-Díaz & Rivera, 2020). Comas-Díaz (2021), whose work revolves around the intersection of culture, psychology, and trauma, asserts that racial minority immigrants are exposed to racial trauma. The author (2021) defines it as “the cumulative attacks that ethnic and racial minority individuals receive within an oppressive society” (p. 128). Based on her conceptualization, trauma is what individuals from marginalized communities, particularly people of color experience as a form of reaction to the constant discrimination they face as well as the one they evidence within their communities (Comas-Díaz, 2021). Like Zembylas (2022), Comas-Díaz (2021) insists on the importance of differentiating racial trauma from PTSD, as the latter fails to account for the constant and accumulative effect of living under oppressive conditions. In other words, the experiences of people of color cannot be pathologized as a mental

disorder; rather, their reactions to the systemic conditions in which they live are entirely normal and understandable (Comas-Díaz, 2007).

Based on their conceptualization of trauma, the question is then: what does it mean to examine it through a decolonial lens? For Comas-Díaz (2021), a decolonial approach implies understanding that most immigrant groups in the United States have a historical background of colonization, which continues to perpetuate due to a *colonial mentality*. David and Okazaki (2006) defined it as the belief that the colonized is inferior to the colonizer (in Comas-Díaz, 2021, p. 134). As a result, people who exhibit a colonized mentality often internalize unfavorable stereotypes regarding their own identities, experience detachment from their native culture, and aspire to emulate the characteristics of the colonizing group (Freire in Comas-Díaz, 2021).

In a nutshell, adopting a decolonial lens to examine trauma means understanding that the trauma experienced by people of colour is the result of living under a system of oppression and colonization. As for research studies in the field of education, Zembylas (2022) proposes specific orientations that can guide the work on trauma from a decolonial perspective. The author (2022) proposes “acknowledging the problems of eurocentric approaches to trauma in education” (p. 8). This implies moving from an “event-based model of trauma”, which does not work for racism, towards “an approach that recognizes that trauma is historically rooted in structural systems such as racism, sexism and colonialism” (p. 10). As the author (2022) explains, the way of approaching trauma will certainly impact on the questions that researchers ponder on their study as well as the answers they seek to obtain. According to the scholar (2022), an effective approach to understanding trauma involves delving into the experiences of marginalized individuals and examining the profound effects these experiences have had on their lives. This method not only

enables a firsthand exploration of traumas in their “historical, social and political complexities” (p. 8), but also amplifies the voices of those who have historically been silenced.

Research Questions

Guided by the conceptualization of trauma as outlined by previously cited literature (Ginwright, 2016; Venet, 2021, Zembylas, 2022) and following the orientations proposed by Zembylas (2022), this study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

- How is trauma present in the life stories of Latinx students in the Spanish Heritage Language Classroom at the university of Washington?
- How did Latinx students cope with the adversities they have encountered throughout their lives?

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study, as mentioned in the previous chapter, seeks to understand the life stories of Latinx students as well as the ways in which they coped with the adversities they have faced throughout their lives. These questions, which are about understanding Latinx youth's experiences, are rooted in the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research examines how participants assign meaning to their experiences, construct their realities, and convey the significance of their encounters (Creswell, 2013). This understanding can only be acquired by allowing these students to tell their own stories and by hearing their voices within their context (Creswell, 2013).

The methodology adopted for this work is that of narrative inquiry, who Clandinin and Connelly (2000), two pioneers in the field, define as:

...a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

According to their definition, narrative inquiry is a means of conceptualizing experience as a story. Their understanding of experience is based on Dewey's philosophy that "an individual's experience is a central lens to understand a person" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 331). In his theory, Dewey sees experience as the interaction of two principles: interaction and

continuity. This implies that people cannot be understood without seeing their relationship with their social world, and that people's past experiences lead to their present, which also leads to future experiences (Clandinin, 2006). Because of this understanding of how reality is interpreted, entering into the field means in other words engaging with the participants and with their stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Consequently, data emerges from those transactional experiences, a process that will be explained more in detail in a subsequent section.

Choice of Methodology

The choice of narrative inquiry as a methodology for this study was intimately tied to the nature of the research questions that this work seeks to answer. It was expected that these students have probably never thought about being traumatized by certain events or situations they have encountered in their lives. Many of them may even naturalize how they feel in relation to their Spanish heritage without questioning the reasons why they feel in such a way. Thus, carrying out interviews in the traditional form of questions and answers about topics they might have never thought about did not prove to be an effective means to understand these students' life stories. A narrative inquiry methodology, instead, allowed participants to tell their own stories, a process that simultaneously enabled them to make sense of their experiences, their ways of thinking and their actions (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002)

. In other words, narrative inquiry allowed me to enter through the participants' portals (Clandinin, 2006) — their stories— and explore their life experiences while also being aware of the sociopolitical, educational, linguistic, and familial backgrounds by which those narratives were being shaped. As Atkinson (2002) argues “telling a life story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear (p. 125).

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at the University of Washington (UW), the largest university in the state of Washington, and in which 6.6% of the student body identifies as Hispanic/Latinx based on data from fall enrollment 2020 (IPEDS). The study took place specifically during the winter quarter of 2023, spanning from January 3rd to March 17th. The participants consisted of students who were enrolled in the Spanish Heritage Course 216, for which I served as the instructor.

The course 216 is the first class offered in the Spanish Heritage Language track at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at UW. The reason why the study was conducted in a 200-level class— rather than in 314 or 316— is because it is often expected that students taking 216 have a more conflicting relationship with their Spanish than students from higher-level courses. Furthermore, as previously indicated, the distinction between this particular class and the other levels was my role as the instructor. Being the teacher of the class allowed me to interact with my participants daily, gain deeper insights into their personalities, and establish a meaningful connection with them as well.

Given the nature of this study and what it attempted to explore, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is of extreme importance. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue, “relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do” (p. 189). When it comes to talking about unpleasant past experiences, it can be extremely difficult for participants to open their hearts to an outside researcher whom they hardly know. Thus, using the classroom as the context to carry out this research gave me a considerable amount of time to establish connection and rapport with the participants, thereby creating a safe and comfortable space for them to share their stories.

To establish a nurturing environment right from the beginning of the study, I introduced the project to the students on the third day of classes. It was important for me to transparently share my motivations, the objectives of the project, and the potential impact it could have. By doing so, I aimed to ensure that the students understood the underlying purpose and value of the project. The same day, all students (11) enrolled in the class were formally notified about the study with a written description and an informed consent to sign in case they wanted to participate (See Appendix A). Ten students agreed to take part in the study and signed the consent. It is important to clarify that students were explicitly informed that their evaluation in this course would not be affected by their decision of volunteering or not in this research study.

Out of 10 volunteers, four students were chosen through a purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The main criterion used to determine the sample was based on participants' responses to the question about their reasons, motivations and expectations in taking the Spanish course 216. This was asked in a questionnaire that all students completed at the beginning of the quarter. While examining their responses, I specifically focused on identifying whether their enrollment in the class was linked to negative past experiences in their lives or with a possible disconnection from their Spanish language and culture. This would give me, as the researcher, an initial hint of what stories these participants brought with them, and how those experiences connected or not with their interests in taking Spanish. The second criterion I used was how willing and open participants were to share and talk about their past experiences with me, which could be reflected in the length of their answers as well as in their responses during our first individual meeting. This was an informal encounter of about 10 minutes that was required for all the students in the course, in which they shared their initial feelings about the class and we went over some of their answers in the initial questionnaire. As this was a requirement for the course,

all the students who had volunteered to participate in the study attended this meeting. Given that this study would ask participants to reflect on past adverse experiences, this second criterion was extremely important. As I was the instructor of the course they were taking, I did not want them to feel forced to accept being part of a study that made them talk about topics that they had not fully processed, or that made them uncomfortable or sad. By conducting the brief sessions in person, I could gauge their openness and willingness to share their personal stories with me.

Based on the two criteria stated before, four participants were chosen for the study. In their questionnaires, the chosen participants explicitly expressed that they were aware of the injustices suffered by people of colour in the United States and that they were interested in engaging in their communities to help solve those problems in their respective fields. Additionally, during the meeting, the four of them were willing to expand more on the brief accounts they gave in their questionnaires, showing initiative in sharing their experiences with me. Lastly, the four participants showed interest in the present study by highlighting the need for more work on Latinxs' mental health. Their openness to share their feelings and some experiences with me was key to determine that the four of them were willing to allow me to enter into their lives, and explore from there what their fears, concerns, conflicts and hopes were.

Instruments: Creation of Field Texts

For the data collection process, I followed Clandinin and Connelly (2000)'s method, which consists of the creation of field texts (which is normally known as data) by participants and researchers before or during the inquiry. Following the suggestions made by the authors (2000) and guided by the research questions of the study, participants were asked to create the following field texts: (a) Biopoem: Exploration of my identity (BP), (b) Poem about my bilingualism (PB), (c) Linguistic and cultural autobiography (LA) and (d) Lotería cards (LC). It

is important to note that these four texts were part of the narratives that the participants had to produce in their role as students of the course Spanish 216. Bellow there is a description of what they were asked to produce in each narrative:

- ***Biopoem: Exploration of my identity*** (See Appendix B): For this narrative, participants were asked to elaborate an autobiographical poem. They were given a guideline to follow which consisted of phrases that they had to complete about themselves.
- ***Poem about my bilingualism*** (See Appendix C): Participants were asked to produce a poem that depicted their perceptions of their bilingualism using the five senses (sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste).
- ***Linguistic and cultural autobiography*** (See Appendix D): Participants were asked to write an autobiography (5-paragraph essay) in which they write about the experiences that have shaped their relationship with their languages and cultures.
- ***Lotería Cards (2)*** (See Appendix E): Participants were asked to produce a visual representation in order to illustrate one or more ideas that they resonate with from a reading and a video they were asked to read and watch. They were also asked to provide a brief justification explaining what they attempted to represent and why.

In addition to the field texts, three more data sources were used in the study: an initial questionnaire (See Appendix F) , field notes from an informal meeting and a semi-structured interview (See Appendix G). As mentioned earlier, the initial questionnaire and the notes from the meeting were used at the beginning of the research process to determine the participants who were going to participate in the study.

Finally, a semi-structured interview was carried out during week six of the quarter. For the interview, participants were previously asked to think about their lives as if it were a book or a novel, and they were asked to write down the names of the different chapters. They were free to create as many chapters as they preferred, but it was recommended that they had between three and six. This was an idea taken from the work of Atkinson (1998) who guides qualitative researchers on how to plan and do life story interviews. I also considered that giving participants some time to previously reflect on their stories would help me to share more in depth reflections of their experiences. The interview protocol was designed to trigger questions that could initiate the narrative process, but additional follow-up questions were made to address the gaps in information and ask for clarification.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in two phrases. The first level is called restorying (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003; Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002) or also known as retelling (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). This process implies “gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence” (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 332). Oftentimes, when people share a story, they may omit or inadequately develop certain parts, so narrative inquirers’ task is to make connections between those ideas and reconstruct them into a single narrative (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002).

For the process of restorying the field texts, I used the three dimensional space approach (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000), as explained by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002). According to Clandinin & Connolly (2000), attending to the three dimensional space implies examining both participants’ individual experiences and their interactions with others (sociality), understanding

the interconnection between their past, present and future (temporality), and considering the specific locations where their interactions took place (situation). Following these three dimensions, once all field texts were collected, I designed a series of questions that guided me on structure and the organization of the four narratives. This guideline allowed me to eventually make comparisons across the four stories, while maintaining the singularity of each. The guiding questions were:

- A. Which chapters did the participant select to depict her life story? What significant memories, whether positive or negative, took place during those periods? Who were the significant individuals that appeared in those chapters?
- B. Was there any turning point in the participant's life, that is to say, a particular moment or time at which a significant change occurred?
- C. What are the participant's current worries and concerns?
- D. How does the participant envision her future? Which are her aspirations, dreams and hopes?
- E. Which text captures and portrays the participant's emotions during a specific part of her story? This text, which was inserted at the beginning of each narrative, was taken from a creative production done by the participants in their role as students of the Spanish Course 216.

The second phase of the data analysis implied looking across the four narratives for echoes and resonances across the stories (Clandinin et al., 2013). Six resonant threads (Clandinin et al., 2013) were initially identified through a decolonial lens focused on trauma. The next step was to review and redefine those ideas, making sure there were clear and identifiable distinctions among them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process resulted in the identification of three

overarching themes that encapsulated the most significant concepts, and the data was coded accordingly using these themes. The coding was made through the commenting feature in Google Docs. Finally, a report of each theme was written including excerpts that conveyed the essence of the point being made.

It is important to note that the entire data, except for the initial questionnaire and the interview, was collected in Spanish. The data analysis was conducted in both languages, English and Spanish, and only the excerpts included in the citations were translated into English. For the translation, I tried to avoid using a word-by-word method but rather attempted to convey the whole meaning expressed in the participants' lines.

Trustworthiness & Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure credibility in my study, I made use of a widely common strategy known as member checks (Creswell, 2013), which indeed is a step required for narrative inquiry. Once the four narratives were written, I negotiated them with each participant to make sure that the meanings that were being expressed were those originally intended, and that the account adequately represented their lived experiences. I shared the stories through a digital editable document and asked the participants to check if there was any event that had been mistakenly interpreted, and I also left comments on the parts that I needed clarification on. I also asked them to let me know if there was any part that they wanted to omit. At this point, participants were also asked if they wanted to use pseudonyms or if they wanted to keep their real names. The four participants decided to keep their original names.

In addition to negotiating the narratives with the participants, I also relied on multiple sources of data—a strategy known as triangulation—which strengthens the internal validity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As explained earlier, the instruments used to create the

field texts were: questionnaires, field notes, poems, linguistic and cultural autobiographies, lotería cards, and interviews.

In order to ensure that this study was conducted as ethically as possible, I followed some of the considerations proposed by Creswell (2013). Prior to conducting the study, I requested the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to make sure the study adhered to all ethical standards by the Human Subjects Division. Once the approval was granted, I proceeded to elaborate a digital informed consent, which participants were asked to sign in case they decided to participate in the study. This consent explained the purpose of the study, its significance and potential impact, as well as their expected role through the research process.

Once the study began, given the sensibility of the topic, I took some precautions to reduce any potential risk of emotional harm. First, the interview was conducted in a confidential and welcoming space that facilitated human connection, and where participants could feel emotionally safe. Before the interview began, I made sure the interviewees knew that they could skip a question if they did not want to answer it, that they could stop whenever they wanted to, and that they did not need to talk about anything they did not wish. Finally, during the whole interview, I remained sensitive to the participants' reactions and feelings, and showed flexibility to make adaptations to the questions (if necessary) to reduce any possibility of making participants feel uncomfortable. Additionally, before knowing whether the participants wanted to keep their real names or not, I used pseudonyms and had a separate document which links the pseudonym with the first name, to which I only had access.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents the four narrative accounts that were co-created as the result of the first level of analysis explained in the previous chapter. Each story is accompanied by an excerpt taken from two of the participants' field texts (the poem about their bilingualism and the loteria card). These extracts were chosen in order to illustrate some of the ideas reflected in their stories. Although minor adjustments were made to the original excerpts in order to incorporate them in the stories, close attention was paid to ensure that their essence and meaning were maintained. In terms of language, those extracts are presented in Spanish, as it was the original language in which they were written. Given that all four participants are bilingual, this decision appears suitable for effectively conveying their stories. Yet, the English translations of the excerpts can be found in Appendix H. Finally, the illustration that accompanies each narrative was co-created with a graphic designer to convey the most distinctive personal qualities of each participant.

Alexia: The Story of a Tenacious Latina who has Beaten the Odds

*Se oye Pitbull y Alejandra Guzmán en un sábado por la mañana.
También escucho a mi mamá cantando y el ruido de las ollas y sartenes
indicando que está preparando el almuerzo.
Papas con huevo, mi favorito.
Se siente como las páginas de un fotolibro:
"Este es tu tío Ricardo" "Esta es tu bisabuela, tienes el pelo como ella".
Anhele ir a México para conocerlos y finalmente sentirme como en casa.
Se mira como una bandera que es mitad americana y mexicana;
Pero hay una línea que las divide.
La línea es borrosa.
Este es mi bilinguism.
(Alexia, PB)*

Alexia was born in a city located in Central Washington, a region with one of the highest Latinx populations in the state. Her grandfather on her mother's side was the first one in the family to cross the Mexican border to pursue a better life in the United States. Ever since then, her family has worked tirelessly to build a new life and make things work in their new home. And despite facing countless obstacles that were beyond their imagination, they never gave up. They possess an unyielding force that drives them forward and reminds them of their ultimate goal: securing a brighter future for the younger generations in their family.



Yet, their desire for a better life in the United States never meant abandoning their roots. From a young age, Alexia was exposed to the rich Mexican culture and learned to cherish it. There was always time for a Spanish TV show with her grandma, football with her grandpa, Sunday morning church with her parents, and traditional Mexican music at birthday parties with the whole family. Alexia's mother also instilled in her daughter a love for Mexican cuisine, teaching her how to cook delicious dishes such as pozole, tamales, and sopa de fideo, which was, by far, Alexia's favorite. By the age of 15, Alexia had already learned how to cook many of these meals since her mother believed it was essential for her daughter to manage the main household duties. Growing up, Alexia noticed this role was often expected of women in her extended family. Although she loved and respected them, Alexia understood at a young age that her aspirations were bigger than those of a traditional housewife. At school, she had found a bigger passion: reading books.

Since she was a little girl, Alexia had always possessed an insatiable curiosity, and reading different books piqued her interest in exploring the world even more. However, during her elementary school years, she would find herself feeling increasingly bored in class. Her hunger for knowledge could not be sated by the limited scope of her coursework, and she longed for more intellectually stimulating challenges. Thankfully, Alexia's fortunes took a turn for the better by the end of fourth grade when she received some life-changing news. The school authorities told her that the scores she had received in the test allowed her to join a special program designed for gifted children. Though this meant leaving her current school, Alexia's excitement for the opportunity far outweighed any hesitation. Finally, she would be able to explore her passions to the fullest and pursue the future she had envisioned for herself.

Alexia's transition to her new school was undoubtedly challenging. She found herself as the lone girl from her previous school in her current class. The only familiar faces were three white boys who had also transferred from her old school. Although she had already proven herself through the test, she still had to prove her worth at the new institution. Despite those challenges, Alexia enjoyed school like she had never done before. For the first time, she was surrounded by classmates who shared the same interests and pondered similar questions. English, History, and Chemistry were among her favorite subjects, but Biology held a special place in her heart. The class fueled her curiosity like never before and urged her to participate in a Science fair, in which she discovered her fascination with research. During this time, the idea of attending college began to take root in her mind. Her older sister had received a basketball scholarship, allowing her to attend university for free. Witnessing the success of her sibling made Alexia realize that college was the path she wanted to take, and she would begin to ask herself: *"How do I get here? How do I get myself there?"*.

At that time Alexia was uncertain about where she would go or what major she would pursue, but she would always remember her father's advice: "*If you wanna go to college, you gotta get good grades*". So, as always, she would work hard and make sure she was getting ready for her next academic adventure. Still, despite doing well in school, Alexia faced a challenge in establishing meaningful friendships during her middle and high school years. While she felt comfortable around the boys from her previous school, finding their conversations intellectually stimulating, she also sought female friends with whom she could share other things. She met a group of Mexican girls in one of her classes and began to spend time with them, but the connection was not as strong as she had hoped. She sensed that they did not see her as one of them, and their use of pejorative words like "*paisa*" made her feel excluded. When Alexia attempted to speak in Spanish, they often reacted with confusion or dismissal, and there was little presence of Mexican culture in their lives. The attitudes of her friends made it difficult for Alexia to trust them, causing her to fall into a superficial friendship just for the sake of having companionship.

However, as the old saying says, every cloud has a silver lining. Alexia's negative experiences with her Latina friends in school ultimately helped her to distinguish between the types of relationships she wanted to foster and those she needed to let go of. This realization was further underscored by two difficult family events during the pandemic: her father's heart surgery and her grandmother's stroke, from which she is still recovering. This made Alexia realize how fast life can end or change, and because of that, she understood that she did not have to be around someone who was mean to her; she deserved better.

It has been a few years since those defining moments in Alexia's life. Now in her sophomore year at university, she enjoys her independence and the open-mindedness she

perceives in this new environment. Though she has made a few new acquaintances in college, she is still searching for true friends she can count on and who provide support. Alexia's past experiences have taught her which types of relationships she values and which she no longer wants in her life. In terms of her studies, Alexia is pursuing a major in Law, society and Justice and a minor in Public Policy. Her future plans are clear: to work in the legislative system to help immigrants who come to the United States for work. Alexia wants to leverage her position to give back to her community and contribute to making this country a better place for immigrants. Though she understands that obstacles may arise, her grandmother's voice saying “*muérdelos*” is a constant reminder that she can do it. Alexia is confident that her resilience and strength will keep her from falling. And even if she stumbles on the way, she will stand up and move forward, as her family has always taught her.

Jhoanna: The story of a Latina in Search of her Destiny

*Mi español es como el mar
Por momentos turbulento provocando emociones
intensas
Y a veces calmo, trayendo mucha paz
Mi español es fluctuante y emocional
Es lindo y fuerte.
(Jhoanna, LC2)*

It is around 11.30 am on January 3rd, 2023.

Jhoanna is in the classroom getting ready for her Spanish Heritage Language class. Jhoanna's enthusiasm is

evident in her face, which mimics the joyful expression of a little girl on her first day of school: a mix of excitement and trepidation for what is to come. When the class finishes, she messages her mom to show her the note that the instructor gave everyone in the class: *"I hope you enjoy this*



course a lot, and that during this journey you feel motivated to know more about this beautiful language and to see how wonderful the hispanic culture is". Jhoanna probably wanted to share with her mom how happy she felt for taking Spanish this quarter. After this first class, she could sense she was exactly where she was meant to be. Not Japanese this time. This was the moment for Spanish.

Jhoanna was born in Central Washington, in one of the cities with the highest number of Latinx population in the state. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico when they were in their early 20s. Her father wanted to live a better life and perhaps give his kids greater possibilities than they would have in their home country. The beginning of a new life implied, particularly for her father, giving up their Mexican lifestyle and customs in order to fully assimilate into American culture. But despite her family's best efforts to integrate into mainstream American culture, there were some values that they simply could not abandon. Throughout her adolescence, Jhoanna would frequently argue with her parents for being overly strict with her and denying her the freedom to do things that any adolescent would enjoy at that age. During her freshman year in high school, Jhoanna would ask her mom to stay more hours in the library once her classes were done, but her mom would refuse to give her that permission. This would frustrate Jhoanna who, deep inside, was seeking some independence from her parents. Her parents, however, were concerned about their daughter's safety, and would not see it in that way. There were also other times, like football games in high school, in which Jhoanna wanted to stay longer, as many of her friends did, but her parents would ask her to come back home immediately after the game was over. As Jhoanna grew up, she could see that her upbringing was very different from that of her upper middle-class wealthy American friends, whose parents seemed to be much more lenient and permissive. Although Jhoanna seemed to

understand where that difference came from, this would not stop her from questioning her parents' arguments and certain ideas, which were drastically different from hers. She tried to comprehend her parents' view, but she was also a 16-year old girl who also wanted to be understood. In addition to her parents, Jhoanna sometimes felt she was not being understood by her friends either. At some points, she felt that her friends would judge her parents and stereotyped them as overprotective, which certainly made her feel even worse. Even Jhoanna's boyfriend at the time, who came from a different background and who did not understand Jhoanna's family values, would find it hard to empathize with her.

Jhoanna's years in high school were also marked by the outbreak of the global pandemic Covid-19, which occurred midway into her sophomore year. This meant for her a moment of prolonged solitude and deep introspection. Being isolated from her usual surroundings allowed her to reflect on who she was and on the kind of bonds that she had built with her family and friends. Her walks on cloudy days during the winter of 2020 allowed her to ponder questions that she would have probably not asked herself in normal circumstances. Apart from being a moment of self-exploration, the pandemic brought some changes in her social life as well. During her senior year, when she came back to in-person classes, she found that many of her friendships were not as strong as they once were, and she no longer felt a sense of belonging to certain groups. The same year, however, she met a group of Latinas with whom she immediately connected. Contrary to previous bonds, Jhoanna found out that she resonated with many of her friends' experiences at home, which created a sense of mutual understanding and made their bond even stronger. This made Jhoanna notice that this type of connection was hard to achieve with someone who had not gone through similar experiences. Also, spending more time with hispanic friends made her notice that her connection to Mexican culture had not been as strong as

that of her peers. It is actually through them that she began to become more curious about hispanic culture and about everything about it. In Jhoanna's words: *"I unconsciously, nourished my Hispanic culture by embracing theirs"*.

Given this lack of cultural connection she had felt throughout her adolescence, Jhoanna had never felt an inclination to study Spanish in high school. When it came the moment to decide on a foreign language class, she faced a dilemma: *"Shall I take Spanish or Japanese classes?"* She finally decided to enroll in Japanese since she felt the curiosity to explore another language and culture, very different from the languages she already knew. However, she sometimes finds herself asking the following question: *What would have happened if I had taken Spanish instead? Would my relationships with my family in Mexico be better?*

Despite not having taken Spanish, Jhoanna began to reflect more on her Hispanic heritage, which seemed to be somehow hidden but had not entirely gone. In fact, it was a question from a friend that caused her to purposefully begin to consider her identity and bilingualism. Are you bilingual? prompted a number of further doubts and ideas that stuck in her mind for a while. *"What does it mean to be bilingual? I do not think I am bilingual because I cannot speak Spanish fluently with my family and friends. But wait, at school I am surrounded by Latina friends and with people who do speak Spanish"*. Jhoanna felt a connection to the culture, but she didn't feel she had the right to call herself a latina because she couldn't communicate well in Spanish. And every time she attempted to reconsider it, the thought of her aunt's innocent question as to why she spoke with a Spanish accent would flood over her.

It is the year 2023. Jhoanna is a nursing student at college and has a special interest in travel nursing. She has a strong desire to explore the world and enjoy her independence, a sense of freedom she has longed for throughout her entire adolescence. Her choice to work in the

healthcare system is also related to major shortcomings that she personally encountered and saw in her community, and which awakened her willingness to help in that field. Jhoanna now has a clearer understanding of who she truly is on the inside, but she is also eager to keep growing. And even though she occasionally feels as though she is navigating a maze between her multicultural identity, she never loses hope that she will find her true destiny.

Anisa: The story of a Latina who has got her Rite of Passage to her Community

I speak English and Spanish,

pero si no hablas perfecto no puedes decir que eres bilingüe.

Mi idioma preferido es inglés, pero el idioma de mi tierra materna es español.

Estoy en el medio.

No vivo en ninguna parte, y vivo en los dos lados.

Es la belleza y tristeza de ser bicultural y bilingüe.

Amo mi tierra materna aunque mi tierra materna no me ame. (Anisa, PB)

When Anisa reminisces about her time in kindergarten, she immediately recalls those mornings in which her mom would help her get ready for school. Her mom would pack her lunch, carefully choose her clothes, braid her hair, and give her a huge hug wishing her daughter to enjoy her time at school. However, those memories get tinged with mixed emotions when Anisa remembers about some interactions with her classmates. She would recall some of her peers mocking her clothes and making fun of the food she brought for lunch, causing her to feel a deep sense of shame that made her reluctant to bring her homemade meals to school any longer. The hurtful remarks made her acutely aware of the differences between her and her peers, leaving her feeling like an outsider in a place where is supposed to be her community. Her mom, who witnessed the negative impact this had on her daughter, decided that Anisa should homeschool



from second to fifth grade instead. At home, learning alongside her mother and younger sister, Anisa found the safety and warmth she lacked at school.

Spending more time with her mother, who is originally from Mexico, also enabled Anisa to start embracing her Hispanic roots. Her mother actively sought out more Hispanic people in their community, further exposing Anisa to Latin culture. Besides, Anisa's biological father appeared in her life after years of absence, exposing her to various aspects of Hispanic culture. Yet, despite this newfound connection, her journey to explore her Hispanic heritage was riddled with complexities. Anisa's previous experiences had left a negative mark on her perception of her Latin culture. Attending a predominantly white school had made her feel that her heritage was inferior, and being around other kids also made her more aware of her skin color. Anisa felt caught between two worlds, too light to fully identify as Latina but too dark to fit in with her white peers. *"Where do I belong?"* she often wondered to herself. Still, although attending a predominantly white school might have not helped Anisa feel connected to her Latinad, her doubts came particularly from the hurtful comments she received from her dad's family members. Even something as seemingly harmless as *"I don't know what you're saying"* had the potential to trigger Anisa's insecurities about her Spanish fluency, leading her to question her Latinidad and sense of belonging. For her, not speaking Spanish fluently was indicative that she did not fully embody her Latina identity.

When Anisa was around 11 years old, her family moved to a new city in Washington. Anisa, who felt that she was missing out on the joys of sharing time with other kids, expressed this sentiment to her mother, who understood her daughter and decided to enroll her in a new school. And so, Anisa began her 6th grade in a public school that was vastly different from her previous one. This new institution was much more culturally diverse, a refreshing change from

the predominantly white environment she had attended before. However, adjusting to a new school and making new friends was no easy feat. Anisa had to overcome the initial challenge of meeting new people and learning how to interact with them. Mrs Smith, her teacher at the time, would encourage her to approach other students and play with them. It took time, but gradually, Anisa started to feel more comfortable and to form closer bonds with her peers, particularly with other Latinos with whom she felt a strong connection. Yet, Anisa's great time at this school would only last one year as her family had to relocate to a nearby city, forcing her to say goodbye to her beloved community and start anew at a different institution.

Anisa's adaptation to a new, predominantly white school, was again complex, something her mom had very well predicted. Before starting classes, she would remind her daughter: *"You're likely going to be the only Hispanic person in that classroom. So you have to present yourself really well and show yourself really smart academically"*. Anisa's mother was proven right, for despite Anisa's outstanding capabilities, she was placed in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class right at the beginning of the school year. Anisa would ask herself: *"Why am I here? How dare they tell me that I don't speak English well? Yes, English, the language that overtook my motherland's native tongue, and that dominated all my childhood"*. Upon discovering the situation, Anisa's mother requested that Anisa be removed from the ESL class. Yet, this was not the only unfortunate situation Anisa had to go through. She soon learned that discrimination can take on many forms. Anisa was frequently troubled when her seventh-grade teacher mispronounced her name. Despite her attempts to correct her teacher on the proper pronunciation, Anisa eventually gave up. Allowing others to mispronounce her name, a crucial aspect of her identity, was letting her hispanic roots gradually fade away.

Yet, as the saying goes, "after the storm, the sun always rises," and so it was for Anisa's Spanish heritage. When her family moved to a new city, she felt a shift in the air. The student body at her new school was much more diverse, as were the teachers on staff. Anisa had the pleasure of meeting many new people, particularly fellow Latinos and Latinas, with whom she shared a strong bond. For the first time, she felt understood, as her experiences resonated with those of her friends, giving her a sense of belonging. During these years, Anisa enrolled in a Spanish course for heritage speakers and joined a Latino Club, which provided her with opportunities to participate in events and trips that empowered her and inspired her to dream big. She also had the chance to travel to Mexico to celebrate her *quinceañera*. Although she had visited Mexico before, this time was different. Anisa connected deeply with her family there, learning more about her culture and feeling a renewed sense of pride in her Spanish heritage, like the one she had once felt. In Anisa's words, "*I got my rite of passage*". A new Anisa was emerging, a stronger and more passionate Latina who —by no chance —would allow anyone to ever mispronounce her name again.

In 2020, Anisa embarked on a new journey as a college student at the most prestigious university in the state of Washington. Recently, she was accepted into the psychology program, driven by her desire to make a positive impact on her community's mental health needs. Anisa's aspirations also include entering into legislative work to advocate for the rights of her people. Her unwavering connection and commitment to her community is also evident in her continuous search for spaces that bring her closer to her people. Anisa is an active member of the Latino Club at her university, which hosts gatherings and events aimed at supporting and uplifting the community. Her dream to see a more fair and just society would not allow her to stop fighting. She knows it will not be easy work, but she doesn't need anyone to remind her of the obstacles

that may arise, as she has already experienced them firsthand. She is ready, and she won't allow anyone to stop her, not this time.

Julie: The Story of a Latina who is Regaining her Superpower

*A veces siento que mi lengua quiere correr,
escaparse, y evitar esa conversación.
Pero mi corazón insiste: háblales, háblales, háblales...
Y después, lo siento como un sabor agrio en mi boca.
Ya no puedo moverme, está quieto y no puedo responder.
Pero ahí sigue mi corazón: háblales, háblales, háblales..
Y allí voy, lo hago. Digo: “Sí, hablo español”
(Julie , PB)*



Julie was born in a small city near Seattle, Washington. She grew up in a loving environment where, like in many Hispanic homes, the family is at the heart of all values. At a young age, Julie was able to recognize the importance of a close-knit family and to appreciate the beauty of Mexican culture, including its traditional food, music, and customs. Her trips to Mexico with her family helped her feel more connected to the culture as well. During her early years of school, Julie was surrounded by hispanic students, which caused her to feel even more connected to her Mexican heritage. Julie vividly remembers her first English as a Second Language (ESL) class in kindergarten. The classroom was small with the English alphabet pasted all over the walls, and the room was full of Hispanic children who, like Julie, were excited to share class time with their friends. Julie's time as an ESL student, however, was brief. When her mother learned that her daughter had been placed in ESL lessons only because she was Mexican-American, she got indignant. Because she was aware of Julie's outstanding reading skills and academic success in English, she asked the school to remove Julie from the class.

From that time onwards, after lunch, when the bell rang, Julie would see her hispanic friends saying goodbye to her and getting ready for their ESL class. Julie would look longingly at them wishing she could join them, but she knew she wasn't supposed to. For the first time, at this particular moment, Julie discovered her superpower: she was bilingual. She spoke and understood English as well as Spanish. Yet, now that Julie is older, she cannot help having mixed feelings about it: *"What had once benefited me academically, was now a barrier between me and my latino friends"*.

A few years later, Julie's feeling of being separated off from her Latino friends grew even greater. Julie was admitted into a program in third grade that was designed to meet the needs of gifted students who performed exceptionally in their tests. Moving to a new school as part of the transition to this program required Julie to adjust to new surroundings as well as to new people. Unlike her old school, Julie now only had one Latina classmate. When Julie entered Middle school, little did the situation change because she was enrolled in an honors program with many of the students who were also her elementary school classmates. Like most teenagers at this age, Julie began to feel self-conscious about her appearance, her sense of style, other people's perceptions of her as well as her Spanish. Well-intended comments from family and friends, teasing her accent, increased this anxiety. Every time she had to speak in Spanish, she would experience a sense of fear because she didn't want to mess it up. And even when she attempted to face such feelings and speak Spanish, a sense of shame would wash over her body and an inner voice inside her head would just say: "Run away". Her feelings about not speaking Spanish "perfectly" made her question her bilingualism. On top of this, her loss of connection with her Latino community made her question her Mexican identity: "Maybe I am whitewashed", she would think.

Julie's desire for perfection was also reflected in her attitude at school. During her first years in High school, Julie would feel too stressed since she was very concerned about doing well and getting good grades. Her admission to the program in Elementary school had somehow defined who Julie was. Julie was the student who would always be responsible, study hard and do well in her classes, and now she felt the pressure to keep it up. Due to the COVID pandemic in 2020, Julie was forced to continue her high school classes remotely. Although the pandemic caused significant harm to many people, Julie instead experienced a profound sense of relief. For once, she was not as anxious as she had been throughout her entire education. The fact that there was more flexibility in class assignments and exams allowed Julie to calm down and feel more relaxed about her academic performance.

Yet, feeling less pressure at school was not the only change that the pandemic brought in her life. Being at home and spending more time with her family allowed Julie to reconnect more with herself, too. Before the pandemic, Julie used to experience insecurities and the pressure to be someone that she was not. Influenced by certain groups of friends, she struggled to be genuine and demonstrate her true self to everyone. Being at home, however, allowed her to reconnect with her roots, her people, her values, and her pleasures, which —perhaps—may have been hidden. Being more aware of who she was let her recognize the people she wanted to spend time with. Thanks to the pandemic, she could also realize that some friendships were not as strong as she thought they were, which allowed her to see who her true friends were. Julie, with a more authentic version of herself, recalls her last year of high school as one of the best years at school.

Julie is currently in college. She is a student of public health and, although she hasn't decided on her specific career path, she is certain of one thing: she wants to work with the Latinx community. She is well aware of the numerous issues that the community encounters on every

single day and wants to be the kind of person that is there to help out. When you look at Julie's eyes, you can see her genuine commitment and desire to help her community. As for her personal journey, when Julie looks back on time, she can see how much she has grown, but she is also aware that there is room for more. Sometimes, Julie would pause and look at her mother, who, like Julie, grew up learning both languages and occasionally has difficulty with either one or the other. For Julie, her mother is the best role model she could have ever had. She shows her that making mistakes is OK and doesn't make her less American or Mexican. Julie seeks to someday achieve the same harmonious balance between her two cultures as her mother has. Finally, over the past few years, Julie has also come to realize the immense value of her superpower, and knowing that she will use it to benefit her people makes her feel even more grateful.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This chapter focuses on answering both research questions on their respective sections. Along with the analysis and interpretation of data, a discussion of the findings is provided explaining their significance in relation to the existing body of literature. The excerpts included throughout the discussion to exemplify the points being made in the analysis were extracted from the following sources of data: Linguistic Autobiography (LA), Interview Transcript (IT), Poem about my bilingualism (PB), Loteria Card (LC) and Initial Questionnaire (IQ).

Trauma in the Life Stories of Latinx Students

The first section presents the answer to the research question 1, which reads: “How is trauma present in the life stories of Latinx students in the Spanish Heritage Language classroom at the University of Washington?” A total of three themes emerged in the course of analysis: (1) cultural authenticity, (2) questioning belongingness and (3) second-class citizenship. Each theme is accompanied by a rhetorical question to portray more effectively the internal dilemma and/or conflict that the four participants are or have experienced at some point in their lives.

Doubting Cultural Authenticity: Am I a True Mexican? The four participants shared moments in their lives when they questioned their Latinidad. Each of them encountered specific situations that caused them to feel that they were not true Latinas. In all cases, the questioning is intimately connected to their ideas of not speaking Spanish “properly”. Additionally, some of them faced situations in which their connection to the culture was called into question. Despite expressing a variety of different feelings such as confusion, guilt, frustration, anger, anxiety, and sadness, the four stories illustrate how these situations led the participants to ask themselves:

"Am I a true Mexican?". Jhoanna recalled a conversation with her aunt that deeply impacted her identity development:

She came to visit us from Mexico for a few days, and we hadn't seen each other since I was 9 or 10 years old. At that time, I was developing my Spanish with the help of my parents, and I was proud of my ability to communicate in two languages. I thought I spoke well and believed that my aunt was very impressed. I vividly remember when she asked me why I had an accent. I was confused and said, "Why do I have an accent? I don't have an accent. I speak normally!" In a sense, my self-perception was shattered; I couldn't accept that I spoke differently. From then on, I became insecure, and every time I spoke in Spanish, I was conscious not only of my accent but also of how I presented myself as a fraud. (LA, 2023)

Jhoanna shared how an innocent question from her aunt led her to feel insecure and self-conscious about her Spanish abilities. She even used the word *shatter* to express how the pride she once felt was now replaced by feelings of being an impostor. This negative self-perception had a significant impact on Jhoanna's relationship with her Spanish culture. She declared that it was not until high school that she began to feel the curiosity to explore more of her Spanish heritage. Prior to those years, she had little inclination to learn more about Spanish culture because she felt that she did not speak it correctly back home. With a broken voice, Jhoanna expressed her feelings of being confronted with her Hispanic identity, and feeling disturbed and annoyed with herself for not having had an interest earlier. She stated: "I don't believe in regrets, but (-) it's something that (-)" (IT, 2023).

Julie shared similar questioning and struggles, which began in Middle school and continued throughout her high school years:

By the time I entered High school, I was so focused on my studies, friends, and social media — all in English — that I put my Spanish on the back burner. Although English speakers around me labeled me as bilingual — an "English and Spanish speaker" — I didn't feel like I deserved that title. The superpower that others thought I possessed

was something that disappeared when I needed it most. What hurt the most was how difficult it made it to communicate with my dad, who speaks Spanish better than English. Although he was patient with me when I forgot words in Spanish or when my sentences were confusing, I was frustrated when I couldn't communicate well. In addition to my Spanish difficulties and insecurities, criticism from other family members who called me "whitewashed" made me feel worse, and sometimes I wanted to give up. (LA, 2023)

Julie shared how she had set aside her Spanish language skills. Like Johanna, Julie also expressed the feeling that she did not deserve to be considered bilingual. During her high school years, she found herself using English more frequently than Spanish. This lack of exposure and practice meant that she often forgot words or struggled to communicate in Spanish, leading to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and sadness, especially when she was unable to communicate effectively with her father. Isabel also explained how being called *whitewashed* intensified her frustration and influenced her lack of motivation to continue learning Spanish. Additionally, her distress over not being able to speak Spanish in the way she wanted was further heightened by her family's questioning about her lack of Latina friends: "My family's question: Why don't you have more Latina friends? reminded me over and over again of my lack of connection with my Hispanic culture"(LA, 2023).

Anisa, like the other participants, faced similar challenges in feeling accepted as a bilingual speaker. She shared how she received comments from her father's family that they could not understand her when she spoke Spanish. This led her to believe that her Spanish was not perfect and, therefore, she could not be considered a true bilingual speaker. This sentiment is reflected in her poem, where she wrote: "But if you don't speak perfectly, you can't say that you're bilingual" (PB, 2023). Anisa, like Isabel, felt that not speaking Spanish perfectly denied her the right to be called bilingual. Similarly, Alexia carried the burden of not feeling like an authentic Mexican due to her lack of fluency in Spanish. She expressed this feeling by saying:

"Sometimes I feel like I'm not Mexican enough. That I'm forgetting my culture. Or because I'm not fluent in Spanish" (LC#1, 2023).

Certainly, these feelings of insecurity and inadequacy regarding their Spanish language skills had a profound impact on all four participants, making them believe that they did not deserve the right to be called bilinguals, which consequently led them to question their *Latinidad*. The questioning of cultural authenticity as described by Sissoko and Nadal (2010), can be connected to the ability to speak the heritage language or to the familiarity or practice of any traditions. This phenomenon has been observed in other studies as well, and is often experienced by multiracial individuals where they receive implicit comments suggesting their inadequacy due to not belonging to a monoracial background (Johnson & Nadal, 2010). In two cases, these insecurities arose from discrimination within their family circles. For example, Jhoanna became self-conscious about her accent after her aunt made a comment about it, while Anisa faced negative experiences with family members who claimed they could not understand her well.

This aligns with previous research in the field of Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) Education which shows how negative childhood experiences, such as instances of humiliation, misunderstandings, and embarrassment related to language, impact on the diminished identification with the heritage language and culture (Potowoski, 2012). This also resonates with Sissoko and Nadal (2010)'s taxonomy of microaggressions, in which —contrary to previous classifications— includes instances in which the discrimination is made by members of the immigrant culture. This insight holds great significance, especially for second-generation immigrants, as it highlights that trauma can be perpetuated not only by individuals within mainstream US culture but also by members of one's own cultural heritage group.

Although Julie and Alexia did not explicitly report facing discrimination based on their Spanish language abilities, they expressed feelings of inadequacy as Mexicans because they believed their Spanish was not "perfect." As their Spanish instructor who was able to see their capacities in the Spanish language, I believe that the notion of perfection should go unnoticed in this discussion: What do they mean by saying they do not speak Spanish perfectly? It is crucial to recognize that many Latinx students who enroll in Spanish courses at university come with the belief that the Spanish they bring from home is not considered proper or correct. For example, this sentiment is evident in the responses of Julie and Alexia to the question about the use of Spanglish in the initial questionnaire. For them, Spanglish was a natural form of communication in their households; yet it was not considered as a reflection of standard or pure Spanish (IQ, 2023).

Valdés (2001) would agree that the idea behind these participants' responses was that their language proficiency did not align with prestigious varieties of Spanish. The scholar (2001) explains that there are linguistic features known to nonprestige speakers that are unknown to prestige speakers, and vice versa. The issue lies not in nonprestige speakers having a limited vocabulary or sentence structures, but rather in their lack of usage of the prestigious variety (Valdés, 2001). On the other hand, Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that whether someone is perceived as a speaker of a prestigious or nonprestigious language variety is not determined by their actual language use, but by how they are perceived by the "white listening subject" (p.160). The authors affirm that beneath these ideas of proper and improper Spanish lies racism (Flores & Rosa, 2015). They further highlight that these ideologies manifest in educational settings where students like Julie and Alexia, who exhibit significant sociolinguistic skills through their bilingual experiences, are still perceived as linguistically inferior and in need of remedial

measures, despite surpassing their peers and even some professors in proficiency (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Adding to Flores and Rosa's (2015) point, these ideologies are not only present in educational institutions but also within the community itself, which can also explain why the linguistic discrimination that second-generation Latinx youth suffer comes from family members as well. Nevertheless, whether they occur within or outside the community, it is important to highlight the profound damage of this language ideology, as it not only makes young individuals question their ability to speak Spanish, but more concerning, their right to be considered as authentic Latinxs.

Questioning Belongingness: Do I Belong Here? The four participants shared experiences of feeling that they did not belong and experiencing isolation and exclusion. In three of these instances, these experiences occurred in predominantly white spaces. Jhoanna, for example, recounted her time on the soccer team, which was made up entirely of upper-middle-class white girls, with Jhoanna being the only Latina. Being part of this group, Jhoanna could not help but notice the stark differences between herself and her friends in terms of freedoms and permissions. She could see that her friends' parents were more lenient, whereas her own parents were more strict, which meant that she was not able to participate in the same activities as her friends did. This left her feeling like an outsider among her circle of friends. As she stated: "I wanted to fit in with my friends at school and be liked. My family's ideals made me feel alienated at times, and different from that of my friends" (IT, 2023). Jhoanna's feeling as an outsider would become even stronger when she felt that was not being understood by her friends either. Sometimes they would judge her parents and stereotyped them as overprotective and referred to their attitude as unfair.

Julie also struggled with feeling like she did not belong during her high school years. She often felt insecure and pressured to fit in with certain groups of friends, particularly those who were white and Asian, making it difficult for her to be authentic and show her true self to everyone. She shared:

There's like that pressure like "Oh you have to be cool", you have to act a certain way so you can have friends, and like should you be friends with these people? Like how do you get people to like me? and it's like very focused on like everybody around you, instead of like just like being yourself. And then, I feel like during the pandemic, since I was like away from people who I had like felt like I had to be friends with before, and then, like like being away for so long I feel like I realized like some of these people weren't actually my friends. (IT, 2023)

Likewise, Anisa also had a difficult time finding a space where she felt like she belonged. Anisa felt caught between two worlds due to attending a predominantly white school, where she felt like her heritage was considered inferior, and being around other kids made her more conscious of her skin color. She found herself in a difficult position, feeling too light to fully identify as Latina and yet too dark to fit in with her white peers. Years later, in a different school, Anisa experienced a similar feeling of not belonging, but this time it was connected to her friends' lack of understanding and her teacher's lack of effort in pronouncing her name correctly. She explained:

My friends are also white, so I couldn't connect with my culture, because when I had problems at home, or some things with my dad, I could not speak honestly because they don't really understand (...) And so I did feel a kind of disconnect, I wasn't able to be myself over here, and also no one looked like me. Like my teacher, I had this teacher who would always say my name wrong, and she said my name wrong for the whole two years that I was there. (IT, 2023)

For Anisa, not pronouncing her name correctly was a sign of not valuing her identity and welcoming her in the class. As a result, this made her feel excluded from that space. In these

three cases, the instances of exclusion were mainly through the participants' peer groups. Jhoanna felt alienated due to conflicting values between her family and her white-American friends, making her feel like an outsider in her group. Julie faced cultural differences with her white friends, which affected her self-confidence and ability to express herself authentically. As for Anisa, her experience of exclusion extended beyond her peers to encompass the entire school. Her memory of her 7th-grade white teacher constantly mispronouncing her name reflects a lack of value and acceptance of her identity in that school.

Unlike these participants, Alexia narrated experiences of being excluded within her ethnic/racial group. During her High school years, she met a group of Mexican girls in one of her classes and started hanging out with them, but the bond was not as strong as she had anticipated. Alexia found it challenging to trust her friends due to their attitudes, leading her to engage in superficial friendships only for the sake of having companionship: "I would try to talk about things, they would laugh at me, they would just not listen" (IT, 2023). Moreover, Alexia remembers feeling discriminated against because of her skin colour and being deemed "too Mexican" by her friends:

And I was also darker than the other girls... So they would make comments to me as well, and that's when I realized that I am very Mexican, and my parents have very dark skin tones too. In our home, we speak Spanish, we eat enchiladas and pozole, but in their homes, they didn't speak Spanish and they didn't eat mac and cheese. So I felt almost embarrassed, especially when I had my friends over, and my parents would try to talk to them in Spanish, but my friends didn't understand, even though they were also Mexican. (IT, 2023).

Through those derogatory comments and actions, her Mexican-American friends made Alexia feel excluded and even ashamed of her Mexican identity, resulting in a sense of not belonging. All these experiences, whether they happened inside or outside the participants'

communities, resonate with a recent study on social exclusion experienced by Latinx immigrants-origin adolescents (Halgunseth, et. al, 2022) . According to this research, a significant number of Latinx youth perceive their community, school, and peer groups as “proximal spaces of exclusion” (p. 541). As the findings show, experiencing exclusion leads students to feel uneasy and disconnected from their communities, schools, or friends (Halgunseth, et. al, 2022). The concept behind spaces of exclusion can also be linked to one of the themes “Alien in own land” proposed in the taxonomy of racial microaggressions by Sissoko and Nadal (2021). In their description, the authors (2021) explain how certain comments and behaviors coming from members of the US mainstream culture can make second- and 1.5 immigrants feel as foreigners in their own country. What this study adds to the current literature is that second-generation Latinx immigrants may also experience exclusion from groups of the same culture, as it was the case in Alexia’s story.

In relation to Alexia’s story, the instances of discrimination she experienced by other Latinas trigger a series of other interrogations: What makes latina youth distance themselves from their Mexican heritage? Or, why do Mexican families feel forced to assimilate into the US mainstream culture and eradicate their Latinx culture? What ideologies shape how Latinxs behave in the United States? It would be far too simplistic to judge their behavior and stereotype them as *traitors* who betray their nation; this rather requires a more comprehensive analysis of the external forces that make Latinxs embrace the U.S mainstream culture. Anzaldúa’s work (2007), for example, has made great contributions towards the understanding of Chicanxs experiences in the United States. She explores how linguistic, cultural, and ideological borders leave Chicanxs feeling trapped between two worlds, unable to fully belong to either. What this shows is that the erasure of one’s cultural heritage is the consequence of an oppressive system

that does not recognize, honor and respect multicultural and hybrid identities, rather than a genuine desire to abandon one's roots.

Second-class Citizen: Don't We Deserve Equal Treatment? All participants shared instances where they experienced or witnessed differential treatment to people from their communities, leading to a range of emotions such as anger, powerlessness, and frustration. Jhoanna specifically talked about the health system in her hometown, referring to it as "in complete disarray" (IT, 2023). She drew attention to the lack of Spanish-speaking health professionals, negatively impacting the quality of service for the Latinx community, which represents almost half of the county's population. Jhoanna also shared an episode during a visit to a dermatologist when she was younger, which she still remembers as an uncomfortable experience:

So there was that disconnect between the physician and my dad; my dad kind of pointed to me like: "Say what you're feeling", but it was like in the heat of an argument, and I was like 12, that was young, cuz I remember like: I don't. I can't alleviate... One: like it's hard to be able to convey what I'm feeling when there's when it's like a stress environment. Two: I can't like alleviate, like this, how this escalates. It's like tension between us, because they were like, the physician was not able to... at which point, the physician was like I need you to....Would you like to see another provider? and so we left. (IT, 2023)

This incident highlights a significant shortcoming in the healthcare system since it lacked the resources to provide adequate care for Jhoanna's father's concern. This placed a great burden on a 12-year-old girl who was already coping with a medical condition, forcing her to face an inefficient system and to witness her father's frustration. Jhoanna certainly felt overwhelmed and recalled being angry at her father, thinking to herself: "Why do you make me do this?" (IT, 2023). While Jhoanna's feelings during the incident are entirely understandable, the situation prompts some important questions: To what extent do healthcare professionals show empathy

toward community members who speak English as a second language or those who don't speak it at all? Was the doctor aware of how challenging it can be for an immigrant father to realize that his daughter needed medical attention but that he could not make himself understood?

Similar to Jhoanna, Julie also highlighted the systemic issues within the healthcare system in her city that disproportionately affect people of color. She emphasized that these issues became even more apparent during the COVID pandemic:

In the pandemic like people of color and like including like Latinos they were more likely to get covid, they're more likely to like be in jobs where they can get covid, and like there's like the statistics showing like all like how they're more likely to die from Covid... It was interesting because my cousin, she works in the school district. She does like translate and she was helping lead like what is it like a Q&A with like Latino families and they were asking like questions that they had about covid and like the vaccine cuz there was a lot of questions that they had, and she was telling us like some of the questions they're asking; they're like "Okay, we heard the the vaccine had egg, things like that". They had a lot of questions and they didn't have the information like there was just things that they didn't know because nobody had made the information available to them. (IT, 2023)

Julie's tone of voice expressed a mixture of anger and sadness, knowing that the Latinx community was more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to the nature of their jobs. She also admitted feeling shocked by the lack of information about the vaccine within her community. In addition to the sad situation during the pandemic, Julie also highlighted the daily barriers faced by Latinx families when accessing healthcare. She shared a personal experience of her grandmother's discomfort with going to the doctor because of her past negative experiences with male doctors. Isabel explained how her mother had to double-check the professional that her grandmother would see prior to her visit to make sure she would feel comfortable. As part of her reflection, Isabel acknowledged the privilege her family had in speaking English but wondered about the challenges faced by families who only speak Spanish.

Anisa reported a similar experience her mother had as a second language English speaker. However, in this case, language was not a barrier to communication but rather the source of discrimination. When asked why her mother preferred to homeschool her, Anisa explained:

For my mom, she does speak English, but she has a fear that she still has a Spanish accent. Sometimes, when she goes to school for me, the teachers and people in the office look at my mom weird or say they can't understand her or listen to her accent. They say some rude things to my mom, and that's why my mom thinks it's not good for her or me because if they can say some things to my mom, they can say some things to me (IT, 2023)

Anisa's account reflects the discrimination and mistreatment that immigrant families face in schools. While some of these instances are explicit, as the one described before, others are more subtle, but they have the power to hurt as much or even worse than the other ones. For example, Anisa recalled how her English skills were put into question upon entering a predominantly white school in 7th grade. Right at the beginning of the school year, she was placed in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class without any assessment of her language proficiency. Anisa would ask herself: "Why am I in this class?" (IT, 2023), and she would immediately think that there was something inherently flawed about her. When reflecting on this episode, she explained that it was easier for the school administrators to enroll her in that class rather than make the effort to determine whether she needed it or not. This is yet another example of institutional staff lacking the empathy, compassion, and training necessary to work with immigrant families.

Alexia's story also reflects moments in which she perceived the oppression against her community. During her elementary education, she was accepted into a special program designed for gifted children. However, she found herself as the only girl from her previous school in her current class; the only familiar faces were three white boys who had also transferred from her old

school. Later in her recount, she went back to moment in her life and explained:

Especially when I look back now, when I had my three white boys, how much harder I had to fight the things than they had to, it made me think that it's going to be a long ride, long uphill ride, in order to get things I want... and sometimes people lose that drive, but they don't deserve it any less, so they deserve support and scholarships and funds when there are people who have more fortunate, where it's easier for them and it's hard for some people, so they deserve more support. (IT, 2023)

Alexia's account highlights two major issues and raises some interrogations. Firstly, the lack of representation of Latinx students in certain spaces, such as the special program she had been admitted to. What does it imply that she was the only Latina in that program? Who is more likely to receive such opportunities? As she expressed, from a young age, she knew she had to work harder than her white peers to achieve her goals. Why is that? Secondly, her reflection also revealed the lack of resources available for certain groups as she mentioned that scholarships and funds need to be particularly reachable to those disadvantaged groups, who are the ones who needed the most. This in turn raises another question: Are current policies supporting and empowering underrepresented communities?

All in all, these experiences, which reveal moments of unequal treatment both in the healthcare and education system, exemplify the pervasive theme of being treated as a second-class citizen. This is a concept coined by Sue and his colleagues (2007) in their study of racial microaggressions experienced by Asian Americans and Black Americans. The same concept was further elaborated by other scholars (Nadal & Sissoko, 2010; Rivera et al., 2010) who also explore racial microaggressions in the United States. Nadal and Sissoko (2010) explain that second-citizen microaggressions, occurring at both interpersonal and systemic level, are instances in which immigrants face obstacles to their access to human basic rights as well as to educational funding and permanent legal status. In their study of racial microaggressions on

Latina/o Americans, Rivera and his colleagues (2010) further expounded on the concept of second-class citizen treatment in the Latinx community introducing additional subthemes such as being disregarded, being deprived of resources or receiving unequal treatment, being excluded, and encountering unwelcoming reactions. Yet, regardless if they occur at a micro or macro level, the underlying message is that Latinxs are lesser beings than white American people (Sue et al., 2007).

Coping with Adversities

The second section of this chapter addresses the research question 2, which states: “How did Latinx students cope with the adversities they have encountered throughout their lives?”. Findings revealed that participants used active forms of coping with the adversities they came across and that they continue facing in their current lives. Both themes emerged from previous literature (Halgunseth, et. al, 2022) on this topic: (1) Seeking my place and (2) Resisting

Seeking my Place: Where Do I Belong? Three participants shared their experiences of seeking genuine connections and spaces where they could feel accepted, valued, and a sense of belonging. Jhoanna described her post-pandemic return to school as an opportunity to distance herself from weaker friendships and embrace new encounters. It was during this period that she formed a profound connection with a group of Latina friends who provided her with a strong bond:

In the time I distanced myself from some friends I was able to make friends not only because we shared the same humor and world views but because we came from the same culture. It was then that I, unconsciously, nourished my Hispanic culture by embracing theirs, as well. I had never spoken so much Spanish in my education as my senior year of high school. I look back with love and am thankful for my friends. (IT, 2023)

Furthermore, Jhoanna emphasized how sharing the same cultural code fostered a profound sense of mutual understanding among her friends, deepening their bond. She highlighted the contrasting experience with her partner at the time, who lacked this shared cultural background and thus struggled to comprehend certain aspects of her identity, such as her parents' values and ways of thinking. Jhoanna also expressed how spending more time with her Hispanic friends enabled her to fully embrace and celebrate her Spanish heritage. Her Latinx friends were definitely a safe space for her.

In a similar vein, Julie also talked about the significance of having Latinx friends in her life. While discussing the clash of values between Mexican and American families, she emphasized the importance of having Latina friends who could relate to and understand the experiences she was going through. These friendships served as a vital support system for Julie, providing a space where she could share her challenges and frustrations with individuals who shared similar cultural backgrounds and encountered comparable situations:

I made some of my friends, they have immigrant parents, too. So, even their parents were strict. So I think it was, it was better than like like, if I had a parent, if I had like friends whose families were completely American like white people from here, you know, I think that would have been different, but, like some of my friends, have like immigrant parents, and I think they have like the same mentality like you can't have fun too much like too many times in a week. You can only go out once a month, you know if you got today you can't go out for like 2 more weeks and stuff like that. So for us it was like we we kind of shared that in common, at least (IT, 2023)

Alongside her friendships, Julie discovered a powerful way of coping with her feelings of not fully embracing her Mexican identity: immersing herself more deeply in the culture and connecting with its people. Following the pandemic, she embarked on a journey to Mexico with her family. Prior to her trip, she would feel unsure about her *latinidad*, but the experience immediately evoked a profound sense of belonging within her:

After being away for so long, I was surprised at how easily I fit in with my family in Mexico. The conversations at night that started at dinner and lasted until dark. The Mexican way of teasing - but with affection. The rides in the truck crushed with all my cousins because you couldn't go anywhere without taking the whole family. With this, I began to realize how much I am Mexican. My family values, my way of speaking, my jokes, the songs I like, my habit of always conversing during meals. Things that are parts of me, that sometimes were not in line with American culture, were my Mexican culture without knowing it (IT, 2023)

Julie articulated how being physically present in Mexico gave her the opportunity to engage directly with the customs, traditions, and people that had shaped her heritage. She recognized that despite her Mexican roots always being a part of her, they had not necessarily aligned with the American culture in which she had grown up. By immersing herself in the environment that reflected her cultural heritage, Julie was able to bridge that gap and strengthen her connection to her Mexican identity. Even as a college student, Julie continues to actively seek ways to deepen her connection to her culture. At the beginning of her Spanish class, she expressed: “I hope that through this class I will become more confident speaking and writing Spanish, learn more about Mexican and other Hispanic cultures, and be able to connect with the Hispanic community at UW” (IQ, 2023, Julie) .

Anisa, like the other participants, also encountered a profound sense of belonging when surrounded by fellow Latinxs. This pivotal moment occurred when she began high school in a new educational environment characterized by a more diverse student body and teaching staff. During these formative years, Anisa became an active member of a Latin club, through which she became acquainted with the Latino Educational Achievement Program (LEAP). LEAP facilitated meetings and events specifically designed to foster connections among Latinx students. Reflecting on those days, Anisa reminisces about the fond memories she created and describes her experiences as follows:

We kind of talked about our culture, and it was kind of nice, because, like I like things growing up that like didn't really know was culture. I was like Oh, it's just like my household....And then I hear other people say it, and I'm like Oh, that's how my mom is, and I'm like like so it's kind of nice to kind of like share with other people that we have like similar things, and i'm like oh, I can attribute that to like like, that's my latinidad, that's me being hispanic/latina... And so it was nice, and it was comforting because it's like oh, like I'm not alone like it (IT, 2023)

According to Anisa's account, her new group of Latina friends, as well as her involvement in the Latino club, played a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging for her. These connections provided a supportive community where she felt accepted and valued, countering any feelings of loneliness and exclusion she may have previously experienced. Being surrounded by individuals who embraced and appreciated her cultural identity reinforced her sense of belonging to the Latinx community, and as she said, gave her “rite of passage” to her Mexican identity (LA, 2023).

The three participants' accounts reflect different active forms of looking for spaces and/or groups of people where they felt truly connected to. These findings align with Halgunseth and her colleagues' study (2022), which revealed that Latinx immigrants-origin adolescents employed “proactive tactics” (p. 542) to cope with feelings of exclusion. In their study (2022), they found that the most common spaces were churches, multicultural organizations as well as groups of other Latinx peers. All these spaces made youth feel safe, welcomed and appreciated for who they were.

Based on these findings and alignments, feeling belongingness, which is an important aspect of any human being, is key for latinx youth, particularly in their identity development process. Being connected to other people as well as valued and appreciated for who they are seems to correlate with a strong sense of confidence and pride in their multicultural identities.

Belongingness and a strong self-concept are then interconnected concepts that influence Latinx youth's sense of identity and well-being by affirming and validating who they are.

Resisting: What Can I Do? Resistance emerged as another significant coping strategy identified in the life stories of the four participants. Each of them shared personal dreams and aspirations that reflect a genuine motivation to advocate for their communities and strive for positive change in their hometowns. Jhoanna, for instance, is currently pursuing a nursing degree, a profession that resonates deeply with her and gives her a sense of purpose in life. Through her firsthand experiences, she has witnessed deficiencies in healthcare services for Latinx individuals. As a result, she envisions returning to her hometown in the future to contribute towards addressing these challenges and improving the experiences of Latinxs in the healthcare system:

As an aspiring nurse I want to be able to help people like my parents who struggle to communicate with professionals in regards to their health. I want to minor in Spanish to bridge the two people for a more trusting and comfortable environment (IT, 2023)

Julie also made the decision to enroll in Spanish classes during her college education, driven by similar motivations: “I knew I wanted to take a Spanish class to improve my fluency and be able to help monolingual Spanish speakers in my future career” (IQ, 2023). Julie recognizes the importance of being able to communicate effectively with Spanish-speaking individuals and hopes that her language proficiency will enable her to support the community in her future profession. Although she has yet to determine her exact career path, she feels committed to advocate for the Latinx community, actively working to address the issues they confront in the healthcare system and making a positive difference in their lives.

Like Jhoanna and Julie, Anisa also possesses a strong desire to make a difference in her community through her chosen profession. Driven by her passion for mental health, she has

recently enrolled in a psychology program with the intention of working in this field. Her motivation to focus specifically on racial minority immigrants originates from her own life experiences, where she witnessed firsthand the challenges and hardships they often face. Having observed the lack of assistance available to this marginalized group, Anisa feels a strong sense of empathy and determination to advocate for them, striving to create a more supportive environment for those in need:

And so experiences like my mom basically and kind of like, help them, and make sure no one has those same experiences again. And so I think that's what I want to do first.... Because I have the opportunity and I like the voice and all those different things. I think that's what I want to do. And then I think in the end I want to work in mental health for adolescents.. a little bit of both. I kind of like want to do it for both my people, my family, but then I also want to do it for people who had experiences I did in the in-between (IT, 2023)

Furthermore, Anisa actively seeks opportunities to engage with the community and advocate for the most pressing needs. Even during her high school years, she already showed an interest in participating in organizations dedicated to defending the interests of the Latinx community. However, the transition to remote learning at the university made it challenging for her to find similar organizations. Despite this setback, she recently became a member of a Latinx club that organizes empowering events and meetings, allowing her to stay connected to her community.

Likewise, Alexia, has a strong drive to make a difference in her community. She is pursuing a major in Law, Society, and Justice, along with a minor in Public Policy, as she has a clear vision for her future. Alexia aims to work within the legislative system, specifically focusing on helping immigrants who come to the United States for employment. With her educational background and expertise, she aspires to use her position to give back to her

community and actively contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive society for immigrants. Witnessing the injustices that occur in her community has motivated her to complete her education and become an advocate for the underrepresented. When asked about her reasons to contribute to her community, Alexia responded:

I think just because you just see the humility in them, you see that they are humans too why should why do they serve any less than you do? If I have good things in my life, why can't they too? So you should give back... it's where we're all human it's not like one human is better than another So why do they deserve less than I do? we all deserve to be treated you know equally and deserve the same amount of love and respect too. (IT, 2023)

When Alexia used the term "humility" in relation to her motivations, it conveyed her awareness of the oppression faced by certain groups and the deep sense of unfairness and dehumanization she feels as a result. The questions she raised during her discussion underscored her frustration with these issues and revealed her strong motivation to instigate change.

The participants' aspirations and goals reflect their motivation to use "active forms of resistance and civic engagement" (Halgunseth et.al, 2022, p.) to deal with the daily injustices they see in their future professional fields. These findings are consistent with Halgunseth and her colleagues' study (2022) in which adolescents' forms of resistance were mainly through advocacy organizations that fought against racism and xenophobia and exclusion. Although these adolescents did not talk about their potential professions as participants in this study did, their active involvement in their community and their initiatives to take action against oppression reflect a similar determination to stand up for their beliefs. The concept of resistance has also been discussed previously in the existing literature. In her work, Yosso (2005) proposes the term *Cultural wealth* to recognize the different forms of skills, knowledge and experiences that individuals from marginalized communities bring to educational settings. One of those cultural

values is resistant capital, which highlights the individuals' ability to challenge and resist inequality (Yosso, 2005). In this study, the participants' resistant capital can be perceived in their motivations to seek professions in which they can potentially fight for a more equitable and inclusive society.

Chapter Six

This chapter presents the final conclusions and remarks of this study and provides with its practical implications in the field of Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) education. Lastly, the chapter includes a section of personal thoughts that were shaped throughout the entire research process.

Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to understand how trauma is present in the life stories of Latinx students in the Spanish Heritage Language classroom at the University of Washington, and how they coped with the adversities they have encountered in their lives. Based on the findings that were revealed in the previous chapter, it is possible to conclude that the participants have undergone various experiences from childhood to the present, which have had a profound impact on their lives, leaving lasting emotional wounds. As with any physical injury, some of those wounds are bigger than others, and consequently, some of them hurt more than others. Some wounds are more visible, while some others are more hidden, located in areas that are hard to see. Some injuries have received attention and are in the process of being healed, while some others are still intensely painful.

While this study aims to avoid generalizing that all Latinx students experience identical wounds, it seeks to emphasize the presence of particular emotions and self-perceptions that can be extremely harmful and detrimental in the lives of Latinx youth. The study shows that their trauma can be present in their feelings of inadequacy, self-blame, insecurities and shame not only about their Spanish abilities but also, and more importantly, about their own Latinidad. As also shown in this study, young Latinxs can also be prone to suffer from experiences of social exclusion, from both sides, including white individuals and members within their own

community. Being excluded from certain groups leads them to feel that they do not belong to either place, thereby intensifying the insecurities about their identities. In addition to those internal struggles, the study also shows that Latinx youth are constantly exposed to systemic inequalities that make them perceive themselves and their communities as lesser human beings, a feeling that, undoubtedly, causes deep pain.

Yet, the findings also revealed that, despite those wounds, the participants have actively sought ways to cope with some of the adversities they have faced, which reflects their resilience and strength. Their genuine commitment to engage in their communities through their future professions and start making the change that they want to see seems to be a resilient response to the pervasive inequities and injustices inherent in the U.S system. This cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) should not go unnoticed since in all cases has proved to be a form that the participants found to, probably unconsciously, start healing their hearts.

Regardless of the internal process that each Latinx student is going through at the time that they enroll in Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) courses, these findings have significant implications for the SHL pedagogy, which will be explained in more detail in the subsequent section.

Pedagogical Implications

Given that the field of Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) education is still in constant growth, scholars have made significant strides in both SHL research and pedagogy, resulting in the building of a robust curriculum. As Beaudrie and colleagues (2014) assert, the design of the current SHL curricula reflects a language-as-a-right and as a resource philosophy that aligns to SHL students' affective needs. The goals for SHL instruction as well as the type of tasks proposed in the curriculum reflects a clear understanding that SHL learners come to these classes

feeling insecure about their Spanish abilities and having a very low self-esteem in the varieties they speak and in themselves as speakers of those dialects (Beaudrie et.al, 2014). However, as mentioned earlier in the introduction of this work, SHL students' negative experiences and the oppressive system in which they live have not been conceptualized as potential sources of trauma in this discipline. As a result, to my knowledge, there is little, if any, training on trauma-informed (Venet, 2021) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris et al., 2017) specifically designed for SHL instructors.

In an attempt to address this point, and based on the insights gained from this study, I provide two suggestions to consider in SHL pedagogy: (a) the enrichment of the SHL curriculum in the affective domain and (b) the professional development of SHL instructors in trauma-informed and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The Enrichment of the SHL Curriculum in the Affective Domain

Based on the research conducted in the field, scholars in heritage language (HL) pedagogy have outlined a series of goals for most HL instruction contexts, which are: (1) language maintenance, (2) acquisition or development of a prestige language variety, (3) expansion of bilingual range, (4) transfer of literacy skills, (5) acquisition or development of academic skills in the heritage language, (6) positive attitudes toward both the heritage language and the various dialects of languages and its cultures, and (7) acquisition or development of cultural awareness (Beaudrie et.al, 2014). Among the seven goals determined for HL instruction, only one of them (goal 6) is concerned with students' affective needs. However, in my opinion, this goal is debatable in terms of its attainability. It is suggested that HL instruction should aim at fostering "learners' self-esteem and pride in their HL language, and in themselves as speakers of it" (Beaudrie et.al, 2014, p. 80). Beaudrie and colleagues (2014) argue that HL acquisition is

enhanced when learners have positive attitudes towards their language varieties and the ethnic groups that they are part of. While I unconditionally support the objective of fostering pride in heritage speakers for their language and culture, I question whether it is feasible to achieve this when our students might carry deep emotional wounds related to their status as Spanish speakers and Latinx community members. It is in the light of this concern that I suggest that the goals for SHL instruction and its curriculum, particularly in the affective domain, can be enriched.

Based on my exploration of racial trauma, I believe that the existing literature on Liberation Psychology (Comas-Díaz & Rivera, 2020) can make great contributions to such curriculum enrichment. Psychotherapists (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Comas-Díaz, 2021) who work in this field are concerned with addressing their clients' trauma from a decolonial and liberating perspective. As explained earlier in the literature view, this understanding of trauma avoids seeing it as an individual-level problem that blames the individuals for challenges that they did not cause (Khasnabis & Goldin in Venet, 2021). Instead, the negative experiences that individuals may have had led to emotional wounds that are connected to the oppressive system where they live and the racial discrimination they face (Venet, 2021). In this way, people's injuries are recognized and validated, as are the factors that caused them (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019).

Lately, mental health scholars and professionals who work in this field have published seminal work on different approaches and frameworks that can be implemented in therapy with racial immigrants groups. For example, Dueñas and her colleagues (2019) have proposed the HEART framework: Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma, which was designed for Latinx immigrant communities. Their framework (2019) consists of four phases: the first one involves creating a space, which the authors define as a "sanctuary", that protects, affirms and validates those who

are suffering as a result of oppression in order to help them feel a sense of immediate relief. The second phase entails unpacking the systemic factors that lead these individuals to feel the way they do, and helping them acknowledge those sources of oppression. The third phase encompasses the development of “survival strategies” that can be tools for dealing with and healing from racial trauma. Finally, the fourth and last phase encourages individuals to take social justice action as a form of mitigating oppression, and a collective form of healing.

Exploring frameworks such as the one described before can be a great starting point in enriching the current SHL curriculum. The idea of recognizing pain, acknowledging its external causes and finding ways to heal collectively are skills that could be incorporated into SHL curricula. In what follows, I will suggest a tentative curricular framework that I am currently designing for SHL courses at the university level. Although my work is not fully complete, these ideas can be used as an initial step for this enhancement. The framework encompasses four skills: (a) the development of self-awareness, (b) the cultivation of self-compassion, (c) the practice of self-appreciation and (d) the advancement of social justice:

Development of Self-awareness: According to the definition provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), self-awareness refers to “the abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts”. When it comes to SHL contexts, the curriculum should then aim at helping Latinx students be aware of their emotions, thoughts and values, and how they dictate their behavior in relation to situations connected to their heritage language and culture. This implies understanding which emotions are evoked when they are interacting in Spanish under particular circumstances or with certain people. Through a series of introspective activities (such as for example poetry), students can reflect on their feelings (shame, guilt, fear), label them and discuss

why they feel in such a way. They can also discuss how those emotions and common negative self-perceptions affect their relationship with their Spanish variety and culture. Self-awareness is then the route through which students can start recognizing what causes pain and locating those wounds. Furthermore, introspective activities and whole-class discussions on this topic gives students the opportunity to voice their worries, concerns and fears, and share them with others. As research on ethno-racial trauma (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019) has proved, a crucial step for the healing process is creating a space where individuals' voices are heard and validated.

Cultivation of Self-compassion: Another goal for the SHL curriculum should be to help students embrace self-compassion (Neff, 2023), which can soothe their pain and bring a sense of relief in their lives. Being more understanding and kind with themselves can help them understand, for example, that their sense of inadequacy is linked to many external factors that they did not have control of, such as their the place where they were born, the school they attended, the family in which they were raised, etc (Neff, 2023). It can also help them acknowledge that they are not crazy for feeling the way they do; the oppression they constantly face is enough reason to experience those feelings. The curriculum could then incorporate more introspective work in which these concepts are explored and discussed throughout the course.

The Practice of Self-appreciation: The SHL curriculum should also seek to help Latinx students value and honor their multicultural identities. This self-appreciation should be accompanied by a discussion on critical language awareness (Mendoza, 2018), which helps students see that the negative perceptions they have on their Spanish variety and on themselves as speakers of it is connected to the stigmatization of those Spanish dialects. For example, Spanglish should be presented as a language that aligns with their hybrid identities, and students should be exposed to materials in which they see how Spanglish is dominant not only in their

communities but also in the media. By bringing authentic materials such as videos, songs, speeches, movies, podcasts, and novels that showcase the use of Spanglish by artists, educators can facilitate discussions that encourage students to recognize and appreciate its validity. This approach helps students understand that there is nothing inherently incorrect or negative about Spanglish, which can lead them to accept and validate it. These two values, acceptance and validation are crucial for them to start embracing their Spanish variety. Another form in which self-appreciation can be promoted is through exposing students to all the beauty that their heritage culture has (music, food, traditions, celebrations, art), and potentially help them reconnect with their Latinx roots. Finally, self-appreciation should also take the direction of presenting multiculturalism as a plus rather than as a minus. Latinx students should see that being multicultural means having more than one window through which to look at the world around them.

The Advancement of Social Justice: The fight for social justice among Latinx community is proposed by liberation psychologists who define *social justice* as “behaviors that aim to diminish oppression and support fairness, equality, and justice” (Comas-Díaz & Rivera, 2020, p. 11). It should be noted, though, that this does not imply forcing the community’s members to take a specific action or tell them what they have to do to address an issue, but rather invite them “to define what social justice means to them” (Comas-Díaz & Rivera, 2020, p.11). Each person may have its own way of attending to a problem or matter, and so, they should have the freedom to choose which battles they want to fight and the means through which they want to engage in those missions. The SHL curriculum should then give Latinx students the opportunity to reflect on this, and offer the space for them to define their social justice action. A good idea would be to bring examples of creative arts and arts-based activism such as “street art, indigenous murals, hip

hop music, spoken word, altar making, and several others” (Comas-Díaz, 2021, p. 137) into the curriculum, and encourage students to discover their own means of expression through which they can raise their voices.

By proposing this curricular framework, I do not suggest that SHL teachers should take on the role of mental health specialists in the classroom, but I do believe that we, as educators, should at the very least create safely held spaces and equip our students with social-emotional strategies that can help them navigate their struggles and hardships more smoothly. I am absolutely convinced that healing and personal growth are crucial initial steps that must be taken if we want to see a future Latinx youth generation that takes pride in their heritage language and works for its preservation in their communities.

The professional Development of SHL instructors in Trauma-informed and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

As many of us would agree, teachers are the backbone of our educational system. A course may have the most complete and updated curriculum ever, or the most stimulating activities, but after all, it is the instructor who has the power to create a safe and nurturing environment, and to make students feel valued and appreciated for who they are and for what they bring to the class. In light of this, SHL instructors should have training on both trauma-informed (Venet, 2021) and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (Paris et al., 2017). Being a trauma-informed educator in the SHL context should begin with being mindful of students’ internal struggles, fears and concerns in relation to their heritage language and culture, and how these feelings are intimately connected to students’ sociopolitical, educational, and familial environments. Understanding this can hopefully allow teachers to empathize with their students and to find ways in which they can support them in their learning process rather

than judge them and label them as “insecure language learners”. This asset-based perspective on students, as opposed to a deficit-based view, will certainly impact on both what and how they teach. Venet (2021)’s work on trauma-informed educational practices can contribute enormously to the professional development of SHL instructors in this affection dimension.

In addition to trauma-informed education, SHL instructors can also highly benefit from the existing body of literature on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris et al., 2017). In their work, scholars (2017) propose to challenge “the white gaze that permeates educational research and practice with and for students of colour, their teachers and their schools” (p. 2), and to raise questions as to what would happen if that gaze were not the predominant. CSP is then concerned with not only honoring and exploring students’ heritage and community cultural practices but also to deepen and *extend* those practices (Paris et al., 2017). The scholars (2017) argue that the classroom should not only be a place that shows respect for what students bring, but, more importantly, a place where those funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenbergare, 1992) are *sustained* and fostered. Undoubtedly, it can be extremely valuable to bring some of the aforementioned bibliography to the professional development of SHL instructors, and find ways in which SHL teachers can implement it into their teaching.

Final Personal Thoughts

It is hard to believe that I am composing the concluding section of my thesis, which reflects the culmination of an academic journey that began nearly two years ago. Looking back on time, I find that the student who is about to finish her thesis is different from the person who embarked on her Master's program during the fall quarter of 2021, and this work is intimately connected to such transformation. I began this research inquiry out of my concerns and curiosities as a SHL instructor and I thought that once the puzzle was completed, I would have

all the answers I was seeking. While it is true that many of those inquiries were resolved, I must admit that this work led me to some personal discoveries that were beyond my initial expectations.

Exploring others' beliefs and perceptions and unpacking the reasons behind their behavior made me revise and confront my own explicit and implicit bias and reflect on how they govern my judgements and behaviors. Thanks to those reflections, I find myself questioning now all the times I assumed I knew what being a Latina in the U.S was. I came to realize that there are numerous aspects and intricacies that I had never considered. First, my language variety is not criticized and stigmatized as other Spanish varieties are; my accent, for instance, is even admired by many Spanish and non-Spanish speaking people in the U.S. My Argentinian culture is usually appreciated and even cherished by many people as opposed to other Latinx cultural practices which are diminished. Furthermore, my light-skin color shields me from experiencing the extent of discrimination faced by other Latinas in the U.S, and my country's European ancestry places me and my people in a position that is often perceived as superior in comparison to other Latinxs. That being noted, was it possible to say that I could entirely understand what being a Latina in the U.S was? Clearly not, and I would have probably never realized this if I had not embarked on this journey and conducted this research.

However, if there is one thing this work has instilled in me, it is an insatiable hunger for more. I know that the journey has not ended yet; this is only one stop, but there is more coming. There is more bias and assumptions that need to be uncovered. There are more ideas to continue questioning and challenging in our systems. There are more injustices that need to be disrupted and dismantled. This research inquiry is only the beginning of more puzzles to resolve.

Appendix

Appendix A

Qualitative Research Informed Consent

Dear students,

I will be conducting a qualitative research study in this course SPAN 216 this quarter. The aim of this study is to explore the personal stories of Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) Learners from a trauma-informed lens. In this study, I will particularly focus on SHL learners' social, educational and political environments that have affected their relationship with their heritage Spanish language and culture. The study also seeks to identify which coping mechanisms, if any, SHL learners have developed to overcome the challenges they encounter in relation to their Spanish language and cultural heritage.

Your participation in this study will help me to better understand and respond to current classroom challenges and demands in the field of Spanish heritage Language education as well as allow me to improve my pedagogical practices.

If you accept to participate in this study, you acknowledge your willingness to engage in all the following activities:

- Offering your written and oral productions for the data collection
- Attending sporadic recorded meetings with me throughout the quarter
- Being observed in interactions during class work.

Some of these activities will be conducted in class time, and some others will require you to complete in irregular class hours. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are all free to refuse to be interviewed, surveyed, and observed.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The records from this study will be kept confidential. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. I'll be the only person with access to the files and data collected. In the final report, I will use pseudonyms in order to protect your identity.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT: A risk involved in this study is the breach of confidentiality, that is, other people might find out the information that participants provide. This is highly unlikely, as I will do everything I can to ensure that participants' identity will be kept a secret. In presentations and publications, I may include short excerpts from the transcripts, but not the actual audio of the audio-recorded interviews.

Another risk involved in this study is that participants may feel uncomfortable and sad when talking about past adverse experiences in relation to their Spanish heritage language and culture. These are the precautions I will take as regards this aspect:

- You will be able to skip any question you do not want to answer during the interview or meetings.
- The interview and meetings will be conducted in a confidential and welcoming space that facilitates human connection, and where you feel emotionally safe.
- I will remain sensitive to your reactions and feelings during the interview, and be flexible to make adaptations to the questions (if necessary) to reduce any possibility of making you feel uncomfortable during the interview or meeting.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY: If you decide not to volunteer for the study, you will participate in all the classroom activities, under exactly the same learning conditions as the rest of the students. But I will not collect any oral or written materials from you. Your evaluation in this course will not be affected by your decision of volunteering or not in this research study.

I appreciate your time and willingness. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions after reading this informed consent.

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Appendix B

Biopoem¹: Exploration of my identity

Write a poem following the instructions in each line. Remember you can also use English if there is a word or phrase that resonates more with you in that language.

(First line) First and last name

(Second line) three of four adjectives that describe you

(Third line) Your favourite phrase

(Fourth line) Two or more important relationships in your life (Daughter of... Mother of..., etc)

(Fifth line) Two or three things, people, or ideas you love

(Sixth line) Three feelings that you have experienced

(Seventh line) Three fears you have experienced

(Eighth line) achievements you have obtained

(Ninth line) Two or three things that you would like to happen or occur

(Tenth line) Residence

¹ Adapted from Abromitis, B.S. (1994, June/July). Bringing lives to life. Biographies in reading and the content areas. *Reading Today*, 11, 26.

Appendix C

Poem about my bilingualism

- ²In this project, you have the opportunity to unleash your creativity. You should write a poem where you explain how your bilingualism is experienced through the five senses. You can describe how your bilingualism smells, tastes, sounds, feels, etc. Remember to explain your comparisons.

² Assignment designed by Dr. Angélica Amezcua as part of the syllabus of the course SPANISH 216

Appendix D

Linguistic and Cultural Autobiography

³In class, we have been talking about our culture and bilingualism. In this composition, you will need to narrate the events that shaped you culturally and linguistically. Before you begin, take a few minutes to reflect on these topics. The final product will be an essay, and the work will be gradual (it will have a series of steps). We will start with the FIRST STEP:

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions. You don't need to answer them one by one (you can if you want), but the idea is to use them as a guide to help you with your reflection.
 - Who am I? Where do I come from? Where does my family come from? Which places did I visit as a child and with which ones do I identify today?
 - What is my culture? What are my values and traditions?
 - My languages: Which languages did I grow up with? Who did I speak each language with? What memories do I have?
 - How was my experience in school? What memories do I have?
 - What are my attitudes towards my languages?

2. Complete this pre-writing activity (brainstorming) that will help you organize your ideas and what you want to express in your composition:
 - A. Think about the experiences/events that shaped you culturally and linguistically
 - ...
 - ...
 - ...
 - ...
 - ...

 - B. Identify the three most significant experiences/events and think about what you want to express about them.

3. Now that you have thought about the structure and ideas you will write about in your essay. It should include an introduction, 3-body paragraphs and a conclusion.

³ Assignment designed by Dr. Angélica Amezcua as part of the syllabus of the course SPANISH 216

Appendix E

Lotería Cards (LC)

⁴LC #1

1. Read "El joven bicultural"⁵ and highlight interesting ideas.
2. Think of a way to visually represent those ideas or a particular one. You can create a drawing manually or digitally. It can be an abstract or more concrete drawing. The choice is yours, the important thing is that it makes sense to you.
3. Justification: In a paragraph, explain what you want to express with your visual representation (relating it to the text you read).

LC #2

1. Watch the video "My Spanish: what is Spanish for a Latina in the United States?"⁶ What ideas resonate with you? Think of a way to represent those ideas using one of the following forms:
 - Think of a way to visually represent those ideas or a particular one. You can create a drawing manually or digitally. It can be an abstract or more concrete drawing. The choice is yours, the important thing is that it makes sense to you.
 - My own verse: You can you create a verse (minimum of 4 lines) related to the idea you extracted from the video.
2. Justification: In a paragraph, explain what you want to express with your visual representation (relating it to the text you read).

⁴ The idea of Loteria Cards was taken from a class I took *Immigrant Schooling*, taught by Prof. Dafney Dabach

⁵ This reading is about the struggles that are usually faced by second-generation americans particularly in relation to their multicultural identities

⁶ [Video](#): The video is about a Latina who expresses her feelings about her Spanish narrating personal experiences and memories.

Appendix F

Initial Questionnaire

I would appreciate it a lot if you could take some minutes to answer the following questionnaire, which will help me get to know more about you. There are no right or wrong answers. Right answers are the ones that are true for you. ;Thank you very much!

- Name
- How old are you?
- What is your first language?
- When did you start learning Spanish? When did you start learning English?
- What is your mother's first language? If Spanish, which variety of Spanish? (for example: US Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Caribbean Spanish, Colombian, etc).
- What is your father's first language? If Spanish, which variety of Spanish?
- Were you born and/or have you ever lived in a Spanish speaking country? If yes, where, how old were you, and for how long did you stay?
- Do you ever visit your mother's and/or father's home country? If yes, how often and for how long?
- What is your attitude when confronted with a conversation that requires your use of Spanish? (Mark as many as apply):
 - Welcoming
 - Anxious
 - Interested
 - Uninterested
 - Frustrated
 - Intimidated
 - Shy
 - Confident
 - challenged
- How would you rate your overall ability in Spanish?
 - Fluent
 - Average
 - Basic
 - Poor
- What are your main strengths in Spanish? And your main weaknesses?
- Think about the different varieties of Spanish (i.e. Spanish from your home country, Spanish from Mexico, Spanish from Spain, Caribbean Spanish, Spanish spoken in the

US, etc.): Is there any variety of Spanish you particularly like? Sounds better/more melodic? Seems more correct/more prestigious?

- What, to your mind, is meant by the term “Spanglish”? What are your thoughts about using Spanglish in a conversation?
- What does being bilingual mean to you? Do you consider yourself bilingual?
- How did you get to know about this class and why did you decide to take it?
- Write about these topics: what you did during your winter break, what you are passionate about and your experience at UW up to this day, and your career. What would you like to do after finishing your degree? Where would you like to work, etc?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about your contact with the Spanish language and culture or your expectations and goals in this course? Feel free to do so!

Appendix G

Semi-structured interview (Protocol)

PART I: For our first interview, it would be very useful to reflect in advance on your life story. In order to do that, I would like you to think about the following:

If you had to imagine your life as it were a book or novel, which would be the chapters of it? Please, take some time to think which those chapters would be and assign them a title. *Note: You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest between 3 and 6.*

Chapter 1 “.....”

Chapter 2 “.....”

Chapter 3 “.....”

Chapter 4 ”.....”

Chapter 5 “.....”

Chapter 6 “.....”

PART II: The second part of the protocol was designed in order to use it as a guide throughout the interview. It is important to note, though, that some questions were adapted based on the name of the chapters assigned by the participants in PART I.

I. Life chapters: Guiding questions:

- I am curious to know why you called each chapter like that. Could you tell me more about it?
- How would you describe this chapter of your life? Any happy moments you can recall from this period? Any challenges?

II. Turning point:

- Now that you have looked back in time and over your life, is there any episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life? By turning point, I mean, a particular moment/ time at which a significant change occurred.

III. Future Script: The next chapter:

- So far you have talked about key scenes and chapters of your past. Now, I would like you to think about your future. Could you describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life? What is it going to be like?

IV. IV. Closure Questions: Is there anything else that we haven't talked about in your life story that you consider important?

Appendix H
Translation (Participants' excerpts)

*Pitbull and Alejandra Guzmán can be heard on a Saturday morning.
I can also hear my mother singing and the noise of pots and pans
Indicating that she is preparing lunch.
Potatoes with eggs, my favourite.
It feels like the pages in a photobook:
“This is your uncle Ricardo”. “This is your great-grandmother, you have hair just like hers”.
I long to go to Mexico to meet them and finally to feel at home.
It looks like a flag that is half american and mexican;
But there is a line that divides them.
The line is blurred.
This is my bilingualism.
(Alexia, PB)*

*My Spanish is like the sea
At times tumultuous, evoking intense emotions.
And sometimes calm, bringing a lot of peace.
My Spanish is fluctuating and emotional.
It is beautiful and strong.
(Jhoanna, LC2)*

*I speak English and Spanish,
But if you don't speak perfectly you cannot say that you are bilingual.
My favourite language is English, but the language of my motherland is Spanish.
I am in the middle.
I don't live in either part , and I live on both sides.
It is the beauty and the sadness of being bicultural and bilingual.
I love my motherland although my motherland does not love me.
(Anisa, PB)*

*I sometimes feel that my tongue wants to run,
Escape, and avoid that conversation.
But my heart insists: speak to them, speak to them, speak to them...
And then, I feel it like a sour taste in my mouth.
I can no longer move, it is still and I cannot reply.
But there my heart remains: speak to them, speak to them, speak to them...
And there I go, I do it. I said: “Yes, I speak Spanish”.
(Julie , PB)*

Appendix I

Illustration⁷

⁷ The illustration was co-created with a graphic designer based on a description of each participant, which illustrates their most salient personal qualities. The text that is included are textual phrases extracted from the data, which also reflect the participants personalities and ideals.

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