

“Learning Where I’m Coming From”: The Identity Construction of 1.5-, Second-, and Fourth-
Generation Migrants of Mexican Descent in Florida

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the identity construction of 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation migrant emerging adults of Mexican heritage in the American state of Florida. This qualitative research was conducted in order to fill a gap in the literature, which has hitherto either mainly analyzed perceptions and representations of Mexican-Americans by others, or has used large-scale survey methods, which force Mexican-Americans to sort themselves into pre-defined categories which may not feel natural to them. In this thesis, the most commonly mentioned identity referents from six life story interviews are identified and analyzed using theory from the fields of identity studies and migration studies. Analysis is chiefly predicated on Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's Dialogical Self Theory (2010) and McAdams' life story model of identity (2001). Several aspects of identity are analyzed, including religious identity, racial identity, and cultural identity. Findings of the research include the identification of "Brownness as Mexican-American identity," "Spanish language as Mexican-American identity," and "Catholicism as Mexican-American identity" as the most commonly occurring identity referents over all.

Keywords: Mexican, Mexican-American, identity, Florida, migrants, migration, 1.5-generation, second-generation, fourth-generation, Latino, Latina, Hispanic, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, Catholicism, brownness, Spanish

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1. Introduction and Methodology

As an academically thriving high school student in the United States, my family and I were surprised when we received a flyer in the mail, addressed to me, advertising tutoring services for those who needed extra help in school. The flyer was written completely in Spanish, a language no one in my nuclear family understands. Although initially puzzled, we quickly deduced that I likely received the flyer because my last name is Spanish. We promptly recycled the flyer.

The assumptions made by the distributors of that flyer about what someone with a Spanish last name would be like—that they would speak Spanish and struggle in school, for starters—are unfortunately common in the United States, where people of Latin American heritage are frequently and systematically discriminated against and stereotyped. People of Mexican heritage, in particular, often fall victim to discrimination due to negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Moreover, people of Latin American heritage have assumptions made about them, both by people outside of the community and within it. This impacts the identity construction of Mexican migrants and their descendants as they attempt to adapt to American cultural influences and narratives while still retaining and honoring their Mexican background.

This thesis explores the identity construction of 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation migrant emerging adults of Mexican descent in the American state of Florida. My general aim is to document and analyze how a few specific people of Mexican descent construct their own identity as related to their heritage. While the topic of Mexican-American identity, in particular, and Latinx identity more broadly has been studied, especially in the last decade or so, most of these studies do not utilize in-depth qualitative interviews to discover how members of the groups construct their own identities; rather, they use large-scale surveys to accomplish this, which force Mexican-Americans to sort themselves into predefined categories which may not feel natural to them (see Carter, Yeh, & Mazzula, 2008; Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016; Estrada & Arciniega, 2016; Faught & Hunter, 2012; Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008; Martinez, Torres, Wallace White, Medrano, Robledo & Hernandez, 2012; and Hipolito-Delgado, 2016). Moreover, existing literature often analyzes the prevailing discourse in various settings, which is often more focused on the construction of Mexican-American and Latinx people by others, such as by mainstream media or non-Latinx Americans (see Zolberg & Woon, 1999; Lugo-Lugo, 2008; and Correa, 2010). While this type of research is vital, it also leaves a gap that can only be filled by stories told by Mexican-Americans themselves.

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The lack of personal stories from actual Mexican-Americans can leave individuals especially prone to stereotyping. By letting Mexican-Americans tell their stories in their own words, the dimensions of their identities that are most relevant to them start to emerge. In order to accomplish this, avoiding large-scale surveys is crucial, since surveys still force Mexican-Americans into predefined, prescribed categories, such as the racial category “Other” without providing an ethnicity option, rather than allowing them to create these categories for themselves. This thesis analyzes many facets of the identity of Mexican-Americans, including religious identity. Much research in the field of religious studies focuses on situations in which religion plays a prominent, clearly visible role. However, studying situations in which religion is a background presence in people’s lives is equally interesting, especially when studying identity, since one’s religious identity—or lack thereof—is but one aspect of one’s complex identity construction.

The central research question of this thesis is: *How do 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation emerging adults of Mexican descent, living in the state of Florida, construct their identity in self-narratives?* In order to help me answer this question, I ask the following sub-questions: *Which identity referents do they use in their narrative construction of their identity? What categories do they use to identify themselves? How do members of this population conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity? How do religiosity and religious identity contribute to and interact with their Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican-American identities? How do the research participants appropriate elements of religious heritage in the construction of their identity?*

In the context of this thesis, I use the term “identity referent” to mean something which one draws upon to construct one’s identity. An identity referent can take many different forms, including that of an abstract idea, a physical object or location, or a cultural practice such as the celebrations surrounding a particular holiday. I use the term “category” to refer to the broader identity categories in which one places oneself and others, such as the category “Mexican-American.” My research question and sub-questions will be answered through the lens of the interpretative research paradigm, since I am operating from the belief that reality, including identity, is socially constructed, and I want to understand the meanings my research subjects themselves attach to events in their lives. In order to answer my central research question, I have conducted a survey of relevant literature in addition to conducting narrative-biographical interviews.

Instead of opting for a survey, I chose to conduct narrative interviews with six 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation migrant emerging adults currently living in the American state of Florida. I chose

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to interview six participants because six was a feasible sample size which still allowed for some comparison. The state of Florida was chosen for the relatively large population of people of Mexican descent, as well as for the practical reason of having contacts living there. I originally planned to interview six second-, third-, and fourth-generation students, because I had anticipated that those participants would be more accessible for recruitment. Moreover, I had originally planned to interview only women, since they are generally more open in interviews, and, since I am a woman myself, it would have enhanced my rapport with my interview subjects. Women are also seen as the symbolic bearers of culture, which makes it even more interesting to hear their perspective regarding their cultural identity (Castles & Davidson 2000, 121). According to Hua (2006), “Women’s bodies, more than men’s, are frequently assigned the cultural work of mourning, pain, witness, and healing” (201). However, ultimately, through the sampling methods I chose, two of the six participants I was able to recruit were male. Upon interviewing these two participants, I discovered that one of the participants is, in fact, a transgender woman. Thus, five of my participants are women, with one being transgender and thus having a unique perspective on gender roles, and one of my participants is a man. Ultimately, through snowball sampling, I recruited 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation emerging adult men and women, which still provided a richly varied group of participants from which I was able to gather compelling data.

The participants were contacted through organizations which have a Latinx or Mexican-American audience, such as Latinx student organizations, as well as recruited by snowball sampling with the help of a previously established contact with Mexican heritage. The method of recruiting participants through organizations with a specifically Latinx audience would likely mean that these participants feel a close connection to their heritage, and have already given some thought to questions of Mexican-American identity, influencing my results by mostly delivering research participants that feel strongly connected to their Mexican heritage, and decreasing the likelihood of finding research participants that do not have a strong Mexican-American identity. The method of recruiting participants through the previously established Mexican-American contact likely positively affected my results by creating a rapport between myself and the participant, since the knowledge that the contact knew and trusted me would likely increase the initial trust and comfort level between the participant and myself.

Crucially, I interviewed these participants using the narrative-biographical interview method, applying McAdams’ (2001) life story model, which defines identity as the life story which one tells oneself in order to explain how one became who one is. I have chosen this method so that the identity

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referents of my interview subjects will emerge more organically than if I were to conduct structured or semi-structured interviews. This approach therefore enables a deeper understanding of the manner in which those of Mexican heritage personally construct their own identity, with a limited audience—namely, I as the researcher.

In order to hear the life stories of my participants, I asked them to draw a timeline of their life, divided into four to eight chapters, and containing high and low points as well as main characters. Three participants chose to use this method, while the other three preferred not to write anything down, and instead created chapters simply while speaking out loud. I then asked them to tell me about the chapters, using probes if necessary, in order to get a sense of their life story, as told to a specific audience at a specific point in time. In this case, the participants only had me, a young female researcher with Mexican heritage, as their direct audience. The probes were divided into four categories: general probes regarding the chapter as a whole, cultural identity, racial and ethnic identity, and religious identity. I began with the deductive codes “Brownness as Mexican-American identity,” “Catholicism as Mexican-American identity,” “Day of the Dead as Mexican-American identity,” “Food as Mexican-American identity,” and “Spanish language as Mexican-American identity.” On the basis of themes emerging from the interviews, I added the following inductive codes: “Celebration of transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity,” “Discrimination as Mexican-American experience,” “Family as Mexican-American identity,” “Quinceañera¹ as Mexican-American identity,” and “Spanish last name as Mexican-American identity.”

Together, these categories were chosen to draw out information that is specifically relevant to my study, although it is also important to note when the prompts needed to be put into use and when the information emerged organically without prompting. Before conducting the interview, I explained to my interlocutors that anything said in the interview would be used only for the purpose of writing my thesis, and I asked for their consent to be interviewed, as well as their consent to be recorded using an audio recorder. I also informed them that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time, to not answer a particular question, or to ask for something not to be recorded or not to be included in the thesis. I also assured them that their answers would be anonymous, so that their names would not be associated with their answers. I transcribed the interviews using F4 Transcription software and analyzed the data using ATLAS.ti. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in

¹ “Quinceañera” is the Spanish term used in the United States to refer to the celebration surrounding the fifteenth birthday of a girl, traditionally celebrated as a rite of passage by people of Latin American heritage.

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English, and took roughly one and a half to two hours each. Four interviews were conducted in a café of the interlocutor's choice, one was conducted at the store owned by the family of the interlocutor in question, and one was conducted at the home of the parents of the interlocutor in question.

Ultimately, the interview guide I designed worked well in eliciting interesting information which was relevant to my research questions. However, there were a few instances in which the interviews did not go as I had hoped. Firstly, I believe I should have tried to find a way to emphasize the nature of my research more clearly: its nature being to analyze how individual stories and experiences construct a larger identity, which is ultimately constructed completely by the people involved. I felt that some of the participants believed that I was coming to them to learn what Mexican or Mexican-American culture *is*, not what the participant *believed* it to be, resulting in a didactic approach which felt one-sided at times, as the participant deviated from the life story format into a focused explanation of Mexican-Americanness. However, this in itself is interesting to analyze, as it relates especially to how I was viewed as the interviewer by some of the participants: as a white “outsider” who has to be told what Mexican-Americanness is.

Secondly, the prompt asking the participant to recall previous experiences filling out surveys and paperwork which asked for one's race and ethnicity, and to tell me what box or boxes they normally check, resulted in interesting answers. However, a follow-up prompt asking what category they would create for themselves if allowed to just fill in a blank would likely have resulted in insightful answers. I believe that this would have added an extra layer of depth when analyzing the racial and ethnic identity of my participants.

Although my research provides a window into the experiences of Mexican-Americans, it is important to note that six is not a representative sample size. Moreover, the people I have chosen to interview are all emerging adults. These factors result in a study that cannot be used to draw conclusions about all 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation Mexican-Americans. Rather than aiming to conduct research which could be used to draw general conclusions about such a large and diverse group of people, I aimed to hear and help share the thoughts and experiences of a few individuals who share a common heritage, and then to analyze these experiences in order to get an indication of how the agency of Mexican-American emerging adults functions at the intersection of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and cultural identity. For those in search of studies which have a more representative sample, survey-based studies are a better option.

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In this text, I have chosen to use the term “Mexican-American” to describe people with Mexican heritage living in the United States. However, as with many identities, there are various terms which members of the group use to describe themselves. The terms which my interview subjects use to identify themselves are also interesting and relevant for my research. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, those are the terms which they prefer, and I believe it is important to respect their wishes. Thus, I will also be using the terms which the interview subjects use to describe themselves.

My literature study consists of theoretical literature within the fields of identity studies and migration studies in order to establish a theoretical basis for my research. Additionally, I read literature about Latinx and Mexican-American people in order to gain a view of what has been researched already regarding Latinx and Mexican-American identity. Central to the theory used in this thesis is Hermans’ (2010) Dialogical Self Theory, which posits that one’s identity is made up of different “*I*-positions” which populate one’s mind and acquire particular salience in particular situations. In the migration context, Dialogical Self Theory is especially relevant as a migration background will likely result in larger “position leaps,” creating new *I*-positions which may conflict rather directly with one another (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 32). Those of a migration background must constantly negotiate and renegotiate their identities in relation to the cultures of which they are a part, as well as navigating feelings of loss and disconnectedness from the homeland (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57 and Buitelaar, 2013a, p. 3). The constructivist approach to intersectionality is also central to this thesis, as I analyze the ways in which Mexican-American emerging adults use their agency to navigate an overarching structure at the intersection of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and cultural identities (Prins, 2006).

Six emerging adults of Mexican descent have been interviewed for my research. I chose specifically to interview different generations of descendants of migrants in order to hear the stories of those who have Mexican heritage but have a life story rooted primarily in the United States. This allowed me to research how aspects of Mexican identity might evolve into a separate, but closely related, specifically Mexican-American identity, and how that identity might evolve again as it gets passed down through the generations. I planned to interview two people from each generation to still allow for some comparison between members of the same generation; however, ultimately I succeeded in recruiting three 1.5-generation participants, two second-generation participants, and one fourth-generation participant.

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My personal motivation for researching Mexican-American identity is that it is directly personally relevant to me. As a fourth-generation migrant of Mexican descent, I have long struggled with the construction of my own identity in relation to my Mexican heritage. Being unable to speak Spanish—the consequence of my grandfather’s awareness that the ability to speak Spanish marks one as a second-class citizen in the United States—and passing as white, I have long wondered whether I have the “right” to claim a Latina or even Mexican-American identity. With this project, I hoped to discover how people similar to me construct their identities, not only because it is interesting in itself and because it will help fill what I perceive to be a wide and obvious gap in the literature, but also in the hope of discovering new ways in which to securely conceptualize my own identity.

Because of my personal investment in this research, my position as a researcher is especially relevant and important to address and critically reflect upon. One potential methodological consideration that I can foresee is that Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican-American identities are, in a sense, contested, being constructed in many different ways by many different people. While this is precisely one of the reasons I find it fascinating to conduct research on this topic, I am aware of the fact that my identity as a Latina/Mexican-American may be contested by my own research subjects, who may view me as an outsider rather than a member of their community. However, my Mexican heritage also provides a window of opportunity for me to examine the reactions that my interview subjects have to my heritage and reflect upon those as indicators of their views about Mexican-American identity as a whole.

In the next chapter this thesis, I will explain the theory on which I will be predicating my analysis of the interviews. The chapters which follow each focus on a different generation of Mexican-Americans to allow for comparison between members of the same generation. The following chapter focuses on discussing overarching themes and similarities and differences between generations, followed by the final chapter, which presents the conclusions to my research.

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2. Theoretical Framework

Central to this thesis is Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Hermans defines the dialogical self as "a dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions or voices in the landscape of the mind, intertwined as this mind is with the minds of other people" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 31). These *I*-positions engage in dialogue within a person's mind. The positions can be internal, such as "I as a Latina"; external, which are connected to "the extended domain of the self," such as "my mother"; or a combination of internal and external, such as "I as the daughter of an immigrant" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 32). Dialogues can take place between any of these types of positions, whether internal, external, or both. The dialogical self forms a "society of mind" in which many voices are in constant dialogue within the mind of an individual, working through "tensions, conflicts, and contradictions," which are all part of a healthy self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 32). Moreover, special circumstances caused by a rapidly globalizing world, such as migration from one country to another, result in larger "position leaps" which, in turn, result in the creation of new *I*-positions which can be harder to reconcile (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 32). Globalization "leads not only to an increasing contact between different cultural groups but also to an increasing contact between cultures within the individual person" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 29). Multiple cultural positions therefore can exist within the same individual, even if that individual has lived their entire life in one country. These *I*-positions can lead to considerable tension within the society of mind as one attempts to reconcile diverging cultural standards, values, and practices.

While Dialogical Self Theory is helpful within the field of identity studies in general, it is especially helpful when analyzing the identities of migrant and diaspora populations, since these populations are more likely to have to grapple with the tensions and contradictions mentioned by Hermans as being part of a healthy self, and the contradictions between the different *I*-positions among migrant and diaspora populations can often be exceptionally substantial, since they, more than those without a migration background, likely experience more prominent tensions and contradictions, as two or more cultures and the practices associated with them play a prominent role in their lives. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use Toloyan's (1996) definition of diaspora, as quoted in Bhatia (2002): "Immigrant communities that make a shared, active attempt to resist nameless homogenization and strive to keep alive a sense of home outside the geographical boundaries of their culture" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57).

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Bhatia (2002) refers to the dialogical negotiations of the diasporic experience as characterized by “multiple mediations within a larger set of political and historical practices that are linked to and shaped by the specific cultures of both one’s ‘homeland’ and one’s ‘hostland’” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57). Members of migrant communities must therefore not merely negotiate cultural and ethnic identity on a personal level, but also as part of a larger set of political and historical structures. This can make the decisions of the descendants of migrants with regards to identity construction carry extra weight, as they may feel pressure to conform to the cultural values and practices of their parents, whilst simultaneously feeling the need or desire to “fit in” with the host country’s culture. The aspirations of parents, who often came to the host country in search of a better future for their children, often also complicate identity construction for those of migrant descent (Buitelaar, 2013a). If the parents migrated in search of a better life for their children, the idea of a “better life” would likely include increased financial stability. Thus, the children of the migrants may feel indirect or even direct pressure to succeed in school and obtain a high-paying job in order to secure financial stability. Additionally, people of color with a migration background may feel pressured to be a positive representative of their racial or ethnic group, since members of those racial or ethnic groups are often negatively stereotyped.

Not only do those of migrant descent often struggle with exceptionally high expectations that they may feel have been placed upon them, but members of migrant communities often have to “accommodate an inheritance of loss” with regards to the loss of their homeland (Buitelaar, 2013a, p. 3). The experience of those who come from a migration background is complicated by a loss of a self-evident home, meaning that “new forms of relatedness have to be negotiated both in the country of settlement and in the country of origin” (Buitelaar, 2013a, p. 3). For those with a migration background, then, homes often have to be “actively created” (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 42). Kinnvall (2004) refers to this concept as “homesteading,” which means “making and shaping a political space for oneself in order to surpass the life of contradictions and anxieties of homelessness” (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 747). Furthermore, as Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) explain, the anxieties provoked by homelessness often motivate migrants and their descendants to create an exile community, band together under a common cultural identity, and create “common spaces of assembly” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 42). Thus, individuals from a migration background may come together to form a migrant community in their host land.

Migrant communities share a sense of “longing, memory, and identification” which characterize their unique experience (Hua, 2006, p. 192). Bhatia (2002) focuses on the symbolism

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behind the hyphen in hyphenated identities such as Mexican-American, which labels he argues represent “dislocation and displacement,” as well as what Visweswaran refers to as a “‘violent shuttling’... between two incompatible worlds” (as cited in Bhatia, 2002, p. 55). This “violent shuttling” is characterized by an incessant negotiation between two or more incompatible cultures, between cherished past traditions and the reality of the present situation in the host country (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57). This constant negotiation between two or more cultural positions can apply for first generation migrants as well as their native-born descendants. Cultural histories from the homeland as well as legacies from the migration experience shape the identity of members of communities with a migration background (Bhatia, 2002, p. 60). Not only do cultural practices and stories of the homeland get passed down through the generations, but stories of “discrimination, hardships and sheer exploitation” are also told and retold, becoming intrinsic to the identity of immigrant communities and their members as well (Bhatia, 2002, p. 60).

The cultural histories passed down through migrant communities can be seen as a form of collective memory. Collective memories, as defined by Maurice Halbwachs (1980; 1992) and quoted in Hua (2006), “are memories of a shared past retained by members of a group, class, or nation” (as cited in Hua, 2006, p. 198). Although collective memories can be found most obviously in stories, both oral and written, they can also be found in everyday gestures, cultural practices, and activities ingrained in a specific culture (Hua, 2006). While memory may be represented as a straightforward, accurate retelling of factual past experiences, it is actually a constant construction and reconstruction of events which occurred in the past (Hua, 2006, p. 198). Memory is not objective, but rather is distorted by the current situation, including “needs, desires, interests, and fantasies” (Hua, 2006, p. 198). It is therefore highly contextual, shaped by the “revision, selection, interpretation, distortion, and reconstruction” of those who keep it (198). Analyzing collective memories can help to reveal the underlying values and motivations which shape the experiences of migrant communities.

Furthermore, the processes of identity negotiation within migrant communities and by migrants and their descendants are “shaped by issues of race, gender, sexuality and power” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 59). It is therefore crucial to use an intersectional approach to study the experiences of migrants and their descendants. Intersectionality is defined by Prins (2006) as “emphasiz[ing] that the complexity of processes of individual identification and social inequality cannot be captured by... arithmetical frameworks,” such as black women suffering under sexism *plus* racism (Prins, 2006, p.

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279). Rather, “categories like gender, ethnicity and class co-construct each other, and they do so in myriad ways, dependent on social, historical and symbolic factors” (Prins, 2006, p. 279).

By using an intersectional approach, my analysis takes into consideration the varying factors which influence the experiences of my research participants. For instance, the fact that two of the participants are members of the LGBTQ community causes friction with the gendered expectations they encounter within the cultures they navigate, including experiences of homophobia and transphobia, which will have influenced their identity formation. As a gay man and a transgender woman, the gendered expectations relating to machismo have weighed on them in a manner unique to non-gender conforming people of Latin American heritage.

The intersectionality approach comes in two main strands: systemic and constructivist. The systemic approach takes the view that a person is passively subjected to systemic domination and marginalization, with social categories merely being placed upon them (Prins, 2006, p. 280). The constructivist approach, however, acknowledges systems of domination whilst also acknowledging that an individual is a subject capable of thinking and acting (Prins, 2006, p. 280). The individual is then not merely “subjected to,” but also is made into a subject with agency. Thus, facets of one’s identity, such as gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, are not simply limiting, but also a source of empowerment, as a subject is able to appropriate these labels to craft their own narrative (Prins, 2006, p. 280). One is then able to use these resources to construct one’s own life story. The constructivist approach views identity as a matter of “narration” instead of “naming,” as one is both an “actor in and co-author of” one’s life story (Prins, 2006, p. 281).

The constructivist approach is the one I will be using in this thesis, since I will be using McAdams’ (2001) definition of identity as a life story, as well as a modified version of his life story model to conduct the interviews. McAdams’ life story model defines identity as one’s “internalized life story,” complete with a plot, characters, settings, scenes, and themes (McAdams, 2001, p. 101). Identity, then, is the story one tells about how one has become who one has become. According to McAdams, identity functions to reconcile, as much as possible, parts of oneself which, in the present, are different or even seem to conflict (McAdams, 2001, p. 102). Moreover, identity should also reconcile one’s present self with past versions of oneself (McAdams, 2001, p. 102). Ultimately, identity should “integrate... things so that although they appear very different, they can be viewed as integral parts of the same self-configuration” (McAdams, 2001, p. 102). McAdams’ life story model states that people begin to work on their identities in emerging adulthood, as it is a way to configure oneself in

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relation to the outside world (McAdams, 2001, p. 102). At that point, one begins crafting a narrative of one's life thus far, which McAdams simply refers to as a life story (McAdams, 2001, p. 102). This is why I chose to recruit emerging adults for my research. Using the life story model and the constructivist approach to intersectionality allows me to analyze the manner in which my research participants use their own agency to construct their own identity within overarching structures.

This thesis is primarily concerned with researching, specifically, the social identity of Mexican-American emerging adults. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory suggests that there are two facets to one's identity: personal identity, which is the way in which one conceptualizes oneself in relation to others; and social identity, which is one's self-conceptualization as a member of various social groups, such as race, gender, and nationality (as cited in Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009). Moreover, Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones (2006), also quoting Tajfel and Turner (1986), emphasize that social identity also includes "the extent to which this [self-conceptualization] leads one to favor the 'ingroup' (i.e., the group to which one perceives oneself as belonging) and to distance oneself from 'outgroups' (i.e., groups other than the ingroup)" (as cited in Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 6). Thus, social identity contains an oppositional, "us versus them" element. Although this seemingly contradicts the theory of intersectionality, which posits that there are no clear-cut ingroups and outgroups due to the complex intersection of various identities within a single person, individuals nevertheless may feel a particular loyalty to certain groups, causing those identities to gain salience in certain or even most situations. They may also subconsciously or even consciously privilege one identity and group loyalty over another: for instance, a Latina woman may choose to support Latino men in the name of ethnic solidarity, even though her position as a Latina woman means she falls victim to machismo, the masculine aggression and dominance which is practiced by some Latino men. In this case, if a white woman accused a Latino man of sexist behavior, the Latina woman may choose to support the man because she feels her identity as a Latina is more salient than her identity as a woman, at least in this situation. The Latina woman would therefore be choosing to create an in-group which contained herself and the Latino man, and an out-group which contained the white woman and other white people. Thus, ingroups and outgroups may still be created or perceived despite the presence of intersecting identities.

Contrary to social identity, "personal identity represents the individual's goals, values, and beliefs" (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 10). The authors also emphasize that the goals, values, and beliefs represented by one's personal identity may or may not specifically relate to the

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cultural or social ideals of the groups of which one is a part (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 10). For instance, in the Mexican-American context, a young Mexican-American woman may, as part of her personal identity, strive to be a high-achieving college student, even though the Mexican cultural ideal would expect her to be self-sacrificing and family-oriented (Liang, Knauer-Turner, Molenaar, & Price, 2017). Moreover, the influence of American cultural values, such as independence, material success, and self-reliance would likely also have an impact on the young woman, demonstrating how migrants and their descendants are influenced by different cultural discourses, and draw on these when constructing their identity.

Although personal identity and social identity are closely linked to each other and to the concept of Mexican-American identity, ultimately, Mexican-American and Latinx identity fall into the category of social identity, specifically ethnic identity. Ethnic identity, rather than simply being “given,” is produced in relation to other people, and for a specific audience (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 257). One may adjust one’s ethnic identity based on the situation and the people they are with (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 257). For instance, in a group of white Americans, a Mexican-American person might refer to themselves as “Mexican,” whereas, in a group of Mexicans who live in Mexico, they might refer to themselves as “American.” Quoting a participant in Warikoo’s (2005) study, Malhi, Boon & Rogers (2009) emphasize the fluidity of ethnic identity, as the participant says that they refer to themselves as white when among Indian people, and as Indian when among white people (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 257).

Golash-Boza (2006) quotes Waters (1999) to argue that, for those with Latin American heritage who are racially white, black, or Asian, “Hispanicity” can become an “ethnic option,” an ethnicity that one can choose to opt into when desired (cited in Golash-Boza, 2006, p. 34). Whether one chooses to opt into or out of the ethnicity depends on many factors, including potential preferential treatment, which might be the case with phenotypically white people. Moreover, the way one is viewed by others can determine how they view and identify themselves: Golash-Boza cites research by Rodríguez (2000) and Candelario (2001) which found that dark-skinned Dominicans living in New York City and Washington, D.C. identified as black because they perceived themselves as being treated as black rather than as Hispanic (cited in Golash-Boza, 2006, p. 34). As generations descended from migrants continue to be born in and live in the United States, they may decide to drop the hyphen altogether, and simply think of themselves as “American.” “Dropping the hyphen” could be considered

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“the ultimate act of assimilation,” as one who drops the hyphen would likely consider themselves no different from mainstream American society (Golash-Boza, 2006, p. 30).

Although on the surface it may seem like it, one’s ethnic identity cannot be switched completely at will, since it may be challenged by others, and one’s cultural identity is embodied and therefore cannot simply be shed when desired (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 257). These challenges can be issued both by those within the group, such as fellow people of Latin American descent, and outside of the group, such as by those who refuse to accept one as simply American. The firmest of these challenges may come from those from whom one is descended. Malhi, Boon & Rogers (2009) discuss a woman of South Asian descent living in Canada who, in the focus group conducted for the study, decided to position herself as exclusively Canadian. The authors argue that she would have positioned herself differently “in the presence of her first-generation South Asian mother,” likely anticipating resistance from her mother, who would be concerned about her forgetting or even rejecting her heritage (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 271). Therefore, challenges to one’s identity are another external factor which influences how one identifies oneself. For the woman in the study authored by Malhi, Boon & Rogers, who positioned herself as only Canadian, the *I*-position of “I as the daughter of a South Asian migrant” was not as strong as it likely would have been had she been asked about her identity in the presence of her mother.

Not only are the categories of “Hispanic” and “Latino” ethnic identities, but they also form racialized categories, as people are often assigned these labels according to their phenotypical appearance (Golash-Boza, 2006). Therefore, Latinos who fit the stereotypical mestizo image that most Americans have of Latinos are likely to experience racial discrimination, even though “Latino” is technically an ethnicity rather than a race. Even Latinos who do not appear to be mestizo are vulnerable to ethnic discrimination based on other characteristics, such as their last name or accented English (Golash-Boza, 2006). Experiences of discrimination affect racial identifications among Latinos, with those who have been discriminated against being more likely to identify as racially non-white (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). These experiences can also impact the extent to which one feels at home in one’s host country.

Using McAdams’ (2001) definition of identity, as well as his life story model of interviewing, will allow me to analyze the various *I*-positions of my Mexican-American research participants, and how they negotiate their social identities between cultural positions which are at times “incompatible” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 57). Moreover, the framework of the constructivist approach to intersectionality will

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allow me to analyze how the research participants negotiate their identities at the intersection of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and religious identities, and within a broader political and historical structure. In the next chapter, I will identify and analyze the identity referents used by the 1.5-generation participants. I will group my analyses of the three 1.5-generation participants into a distinct chapter in order to draw comparisons between three members of the same generation.

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3. 1.5-Generation Participants

In this chapter, I identify and analyze the identity referents which appeared most prominently in the life stories told by the three 1.5-generation participants that I interviewed. The analyses relate to the following sub-questions: *Which identity referents do they use in their narrative construction of their identity? What categories do they use to identify themselves? How do members of this population conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity? While the sub-questions How do religiosity and religious identity contribute to and interact with their Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican-American identities? and How do the research participants appropriate elements of religious heritage in the construction of their identity?* were addressed in my conversations with the 1.5-generation participants, I will analyze their answers relating to those sub-questions in the discussion chapter of this thesis. In this chapter, I identify and analyze the three most frequently occurring identity referents among the participants of the 1.5 generation, in order of most frequently occurring to less frequently occurring. I have chosen this structure in order to analyze the most relevant referents for this particular generation. The term 1.5 generation is used to describe people who migrated at a young age—generally during childhood (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). Of my research participants, three of the six were brought to the United States from Mexico during childhood: one as an infant, one around the age of six, and one around the age of ten. The identity referents which were most prominent among the research participants that belong to the 1.5 generation were “Brownness as Mexican-American identity,” “Spanish language as Mexican-American identity,” and “Food as Mexican-American identity.”

Brownness as Mexican-American identity was an especially common referent among the members of the 1.5 generation. Brownness was generally characterized as an inherently Mexican trait. All three participants grappled with it in some way, whether it was because they were too light to fit the generally expected physical appearance of Mexicans, and thus felt excluded from their community in some ways, or because their skin tone matched the expected level of brownness and caused them to be stereotyped. The participants had internalized a certain benchmark of acceptably brown skin, and had become aware of their own skin tone in relation to the benchmark at a young age. Failure to meet the benchmark caused two of the participants to wonder about their deviation from the perceived norm. Comments from others of Mexican descent regarding her light skin and eyes enhanced the struggle of one participant in particular.

Yolanda was brought to the United States around the age of six because her mother wanted a better life for her children. As a young child in the United States, she attended a school with

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predominantly English speaking people, a strategic move by her parents to encourage her to learn the English language. Living in a town with a large population of Latinx people ensured that she interacted with many people with Mexican heritage. In middle school she began hearing comments from others of Mexican descent claiming she could not be Mexican because she had light skin and eyes, causing her to question her appearance: “Everybody would be like... ‘You don’t look like the typical Mexicans,’ and I used to tell my mom, ‘Why do I look like this?’” Her identity as a Mexican, which she identified strongly with, was shaken by others with the same identity. She described the retorts she made against those who doubted her heritage: “I don’t know what to tell you, but I know I’m Mexican.” She attributed her identity as a Mexican—a term she identifies with, rather than Mexican-American—in part to the fact that she was born in Mexico. To Yolanda, this is a strong argument in favor of the authenticity of her Mexican identity: “I know I was born in Mexico, and... that makes me Mexican as much as you.”

Significantly, Yolanda’s legitimacy as a Mexican was called into question by those who shared her Mexican heritage. The challenge therefore comes from within the community, as described by Malhi, Boon & Rogers (2009). Fellow young people with Mexican heritage created a clear dichotomy between themselves and “the Other,” placing Yolanda firmly in the category of “Other”: “[They’d say] I don’t know what you are, but you’re just not brown-skinned.” Brown-skinned, as used by Yolanda in this case, serves as a stand-in for Mexicanness. This caused Yolanda to rethink an identity of which she was previously certain, owing to what she felt was strong evidence in her favor, such as Mexico being her country of birth. She even asked her mother to take her tanning so that her skin would match that of her fellow Mexicans who said she was not brown enough. When talking one-on-one with me, a light-skinned researcher with partial Mexican heritage, the audience for the construction of her Mexican identity clearly differed from the middle school scenarios which she described: my own precarious claims to Mexicanness perhaps freed her to affirm her identity as a Mexican despite her light skin and eye color. Although I was the primary audience for these interviews, Yolanda and the other research participants likely imagined an audience of highly educated researchers, such as my thesis supervisor; the participants’ friends and family members, who they likely anticipated would be interested in reading the thesis once it is published; and their fellow participants, who they likely also anticipated would be reading the finished thesis. Moreover, Yolanda discussed her struggles with her light coloring without being prompted, indicating the centrality of brownness in her conceptualization of Mexican-American identity.

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Razi came to the United States by walking the desert with her family at the age of ten. After migrating to the United States, she learned English in school. Like Yolanda, she refers to herself as “Mexican.” Despite being the participant who moved to the United States at the oldest age, she feels that she is just now starting to learn more about her heritage. Referring to my introduction to her, in which I mentioned that I hoped to learn more about my Mexican heritage through this research, she told me that she “basically... didn’t know that much of [her] heritage either,” which she attributed to family members not sharing family history. Part of the family history she is curious about is the reason that one side of the family has light colored eyes and blonde hair. The fact that she, like Yolanda, mentioned this so early in the conversation demonstrates how noteworthy it is to her that Mexicans would have a relatively light coloring, and how central brownness is to Mexican and Mexican-American identity. For her, finding out why her family includes a significant number of people with a lighter coloring is a central question in her quest to learn more about her heritage: “I’m still learning from my culture, you know, my heritage, my family... ’cause I still want to know why my mom’s side of the family... [are] blonde, [with light] colored eyes.” She also described herself as the person with the lightest skin color within her nuclear family.

Much like Yolanda, Razi’s light skin color has complicated her identity construction. She described an experience filling out paperwork at a doctor’s office, which included marking her race and ethnicity. For ethnicity, she marked Hispanic, but was stumped when it came to marking her race, for which the only options were “white” and “black.” Uncomfortable with this dichotomy and not seeing herself represented in either option, she chose to leave it blank. She argued that a third option should have been presented in order to represent people with Latin American heritage more accurately: “Where’s the brown? ... You know, there’s Afro-Latinos, ... white Latinos, brown Latinos, and we have to have that little option.” Upon returning to the doctor’s office at a later date, she asked one of the staff members if they ended up choosing an option for her after she left the race question blank. To her surprise, the staff member informed her that she had been marked as white. Dismayed, she asked, “Do you have the right to do that?”, only to be told that the office’s computer system automatically marks people as white if they do not choose an option themselves. Finding this system which considers whiteness as the default to be “kind of weird,” she asked if her race could be changed to black, because being marked as white “will feel like [she has] white privilege.”

Although in this case “Hispanicity” has become, for Razi, an “ethnic option” (Golash-Boza, 2006) due to the fact that the employees at the doctor’s office believe she passes as white, she has

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chosen to embrace her identity as a person of color, since she is uncomfortable with the notion of having and embracing white privilege. The notion of having white privilege is one that Razi is resistant to, likely influenced by her undocumented status. Being undocumented, she is vulnerable to negative stereotyping, along with the palpable threat of her DACA² status being altered or revoked. Razi therefore felt frustrated at having to fit into predetermined racial categories that did not actually represent her identity, and which came laden with connotations, such as that of what she believes to be falsely attributed white privilege.

Razi has a relatively high profile within her town, as she is an activist for both the undocumented community and the LGBTQ community, with a focus on educating community members about their rights. Thus, she consciously changes her identity-related vocabulary depending on her audience: asked whether she feels that there is a difference between Hispanic and Latino, two words that she has been using throughout the conversation, she answered that she likes to use both, “to connect... with the people.” She is aware of her racially ambiguous appearance, and she uses this to appeal to audiences beyond the Mexican-American community: “Because of my color or even my look, ... sometimes I get that I’m Mexican, that I’m Puerto Rican, ... Middle Eastern. ... I don’t just represent the Mexican community ... I feel like I represent the undocumented community instead of being ... one race or from one country.” Ultimately, then, Razi identifies with the broader undocumented community, no matter their ethnicity or country of origin.

Gabriela immigrated to the United States with her mother when she was a baby. Much like Yolanda’s mother, Gabriela’s mother migrated in search of a better life for her daughter and herself. In contrast to Yolanda and Razi, however, Gabriela does not feel a strong connection to her Mexican heritage and identifies more strongly with her American upbringing. She attributed her lack of connection to her heritage to the fact that she lived in Mexico for such a short period of time, grew up mostly surrounded by her American side of the family rather than her Mexican side, and spoke almost exclusively English. This led to her not participating in various common Mexican cultural practices, such as Quinceañeras and Catholicism. Her brown skin color, she feels, is the only thing that connects her to her heritage: “The only reason I knew I was Hispanic is because I was dark.” She expressed resistance to the category of “Hispanic” as a whole: “I wasn’t raised very like, Hispanic, quotes,

² The DACA program, an acronym for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is a program created by the United States government to protect eligible young migrants who came to the United States as children from deportation (“DACA Information,” n.d.).

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whatever that means.” She attributed the category of “Hispanic” mostly to racialized stereotypes, although she simultaneously admitted that she believes some of the stereotypes make sense.

Upon being asked what she marks as her race and ethnicity on surveys and official forms, Gabriela explained that she takes a very practical approach: “I put Hispanic, because my dad always said... God forbid there was a fire, and they had to locate people in the building... They’re gonna look for someone who’s Hispanic.” Gabriela and her father thus believe that, if Gabriela were in danger and she was being searched for by first responders, the first responders would have a clearer image of what she looked like if they were told to look for a “Hispanic” person. This assumption is based on the thought that most people would picture a Hispanic person to have brown skin, black hair, and dark eyes, like Gabriela has. Ultimately, Gabriela’s approach to reporting her race and ethnicity is simple: “Just... whatever you look like.” This approach is so logical to her that she has never considered another. Upon hearing that a friend with white and Haitian heritage marked “Other” because he identifies with neither “white” nor “African American,” she was surprised: “I was like huh, interesting... I always thought you put whatever you look like.” Gabriela’s racial and ethnic identification thus relies heavily on the manner in which she believes others perceive her. This conforms to Malhi, Boon, & Rogers’ (2009) assertion that ethnic identity is produced in relation to other people (Malhi, Boon & Rogers, 2009, p. 257). She is aware that her brownness causes many to assume that she is Latina: the assumption that she is Latina causes her to be treated as Latina, which, in turn, causes her to identify as Latina. Oftentimes, those who assume that she fits into this racialized category are fellow people of Latin American heritage. She described situations where fellow Latinos address her in Spanish based on her appearance: “People just assume that I speak Spanish.” Gabriela is resistant to this assumption, although she also understands that it is made because of her brownness. She explained that she mainly resists this type of categorization because she feels it reduces her to her appearance and one aspect of her identity: “They’re right, I can [speak Spanish], but that’s not necessarily... all I am, you know what I mean?” Moreover, in terms of Dialogical Self Theory, Gabriela’s father is a member of her “society of mind,” and metaphorically speaks to her, influencing her by stating his approach to racial and ethnic identity. As a result, Gabriela has adopted his approach by also marking her race and ethnicity as “whatever [she] look[s] like” on forms.

Gabriela may also be resistant to being addressed in Spanish because she did not grow up speaking Spanish on a regular basis. Although her mother did teach her some Spanish, enough for Gabriela to talk with her Mexican grandmother, she did not consider it particularly important to teach

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her children the language, and only rarely spoke it to them. Gabriela expressed relief at the fact that her mother was never strict about her children learning Spanish: “She didn’t really care. She told us that’d be nice, for us to learn... just for the future, ... like [for] our future jobs. But she never pressured us to, and she never... made us practice or anything. Which was nice.” She considers being raised in an almost exclusively English-speaking household a major difference between herself and other people of Latin American heritage that she knows. When they address her in Spanish, she responds in English, because she says she “wasn’t raised like that” and therefore doesn’t feel comfortable speaking the language. Although Gabriela does not feel strongly connected to the Spanish language despite her Mexican heritage, others around her evidently consider the Spanish language closely tied to Latin American heritage, so much so that they act confused when Gabriela responds to them in English, and insist on repeatedly addressing her in Spanish even though she answers in English every time. The fact that, in our conversation, Gabriela repeatedly came back to the Spanish language as a feature of Mexican identity even though she does not speak it herself demonstrates that she considers Spanish to be a key feature of Mexicanness and Mexican-Americanness, even if it is one that she does not feel particularly attached to herself.

Spanish also featured prominently among Yolanda’s identity referents. She grew up speaking Spanish and only learned English when she moved to the United States. To this day, she still speaks mostly Spanish with her family and friends. With her young son, however, she speaks English and Spanish in roughly equal amounts. She considers it important that he speak both languages because of his heritage and the fact that he’s also American: “I want him to have both, because he’s from here, and he’s also half Mexican. I’m going to raise him as... half American and half Mexican.” Not only does Yolanda consider the Spanish language to be a part of her identity, but she also considers the Spanish accent she has when she speaks English part of her identity. While she says she could consciously choose to lose the accent, she wants to keep it because it’s “part of [her],” even if it marks her as “other” among the majority of people in the United States.

Interestingly, Razi did not talk extensively about the Spanish language as it relates to her identity. She only mentioned it in passing as part of a larger narrative about her activism within the undocumented community, sharing that her younger brother and sister moved to a school with a larger Latino population, which resulted in them hearing more Spanish than English in their everyday lives. The school, being aware of the fact that most of their students’ parents speak Spanish, actually asked the students to speak English to their parents, and to translate if the parents do not understand. While

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well-intentioned, this puts pressure on the children to help the parents learn English, thereby burdening the children of immigrants with an additional responsibility that children of non-immigrants simply do not have. Children of immigrants often become the translator of both spoken and written word for their families. Razi described how, at the age of ten, when her family had just moved to the United States, she was already tasked with the responsibility of “learning how to translate... hospital paper[s].” She mentioned that since she obtained legal status through the DACA program, she is afforded more opportunities than those around her who are undocumented, such as the opportunity to get her driver’s license. These opportunities imbued her with a sense of responsibility: “I’m able to... offer the opportunity that I have [to help those in my community].” This relates to Buitelaar’s (2009) assertion that the children of migrants often gain autonomy in the host country more quickly than their parents, due to the generally higher adaptability of young people, leading to a power reversal within the family. The responsibility for helping take care of the family in the unfamiliar new environment of the host country thus often falls on the shoulders of the younger generation, whose members are usually able to learn the language and customs of the host society more quickly.

It is significant that Razi only mentioned the Spanish language within the context of helping the parents at her siblings’ school learn English. For Razi, the Spanish language seems to be more of a practical fact of life rather than a marker of identity. Her status as a 1.5-generation immigrant, plus her work with the undocumented community, may mean she is more focused on learning English and navigating life in a country where she is not a citizen, especially since, unlike Yolanda, she does not currently have any children of her own, let alone children who are U.S. citizens, as is the case with Yolanda’s son. Thus, Razi may view Spanish more as simply an aspect of life to navigate rather than as a marker of Mexican or Mexican-American cultural identity.

Among diaspora communities, food often also plays a major role in heritage traditions, as it is a palpable way of recognizing one’s culture and heritage. There is no exception within the Mexican diaspora, and the 1.5-generation participants mentioned food particularly often as a marker of Mexican or Mexican-American identity. Both Razi and Yolanda mentioned the cooking and eating of Mexican food at family gatherings as a way to bring people together. When Razi started working at a Mexican store and decided to learn more about her Mexican heritage, food was one of the first things she sought to learn about. Not knowing how to cook the food that she used to take for granted in Mexico, she felt like food was a key part of her identity which she was “missing,” and so she asked her colleagues questions in order to learn how various Mexican dishes are made. Only when she moved to the U.S. did

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she sense that she was missing an important piece of her Mexican heritage: “From [age] ten to now, ... I have lived in some other country that, you know, the food, the taste, everything... It’s so different.” She values the tutelage of other women in the Mexican-American community who teach her how to cook Mexican dishes, since, through them, she is able to feel more connected to her heritage: “I think until now it’s like having that connection. ... It’s kind of like, learning where I’m coming from.”

When discussing what elements of Mexican culture she considers important to incorporate into her son’s life, Yolanda mentioned Mexican food first. She considers food part of her son’s “basic Mexican heritage,” and listed the various Mexican dishes that she cooks for him and which she proudly told me he enjoys eating. Traditional food is also an essential part of family gatherings, including holidays such as Christmas. As can be expected, traditional Mexican holidays such as Mexico’s Independence Day are celebrated, in Yolanda’s family, with a family gathering which includes traditional Mexican food. Interestingly, American holidays such as Thanksgiving are also incorporated into Yolanda’s family’s traditions, but rather than celebrating with traditional American Thanksgiving food such as turkey, her family makes traditional Mexican food, blending Mexican culture and American culture to make a new Mexican-American tradition: “We have... the holiday that we took, but we made it into our own.” Rather than considering her Mexican heritage culture and new American culture to be incompatible, it seems that Yolanda and her family have, at least in this particular instance, blended the two cultures into a new tradition which bridges both their Mexican and American cultural positions.

Gabriela was the only participant who did not mention Mexican food as a cultural referent at all during our conversation. This is likely because of what she called the “American influences” in her life: she feels so strongly influenced by her American upbringing that she does not feel influenced by her Mexican heritage at all. Although she did mention family traditions which involved food, such as Thanksgiving, the food in question was American instead of Mexican. Throughout our conversation, Gabriela indicated that she feels that people of mixed cultural heritage such as herself tend strongly towards favoring one of their cultures, at a detriment to their other cultural influence or influences. She explained that many of the “mixed” people she has met “hold on to one” culture over the others. Moreover, she described how, for her, it was “really hard... to grasp both [cultures].” She expressed the belief that people with more than one cultural influence generally prefer one culture over another because of how they were raised: “I think just naturally we’re going to lean on one... And that’s not necessarily the most... dominant, that’s just, typically what it was is how you’re raised.” The use of the

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word dominant here could be referring to dominance within one's metaphorical blood: whatever ethnic heritage is more represented within your background.

Rather than attempting to blend her cultures, like Yolanda has in some aspects of her life, Gabriela has constructed a cultural identity for herself which is predominantly American. When asked what specifically American influences she perceives in her life, she exclusively cited plans for the future, such as wanting to stay and work in the United States, and a *lack* of Mexican influences, such as speaking Spanish at home and participating in traditional Mexican celebrations such as Quinceañeras. Her inability to list any concrete American influences in her life could be attributable to a belief that the categories "American" and "Mexican" are entirely separate, unrelated, and incompatible, and that one can essentially only be *either* Mexican *or* American, but not both. Therefore, her American identity may be built on what she feels she is *not*: someone who participates in cultural practices typically associated with Mexico, such as speaking Spanish. Alternatively, her identity as an American may be so firmly rooted within her that she simply has not given much thought to what elements contribute to her American cultural identity. American cultural practices such as celebrating Thanksgiving and speaking English at home did emerge organically throughout our conversation, but were not specifically and concretely named by Gabriela as American influences within her life which contributed to the construction of her cultural identity.

Among the participants of the 1.5 generation, the most frequently appearing identity referents in our conversations were "Brownness as Mexican-American identity," "Spanish language as Mexican-American identity," and "Food as Mexican-American identity." Yolanda and Razi's life stories shared several main themes, including a discomfort with their relatively light skin colors, a regular use of the Spanish language, and an appreciation for the cultural value of traditional Mexican food. Gabriela's narrative construction of her identity stands out as being noticeably different from her fellow members of the 1.5 generation. While the identity referents "Brownness as Mexican-American identity" and "Spanish language as Mexican-American identity" also featured in Gabriela's life story, the manner in which they featured was almost completely opposite to the manner in which they featured in Yolanda and Razi's stories. Gabriela, though having a browner skin color than both Yolanda and Razi, also experienced her skin tone as a source of conflict. However, rather than feeling conflicted about having a lighter skin tone than that which is widely expected from a person with Mexican heritage, Gabriela experiences assumptions made about her by others of Latin American heritage—assumptions which cause her to be treated in a way that makes her feel uncomfortable, such as when she is addressed in

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Spanish while she does not necessarily feel comfortable communicating in that language. She thus associates the Spanish language with different feelings and situations than both Yolanda and Razi, who have mainly positive to neutral associations with the language. Thus, Gabriela, likely due to her heavily American-influenced upbringing, feels much more strongly connected to her current country of residence, while Yolanda and Razi, the other two participants of the 1.5 generation, feel a much stronger connection to their Mexican cultural heritage.

The next chapter, while keeping the same basic format to analyze the most commonly occurring identity referents among the second-generation participants, analyzes the referents “Catholicism as Mexican-American identity,” “Celebration as Mexican-American identity,” and “Brownness as Mexican-American identity.” I chose to use the same format in order to make comparisons between the three most commonly occurring identity referents clear.

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4. Second Generation Participants

In this chapter, I identify and analyze the identity referents which appeared most prominently in the life stories told by the two second-generation participants that I interviewed. This chapter relates to all of my sub-questions: *Which identity referents do they use in their narrative construction of their identity? What categories do they use to identify themselves? How do members of this population conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity? How do religiosity and religious identity contribute to and interact with their Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican-American identities? How do the research participants appropriate elements of religious heritage in the construction of their identity?* Unlike the participants in the previous chapter, the second-generation participants addressed aspects of religiosity as an identity referent, in addition to discussing racial and ethnic identity. In this chapter, similarly to the previous chapter, I identify and analyze the three most frequently occurring identity referents among the participants of the second generation, in order of most frequently occurring to less frequently occurring. I have chosen this structure again in order to analyze the most relevant referents for this particular generation.

The second generation of migrants consists of people whose parents migrated from the home country to the host country. In the American case, if the person was born in the United States, as is usually applicable, they are second-generation migrants but first-generation American citizens from birth. Of my six participants, two were second-generation migrants. The identity referents which featured most prominently in my conversations with the second-generation participants were “Catholicism as Mexican-American identity,” “Celebration of transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity,” and “Brownness as Mexican-American identity.”

David’s parents both migrated to the Southwestern region of the United States from Mexico. David himself was born in the United States and moved to Florida only recently. In my conversation with him, “Catholicism as Mexican-American identity” was the referent which featured most prominently. Although he no longer practices Catholicism, David was raised Catholic, and Catholicism has played a key role in his life and identity development. As a child, he attended a private Catholic school for several years before transferring to a public school. He described Catholic school as relatively strict and regulated, although he expressed appreciation of the structure. One of the school’s regulations he specifically mentioned as being “very strict” was the requirement for the students to attend church “two to three times a week,” including on Sundays with their families, after which they were expected, on the following Monday, to report what had been discussed in church. David’s mother

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had decided to enroll him in Catholic school “to give [her children] the best start possible.” The transfer to a public school environment was “a drastic change” for David, since public school was much less structured and regulated than Catholic private school: “You know, [in Catholic school] things are so uptight, you have to do things a certain way.” Ultimately, though he was slightly resistant to the intense structuring, David still appreciates his parents’ decision to enroll him in Catholic school: “I’m glad my parents put me through that.”

As he got older, however, the strictures of the Catholic Church began to grate at him more: “I was confirmed, a confirmed Catholic... [But] I felt like there was [sic] so many rules, and I just felt like I kept—everything I did was wrong.” Being gay played a large role in his unease as a Catholic, since he did not feel his identity as a gay person was accepted in Catholicism. In terms of Dialogical Self Theory, his *I*-positions of “I as a gay man” and “I as a Catholic” conflicted with one another so much that he decided to leave the Catholic Church. He eventually found a non-denominational church in which he felt much more comfortable, owing in a large part to the manner in which the people at the church talked about gayness: “The whole fact that... they talk about it in church, ... being gay is... not the way God intended it to be, but it’s okay, you’re human, you are the way you are for a reason.” He felt that his new church was welcoming in a way that the Catholic Church was not: “It was very welcoming... Not that the Catholic Church wasn’t, ... it’s just, you feel like you’re being judged.” Though his parents did not initially take his departure from Catholicism well, they eventually learned to accept it. Although it is possible that David’s parents did not take his departure well because they consider it to be an important aspect of being Mexican, David did not offer this reason himself during our conversation. David still occasionally attends mass with his parents “just to make them happy.”

He also attends mass and participates in Catholic traditions because these practices are inextricably tied to cultural family traditions. On the anniversary of his grandmother’s death, which also happens to be the Day of the Virgin Mary, the whole family attends a mass in her honor. The anniversary of the death of David’s grandmother is an important event for his family, laden with practices that have symbolic meaning and are rooted within traditional Mexican practices: “We go to the... church for the Lady of Guadalupe, ... [the] Virgin Mary. It has to be in Spanish because my grandma spoke strictly Spanish, and that’s the mass that my dad always dedicates to her.” Although his family does not celebrate Dia de los Muertos, the Mexican holiday during which a family honors their deceased ancestors, David likens the family traditions surrounding his grandmother’s death to

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traditional Dia de los Muertos practices: “[My father] brings tamales³ for that, and... we all go back to the house after mass and... talk about the times when my grandma was alive, and that’s one of the things that Mexican heritages [sic] do, and that’s the whole reason for Dia de los Muertos, ... they talk about their ancestors and how it shaped the family for what it is today.”

This is a rich example of how the practices which form a part of a people’s collective memory can demonstrate underlying values. In this case, the retention of the acknowledgment of dead relatives through family get-togethers, even if traditional Dia de los Muertos rituals are no longer followed, shows an emphasis on valuing the family and honoring both living and deceased members of that family. Moreover, as evidenced by David’s participation in his family’s Catholic-influenced traditions, Catholic practices still play a key role in David’s life even though he is personally no longer a practicing Catholic. This important family tradition in David’s family is rooted firmly in Catholicism, which, in turn, is inextricably connected to Mexican cultural traditions, such as the figure of the Lady of Guadalupe, a specifically Mexican Catholic figure. Thus, David’s family practices a Mexican version of Catholicism, to which David remains tied despite the fact that he now identifies as a non-denominational Christian.

Catholicism also plays an important role in the life of Josefina, the other second generation participant I interviewed. She is the daughter of parents who immigrated to Florida from Mexico, and was born and raised in Florida. When asked about traditions which are important to her, she mentions the *posada*, which she described as “a celebration for the Virgin Mary.” A traditional Mexican practice during Christmas time, it involves “mimicking... the Virgin Mary asking for someone... to invite her into [their] house.” It is a performance of the part of the nativity story in which the pregnant Virgin and her husband Joseph ask for, but are repeatedly denied, shelter in Bethlehem. This is something which Josefina’s family practices every year, despite the fact that they live in the United States rather than Mexico. This is largely made possible by the fact that Josefina’s family has actively sought out a Mexican-American community within their region of the United States. Josefina’s family is a prime example of the phenomenon of homesteading: they, and many other people of Mexican heritage living in this region, have created what Hermans and Hermans-Konopka would call “common spaces of assembly” in which to meet with people from the same cultural background (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 42). Although Catholicism was an identity referent mentioned by Josefina, she did not mention it nearly as often as David. Rather, in her story, the identity referent of “Celebration of

3 Tamales are a traditional Mexican dish, consisting of a meat filling in cornmeal dough, wrapped in a corn husk and steamed.

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transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity” featured much more prominently, and it is stories which emerged related to this identity referent that delivered especially rich examples of homesteading.

Josefina, unlike David, frequently mentioned “Celebration of transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity” as a referent. The referent featured so prominently in her story that it was the second most common second-generation identity referent overall. Thus, it deserves to be analyzed. When asked when she feels most connected to her Mexican heritage, Josefina mentioned weddings, since “there’s just so many [Mexican cultural] things... tied into it,” especially traditional symbolic dances which are danced specifically at Mexican weddings. She described a humorous dance in which the husband is dressed in an apron and dances around his wife, sweeping the floor with a broom, whilst simultaneously carrying a baby. This, Josefina said, symbolized the work a wife has to do, and “what [women] have to deal with.” Thus, the function of the dance is for the husband to acknowledge the work his wife will have to do, whilst giving him a taste of it as well. It was while attending a Mexican wedding and enjoying the celebrations that Josefina realized how much she appreciates her heritage: “That’s honestly the time where I was like I love my... culture.” She described a sense of community and hospitality which in her experience pervades Mexican and Mexican-American celebrations in her community: “Here... even though... you’re not family with them, ... they’ll invite you... And you just see like literally the whole town there, even though they don’t know them, they’ll just show up... you don’t make a big deal [about uninvited guests].” She also described the dances that are put on by people in her community, which are mostly attended by people of Mexican heritage. Through these dances, Josefina met many of her friends, which keeps her closely involved in her Mexican diasporic community: “I have mostly Mexican friends, because I guess I just grew up just... doing all these things like going to these dances.” She sees dancing and music as a big part of Mexican and Mexican-American culture, and as a way to foster a community for Mexicans in diaspora: “You’ll... see different people and you meet different people from all the places, and you’re like what, there’s Mexicans out there?”

Events like dances and weddings are therefore ways in which people of Mexican heritage, living in the United States, are able to create a diasporic community for themselves. Josefina and her community are actively engaged in homesteading, creating common spaces of assembly for themselves at events like the dances Josefina mentioned. Moreover, Josefina’s family runs a Mexican store-restaurant hybrid which sells traditional Mexican foods that may be unavailable in mainstream grocery

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stores. A quick glance around the store gives one the impression that most of the customers, as may be expected, are people with a Latin American background. The store has tables for customers to sit at and eat the food purchased and prepared in the restaurant portion of the store, encouraging people to congregate, spend time in the store, and interact with one another. Spaces such as the store run by Josefina's family therefore also serve as spaces of assembly for the Mexican diaspora in this area of Florida.

The third most mentioned identity referent between both second-generation participants was "Brownness as Mexican-American identity." It was mentioned a roughly equal amount of times by both David and Josefina. David shared that he marks "White" or "Caucasian" on official forms which require one to designate one's race, and then marks "Hispanic" or "Latino" as his ethnicity. Interestingly, David revealed that he marks his race as white in part because he is American: "I always put Caucasian White because I mean... I got some White Caucasian background in my, in my—I'm American." The background of David's parents is indigenous Mexican on one side and indigenous Mexican mixed with white European on the other side. It is interesting to note, then, that instead of identifying as a person of color because of his indigenous background, or identifying as a white person because of his light coloring or European heritage, David explained his choice to mark his race as "White" simply by saying that he is American. Although this statement may seem self-explanatory to some at first glance, by stating that he is white because he is American, David is equating Americanness with whiteness. This reflects the commonly held view that the (stereo)typical American is white, perpetuated through images of "all-American" people with light skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. However, by equating Americanness with whiteness, people of color are, by definition, considered un-American, and therefore the "Other" in an us-versus-them dichotomy, enforcing both subconscious and conscious prejudices against people of color. David did not reflect much on brownness as an identity referent. Rather, he expressed views related to whiteness and the meaning of Americanness, thus implicitly revealing views about brownness as a thing which is "Other," foreign. However, David seemed to hesitate when explaining his reasoning behind marking his race as "White," indicating that he may not have felt completely comfortable with his choice. David may feel slightly guilty identifying as white when he is aware of the political implications behind his choice and his reasoning, such as the fact that those with Mexican heritage who have a relatively dark skin color are often denied the privilege to claim Americanness based on something so simple as their skin color.

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Josefina spoke more directly about brownness as a cultural identity referent. She expressed dismay at moments when she was asked to mark her race on a form and the option “Hispanic” was not available. Feeling she cannot place herself within the “white or black” American racial dichotomy, she decides to choose the option “Other”: “I’m not white, and I’m not black. So I’m just like, I’m ‘Other.’” She shared that the American focus on the “white or black” racial dichotomy causes her to question her own racial identity. When asked “What are you?” by people she meets, Josefina simply answers “I’m Mexican.” However, this usually triggers further questions. If she is then asked if she was born in Mexico, as often happens, Josefina answers no, and she feels as if she has to specify a “Mexican-American” versus a “Mexican” identity. Nevertheless, Josefina prefers to identify as “Mexican”: “I was born here [in the United States], I’m still Mexican.”

Josefina identifies so strongly with her Mexican heritage that she does not feel very American. When asked if she feels American, Josefina explained the differences between her family’s lifestyle and that of what she sees as the lifestyle of a typical American family: “I’ve been to... an American house, and it’s just so different how they live compared to how I live.” The fact that Josefina refers to other households as “American” and contrasts them with her household indicates that she does not conceptualize her family as American. Although she practices some American habits, like occasionally eating American food, she firmly stated that she “[has] always felt more Mexican than American.” She clearly conceptualizes herself as a person of color, as she went on to express her discomfort when she is “surrounded by a bunch of white people.” Simultaneously, she feels comfortable around other people of color, because she feels she has more in common with them: “I don’t ever feel uncomfortable when I’m around black people, ... because I feel like they’re so culturally [similar].” This feeling of cultural similarity between people of Mexican heritage and black people is likely related to the discrimination experienced by both Latinos and black people in the United States, which perhaps creates some feelings of solidarity between the two groups. She feels as if her habits are different enough from those of the average white person in the United States that she might actually cause offense: “You... put yourself out there, ... and I feel like... white people are... just like looking at me, you know? ... Am I being too Mexican for you or something? ... You know, out of place kind of thing.”

Interestingly, Josefina seemed to perceive me as a white person rather than a person of Mexican heritage; when speaking about the habits of white people, she said: “When it comes to... certain... white people I feel... uncomfortable. ... I don’t know, I don’t feel I can adapt to how—what *you* are used to” (emphasis mine). Thus, she viewed me as an outsider during our entire conversation.

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This is indicative of me failing to meet certain standards of Mexicanness—or even Mexican-Americanness—that she has set, consciously or subconsciously, in her own mind, including perhaps my appearance as a white-passing Latina. Josefina also revealed her view of me as an outsider by adopting a particularly didactic approach to our conversation in comparison to the other participants. When asked how she experienced the interview, Josefina answered that she appreciated the opportunity to “Let... somebody know how it is to be... Mexican-American.” Moreover, when asked what made her decide to participate in this research, she explained that her reaction upon being asked for an interview was, “Oh, she wants to know, okay, I’ll tell her. I mean, I’ll try to explain it my best way.” Her use of the phrase “I’ll tell her,” along with the use of the word “explain,” indicate that she considers herself to be an insider in possession of factual information which I, as an outsider, do not have access to myself, and am therefore seeking through an informant.

Among the participants of the second generation, the most frequently appearing identity referents in our conversations were “Catholicism as Mexican-American identity,” “Celebration of transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity,” and “Brownness as Mexican-American identity.” Catholicism played an especially large role in David’s identity construction, as he struggled with attempting to consolidate the conflicting *I*-positions of “I as a Catholic” and “I as a gay man” before eventually eliminating his *I*-position as a Catholic in favor of a new *I*-position as a nondenominational Christian, which he felt conflicted less with his *I*-position as a gay man. Despite no longer identifying as Catholic, David continues to practice some Catholic traditions with his family, as some prominent family traditions are inextricably tied to Mexican Catholic cultural traditions. Similarly, Josefina’s family practices Mexican Catholic cultural traditions with their diasporic community even though they live in the United States. “Celebration of transitions in the life cycle as Mexican-American identity” was an especially prominent referent in Josefina’s life story, as she identified traditionally Mexican weddings as the events at which she felt most connected to her Mexican heritage. Contrariwise, David did not mention that referent in his life story. “Brownness as Mexican-American identity” was the third most frequently mentioned identity referent between the second-generation participants, but featured very differently in the two narratives. While David reflected mostly on his identity as a white person with Hispanic heritage, Josefina expressed solidarity with people of color while simultaneously expressing discomfort at the American black versus white racial dichotomy.

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In the next chapter, I will analyze the identity referents most common in the narrative construction of the identity of the fourth-generation participant I interviewed. I will use a similar format to the previous chapters, analyzing the three most frequently occurring identity referents, from most frequently occurring to least frequently occurring. I have chosen this format in order to make a clear argument which allows for comparison between the generations.

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5. Fourth Generation Participant

In this chapter, I identify and analyze the identity referents which appeared most prominently in the life story told by the fourth-generation participant that I interviewed. This chapter relates to the following sub-questions: *Which identity referents do[es] [she] use when constructing the narrative construction of [her] identity? What categories do[es] [she] use to identify [herself]? How do members of this population conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity?* Unlike the second-generation participants in the previous chapter, the fourth-generation participant did not address aspects of religiosity as an identity referent, and thus, the narrative construction of her identity does not relate to all sub-questions, unlike those of the second generation. In this chapter, much like in the previous two chapters, I identify and analyze the three most frequently occurring identity referents in the narrative of the fourth-generation participant, in order of most frequently occurring to less frequently occurring. I have chosen this structure once again in order to analyze the most relevant referents for this particular generation.

Fourth-generation migrants is a term commonly used for people whose great-grandparents migrated from the homeland to the host land. In many Mexican-American cases, fourth generation migrants are the third generation of U.S. citizens in their family. Although I had originally aimed to interview two people from each generation of migrant, I was only able to recruit one fourth-generation participant. The difficulty I experienced in recruiting fourth-generation participants may be attributable to a waning identification with one's Mexican heritage as one becomes further removed from one's Mexican ancestors. Potential fourth-generation research participants may not discuss their Mexican heritage as openly because they might not identify with it as strongly as the 1.5-generation and second-generation participants, and therefore would not readily come to the minds of participants in the snowball sampling recruitment process.

This participant happens to be a family member of mine.⁴ I suspect this has influenced my results in the following ways: firstly, it has likely positively influenced the data collected by increasing my rapport with the participant, encouraging her to feel comfortable sharing personal details with me that she might otherwise not have been comfortable sharing. However, since she believed me to be familiar with her story already, she may have neglected to share certain parts of her story simply because she thought I already knew them, and that there would therefore be no more for her to add. Additionally, she may have left some parts of her story out or altered some parts of it, since her

⁴ In order to protect her privacy, I cannot give more details than these.

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audience was someone who already had a preconceived notion of her which she, the participant, may have had a vested interest in upholding, especially keeping in mind that she would be interacting with me in the future, even after the research has been completed.

Maria is a fourth-generation migrant whose paternal great-grandparents came to the United States from Mexico, while her mother migrated to the United States from Western Europe as an emerging adult. The identity referents which emerged most prominently from my conversation with Maria were “Brownness as Mexican-American identity,” “Spanish language as Mexican-American identity,” and “Spanish last name as Mexican-American identity.”

Maria began our conversation by describing the formation of her consciousness that she was considered ethnically or racially different by those around her. She described moving from Florida, a place where many people of Latin American heritage live, to a place where there were far fewer people of color, let alone people of Latin American heritage. Once she and her family moved, she came to the realization that others saw her as different. Two main ongoing events spurred this realization: the racial othering of her father and the bullying she experienced at school for being “Mexican.” She mentioned that her father was treated differently, which she suspects was because of the color of his skin: “I remember they called him asylum seeker.” She expressed her confusion at the assumption that she was from Mexico instead of from the United States: “When I started going to school there was a boy that bullied me really badly... And he would tell me to go back to Mexico, and we’d never even been to Mexico, I had no idea what that meant.” This confusion was perhaps the start of what Maria referred to as “a disconnect” between the reality of her heritage, which is not exclusively Mexican but also includes a large percentage of white European, and the way in which people perceive her and her family members: namely, as Latinx. Maria explained that, due to her phenotype, she and other members of her family would be considered white by many casual observers: “[We] pass off as white.” Therefore, she feels unable to fully claim a Mexican identity, even though her father has experienced discrimination and she has a Spanish last name. Assumptions people have made about what people of Mexican heritage are like cause Maria to be consistently questioned about the authenticity of her claim to Mexican-Americanness: “You say... ‘Oh, I’m part Mexican.’ ‘Oh, do you speak Spanish?’ ‘No, I don’t speak Spanish.’ ‘Well, you don’t look Mexican.’ ‘No, I don’t look Mexican.’” The fact that others—both people with Latin American heritage and people with no Latin American heritage—placed so much emphasis on speaking Spanish and having a certain, supposedly typically Mexican, appearance may have caused Maria to internalize these identity referents, as “Brownness as Mexican-American

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identity” and “Spanish as Mexican-American identity” are the referents which appeared most often in our conversation by a sizable margin.

Because Maria passes as white, she feels conflicted about claiming a Mexican-American identity, since she associates Mexican-Americanness with experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination: “[My] dad gets discriminated against... but [I’m] not a part of that because [I’m] white, so then... [I] can’t talk about it, because [I] don’t have the same skin color... Or [I] don’t look Mexican enough.” Despite passing as white to the casual observer, Maria still gets racially othered regularly, often during casual encounters: “Some people say I look [European]-Mexican... They’re like, you look not [white].” A term that she feels especially resistant to is “exotic”: “Sometimes they say exotic, and I hate that word, it’s so stupid, because I don’t, I just look white.” Interestingly, rather than being resistant to the word because of its potential colonialist connotation, Maria dislikes it specifically when it is used to describe her because she feels that it does not apply to her: “Exotic, I feel like, is like... Princess Jasmine [the Middle Eastern Disney character from the movie Aladdin]... I don’t feel like that, because I’m just... white, honestly.” When asked if she feels like she would have to be browner for the term “exotic” to apply to her, she answered in the affirmative. Brownness is a key element of Mexican-American identity for Maria, and much like Yolanda and Razi, she feels conflicted regarding her coloring, which is lighter than the standard of brownness she has set for herself based on others’ expectations. Though she recognizes that she is fortunate to not experience discrimination due to her skin color, Maria feels metaphorically caught between two cultures, neither fully American nor fully Mexican: “I’m not... American enough, but then I’m not... Mexican enough.”

As asserted by Malhi, Boon, & Rogers (2009), Maria, like other descendants of migrants, constructs her cultural and ethnic identity in relation to those around her. Because those around her expect a Mexican person to be browner, she feels inadequately “Mexican” and thus conflicted about claiming a Mexican-American identity. Moreover, when living in an environment with mostly white people, her Mexican heritage became more salient in relation to those around her: “[I] definitely felt more Mexican there because... there were so many white people.” There, surrounded by an overwhelmingly white majority, she both felt more Mexican and was perceived as “Mexican” by those in her environment. Upon moving back to Florida after graduating from university, though, she was shocked by the Mexicanness of others with Mexican heritage living in Florida: “It was like... these people are... actually Mexican because they speak Spanish.”

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The ability to speak Spanish was also an identity referent that emerged prominently in our conversation. Maria's assertion that others of Mexican heritage are "actually Mexican" due to their ability to speak Spanish is indicative of a belief that the ability to speak Spanish separates those who have a valid claim to their Mexican heritage, and those who do not have a valid claim to it. This belief may be strengthened by encounters with others of Latin American heritage, such as a Nicaraguan colleague of hers: "She would be like, it's your fault you never learned Spanish." Though Maria firmly denied that she was to blame for her lack of Spanish, citing the fact that her father never learned Spanish from his father, the belief that she ought to speak Spanish in order to have a valid claim to her Mexican heritage persists. She compares herself to a friend of hers who she believes has a more valid claim to her Mexican heritage because she was born in Mexico, speaks Spanish, and has brown skin: "[She was] born in Mexico, speaks Spanish, has brown skin, dark hair. Like, she's Mexican." Being born in the United States, not speaking Spanish, and having relatively light skin led Maria to feel that she, unlike her friend, cannot claim Mexicanness.

Maria was the only participant to mention having a Spanish last name as an identity referent. Her Spanish last name has caused confusion among those she meets, both among those with Latin American heritage and without Latin American heritage. Now that she has moved back to Florida, she feels more comfortable having a Spanish last name, since a Spanish name is less conspicuous in Florida due to the large Latinx population. On the other hand, living among others of Latin American heritage makes her identity construction more "complicated" as well: "Since living in Florida... I feel... both more at home and less at home. Because Hispanic people... kind of accept me, and they'll... teach me Spanish, but then at the same time I always have to... defend myself. And I have to... defend my name." She described the need others of Latin American heritage feel to put a label on her, and how her light skin and lack of Spanish makes that a challenge to them: "There's so many Hispanic people here... They're curious as to—because you don't look like them necessarily, and you don't speak Spanish, so then it's just kind of like, well, what are you? ... The label is a little harder." The fact that Maria was the only participant to mention having a Spanish last name, despite the fact that most of the participants have a Spanish last name, is indicative of the conflict she has experienced, and continues to experience, regarding the construction of her Mexican-American identity. This identity referent may be especially salient for Maria because it is an indicator of Mexican heritage, not only to herself, but also to those with whom she interacts. Fellow people of Latin American heritage are more likely to see her as a member of their community if they know her last name, while those who do not have Latin American

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heritage are more likely to other her as a result of viewing her as a Latina. Having a Spanish last name might be both positive and negative for Maria: on the one hand, it is one of the Mexican-American cultural identity referents of which she actually meets the standards she and others have set for her, but on the other hand, it is a source of conflict and frustration, since it causes others to constantly question her ethnic background.

This conflict surrounding the construction of her Mexican-American identity also takes place in Maria's mind between conflicting *I*-positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). She described marking her race as "Hispanic" on a government form recently, only to have her mother disagree with her by telling her she is not Mexican and therefore cannot mark "Hispanic." However, Maria felt conflicted, especially because she had been told by a government employee to only check one box, after she originally checked both "White" and "Hispanic." This caused her to feel as if she had to choose between two parts of her identity: "It's just hard [to choose one or the other], because... I don't feel Hispanic, but I feel like if I check white... Just like how they phrase it, they were like you can't be—you can't have both checked." Maria seems to have perceived the demand of checking only one box as equivalent to being told by the government that she could only *be* either white or Hispanic. She felt that her very existence as a person of mixed heritage was being declared invalid. She eventually chose to mark "Hispanic" because she is not "only white," indicating a belief that marking her race down as "White" would invalidate her Mexican heritage by not acknowledging it.

In this story, Maria's *I*-position as "Daughter of a white mother" (of non-Mexican heritage, AR) and "Daughter of a father with Mexican heritage" came into conflict with one another. On the one hand, she had her mother literally by her side telling her to mark her race as "White"; on the other hand, she had a metaphorical voice inside her head telling her that marking only "White" would be tantamount to denying the Mexican heritage passed down to her through her father. Maria shared that, since that experience, she marks her race as "Other" unless she is able to check both "White" and "Hispanic." First, she claimed that she does this because she "[doesn't] feel like dealing with it." However, another reason emerged immediately after the initially stated reason: "Because I feel like if I say I'm white, only white, then it just... kind of discounts... all of my dad's side of the family." Thus, Maria has given thought to the symbolic meaning behind the selection of her race, beyond merely a seemingly straightforward box that is checked on a form.

Notably, during our conversation, Maria reflected relatively little on her *I*-position as the daughter of a Western European immigrant. This can be attributed to a number of possible reasons. For

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instance, since Maria was aware that my thesis focused on Mexican-American identity, she may have subconsciously or consciously focused more on her Mexican-American side of the family while telling her life story. It may be that she also feels a strong connection to her Western European heritage, but that she did not reflect upon it in our conversation because she did not consider it relevant. Another reason she may not have reflected much on her *I*-position as the daughter of a Western European immigrant is that her mother, as a white person, may have been able to blend in more easily into American society. Being white, she may have been able to avoid racialization in a way that Maria's paternal side of the family was unable to do, even generations after the initial migrants came to the United States from Mexico.

The identity referents which emerged most prominently from my conversation with Maria were "Brownness as Mexican-American identity," "Spanish language as Mexican-American identity," and "Spanish last name as Mexican-American identity." Throughout our conversation, Maria expressed conflicted feelings over her relatively light skin tone and its relation to her ability to claim her Mexican heritage: brownness emerged as a key identity referent for Mexican-Americanness. Similarly, the Spanish language, and her inability to speak it, also emerged as major identity referent which caused conflict in Maria's identity construction. Interestingly, Maria was the only participant to mention having a Spanish last name as an identity referent, perhaps because she feels it is one of the few outward signs of her Mexican heritage, which enables her heritage to be recognized both by people with and without Latin American heritage. In the next chapter, I will discuss my findings more broadly, and draw comparisons across all three generations.

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6. Discussion

	Brownness	Catholicism	Celebration	Day of the Dead	Family	Food	Quinceañera	Spanish language	Spanish name
Yolanda	3	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
Razi	3	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
Gabriela	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0
David	2	3	0	2	0	1	0	2	0
Josefina	2	1	3	0	2	1	1	2	0
Maria	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	2

Table depicting frequency of appearance of each identity referent in each interview. 3=often, 2=sometimes, 1=rarely, 0=never.

In this chapter, I will discuss the overarching results of my research, as well as draw comparisons between the generations. As shown by the table above, which depicts the frequency of the appearance of each identity referent mentioned during the interviews, some referents, such as “Brownness as Mexican-American identity” and “Spanish language as Mexican-American identity,” resonated with all participants, albeit more with some than with others. I suggest that these referents may have resonated with all participants, regardless of generation, because both people with Mexican heritage and people without Mexican heritage expect those with Mexican heritage to have brown skin and speak Spanish. Thus, these characteristics may have become identifying features which distinguish people of Mexican heritage from people without a Mexican background, and thus may have become referents for cultural identity. However, since six interlocutors is not a representative sample size, I cannot make any claims about the significance of the outcomes.

The deductive code which unexpectedly resonated with the smallest number of participants was “Day of the Dead as Mexican-American identity.” Half of the participants did not even mention the Day of the Dead⁵ in any way, while the other half only mentioned it occasionally. Moreover, none of the participants who mentioned the Day of the Dead spoke of actually celebrating it themselves. Based on this information, I suspect that I added “Day of the Dead as Mexican-American identity” as a deductive code because representations of Mexican and Mexican-American identity in media and popular culture often include references to the Day of the Dead. This demonstrates how even those who are relatively well-informed about identity construction and the contribution of representation to the

⁵ The English translation of Dia de los Muertos.

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formation of generalizations and assumptions, such as myself, can make assumptions based on representations in the media and popular culture.

The identity referent “Brownness as Mexican-American identity” featured among the most prominent referents in all three generations. No matter the skin color or racial and ethnic self-identification of the participant, brownness was considered an important element of Mexicanness and Mexican-Americanness. Moreover, brownness—and the ability or inability to live up to a certain standard of brownness in order to be considered Mexican enough—complicated the cultural, racial, and ethnic identity construction of the vast majority of the participants. Yolanda (1.5-generation), Razi (1.5-generation), and Maria (fourth-generation) expressed a certain discomfort with their relatively light skin tones not matching the level of brownness which is generally expected of people of Mexican heritage.

It is interesting to note that, while Yolanda and Razi are both members of the 1.5-generation and are “closer” generationally to their Mexican heritage than subsequent generations might be, and may therefore be expected to have a more secure conceptualization of their Mexican or Mexican-American identity, they nevertheless feel conflicted about their inability to meet the standard of brownness set for people of Mexican heritage. This is despite the fact that they still identify as Mexican, practice Mexican cultural traditions, and perceive themselves to fit other standards of Mexicanness, such as speaking Spanish and eating Mexican food. The similarity between Yolanda and Razi’s insecurity about not being brown enough and Maria’s insecurity about not being brown enough is especially remarkable since they are so far removed from each other in other experiences. Yolanda and Razi are members of the 1.5 generation, while Maria is a fourth-generation Mexican-American; Yolanda and Razi speak Spanish and are immersed in a Mexican diasporic community, while Maria does not speak Spanish and is not a member of a Mexican diasporic community. Brownness is nevertheless a cause of conflict in the identity construction of all three participants.

Brownness is also a cause of conflict for the third 1.5-generation participant I interviewed, Gabriela. However, in Gabriela’s case, brownness causes her to be the target of unwelcome assumptions from other people of Latin American heritage. The relatively brown color of Gabriela’s skin causes other characteristics which are associated with people of Latin American heritage to be attributed to her, such as fluency in Spanish and a desire to interact with others in that language. Therefore, she is assumed to be connected to a certain culture more than she actually is, and receives unwanted attention because of it.

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Ideas about brownness also cause distress for Josefina (second-generation), but instead of causing her to feel conflicted about her identity construction, she described being a victim of discrimination because of her relatively dark skin color. She told a story of how she sometimes goes into stores with higher-end merchandise and is judged by the employees, who believe she cannot afford to shop there: “I feel like they’re kind of like trying to belittle me, like, ‘Are you just looking?’ ... ‘You know that’s really expensive, right?’ And it’s just like, who says I can’t afford it?” This makes Josefina feel othered for her skin color and ethnic background, and distrustful of white people. Moreover, as argued by Golash-Boza & Darity (2008), Josefina may identify much more strongly with her Mexican heritage than with the culture of the country in which she was born and raised—namely, the United States—because of the discrimination she has experienced, which makes her feel ill at ease in a culture which, in her experience, has not been welcoming despite the fact that she has lived there her entire life. Thus, ideas surrounding brownness and the meanings attached to brownness cause conflict in the lives of most of the participants, regardless of generation or skin color. The importance of brownness in Mexican-American identity construction is likely influenced by public discourse in the United States, which places a strong emphasis on skin color as a marker of identity and identification. Not only do many draw their racial and ethnic identities from, among other factors, their skin color, but others identify them and assume their racial and ethnic identities based on their skin color. Moreover, as is the case with the ethnicity “Latinx,” one’s (assumed) ethnic identity can be racialized, with many of the resulting negative consequences, such as stereotyping. In the United States, skin color is taken to be an indicator for many other identifying features, including socioeconomic status. Skin color is also used as a measuring stick for one’s Americanness: the more white one is, the more likely they are to be accepted as an American, owing to the conflation of the concepts of “whiteness” and “Americanness.” As a result, one’s assumed racial and ethnic identity can result in discrimination due to negative stereotyping.

Experiences of discrimination like the experience mentioned by Josefina are also part of Maria’s (fourth-generation) Mexican-American identity construction. She discussed how her father is discriminated against because of his relatively dark complexion, and how that legacy of discrimination affects her even though she herself is not discriminated against due to her skin color. As theorized by Bhatia (2002), experiences of discrimination have been passed down by Maria’s Mexican-American father, so that she is affected by them even though she has not directly experienced discrimination due to her skin color. These experiences have become intrinsic to Maria’s cultural and ethnic identity, and

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thus make her identify with her Mexican heritage despite not meeting the standards she and others have set regarding Mexicanness: out of the three identity referents mentioned most frequently by Maria, she only meets the standard of having a Spanish last name, and does not meet the standard of brownness and Spanish fluency that she, and others, have set for herself. Further research to analyze the role of skin color and legacies of discrimination in the construction of racial and ethnic identity would add to the analysis of racial and ethnic identity construction.

In addition to the salience of skin color in the construction of Mexican-American identity, the salience of having a network of fellow people of Mexican heritage also emerged from the life stories of my participants. Over all, it appears that the participants who have family members or members of a wider Mexican diasporic community to answer questions that may come up in their quest to construct a Mexican-American identity, as well as tell stories which help them connect to their Mexican heritage, are more securely able to construct their ethnic and cultural identities. Razi (1.5-generation) expressed being especially grateful to her colleagues at the Mexican store, who teach her how to cook traditional Mexican dishes, and the members of the Latin American youth group she was a member of, who taught her the meanings behind various Mexican cultural traditions. Yolanda (1.5-generation) related stories of receiving supportive insight from her mother when struggling with her light skin color, in addition to having a sizable community of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans with which to regularly interact and practice Mexican cultural traditions. Similarly, Josefina (second-generation) is also surrounded by a robust Mexican diasporic community which nurtures her Mexican-American identity. Contrariwise, participants like Maria (fourth-generation), who has relatively few Mexican-American relatives to whom to pose questions and who is not a member of a Mexican diasporic community, are left feeling less secure in their identity construction, likely at least in part because they do not have as robust a support network. Further research is needed to analyze the role of a robust, culturally similar support network in the construction of cultural identity.

The influence of location in cultural identity construction also deserves to be studied. Among the six participants, three mentioned the Disney movie *Coco*, which is set in Mexico during Dia de los Muertos celebrations, as an example of a positive and accurate representation of Mexican culture. One participant, Yolanda (1.5-generation), mentioned she uses *Coco* to teach her son about his heritage. The fact that my research participants are all currently living in Florida, where the Walt Disney World⁴⁶ theme parks and resorts are located, likely increased their awareness of Walt Disney Company products such as *Coco*, since Walt Disney World looms large in the public consciousness of Florida. Thus, *Coco*

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likely emerged as an identity referent because of the location of my participants. Similarly, living in a location with a relatively low Latinx or Mexican-American population would likely also influence the referents which would emerge in a study of identity construction. Thus, the role of location in cultural, ethnic, and racial identity construction also deserves to be studied.

Despite not having a robust Mexican-American support network, Maria, as well as the vast majority of the other participants, ultimately considers it important for their Mexican-American cultural identity to be kept alive. She seeks out stories from her father about his heritage, happily eats Mexican food, and is attempting to learn Spanish. Similarly, David (second-generation) expressed a belief in the importance of cultural traditions when reflecting upon what he would like to teach his future children: “[Children today] don’t realize the truth behind tradition... What’s the meaning of tradition... what’s the meaning behind culture?” He feels that, when people forget their cultural traditions, “they forget the true meanings of... what it is to be human.” Yolanda (1.5-generation) also evidently considers it important for her son to know his Mexican heritage. When describing the choices she and her son’s father, who is also of Mexican descent, make when co-parenting, Yolanda detailed the ways in which they consciously choose to enforce a Mexican-American identity for their son: “[My son’s father] tells him, ‘Hey, you’re Mexican, you’re more Mexican than you know.’” She also specifically addressed the religious traditions she and her son’s father have decided to pass down to their son. Though Yolanda identifies as “Christian,” her son’s father practices Catholicism, and they are raising their son with elements from both religious traditions in order to allow him to experience both and ultimately make his own choice when he gets older: “We’re trying to raise him with both... beliefs. ... And he will later on choose what he really wants to be.” However, at Yolanda’s request, her son’s father does not teach their son about certain elements of Mexican Catholicism, such as Dia de los Muertos, in order to keep it “balanced.” Nevertheless, she considers it important for both parents to be able to share their religious traditions with their son. Ultimately, then, most participants consider it important to keep practicing Mexican cultural traditions and be aware of their heritage, even passing that awareness on to current or future children.

The exception to this pattern is Gabriela (second-generation), who feels more strongly connected to her American cultural identity, expressed relief at her mother not teaching her Spanish, and expressed no desire to either practice Mexican cultural traditions in the future herself, or to teach them to her potential future children. It is particularly interesting to contrast Gabriela, a 1.5-generation Mexican-American who does not feel strongly connected to her Mexican heritage, with Josefina, a

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second-generation Mexican-American who feels very strongly connected to her Mexican heritage, so much so that she does not identify strongly with her Americanness. This major difference can likely be attributed in large part to the presence or absence of a Mexican diaspora community in which to embed oneself. Whereas Gabriela grew up surrounded by her American family members and with no significant diasporic community of which to be a part, Josefina grew up surrounded by Mexican and Mexican-American family members who believed strongly in continuing Mexican cultural traditions, as well as a larger Mexican diasporic community with which to congregate. Furthermore, her parents' choice to open a store targeted towards serving the local Mexican community ensures that Josefina and her family interact mostly with other people of Mexican heritage. This likely led to Josefina identifying much more strongly with her Mexican heritage than with her country of birth, the United States. In contrast, the fact that Gabriela grew up surrounded by American influences and American family members likely played a large role in her feeling much more connected to her American background than her Mexican background

Of the six participants, Razi (1.5-generation), David (second-generation), and Josefina (second-generation) reflected on the manner in which gendered expectations play a role in their identity construction. Razi, the transgender woman, reflected on these expectations the most, as might be expected from someone who defies traditional gender roles in such an obvious way. She was also the only participant to mention the well-known concept of machismo, which is associated with aggressive masculinity, especially in the Latin American context. She initially mentioned it in connection with cooking, saying how the women in her family used to be the only ones to cook, but now her father helps in the kitchen as well, which Razi feels is indicative of a fading machismo within her father. She then went on to reflect upon the potential reason for her father's fading machismo: "I think one of the reasons is... me, for being [a member of the] LGBTQ community." Although she still struggles against vestiges of her father's machismo, such as when he makes jokes at the expense of the LGBTQ community, she feels her identity as a member of the LGBTQ community makes him more aware of the negative or outright hurtful hypermasculine behavior he sometimes engages in: "He knows that... he's talking about... me. He's describing me or insulting me."

Another issue Razi struggles with is the acceptance of LGBTQ people in Mexico, since she has heard stories of LGBTQ people being victims of violence there. She described reaching out to family members living in Mexico on social media in order to tell them about her transition to living as a woman, in an effort to be accepted by her family; so far, she has received positive responses. Even

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choosing a feminine name for herself was challenging, since her great-grandmother chose her birth name, and named Razi after her husband, Razi's great-grandfather. Razi has therefore decided to keep her masculine middle name, "to have the memory" of her great-grandfather and acknowledge the origin of her birth name. She was also the only participant to explicitly ask me to use her actual name as opposed to a pseudonym, and so the name I have used to refer to her throughout this thesis—Razi—is, in fact, the name she actually goes by. The name Razi has Middle Eastern origins, and, according to Razi herself, means "my secret." Her full name therefore represents her identity as a woman and a member of the LGBTQ community, as well as her Mexican heritage.

Being a member of the LGBTQ community also spurred David (second-generation) to reflect upon traditional gender roles in his story as well. He described how his family members began noticing that he was uninterested in many traditional masculine activities, such as talking about women. When his family found out by accident that he is gay, David's father had an especially hard time accepting it, and called him disgusting for his attraction to men. Although David did not mention the concept of machismo, and instead attributed his father's reaction to his being a devout Catholic and his personality as someone who is resistant to change, gendered expectations of how a man is allegedly supposed to act almost certainly played a role in the difficulty David's father had in accepting David's identity as a gay man. David alluded to machismo when reflecting on the difficulty his father had in accepting David's sexual orientation: "One of the people who I found [having the hardest time]... cop[ing] with it was my dad. You know, coming from a *Mexican culture*, ... and my parents are very Catholic, you know, being gay is not right, it's in the Bible" (emphasis mine). The influence of traditional gender roles, supported by Mexican cultural concepts like machismo and Catholicism, resulted in the difficulties David and Razi experienced and continue to experience in the quest to have their identities as members of the LGBTQ community accepted. David and Razi's experiences also demonstrate the importance of intersectionality in the analysis of one's identity construction: as members of the LGBTQ community, David and Razi experience particular forms of discrimination within the Mexican-American community. Their identities as LGBTQ people intersect with their identities as people of Mexican heritage, resulting in particular challenges which would not be faced by people who are only members of one group and not the other.

Josefina (second-generation) also mentioned some of the pressures that come with traditional gender roles in her community, such as the expectation that she will get married soon, since she has passed the age of eighteen. However, she resists this, even though she does still want to eventually have

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a big family. There are other gendered expectations which she does not resist, such as the idea that women should not have tattoos: “I would say like girls with tattoos, ... they’re mostly like ‘No!’ ... They won’t make a big deal on the guys, but with the girls it’s like, ‘Oh my God, you look so ugly like that.’” Because Josefina knows her parents would frown upon her getting a tattoo, she says that is something she simply “won’t do.” When asked why people in her community might be especially resistant to women getting tattoos, she speculated that it is “because they want to see... the woman pure and stuff.” The concept of female purity and heavy emphasis on early marriage for women are indicative of rigid gender roles which Josefina, David, and Razi are attempting to navigate while still upholding Mexican cultural traditions.

Out of all the identity referents analyzed in this thesis, “Brownness as Mexican-American identity” and “Spanish language as Mexican-American identity” resonated most with all of my participants. “Brownness as Mexican-American identity” in particular featured prominently in the narratives of all of the participants, regardless of generation or skin color. For all participants, either meeting a certain standard of brownness or being discriminated against for having brown skin was a cause of conflict, which likely contributed greatly to the status of “Brownness” as an identity referent.

Additionally, it appears that the participants who have a Mexican-American social network to whom they can pose questions, and with whom they can share cultural experiences, are able to conceptualize their Mexican-American identity more securely. Additional research is needed to investigate the influence of a culturally similar support network on identity construction, as is additional research on the influence of location on Mexican-American identity construction. Despite these potential conflicts in identity construction, all participants, with the exception of Gabriela, expressed a belief in the importance of retaining cultural traditions and passing them on to potential future generations. Gabriela was likely the exception to this pattern in part because she was never a member of a robust Mexican-American cultural network. Lastly, of the six participants, Josefina, David, and Razi reflected on the role of gender in their identity constructions. David and Razi were likely spurred to do this mainly because of their identities as members of the LGBTQ community, which can conflict with traditional Mexican masculine gender roles.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will present my conclusion. I must emphasize that all claims made throughout this thesis, including in the discussion and conclusion, are based on a sample of six interlocutors. This means that all claims based on the data collected during the interviews are contingent, and do not represent significant trends that necessarily apply to other Mexican-Americans.

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7. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed the identity construction of six emerging adults of Mexican heritage living in the state of Florida, by identifying and analyzing the most commonly occurring identity referents within their life stories. The participants were interviewed using a modified version of McAdams' (2001) life story model, which theorizes that identity is constructed as a life story, complete with traditional elements of a story, such as characters, plot, and settings. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's Dialogical Self Theory (2010), which posits that one's mind contains various "I-positions," viewpoints which are constantly internally in dialogue with one another, also played a key role in my analyses of the participants' identity construction. Based on theory by Bhatia (2002), I analyzed the diasporic experience of my participants and how their I-positions are not only situated within their individual minds, but also within broader political and historical structures. Prins' (2006) analysis of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provided further context to the manner in which one's intersecting identities are influenced by these broader political and historical structures, and how one might draw one's agency from one's identities. Furthermore, Malhi, Boon & Rogers' (2009) assertion that ethnic and racial identity is context-dependent, constructed in relation to one's audience, contributed to my analyses of my participants' identity construction in relation to their (imagined) audience. McAdams' (2001) life story model for interviewing, modified to allow the interview to be conducted in a shorter amount of time, elicited rich responses from my participants. The interview guide was a useful tool to allow identity referents to emerge with minimal prompting. Together, the theories and tools used were successful in answering the central research question of this thesis: *How do 1.5-, second-, and fourth-generation emerging adults of Mexican descent, living in the state of Florida, construct their identity in self-narratives?*

My analyses of the identity referent "Brownness as Mexican-American identity" helped answer the sub-question *How do members of this population conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity?* Moreover, my analysis of the identity referent "Catholicism as Mexican-American identity" helped answer the sub-questions *How do religiosity and religious identity contribute to and interact with their Latinx/Hispanic/Mexican-American identities?* and *How do the research participants appropriate elements of religious heritage in the construction of their identity?*

Though none of the participants identified as Catholic in our conversations, traditional Mexican Catholic practices were present in their everyday lives, seen most prominently in David's experience of negotiating his parents' Catholic practices and beliefs with his nondenominational

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Christian practices and beliefs. David discussed being particularly challenged when he was still a practicing Catholic in his attempt to consolidate his conflicting *I*-positions of “I as a Catholic” and “I as a gay man.” This tension eventually proved too great, and David decided to resolve the tension by identifying as a nondenominational Christian instead of a Catholic. Similarly, Razi discussed experiencing conflict between her identity as a member of the LGBTQ community and her cultural identity as a person of Mexican heritage, since she perceived an intolerance towards LGBTQ people in Mexican culture.

This research not only helps to fill a gap in the literature on Latinx identity construction and religious identity construction, but it has also uncovered gaps which are beyond the scope of this project but nevertheless deserve to be further researched. As suggested by previous research and buttressed by the findings of this thesis, one’s skin color likely contributes to one’s racial and ethnic identity, with those of a darker skin tone being more likely to identify (strongly) with their ethnic and racial background. This is likely connected to experiences of discrimination, which discourage one from identifying with the majority group and encourage one to identify with the minority group. Not only the role of personal experiences of discrimination, but also the role of legacies of discrimination—the stories of discrimination passed down through collective memory—should be taken into account when researching the effects of discrimination on racial and ethnic identity construction.

Moreover, further research is needed to analyze the role of a robust social support network of culturally similar people in cultural identity construction. As suggested by this research, those who have access to a community of others of a culturally similar background, and are able to ask them for stories about the homeland and for answers to questions about the heritage culture, are generally able to conceptualize their cultural identity more securely than those who do not have access to such a robust culturally similar social network. Additionally, the influence of location on one’s cultural, ethnic, and racial identity construction also deserves to be studied, as location can influence whether one has connections to a diaspora community. Moreover, location can impact the identity referents one mentions in one’s life story, as seen by the example of the Disney movie *Coco*, a reference likely made in part because all members of the research population live in Florida.

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