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Affirming Indigeneity in Public Spaces: Indigenous Mexican Testimonios About Higher Education

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2019

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students in U.S. higher education. Latinx critical race theory and critical Latinx Indigeneity served as conceptual frameworks for this study, and a decolonial lens was employed to distinguish the unique educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students from the broader Latinx student population in the United States. A testimonio research design was used to explore two research questions: (a) What is the role of higher education in the identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students? and (b) How do Indigenous Mexican college students challenge or disrupt colonial perceptions about Indigenous people on their college campus and in their communities? Twelve Indigenous Mexican (Mixtec/Ñuu Savi, Zapotec/Bene Xhon, and Nahua) college students and graduates participated in the study, which involved participation in a 90-minute oral testimonio interview. Through a constant comparative analysis of the data, multiple readings of the participants' transcripts and testimonios, and feedback from the participants, four themes emerged: (a) defining Indigeneity in diaspora, (b) higher education as a consciousness-raising space, (c) tensions within Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-based campus organizations, and (d) the urgency for public Indigeneity on and off campus. Findings revealed how participants publicly affirmed their Indigenous identities during

college, particularly when exposed to courses in Ethnic Studies, Chicanx Studies, and Anthropology. Findings also shed light on intra-Latinx discrimination and its impact on Indigenous Mexican decisions to advocate for their respective Indigenous communities both on and off campus. The study contributes to the limited body of research on Indigenous Mexican students and their experiences in U.S. schools. It also begins to interrogate the ways Indigeneity is represented within Chicanx Studies curricula and Chicanx-based campus organizations from the perspective of Indigenous Mexican college students.

Keywords: Indigenous Mexicans, Indigeneity, diaspora, Chicanx Studies, ethnic identity development

Dedication

A todxs lxs que luchan en contra del colonialismo.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Latinx[1] demographic in the United States is rapidly increasing, with predictions that Latinxs will represent 29% of the population by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). While there is significant media attention placed on this growing demographic, there is also an urgency to acknowledge the diversity among this population (Blackwell, Lopez, & Urrieta, 2017), particularly that of Indigenous Latinxs and Afro-Latinxs. Indigenous Mexican migrants, for instance, have been coming to the United States for decades, but over the last few decades their numbers have significantly increased. Approximately 1.5 million Indigenous Mexicans live in the United States (Mesinas & Pérez, 2016). In 2004, it was estimated that 150,000 Indigenous Mexicans lived in California alone (Huizar Murillo & Cerda, 2004), and within 12 years, this number has increased to approximately 250,000 (Day, 2016). Still, the historical discrimination of Indigenous groups in Mexican society remains significantly relevant to the experiences of Indigenous Mexican migrants living in the United States (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Stephen, 2007).

Previous research about Indigenous Mexican migrants in the United States highlights the establishment of transnational spaces and Indigenous-led organizations which served as vehicles for the continued articulation of their Indigenous identity (Besserer, 2002; Kearney, 1991, 2000; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Velasco Ortiz, 2002, 2005). This body of research, however, focuses predominantly on the experiences of adult migrants, leaving open the question of how migration and transnationalism shapes the lives of their children who grow up in the United States and navigate multiple and different cultural, social, and political contexts (Casanova, O'Connor, & Anthony-Stevens, 2016; Kovats, 2010).

[1] Latinx serves as gender-neutral term that challenges the gender binary: "Latinx reflects the shifting terrain of identification and the ongoing commitment to building unity through

A large body of research exists on the experiences of immigrant, first-generation, and 1.5-generation Latinx, Mexican, and Chicanx[2] students in U.S. schools. For these students, and other students of color, their educational experiences are directly impacted by race and racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Their histories, cultures, languages, and experiences have historically been omitted, misinterpreted, or devalued within educational settings (Delgado Bernal, 2002) while the White European experience has been upheld as the master narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The presence of a White master narrative in the educational school system has directly impacted the ways students of color negotiate and develop their ethnic identities. Hostile racial climates can isolate immigrant students (Brittain, 2002; Crawford, 1992; Cummins, 1996, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) and impact their social integration and adjustment to the college environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Torres, 2003).

Similar to other students of color, Indigenous Mexican students are subject to similar assimilationist and subtractive schooling practices and policies that seek to divest them from their home culture and language. Indigenous Mexican students, however, differ from mestizo Mexican or Latinx students. In addition to the White master narrative, their experiences are shaped by cultural and linguistic differences rooted in colonial Mexican history (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013). Indigenous Mexican students' knowledge systems, beliefs, practices, and languages are typically dismissed because they are assumed to be part of a linguistically and ethnoracially homogenous Latinx population (Martinez, 2017).

Little attention has been given to understanding how Indigenous students differ from

[2] Like Latinx, Chicanx is meant to be a gender-neutral term.

Mexican and Latinx students in the field of education and discussions of race, ethnicity, and cultural differences among Latinxs are generally not explored within Latinx studies (Gutierrez Najera, 2010), which tends to homogenize the experiences of a diverse base of Latinx students. The long history of marginalization and discrimination against Indigenous peoples impacts students' perceptions about Indigeneity and directly influences the way they negotiate their identities against the backdrop of not only a U.S. settler colonial identity but also a dominant Mexican mestizo ethnic identity—a constructed identity imposed by the nation-state rooted in a colonial desire to erase Indigenous people (Forbes, 2005).

Currently, there is a limited amount of research that focuses specifically on the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican youth and adolescents living in the United States (Barillas-Chón, 2010; González, 2016, 2018; Kovats, 2010; Machado-Casas, 2009; Martinez Morales, 2012; Mesinas & Pérez, 2016; Nicolás, 2012; Pérez & Vásquez, in press; Pérez, Vásquez, & Buriel, 2016; Stephen, 2007; R. Vásquez, 2012). Collectively, these studies highlight the experience of racial discrimination among Indigenous Mexican youth, particularly within the larger mestizo Latinx community. In several studies, Indigenous students are called pejorative names like "indio" or "oaxaquita" by their mestizo Latinx peers and teased about their native language, dark skin complexion, height, and other physical attributes associated with the colonial Indigenous stereotype (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Casanova, 2012; Kovats, 2010; Martinez Morales, 2012; Nicolás, 2012; Pérez et al., 2016). In my previous research (Kovats, 2010) and that of Casanova (2012) and Martinez Morales (2012), teasing and rejection encountered by Indigenous youth triggered negative feelings about their own Indigenous identity, culture, and language.

There is even a larger gap in the literature related to the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in higher education (Casanova, 2012; Kovats, 2010; Nicolás, 2012). Still, these limited findings align with prior literature on ethnic identity development among students of color in higher education (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012; Museus, Lam, Huang, Kem, & Tan, 2012; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Campus spaces and relationships that reflect the experiences and knowledge of student of color, such as courses, support programs, ethnic organizations, peers, and faculty, contribute to the development of positive ethnic identity (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012; Rendón et al., 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Students' understanding of their ethnic identities also positively impacts their educational outcomes and future career plans (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Furthermore, the development of ethnic identities allows students of color to "develop a strong sense of self that helps them ignore the threats to the viability of their academic self" which contributes to academic achievement in college (Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, Podobnik, & Schaeffer, 2008, p. 302).

Indigenous Mexican students are placed in a unique position within educational settings and general U.S. society as they navigate multiple layers of discrimination and identification with U.S. and Mexican/Latinx contexts. Given the different challenges faced by Indigenous Mexican students, their educational experiences must be disaggregated from the broader Latinx student context. Recognizing the differences between Indigenous students and Latinx mestizo students also begins to shed light on an issue few academics in education address—the racist and genocidal attitude of Latinxs against Indigenous people (Urrieta, 2017). As more Indigenous Mexican students enroll in U.S. schools and pursue higher education, it is important to consider the impact of educational settings and the development of their ethnic identity, which is built against the backdrop of White Americans and mestizo Latinxs.

Purpose of Study

Considering previous research on the ethnic identity development of students of color and validating spaces in higher education, the purpose of this study was to examine the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students. In this study, I specifically considered the role of the college experience and its impact on Indigenous Mexican students' self-identity. Close attention was also placed on the complexity of defining Indigeneity for Indigenous Mexicans students in diaspora. Lastly, I analyzed the experiences of Indigenous Mexican college students within a framework that acknowledges "historical complexities of Europe's multi-layered strategies of colonization" (Cotera & Saldaña-Portillo, 2015, p. 563) and the ways these are manifested, challenged, and disrupted throughout the college experience.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of higher education in the identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students?
2. How do Indigenous Mexican college students challenge or disrupt colonial perceptions about Indigenous people on their college campus and in their communities?

Significance of the Study

The literature about Indigenous Mexican students begins to shed light on the challenges they face in the United States. Still, Casanova et al. (2016) urge scholars to distinguish the unique experiences of Indigenous Mexican communities from the broader Latinx population:

> While all im/migrant families and children encounter common challenges, Indigenous Mexican im/migrant children and their families need to be understood within a framework that acknowledges Indigenous people's historical battle to resist absorption in

> the 'democratic imaginary' through continued contemporary struggles to maintain autonomous and sovereign lifeways in ever-changing geographies (Grande, 2000) as well as the new globalizing experiences of Indigenous families and communities (Delugan, 2010) who (re)create themselves in transnational spaces (Kearney, 2000). (p. 206)

Along these same lines, Barajas (2014) calls for the study of Indigenous Mexican migration to be "contextualized in the history of colonialism" (p. 53). Addressing coloniality not only draws attention to the homogenization of Latinxs but also the intradiscrimination that exists within Latinx communities. The findings from this study are significant because they challenge the one-dimensional understanding of Latinxs in the United States and provide new perspectives on how we conceive Indigeneity in diaspora. Moreover, the educational context of this study provides schools and educators with nuanced understandings of how to better serve Indigenous Mexican students and expose non-Indigenous and mestizo Latinx students to contemporary Indigenous Latinx communities in a way that does not perpetuate colonial logic.

Lastly, placing the testimonios of Indigenous Mexican students at the forefront of this study disrupts the historical invisibility of Indigenous narratives and recognizes them as "holders and creators of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106). As Urrieta (2017) explains, the participants' reflections about "lived experiences as forms of empirical knowing(s), individual and collective *saberes*" (p. 7) and what it means to be Indigenous for different people across different landscapes can help us unpack multiple coloniality frameworks, which is "a fundamental process of decolonization in order to re/center Indigenous collective community knowledge(s) and I/We/Us Indigenous identities" (p. 7).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I examined the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students with higher education in the United States and, as such, requires a historicizing of Indigenous people within transnational contexts and the construction of Indigeneity as a result of colonialism, and more broadly, an understanding of race and racism that is grounded in the coloniality of power. This literature review is divided into four sections. First, I discuss the use of decolonial thought, Latinx critical race theory, and critical Latinx Indigeneities as theoretical frameworks for this study. Second, I provide a historical overview of Mexico's Spanish conquest, the formation of Mexico as a nation-state, and its relevance to current political and social structures that continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples. Next, I define U.S. settler colonialism and its relationship to ethnic identity development in education—specifically within higher education. Fourth, I explore the application of Indigeneity among Chicanx identities and the perception of Indigenous narratives as terminal and unchanging over time. In the last section, I provide an overview of the literature on Indigenous Mexican students in the United States in both K-12 and higher education settings.

Theoretical Perspectives

Although the aggregate study of Latinx students' educational experiences has led to very powerful findings, it is important to consider that using pan-ethnic terms like Latinx can perpetuate "the invisibility and oppression of historically marginalized communities" (Machado-Casas, 2009, p. 84), including Indigenous peoples. Researchers who study Indigenous Mexican students in the United States have shed light on race and racism in relationship to their educational experiences (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010; Pérez & Vásquez, in press) and begins to offer a historical context on the colonization and

oppression of Indigenous peoples (Casanova et al., 2016; Ruíz & Barajas, 2012). For this reason, this study is framed by a decolonial approach that recognizes the historical and contemporary impact of colonialism.

Decolonial Thought

Decolonial thought is a particular critical theory (Mignolo, 2007) that accounts for Eurocentric colonialism and its long-lasting role in creating systems of modernity that operate epistemically, economically, politically, culturally, and contextually (Grosfoguel, 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000, 2007). Decolonial thought as a critical project emerged during the 20th century, particularly out of dependency theory and Latin American philosophy of liberation in the 1970s (Mignolo, 2007). The genealogy of decolonial thought comes from individual thinkers like Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, W. E. B. Dubois, and Gloria Anzaldúa and is also rooted in social movements and uprisings like the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, and other Indigenous movements (Mignolo, 2007). The decolonial turn of the 20th century and the understanding of coloniality and modernity are further elaborated by prominent contemporary decolonial thinkers including Quijano (2000, 2007), Mignolo (2002, 2007), Grosfoguel (2002, 2011, 2013), Lugones (2010), and Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2016).

The colonization of the Americas and the expansion of European colonialism across the world propelled a dominant Eurocentric perspective of knowledge that established colonial relations superiority and inferiority between colonizers and the colonized. Quijano (2000) explained that Eurocentrism is based on two founding myths: (a) the idea that the history of human civilization culminated in Europe, and (b) the differences between European and non-Europeans are natural rather than a consequence of a history of power.

Prior to the colonization of the Americas, the concept of race did not have a known history (Quijano, 2000). Race and racial classification were established as colonial tools to separate phenotypic differences between colonizers and the colonized, while then deeming them as natural or biological (Quijano, 2000, 2007). This racial classification, consequently, justified the economic and political subordination and exploitation of colonized people, creating a structure of control for the division of labor (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Quijano (2000) further explained that racial classification allowed Europeans to associate nonwaged labor with the colonized or so-called "inferior races" (p. 539).

Racial classification also grouped a number of different people with different histories, languages, memories, and identities into a single identity. Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas, for example, were categorized as "Indians," and Ashantis, Yorubas, and Zulus who were kidnapped and enslaved became "Black" (Quijano, 2000). This mass grouping dispossessed people from their own historical identities and their new racial identity placed them in a subordinate or inferior position within the colonial context.

In addition to the mass genocide of Indigenous and Black people, the process of colonization repressed non-European epistemologies, knowledges, and ways of being (Grosfoguel, 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000, 2007). Colonized peoples were forced to learn the dominant colonial Eurocentric culture. The expansion of Eurocentric colonial dominance and repression of colonized forms of knowledge established a specific model of power that used race as a basic factor in the creation of a nation-state (Quijano, 2000). As such, the legacy of colonialism continues to impact all society forms of life and modern systems and institutions.

Rather than a single event, decolonial thinkers argue that colonialism is a continuous process—a logic that is internalized by generations and manifested in daily spaces. Consequently, colonial history, imperial domination, and racism are cornerstones of the modern nation-state (Mignolo, 2008). Our contemporary understanding of modernity, modernization, and progress as natural historical processes are in reality "regional narrative[s] of the Eurocentric world view" (Mignolo, 2008, p. 13). The long-standing Eurocentric structure of power established by colonialism is referred to as coloniality. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) described:

> Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in the aspirations of self, and so many other aspects. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday. (p. 243)

Moreover, coloniality defines our culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000).

Given the deep and long-lasting role of coloniality, decolonial thinking "introduces the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and thinking" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 262). Thus, decolonial thinking or the process of decolonization not only seeks to end formal colonial relations but also aims to confront racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that exist because of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Decolonial thinking seeks an alternative to the single narrative of modernity and challenges the assumption that it is universal and disconnected from coloniality (Mignolo, 2008). In doing so, decolonial projects require the rejection of the colonial matrix of power and the centering of knowledges, subjectivities, perspectives, and histories of those who have historically been colonized and

racially classified as inferior (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2008). In this sense, decolonial thought attempts to reconstitute an epistemology that accounts for the "colonial wound inflected by five hundred years of the historical foundation modernity as a weapon of imperial/colonial global expansion of Western capitalism" (Quijano, 2007, p. 165).

Education as a colonial project. As a study focused on the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in the United States, it is important to use a decolonial approach to examine how education in the United States maintains coloniality (Calderón, 2014; Patel, 2016), particularly through oppressive discourses and mechanisms of settler colonialism (Calderón, 2014). The impact of U.S. settler colonialism is continuously present as European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate U.S. society (Brayboy, 2005) and maintain the cultural capital of the White, upper middle class as "hegemonic normality" in the United States (Urrieta, 2004). The elevation of western European thought because of U.S. settler colonialism is directly linked to the construction of schools in the United States. Public education has been a primary tool for erasing Indigenous histories, identities, and knowledges and as a result, "formal education has consistently been at odds with Indigenous cultural and educational needs and desires" (Calderón, 2014, p. 85).

Native American boarding schools, for instance, were created to strip Indigenous children from their traditional cultures through their forced assimilation into European American culture (Urrieta, 2004). Students were forced to wear Anglo clothing, forbidden to speak their native language, and isolated from their families and community (Urrieta, 2004). The restriction and prohibition of the Spanish language in U.S. classrooms is another example of colonial schooling designed to replace Mexican American students' cultural knowledge with "whitestream culture" (Urrieta, 2004). Historically, non-English languages and non-White cultures have been

stigmatized as being deficient and counterproductive to the assimilation process, as explained by Urrieta (2004):

> The implicit institutional and societal message portrays non-White cultures as less valuable by making them invisible, portraying them in uncritical ways, or even portraying the subaltern in negative and hostile ways (in equating Chicana/o with chicanery, for example). This continuous attempt to assimilate people by erasing them from history and displacing them of their social context illustrates Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) argument that assimilation follows the logic of glorification, stigmatization, and rationalization. As stated previously, assimilation and acculturation have traditionally been justified as the "greater good" for both immigrants and U.S. society in an effort to create a responsible citizenry. (p. 450)

The U.S. educational system is rooted in its own history of coloniality (Patel, 2016). Educational spaces are "polluted by colonial history, a colonial imaginary, colonial knowledges, and racial/ethnic hierarchy liked to a history of empire" (Villanueva, 2013, p. 26). Villanueva (2013) pointed out that this racial hierarchy is visible in school curricula when White authors, scholars, and intellectuals are prioritized over people of color.

Colleges and universities in the United States are also shaped by a long history of White cultural ideology that situates White cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge as the norm within the institution (Gusa, 2010). The institution's monocultural White ideological worldview has historically influenced policy initiatives, course content, research practices, research methods, and teaching pedagogy, leaving other worldviews to be considered "not appropriate, scholarly or in good form" (Gusa, 2010, p. 475). This, in turn, creates hostile racial

climates for students of color that impact their social integration and adjustment to the college environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Torres, 2003).

Decolonization as metaphor. In pursuing research that addresses the experiences of Indigenous communities, it is also important to consider how decolonial theory and practice is implemented, particularly in the field of education. The term decolonization is often used in the field of education as a metaphor for antiracist and social justice research (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012), however, explicitly defined decolonization as the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. They further questioned the use of this term as a synonym for social justice projects, particularly when they do not focus on Indigenous people or provide an analysis of settler colonialism. It is common to hear speakers at educational research conferences talk about decolonizing schools and decolonizing methods, but as Tuck and Yang (2012) observed:

> A startling number of these discussions make no mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization. Further, there is often little recognition given to the immediate context of settler colonialism on the North American lands where many of these conferences take place. (pp. 2-3)

Furthermore, Tuck and Yang posited that this superficial adoption of decolonial discourse is part of a history that seeks to alleviate the impacts of colonization. They added that calling different groups colonized without describing their relationship to settler colonialisms is problematic as it creates an ambiguity between decolonization and social justice work. The adoption of Freire's philosophies has also encouraged educators to use decolonization as a metaphor for oppression—following the assumption that decolonizing the mind leads to decolonization in other forms. Tuck and Yang (2012) disagreed and stated, "Decolonization is not converting Indigenous

politics to a Western doctrine of liberation. It's not a philanthropic process of helping the at-risk and alleviating suffering. It's not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes" (p. 21). While Tuck and Yang's critique is not meant to discourage scholars and practitioners from teaching themselves and others to be critically conscious of various oppressions, they do urge scholars to consider how social justice relates to settler colonial ideologies that uphold power, land, and privilege.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

In addition to the broader theory of decoloniality, I use Latinx critical race theory (LatCrit) to center the racialized educational experiences of the participants in this study. Rooted in critical race theory, anthropology, legal theory, and political science, LatCrit places the knowledge and experiences of students at the center of the analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003, 2004). LatCrit centers on the experiential knowledge and racialized experiences of Latinxs while incorporating an additional layer of analysis that accounts for issues like language, immigration status, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002). LatCrit acknowledges and upholds the narratives, testimonios, and oral histories of Latinx students (Solórzano, 1998). LatCrit's focus on student voices permits a greater understanding of how students respond to and confront hostile climates (Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). This type of analysis provides a closer look at the ways students cope with racism and, more importantly, how they draw from their own cultural and community resources to resist and survive hostile and marginalizing educational climates (Yosso et al., 2009). Furthermore, the elevation of participant narratives provides an opportunity for researchers to consider participants' responses to oppression as forms of resistance.

Accounting for students' racialized experiences is central to this study—especially considering the contentious relationship between Indigenous and Latinx mestizo communities in the United States. Race and racism impact students' educational experiences within the classroom and at the larger institutional and political level (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is important to point out, however, that LatCrit does not explicitly address colonialism in its layers of analysis. Racism within the Latinx community and among its members is deeply rooted in colonial logic that continues to shape perceptions about Indigeneity (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Gutierrez, 1999).

Critical Latinx Indigeneities

While LatCrit accounts for the unique experiences of Latinxs, there is an urgent need to examine how Indigenous migrants from Latin America relate to Latinidad and Indigeneity in the United States. Consequently, critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI) is an interdisciplinary analytical lens that "understands the co-constitutive relationship of multiple contexts of power and multiple colonialities" (Blackwell et al., 2017, p. 127). Critical Latinx Indigeneities also put forth questions about transnational meanings of race, place, and Indigeneity. As such, CLI provides an intervention in Latinx Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Latin American Studies—fields that Blackwell et al. (2017) argue are often perceived as distinct but the growth of Latin American diaspora places these three fields in conversation. As the Latinx demographic rapidly grows in the United States, Blackwell et al. (2017) urge us to recognize the actual increase in Latinx diversity, which includes Indigenous Latinxs. This lens aims to expose complex and intersectional nuances about Indigenous Latinxs in diaspora and intergroup oppression and enduring colonialities of power. Critical Latinx Indigeneities also begin to interrogate the relationship between the Mexican state's notions of *indigenismo* and the origins of the Chicano

movement. Finally, the CLI perspective draws from the personal stories, ways of knowing, and ways of being of Indigenous Latinxs in the United States, and, through this standpoint, "destabilize[s] essentialist notions of both Latinx and Indigenous categories of identification and critique global forms of colonial legacies" (Blackwell et al., 2017, pp. 134-135).

Mexican Colonial History

The educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students cannot be examined without first addressing Latin American's colonial history. Since European contact, Indigenous people's identities have historically been constructed as "naturally or genetically inferior to Europeans" (Urrieta, 2004, p. 438). This negative perception of Indigenous communities is the result of colonial and settler colonial projects that sought to control, "save," and condition Indigenous peoples for "servitude in whitestream civilization" (Urrieta, 2004, p. 438). The psychological and physical effects of colonialism have led many colonized people to internalize unresolved feelings of inferiority (Urrieta, 2004).

The systemic marginalization and displacement of Indigenous communities in Mexico is deeply rooted in the exploitation of Indigenous people during the Spanish Conquest (Bonfil Batalla, 1989). Similar to other counties in Latin America, the colonial experience left the native population subject to extreme marginalization and exploitation. The importance of blood lines during the Spanish regime was mirrored by the colony's categorization of identities and organization of political life (Lomnitz-Adler, 1992). The colonial period was a highly segregated society based on hierarchical divisions of birthright. The maintenance of ethnic boundaries allowed for the exploitation of not only Indigenous people but also the African population and American-born castes like mestizos and mulattos. The physical characteristics of each group also became clear markers for ethnic manipulation.

The extraction of resources and wealth relied heavily on non-European bodies and the Catholic Church justified this exploitation by depicting Indigenous people as primitive, submissive, and docile (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Kearney & Varese, 1995). Kearney and Varese (1995) pointed out that,

> unlike the English in North America, who generally viewed the natives as obstacles to their enterprises, the Spanish regarded Indigenous labor as essential to extract wealth from the gold and silver mines and from plantation that produced commodities such as sugar, silk, indigo, and cochineal for the world market. (p. 209)

Since Indigenous people were essential economic resources, Kearney and Varese argued that they were often legally recognized and given resources so they could perpetually be exploited by the Spanish crown, Spanish colonists, and the Catholic Church. Kearney and Varese (1995) also noted, "The subsequent social identities and destinies of the *indígenas* and their communities in Spanish America thus developed under markedly different conditions from the English colonies" (p. 210).

The imposition of the Catholic Church also served as an ideological justification for the treatment of New Spain's colonized population. The Catholic Church along with the Spanish authority subsequently suppressed Indigenous traditions, religious beliefs, and languages (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Weinberg, 1977). The concept of racial categorization during the colonial period also generated significant tension between the Spanish-born *peninsulares* and the American-born Spanish *criollos* (creoles). This hierarchical tension along with the desire to secure power and wealth in New Spain led the *criollos* to seek independence from Spanish rule. Influenced by the French Revolution, the *criollos* adopted a western Eurocentric model for nation building that embraced concepts of modernity, progress, and wealth (Bartolomé, 2005).

Mexico's independence from Spanish rule further problematized Indigenous identity. In an attempt to create a common national identity, the newly formed Mexican state created the *mestizo* identity, which was conceptualized as the congenial blend of Indigenous and European people (Bartolomé, 2005; Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1999; Lomnitz-Adler, 1992). Although the mestizo identity theoretically implied a unification and synthesis of cultures, it failed to validate its living Indigenous population. As Urrieta (2012) indicated, *mestizaje* is emblematic of colonization since it was more of a "historical claim to whiteness (Spanish) and at best, implicit, rejection or escape out of Indianess" (p. 323). Indigenous groups were still considered inferior to the mestizo ideal as their existence contradicted the newly conceived "modern" Mexican nation (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1999).

Therefore, even after the conquest, Indigenous knowledges, traditions, and languages continued to be suppressed through the implementation of federal policies (Academia de la Lengua Mixteca, 2007; Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Gutierrez, 1999; Kearney, 1991; Martínez Novo, 2006; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Ramírez Castañeda, 2006). The Mexican state carried out various policies in an effort to assimilate its Indigenous population into mainstream mestizo society (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Kearney, 2000; Kearney & Varese, 1995; Martínez Novo, 2006; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990).

The push for national identity intensified during the early 20th century. Although official discourse asserted the unification and synthesis of cultures and acknowledged the nation's Indigenous civilizations, it failed to validate its living Indigenous population. Instead, *mestizaje* became a tool of exclusion for those that did not conform to Mexico's path toward modernization through rejection of their Indigenous identities (Martínez Novo, 2006). *Indigenismo* emerged as the prevalent ideology in official government discourse. *Indigenismo*

correlated progress with the acculturation to European ways and considered ethnic difference a hindrance for Mexico's nationalist mestizo identity (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Kearney, 1990, 1991; Martínez Novo, 2006; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990). Just as Indigenous identity was prohibited during the Colonial Era, it continued to be marginalized throughout the 19th and 20th century.

Mexico's push for a national identity is an issue that Appadurai (2006) associated with the creation of a modern nation-state. Instead of being an overwhelmingly biological reality or a complementary exchange of cultural traditions, *mestizaje* became an ideological product of the Mexican state (Gutierrez, 1999). The creation of a national identity in many cases leads to the formation of what Appadurai calls *predatory identities*. These identities require the extinction of another minority group for their own survival. Appadurai (2006) also noted that predatory identities

> are products of situations in which the idea of a national peoplehood is successfully reduced to the principle of ethnic singularity, so that the existence of even the smallest minority within national boundaries is seen as an intolerable deficit in the purity of the national whole. (p. 53)

The Mexican state carried out various policies that attempted to assimilate its Indigenous population into the mainstream mestizo society. The educational system, in particular, became the State's most effective means of achieving ethnic integration and linguistic uniformity (Gutiérrez, 1999). During the 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican government set out to implement educational and cultural programs that promoted the nation's political platforms, including *indigenismo* (Gutiérrez, 1999). The Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), founded by José Vasconcelos in 1921, therefore, made efforts to bring education to parts of the population that traditionally had limited access to education, such as rural Indigenous communities (Gutiérrez,

1999). The educational curriculum in these communities sought to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures to integrate the population into mainstream Mexican society (Academia de la Lengua Mixteca, 2007; Ramírez Castañeda, 2006). Teachers were sent to rural communities to educate children about national culture and language (Bonfil Batalla 1989; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990). Indigenous languages were not taught in schools and many children were punished for speaking any language other than Spanish in the classroom (Ramírez Castañeda, 2006).

By the 1940s a new type of *indigenismo* emerged with the purpose of further incorporating Indigenous people in to the State (Gutiérrez, 1999). Influenced by the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, this new *indigenismo* sought to glorify Mexico's Indigenous past, while promoting their integration into mainstream society (Gutiérrez, 1999). However, as Gutiérrez (1999) pointed out, this new "respect for Indigenous personalities" (p. 97) did not actually move away from the assimilationist mestizo identity. Instead, *indigenismo* acquired a new dimension where "the usurpation and manipulation of Indian cultures became another stage in the process of mestizaje" (Gutiérrez, 1999, p. 97). Bilingual programs, for instance, were set up in rural communities not with the purpose of preserving Indigenous languages but for facilitating Spanish acquisition.

Many Indigenous groups challenged Mexico's continued practices of *indigenismo* and by the 1980s, a dialogue emerged within the Mexican government to recognize the country's diverse population (Maybury-Lewis, 2002). As a result, the new Mexican Constitution of 1993 stipulated that Mexico was a pluriethnic nation (Maybury-Lewis, 2002). Despite this shift from classic *indigenismo*, Mexico's new pluriethnic claims did little to mitigate the state's attempts to

assimilate Indigenous groups into the mainstream population, especially with the implementation of neoliberal policies.

Following the 1982 debt crisis, Mexico signed on to a neoliberal agenda that sought to restructure the economy through deregulating the economy, opening markets to foreign investment, and focusing on export-oriented growth (Warnock, 1995). Similar to earlier policies that tried to integrate the Indigenous population, structural adjustment programs attempted to urbanize Mexico's Indigenous communities. Subsistence farmers and small-scale farmers could no longer rely solely on local market exchanges and were forced to move toward a cash economy. The lack of cooperatives or other regional marketing systems that were Indigenous owned prevented them from competing with commercial agricultural industries (Warnock, 1995). In addition, the Salinas administration amended Article 27 of the Constitution, which ended any further redistribution of land to Indigenous groups and removed the protected status of *ejido* lands. After the Mexican Revolution, *ejidos* were designated as communal pieces of land where community members farmed designated parcels and collectively maintained communal holdings to this land. The neoliberal mindset of the current administration viewed *ejidos* as a relic of the past and wanted to bring *ejido* land into the capitalist market (Warnock, 1995). The privatization of *ejido* lands contradicted Mexico's pluriethnic claims to preserve and reinforce ethnic identity and served as a clear example of how classic *indigenismo* had reworked itself into the neoliberal framework by integrating Mexico's Indigenous base into the capitalist market (Martínez Novo, 2006).

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) also had a dramatic effect on Mexico's Indigenous population. NAFTA proposed to lower trade barriers and promote investment in Mexico, the United States, and Canada to stimulate economic and job growth. On

an aggregate level, NAFTA appeared to increase trade and investment and stabilize the peso in Mexico. Yet, for small-scale farmers this meant the further commercialization of agriculture and export-oriented production. The development of new crops and the decline in the price of traditional crops left many Indigenous farmers landless (Warnock, 1995). A significant majority of Indigenous communities was no longer making enough money to support their farms and the degradation and over-exploitation of land forced people to seek economic opportunities elsewhere.

The maintenance of racial differences during the Spanish colonial period had a direct result of the cultural divisions still palpable in today's Mexican discourse of modernity and growth. As previously noted, this discourse specifically excludes elements of Mexico's past that cannot be easily merged with progress; this allows for the continued stratification and marginalization of Mexico's Indigenous population who retain their language and culture. Western notions of modernity and nationalism have helped to further construct the "Indian" stereotype in Mexican society. Stephen (2007) pointed out that still "the monolingual 'traditional' Indian is projected as an explanation for poverty, illiteracy, and dependence of so many of Mexico's Indigenous people" (p. 20). The Mexican government's push for a homogenous mestizo culture has excluded a significant portion of the population. To this day, Indigenous groups are continuously pressured to leave their cultures and languages behind to become part of mainstream mestizo society.

In her research, Gutierrez (1999) examined a collection of primary school textbooks published from 1970 through the 1990s and found that none of the text editions contained any specific information about the present situation of Mexico's Indigenous populations. Instead, Indigenous cultures were contextualized as a form of cultural stagnation and were perceived as

having little to offer to Mexican society as a whole. The official version of "Mexican culture" in these textbooks sought to balance the Indigenous past, which was primarily Aztec, with European influences. Gutierrez pointed out that the exclusion of other Indigenous groups also creates a selective understanding of the Indigenous past since the Aztecs are the only ones who receive attention in these texts.

The emergence of Indigenous movements and perspectives in the past 20 years, such as the Zapatista Army for National Liberation, have challenged Mexico's nationalist identity and neoliberal polices while demanding the recognition and respect of Mexico's living Indigenous population (Gibler, 2005; Muñoz Ramírez, 2008). The Zapatistas, for instance, embrace the possibility of a pluralistic society that challenges various structures of oppression, including racism and sexism. Their different approach in politics also attempts to unite different sectors of society in the movement for real democracy. However, while movements like the Zapatista Army for National Liberation continue to grow, there remains a vast disconnect between Mexico's Indigenous and non-Indigenous population.

The legacy of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* created dichotomous thinking around who and what identifies someone as Indigenous and non-Indigenous (Urrieta, 2017). Urrieta (2017) described this thinking as Mexico's nationalist ethno-racial structure of Indigeneity, where language and dress became the visible markers of Indigeneity. Alberto (2012) added that the history and practice of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* are "always the backdrop against which Indigenous peoples negotiate their own cultural representations and social political realities" (p. 39).

The pervasiveness of ethnic discrimination is apparent in everyday speech when pejorative terms like *indio* [Indian] and *oaxaquita* [little Oaxacan] are used synonymously with

poverty, ignorance, and ugliness (Bartolomé, 2005; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Urrieta, 2012, 2017). Phenotypic differences are used against Indigenous peoples as they are marked by the Mexican nationalist ethno-racial structure as having shorter stature and darker skin (Gutierrez Najera, 2010). It is also common for Mexican mestizos to glorify distant European ancestors while disregarding or even concealing their Indigenous heritage (Urrieta, 2017).

The elevated status of Spanish as the mestizo national language has also marked Indigenous languages as inferior as most of Mexican society commonly refers to Indigenous languages as dialects (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010). Being Indigenous in Mexico (and in the rest of Latin America) reflects a negative connotation as they continue to be denied recognition and respect in mass media and the educational system (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013). Many Indigenous Mexican people also internalize these negative perceptions about Indigeneity. Within the Mixtec or Ñuu Savi[3] community, for instance, many members refer to their native language as *tu'un nda'vi*, which means "the poor language" while Spanish is called *tu'un jaan*, "the rich language" (Kovats, 2010, p. 24).

Moreover, Bartolomé (2005) argued that few people accept defining themselves as Indigenous because of its pejorative connotation. In the 2000 census, for example, under the self-identification category, there were 1 million fewer people who identified as Indigenous than there were in the category of those who spoke Indigenous languages (Bartolomé, 2005). Although self-identification is not solely based on the use of an Indigenous language, the

[3] It is important to point out that the word *Mixtec* is derived from Nahuatl. After the conquest of the Aztec empire, Spanish authorities and missionaries used the Nahuatl language to describe other native communities. This is why most Indigenous groups in Mexico are commonly referred to by their Nahuatl name. *Ñuu Savi*, which means people of the rain, is the native term to define Mixtec people. In effort to honor and recognize Ñuu Savi culture, language, and resistance and as per request of the participants of this study, I use Ñuu Savi in place of Mixtec.

significant gap between the two categories mirrors the mestizo mainstream society's attitude toward its Indigenous population. Indigenous languages are not viewed as sources of pride within the mestizo ideological construct; therefore, many people do not self-identify as Indigenous even if their native language is an Indigenous language.

Mestizos/Chicanxs and Indigenous Mexicans in the United States

As Indigenous groups migrate to the United States, they continue to be exposed to ethnic discrimination, particularly from Mexican mestizo migrants (Gutierrez Najera, 2010; Kearney, 1998, 2000; Stephen, 2007). Stephen (2005) argued that Indigenous Mexicans continue to be "a racialized category within Mexican immigrant communities" (p. 210). Additionally, the U.S. context brings forth the political imaginary of Chicanx consciousness (Cotera & Saldaña-Portillo, 2015) and other forms of Indigeneity that are constructed in the diaspora (Urrieta, 2017). Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo (2015), for example, argued that Mexican mestizos and Chicanxs have deep connections to Indigenous communities both through ancestral land-based ties and through living relations. They add that the use of Chicanx Indigeneity must take into account centuries-long processes of colonization, and as a result, mestizos occupy a "complex position between 'settlers' and 'Indians' or both" (Cotera & Saldaña-Portillo, 2015, p. 554). Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo (2015) argued that unlike U.S. settlers that decimated Indigenous populations and differentiated themselves from Indigenous people, Spanish colonizers settled in Indigenous communities, thus creating for Mexican mestizos a "close association with Indigenous peoples" (p. 557).

Still, Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo's (2015) conceptualization of *mestizaje* is romanticized. Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo (2015) placed blame on "US statecraft and racial nationalism" (p. 562) for disassociating Mexican Americans from their Indigenous ancestry but do not consider

the implications of Mexican national mestizo identity and the historical sociopolitical efforts to erase and marginalize Indigenous communities. As discussed previously, the concept of *mestizaje* represents a psychological embrace of Mexico's Indigenous ancestry and western European heritage, but in reality, this constructed identity was an imperialist imposition to execute the colonial desire to erase Indigenous people (Forbes, 2005; Urrieta, 2017). Over time, the concept of *mestizaje* or "myth of descent" has continued to shape Mexican society's perceptions about Indigenous people (Forbes, 2005).

With that said, it is important to problematize Mexican mestizos and Chicanxs' relationship with Mexican nationalist ethno-racial structures of Indigeneity (Urrieta, 2017) and their complicity in U.S. settler colonialism (Pulido, 2017). A growing number of scholars have discussed the impact of Mexican nationalism/*indigenismo* on the development of Chicanismo (Alberto, 2012; Blackwell et al., 2017; Pulido, 2017; Urrieta, 2017). While the Chicanx movement of the late 1960s and 1970s led to significant gains for Mexican American communities, Alberto (2012) argued that this empowerment occurred at the expense of Indigenous peoples and in light of *indigenismo*'s negative history in the Americas. Understandably, in an attempt to retaliate against Anglo aggressions and negative portrayals of Mexican Americans, Chicanismo drew from Mexican nationalism/*indigenismo* and romanticized the glories of the preconquest Aztec empire (Alberto, 2012; Barrenechea & Moertl, 2013; Castellanos, Nájera, & Aldama, 2012; Pulido, 2017; Urrieta, 2012). This heavy connection to Mesoamerican ancestry (specifically Aztec), as a result, ignored present day Indigenous peoples and the colonial history of Mexican nationalism (Alberto, 2012). Urrieta (2017) further argued that mestizo claims to "a distant and lost Indigenous ancestor and their often performed

Indigeneity in folkloric ways, contributes to the erasure and denial of Indigeneity for people who live Indigenous realities on an everyday basis" (p. 7).

Given the complicated history of *mestizaje*, the use of the term mestiza/o in Chicana feminist literature and epistemologies also requires a deeper analysis. Some critics, for example, have argued that Anzaldúa's use of the term mestizo in her work "forecloses the possibility of contemporary Indigenous practice, always relegating Indigeneity to some nebulous past that nevertheless influences individual personhood" (French, 2010, p. 2). While Chicana feminists have addressed issues of resistance, culture, and activism through the concept of *mestizaje*, Urrieta (2012) reminded us that *mestizaje* is not a benign concept for Indigenous people. For example, in her analysis of Ana Castillo's novel *Mixquiahula Letters,* Alberto (2012) explored the concept of *mestizaje* privilege among Chicanas and suggests:

> It is this logic of mestizaje that frees the Chicana to speak as an Indian woman, but as powerfully illustrated in the novel, when the Chicana speaks as an Indian woman, actual Indigenous women must be silenced. The privilege of mestizaje is that it is constructed as a universal subject that can access both the Indian and the colonial. When Castillo's Teresa [the novel's protagonist] takes the mestiza framework to southern Mexico, the privilege of mestizaje is exposed. (p. 44)

Alternatively, French (2010) argued that Chicana feminists like Anzaldúa consciously used terms already available to them, like *mestizaje*, to challenge colonial perceptions and give them new meaning. According to French, Anzaldúa, for example, appropriated and refracted the term to create a new or decolonizing discourse about *mestizaje*. Furthermore, Anzaldúa traced the migration of *mestizaje* from the Mexican nationalist context to the U.S. borderlands contexts, which gives the term new meaning (French, 2010). Calderón (2014) also acknowledged that the

legacy of colonization has inadvertently been incorporated in Chicana feminist epistemologies and as a result, contributed to the continued silencing of Indigenous people. Nevertheless, she pointed out that "the idea that Chicana indigenism could be an extension of a colonial legacy is equally as painful for Chicana feminists, since they have relentlessly worked to deconstruct structures of power and decolonize women's history" (Calderón, 2014, p. 50). Calderón (2014) called for Chicana feminist scholars to seriously take into consideration "the legacies and contemporary manifestations of coloniality" (p. 82) and how these shape how we understand the world. Only then can scholars explore aspects of coloniality that are normalized.

Ethnic Identity Development

Given the complex construction of Indigeneity and the Mexican nationalist ethno-racial creation *mestizaje*, it is important to understand how these impact the development of ethnic identity among Indigenous Mexican college students in the United States. The term identity is typically defined as an individual's understanding of self (Erikson, 1968). Phinney (1990) defined ethnic identity as an individual's sense of self as a member of a particular ethnic group and the behaviors and attitudes associated with that sense. Ethnic identity is a multidimensional and fluid construct that changes in response to social and contextual factors (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Identity development is described as the process of defining an individual's own identity (Erikson, 1968). Ethnic identity development, specifically, is conceptualized as an exploration of an individual's ethnic and cultural issues and values (Phinney, 1996). These ethnic and cultural issues and values are influenced by an individual's socialization experiences within their family, ethnic community, and broader society (Phinney, Horenezyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).

There are various models or frameworks used to explain ethnic identity development. Collectively, these models attribute ethnic identity development to a crisis or awakening that causes individuals to explore the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its salience in their lives (Phinney, 1993). Phinney's (1993) widely used model of ethnic identity development in adolescence drew from Erickson (1968) and Marcia's (1966) identity models. Based on her research with adolescents from ethnically diverse high schools and colleges, Phinney described ethnic identity as a process that takes place over time and one where individuals achieve a sense of ethnic identity only after having explored their ethnicity and what it means to them.

Phinney's (1993) model is divided into three stages. In the first stage, individuals accept values and attitudes about their ethnic group based on the majority culture. Phinney called this stage "unexamined ethnic identity." In this period, most adolescents have not yet explored the meaning of their ethnicity and accept preconceived notions about their identities from their parents and the larger society, including negative stereotypes (Phinney, 1993).

In the second stage, individuals encounter cognitive dissonance or a situation that forces them to consider their sense of self in relation to their ethnic group; this initiates what Phinney (1993) called an ethnic identity search. During this process of exploration, individuals attempt to learn more about their culture and understand the implications of their ethnic group membership. Finally, in the third stage of achieved ethnic identity, individuals internalize and accept their own ethnic identity. Phinney argued that this process of ethnic identity is a key factor in understanding the self-concept of students of color. The process of ethnic identity exploration is perceived to help students of color develop an "internally and ethnically grounded reason for aspiring toward academic success" (Pizzolato et al., 2008, p. 302).

Phinney (1990, 1993) and other scholars have argued that an achieved or strong ethnic identity promotes overall psychosocial well-being, which allows students to effectively cope with challenges within educational settings and mitigate negative effects related to discrimination (Brown & Chu, 2012; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Phinney, 1993; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). In addition to buffering the effects of discrimination, adolescents of color who believe their ethnicity is central to their self-concept believe in the utility of education and academic success (Brown & Chu, 2012; Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005).

In their work, Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke (1998) provided another influential model for ethnic and racial identity development, particularly for African American youth. Unlike other models, the multiple model of racial identity does not assume race is a defining characteristic or the existence of an optimal African American identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Instead, racial identity is defined as part of a person's self-concept and the model measures students' centrality of race as a predictor for college outcomes.

Yeh and Huang (1996) pointed out, however, that traditional ethnic identity models, like Phinney's (1993) three-stage model, assume ethnic identity is a final and fixed outcome that follows a linear progression. They went on to state that the oversimplification of the development process fails to recognize "the malleability of identity within its social context" (Yeh & Huang, 1996, p. 653) for students of color. Torres and Baxter Magolda's (2004) research on the ethnic identity process of Latinx college students further supports Yeh and Huang's (1996) claims that traditional identity models only "exemplify a snapshot of development rather than explain a developmental process" (p. 333).

Other assessments of ethnic identity development consider the distinction between ethnic and racial identity and suggest the combined study of ethno-racial identity development (Casey-Cannon, Coleman, Knudtson, & Velazquez, 2011; Cross & Cross, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012). Although the constructs of race and ethnicity are different, Casey-Cannon et al. (2011) argued that the United States' long history of placing social groups in racial categories has led to the overlap between race and ethnicity. Cross and Cross (2008) added that youth do not keep their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities separate in their lived experiences. In this way, the study of ethno-racial identity captures "the experiences that reflect both the individual's ethnic background and racialized experiences as a member of a group in the context of the United States" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23).

Although this literature focuses on ethnic identity development it is important to consider the intersection of race and ethnicity, particularly in the United States. Phinney's (1993) model and the conceptualization of ethno-racial identity by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) provide guidelines for understanding how students adapt and manage their college experiences. Students' socioenvironmental contexts deeply shape their beliefs and attitudes about their ethnic and racial group identification.

Precollege Influences on Ethnic Identity Development

Students' ethnic identities are influenced by their socialization in different contexts (Phinney et al., 2001). Family socialization is one of the most important contexts that shapes students' ethnic identities (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). For individuals of color from minoritized groups who are subjected to discrimination and marginalization, the societal context also deeply influences their ethnic identity development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Given the amount of

time students spend outside the home at school and with their peers, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of looking at the impact of nonfamilial socialization contexts on ethnic identity development.

Most research on culturally diverse students reveals that schooling in the United States has historically been a key instrument for assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, & Rannut, 1995). In this process of assimilation, subtractive schooling practices dismiss students' cultural knowledge and language (Valenzuela, 1999). This dismissal often causes students to experience shame and doubt about their home identities. In attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture, for example, students actively reject the use of their native language (Cummins, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). This type of response aligns with Phinney's (1993) first stage of unexamined ethnic identity, where students of color assume preconceived notions about their ethnic group from the larger, dominant culture. Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) added that students without access to K-12 environments that encourage ethnic identity exploration are forced to rely on external authorities to define their beliefs, making them vulnerable to the internalization of negative stereotypes. Consequently, many students of color enter college with a lack of awareness about their own ethnic identities (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Nevertheless, some scholars have indicated that not all students enter college with unexamined ethnic identities (Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002; Torres, 2003). Students' experiences in college may differ based on their prior experiences with ethnicity. In her qualitative study on the ethnic identity development of Latinx college students, Torres (2003) revealed that students' influences of "where they grew up, their generational status in the United States, and self-perception of societal status play a major role in situating their identity in their

first year of college" (p. 544). Specifically, students who come from ethnically homogenous home communities prompted stronger ties to their ethnicity at predominantly White institutions (PWI). Along these same lines, students' whose parents instilled cultural relevant activities at home where more likely to identify strongly as Latinxs. In terms of socioeconomic status, however, students from more affluent homes entered college believing negative stereotypes about Latinxs but did not assume those stereotypes for themselves (Torres, 2003).

An earlier study by Chavous et al. (2002) examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and racial identity of African American college students. They found that students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and ethnically homogenous home communities experienced less ethnic fit at PWIs (Chavous et al., 2002). Depending on the student's precollege experiences, Chavous et al. conclude that racial and ethnic identification can serve as a buffer to the PWI climate or create increased vulnerability at PWIs.

Ethnic Identity Development in Higher Education

College is often described "as a consciousness-raising experience" (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008, p. 11), where the exposure to peers, coursework, and social spheres encourages students to examine their ethnic identities. Moreover, the limited diversity and hostile campus climate, particularly at PWIs, strongly influences the experiences of students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Students of color negotiate two different domains, "one related to their ethnicity and development of self-identity, and the other relating to adjusting to and negotiating the values and demands of the PWI school environment" (Chavous et al., 2002, p. 239). These conflicting spaces or experiences of cultural dissonance often force students to bring their ethnic identity to the forefront as they attempt to deconstruct stereotypes about their ethnic

group and understand their own cultural and ethnic values and behaviors in connection to the institution.

Researchers who study ethnic identity development in higher education have documented several factors that contribute to students' renegotiation of their ethnic identities (Azmitia et al., 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). For students of color who are numerical minorities at PWIs, the affirmation of their ethnic identity serves as a mechanism to preserve their "self-concept as a member of a devalued ethnic group" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 31). Experiences of racism and discrimination often serve as powerful triggers for students to reexamine their racial and ethnic identities (Azmitia et al., 2008). Cultural dissonance, however, is not limited to negative experiences. Students that are exposed to inclusive and supportive spaces often experience a greater sense of ethnic pride (Azmitia et al., 2008). Overall, studies on ethnic identity development highlight how the college setting provides students with a wide array of experiences and new information about their ethnic identities (Azmitia et al., 2008; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Culturally Validating Faculty and Curricula

Access to alternative histories and courses that validate students' home communities have been found to trigger ethnic identity development among students of color. Across the literature, access to courses that unpack racism and address the history of social injustice proved powerful contexts for students' elevated consciousness and ethnic pride. Cross (1995), for instance, described the impact of exposing Black students to the powerful cultural and historical information about the Black experience (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Museus et al. (2012) found that exposure to culturally validating curricula engages students to connect the material to their lived experiences. In their qualitative analysis of Asian American Studies courses at the

University of Massachusetts, Museus et al. found that Asian American students were able to ask questions and seek answers around the meaning of their ethnic identity—something they were denied during their K-12 experience. In a media literacy course, for example, students digitally document their personal narratives, and these were presented at a campus-wide exhibition. The opportunity for students to share their stories with their classmates and the wider campus validated their cultural knowledge and encouraged further exploration of their ethnic identities. For many participants, the courses within Asian American Studies helped them co-construct knowledge around the meaning of their own ethnicities. For instance, a Cambodian American student in the study expressed:

> I knew I was an American, but why didn't I feel like a part of anything American? What did it mean to be a Cambodian living in America? What did it mean to be Cambodian American? I did not feel like there was a space for me to nurture that curiosity and desire to learn more. Fortunately for me, that changed. I was finally able to find that space in my freshman year of college when I discovered the Asian American Studies Program. . . . It was there that, for the first time, I found a community of support from peers and mentors to pursue the answers to the question I had asked myself for so long. (p. 15)

Similar responses were found in Torres and Baxter Magolda's (2004) qualitative study on Latinx college freshmen. Participants who took multicultural courses were encouraged to think critically and question authority. Several students also expressed feeling validated in their capacity to know and learn through the exploration of their Latinx ethnic identities (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Similarly, access to courses in Ethnic Studies and the university's cross-cultural center served as powerful epistemological spaces for the participants in Maramba and Velasquez's

(2012) research. Prieto and Villenas (2012) added that students' ability to name their experiences as racial microaggressions as a result of the classes they took helped them to gain a better understanding of their social context. For the students in Torres and Hernandez's (2007) longitudinal study of Latinx college students, the ability to recognize racism through their exposure to critical courses contributed to their efforts to understand how negative stereotypes influenced their self-perceptions.

Several researchers who study Indigenous Mexican students, a highly underexplored and stigmatized population, reflected similar findings on the importance of college coursework in the reaffirmation of their identities (Museus et al., 2012; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). In her unpublished master's thesis, Nicolás (2012) attributed college courses on Latin American history and politics to the ethnic reaffirmation of Indigenous Mexican college students. Comparably, Martinez-Morales (2012) found that Chicanx studies courses served as catalysts for Indigenous Mexican students to explore their (historically stigmatized and marginalized) Indigenous roots and origins.

The faculty who teach these courses also challenge students' preconceived notions about people of color. In their qualitative study on college students of color, Pizzolato et al. (2008) found that students who engaged in conversations with faculty gained the language to describe their experiences. Cristina, a first year in their study, explained:

> I've learned words I didn't know before, like "ethnocentrism," and "privilege," and "social reproduction." I knew what those words meant before I ever heard of them because me and my family have experienced the consequences of those words every day. So it's cool to learn that there are words for my experiences, and it helps me talk more about my experiences and what needs to change. (Pizzolato et al., 2008, p. 311)

Access to staff and faculty of color was also a key component for the participants in Maramba and Velasquez's (2012) study. In Torres and Baxter Magolda's (2004) study, students who reached cultural dissonance and struggled to cope with the challenges of attending a PWI sought out trusted faculty and academic advisors to help them make sense of their experiences. These findings resonate with previous studies on faculty-student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), particularly when those relationships challenge the dominant narrative at PWIs.

Ethnic Student Organizations and Peer Networks

In addition to culturally validating relationships with faculty, students of color explore their ethnic identities through their participation in ethnic student organizations. Phinney (1996) emphasized the important role "ethnic clubs on campuses can assist students in this process" (p. 148) of ethnic identity exploration. Students of color with low connections to their ethnic identity, upon entering PWIs, embark on a journey to learn more about their ethnicity and language (Torres, 2003). Torres (2003) found that Latinx students who felt their campus environment was not welcoming or accepting of diversity sought to establish personal relationships that reflected their own ethnic identities. She concluded that Latinx student groups have the potential to influence personal growth and identity development (Torres, 2003).

In his longitudinal study with Chicanx college students, Villalpando (2003) found that Chicanx college students who associated with other Chicanx students reinforced and reaffirmed their cultural practices, beliefs, and norms despite attending a PWI. Likewise, Inkelas (2004) underscored the role of student organizations in encouraging students to commit to their ethnic communities. Furthermore, Museus (2008) posited that ethnic student organizations provide students spaces to express their cultural identity, particularly for the African American and Asian American students in his research. It is in these spaces that students learn more about their own

heritages and experience a sense of support within the university. Greater exposure to historical and contemporary injustices within their ethnic communities prompted students to advocate for cultural change at their universities. Additionally, ethnic student organizations offered culturally familiar spaces for students to connect and develop relationships with other peers form similar backgrounds. A third-year Black student in Museus' (2008) study, for example, explained how members of this Black student organization provided him with emotional support:

> They did provide me with emotional support. That was because of the bonding around academics and people being like me. You feel like you can relate more to a person who is like you, and you feel like you can open up to them more. (p. 577)

Similar to Villalpando's (2003) research, students from Museus' (2008) study found common struggles with peers that allowed them to connect on a deeper level.

Participants in Prieto and Villenas' (2012) qualitative study identified their involvement with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), a Chicanx-based political organization, as a critical space that helped develop their cultural identity in college. Within this organization, students established "supportive and critical friendships" (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 421) that held "lasting impacts on the development of their *consciencia*" (p. 421) or sociopolitical consciousness.

Benefits of Ethnic Identity Development in Higher Education

Exposure to curricula, faculty, and ethnic student organizations has significant effects on ethnic identity development. These college factors contribute to cultural dissonance that sets in motion a process of self-exploration for students of color. Museus et al. (2012) described these factors as "campus subcultures" because they defy the traditionally White spaces on campus. A campus subculture is defined as "a distinct system that is developed by a subset of members of

an institution and consists of specific norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that differ from the dominant culture of the campus" (Museus et al., 2012, p. 3). Targeted support programs for specific ethnic groups, ethnic studies programs, and ethnic student organizations all foster connections between students and intuitions (Museus, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). More importantly, institutional subcultures help to merge or integrate students' cultural and ethnic identities with their academic and social identities. This cultural integration leads to cultural validation, and "that validation has a positive influence on the experiences of students of color because it facilitates undergraduates' connections to their institutions and maximizes those students' learning and success" (Museus et al., 2012, p. 25). In other words, the validation students receive and the affirmation of their ethnic identities directly impact their educational outcomes and postsecondary attainment.

In their seminal study on campus racial climate and Latinx colleges students' sense of belonging, Hurtado and Carter (1997) identified membership in ethnic student organizations as a potential way to mediate the effect of hostile campus climates. In their study, students who were members of ethnic organizations reported higher levels of sense of belonging than those that were not involved in an organization (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Ethnic student organizations and other campus subcultures provide students the opportunity to find membership at their institution when they are unable to find membership within the PWI campus culture.

Suggested in these findings is the idea that alternative campus spaces or subcultures validate the presence and experiences of students of color. For students who are typically othered at PWIs, these spaces represent an opportunity to connect with their university. This connection to the university contributes to students' sense of belonging, which is linked to college student

retention (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), especially for students of color (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007; Museus et al., 2012).

Indigenous Mexicans in the United States

Since the 1980s, an increasing number of Indigenous Mexican groups from southern Mexico, primarily from the state of Oaxaca, have immigrated to the United States (Cohen, 2004; Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Huizar Murillo & Cerda, 2004; Kearney, 2000; Velasco Ortiz, 2005). The commercialization of agriculture and privatization of communal land through policies like the NAFTA displaced small-scale, rural, and Indigenous farmers forcing them to seek economic opportunities elsewhere to sustain their families (Cohen, 2004; Stavenhagen, 2015; Stephen, 2007). Approximately 1.5 million Indigenous Mexican immigrants live in the United States (Mesinas & Pérez, 2016), and over 100,000 Indigenous Mexicans live in California (Huizar Murillo & Cerda, 2004).

Since the 1990s, Kearney and other prominent scholars have documented the experiences of Indigenous Mexican migrants' (mainly from the state of Oaxaca) and their construction of transnational identities in the United States (Besserer, 2002, 2004; Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Kearney, 1998, 2000; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Velasco Ortiz, 2005). Through various political, social, and cultural practices, Indigenous Mexican migrants have constructed "social forms and identities that escape from cultural and political hegemony of their nation-state" (Kearney, 2000, p. 174). The migratory experience has allowed many Indigenous people to develop a successful subnational Indigenous identity in California—something that scholars argue would not have been possible had they remained in Mexico (Clark Alfaro, 1991; Kearney, 2000; Kearney & Varese, 1995; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990).

Indigenous Mexican organizations have established transnational networks that remain deeply linked to their hometowns. Several organizations in California have come together to address the economic, political, social, and cultural problems confronting Indigenous Mexican migrants from Oaxaca (Kearney, 2000). Organizations like the Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB) and the Asociación Cívica Benito Juarez work toward improving the working and living conditions of Indigenous Mexican migrants. Transnational organizations also promote Indigenous culture through dance groups, musical bands, and other community events (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kearney, 2000). The Comisión de Comunidades Indígenas de Oaxaca in San Diego County, for instance, stages the annual Guelaguetza at Cal State San Marcos, where performers and vendors share regional art, music, dance, and food (Kovats, 2010). Others organize for the direct benefit of their home communities in Oaxaca by funding community projects. The Santa María Natividad hometown association in San Diego, for example, organizes *kermeses* [community dances] to raise funds to build a sewage system in Natividad (Kovats, 2010).

Kearney (2000) argued that these organizations and their members "partially escape cultural and political hegemony of the Mexican state by residing to a great degree outside Mexican territory" (p. 175). Being outside of Mexico and yet not socially and culturally incorporated into U.S. society, Indigenous Mexican migrants have managed to create and occupy a tightly bound transnational space that has cultural and political dynamics different from Mexico (Kearney, 2000).

Nevertheless, Indigenous Mexican communities are still exposed to ethnic discrimination in the United States. As Stephen (2007) pointed out, Indigenous migrants in the United States continue to be "a racialized category within Mexican immigrant communities" (p. 210).

Members within the larger Latinx community are still perpetuating discriminatory practices against Indigenous Mexican people (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010).

Indigenous Mexican Students in K-12 Education

As Indigenous Mexican migrants, particularly Ñuu Savi and Zapotecs also known as Bene Xhon[4] from Oaxaca, establish transnational communities, their children are enrolling in U.S. schools at a growing rate. Unlike their parents who were socialized in Mexican schools and the workspace, children of immigrants develop a point of reference that comes from their experiences in the United States (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). As such, in addition to the discrimination and stigmatization Indigenous Mexican students face in Mexican communities, they are subject to the historical disenfranchisement of students of color from the U.S. educational system. Hipolito-Delgado, Gallegos, and Baca (2013) argued that the effects of Mexico's pervasive colonial logic are further exacerbated by a history of oppression faced by Latinxs in the United States. Thus, the experiences of Indigenous Mexican youth are multifaceted as they navigate multiple communities and contexts.

Currently, there are only a limited number of research studies that focus on the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican youth growing up in the United States (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Casanova, 2012; Casanova et al., 2016; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; González, 2016; Kovats, 2010; Martinez Morales, 2012; Mesinas & Pérez, 2016; Nicolás, 2012;

[4] Like the term Mixtec/Mixteco, Zapotec/Zapoteco is derived from Nahuatl. *Bene Xhon* is the native term to define Zapotec people particularly from the northern highlights of Oaxaca (Sierra Norte), which is where the participants from this study are from.

Pérez & Vásquez, in press; Pérez et al., 2016; R. Vásquez, 2012). Collectively, this literature addresses the lack of knowledge within U.S. schools and among educators about Indigenous Mexican communities. Schools and teachers are often not aware of students' Indigenous backgrounds and assume children from Mexico are native Spanish speakers without considering that over sixty Indigenous languages are spoken in Mexico (Kovats, 2010; Pérez et al., 2016; Velasco, 2010). Consequently, Indigenous Mexican students are incorrectly classified as native Spanish speakers (Casanova et al., 2016; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010; Pérez et al., 2016; Velasco, 2010).

Like other immigrant students, Indigenous Mexican students in English learner programs are excluded from the rest of the student body (Olsen, 1997; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009), which contributes to their isolation within the school system (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010; Pérez et al., 2016; Ruíz & Barajas, 2012; P. Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009; Stephen, 2007; Velasco, 2010). Previously, researchers have noted that this type of segregation reinforces a climate of low academic expectations for immigrant students, causing lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). For Indigenous Mexican students, in particular, Barillas Chón (2010) pointed out that the isolating and unwelcoming practices of English learner programs gradually divest Indigenous immigrant students of their ethnic and linguistic identities.

In these hostile schooling environments, immigrant students must negotiate multiple identities while being ascribed labels by their White and nonimmigrant peers (Song, 2010). As members of multiple communities—Indigenous, Mexican, Latinx, immigrant—Indigenous Mexican students must continually negotiate their identities with multiple frames of reference. Unlike their mestizo Mexican and Mexican American peers, Indigenous Mexican students must

also negotiate their identity against the dominant Mexican ethnic identity. A handful of studies discuss the racial discrimination Indigenous Mexican youth face when interacting with their mestizo Mexican peers (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010; Pérez et al., 2016; Ruíz & Barajas, 2012; P. Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009; Stephen, 2007; Velasco, 2010). In these studies, Indigenous students were called pejorative names like *indio* or *oaxaquita* by their mestizo Mexican peers and teased for their native language, dark skin complexion, height, and other physical features associated with negative Indigenous stereotypes (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Casanova, 2012; Kovats, 2010; Martinez Morales, 2012; Nicolás, 2012; Pérez et al., 2016).

My own research (Kovats, 2010) and that of Casanova (2012) and Martinez Morales (2012) found that teasing and rejection encountered by Indigenous Mexican youth triggered feelings of shame about their own Indigenous identity, culture, and language. The Ñuu Savi participants in my research faced stigmatization and discrimination from their mestizo Latinx peers (Kovats, 2010). Some were singled out for their limited Spanish language fluency while others were teased for their short stature and darker skin complexion. As a result of these negative peer interactions, the participants did not associate publicly with their Indigenous heritage and avoided speaking Tu'un Savi (Mixtec/Ñuu Savi language) in front of their peers. One participant, for example, blamed herself for the bullying she experienced and developed a negative association with her Ñuu Savi heritage. Another participant further explained, "In middle school, I was kinda ashamed in a way of being who I was. I remember they would make fun of the darker kids. They would say you're an *india* [Indian]" (Kovats, 2010, p. 51). In an attempt to mitigate teasing from their Mexican mestizo classmates, the participants avoided

telling their peers they were from Oaxaca—a state that is commonly and pejoratively known for its large Indigenous population (Kovats, 2010).

In their extensive report on Indigenous Mexican youth in California's Central Valley, the Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños (2013) also found similar experiences related to students feeling ashamed about their Indigenous heritage. As a result of the discrimination from Mexican peers, a participant in the report explained, "There were situations where I denied that I was Oaxacan. I even said that I was from Guanajuato one time" (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013, p. 65).

The research on the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students aligns with broader research on ethnic identity development for students of color. Ethnic identity development, as previously mentioned, is conceptualized as the exploration of an individual's ethnic and cultural issues and values, which are influenced by family, community, and broader society (Phinney, 1996). In addition to the socialization students acquire at home, students' socioenvironmental contexts deeply shape their beliefs and attitudes about their ethnic and racial group identification (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). As Phinney et al. (2001) point out, the school environment plays a very import role in students' identity development. Hostile school experiences can cause some students to downplay or reject their own ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001). Students may also feel insecure and resentful about their ethnic identity as a result of mainstream society's negative perceptions about their ethnic group (Kiang, Perreira, & Fuligni, 2011).

As immigrants and students of color, Indigenous Mexican students face discrimination and marginalization as a result of their ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic identities. Given the multiple communities and contexts Indigenous Mexican youth belong to, it is important to

consider how their ethnic and racial identities intersect. Although the constructs of race and ethnicity are different, the United States' long history of placing social groups in racial categories has led to the overlap between race and ethnicity (Casey-Cannon et al., 2011). Moreover, the racialization of Indigeneity and the conceptualization of *mestizaje* place Indigenous Mexican youth in a unique position where the constructs of ethnicity and race intersect. Cross and Cross (2008) add that youth do not keep their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities separate in their lived experiences. In this way, examining students' identities through an ethno-racial identity potentially captures "experiences that reflect both the individual's ethnic background and racialized experiences as a member of a group in the context of the United States" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23).

Most research about culturally diverse students reveals that the school environment has historically served as an instrument for assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 1995). In this process of assimilation, subtractive schooling practices have dismissed students' cultural knowledge and language (Valenzuela, 1999), causing students to feel shame and doubt about their racial and ethnic identities. In an attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture, students actively reject the use of their native language (Cummins, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), as is the case for many Indigenous Mexican youth (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010). This type of response aligns with Phinney's (1993) first stage of unexamined ethnic identity, where students of color assume preconceived notions about their ethnic group from the larger, dominant culture. Students who are not encouraged to explore their ethnic identities at an early age are forced instead, to rely on external authorities to define their beliefs, making them vulnerable to the internalization of negative stereotypes (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Indigenous Mexican Students in Higher Education

Currently, there are only a handful of studies that specifically examine the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in U.S. colleges (Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018; Martinez Morales, 2012; Nicolás, 2012). Nevertheless, their collective findings parallel with previous research on the ethnic identity development of college students of color. Access to alternative histories and courses that validate students' home communities have been found to trigger ethnic identity development among students of color. Across the literature on ethnic identity development, college courses that unpack racism and address the history of social injustice have proven to be powerful contexts for students to elevate their consciousness and ethnic pride.

In her master's thesis, Nicolás (2012) drew attention to the importance of college courses in fostering pride among Indigenous Mexican Zapotec college students. Learning about the sociopolitical history of Indigenous communities in Latin America further developed the participants' ethnic consciousness, which encouraged them to publicly self-identify as Indigenous (Nicolás, 2012). In this sense, the college context allowed the students in Nicolás' study to co-construct knowledge around the meaning of their Indigenous Zapotec identities. Comparably, Martinez-Morales (2012) found that Chicanx studies courses served as catalysts for Indigenous Mexican students to explore their Indigenous roots and origins.

Along these same lines, in my own master's thesis research, the Ñuu Savi participants developed a stronger cultural and ethnic identity during college (Kovats, 2010). Access to courses within Latin American studies exposed them to alternative histories about Mexico and validated their experiences as learners and knowers of a rich culture and history that, prior to college, was undervalued and unnoticed by their teachers and peers (P. Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009). Additionally, their enrollment in the university's Tu'un Savi language course led

the participants to perceive their native language through a new lens that inspired them to relearn the language and help their home communities (Kovats Sánchez, 2018). After taking two semesters of the Tu'un Savi language college course, one of the participants expressed:

> I think that when I was like really proud to be from Oaxaca. I don't know, it's like, I have an identity and I can say that I'm from here and I'm proud to say it. I remember how ashamed I was. How foolish could I have been to be ashamed of the place that I was born? It makes me feel mad in a way that I was ashamed but then again, I guess, I was forced to be. (Kovats, 2010, p. 62)

Unlike the subtractive schools' practices during their K-12 years, the exposure to courses and faculty that validated their home culture and language positively impacted the participants' reaffirmation of their Indigenous culture and language (Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018).

The response of Indigenous Mexican students to culturally validating courses is similar to previous research about Latinx college students. Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) found that Latinx college students who took multicultural courses were encouraged to think critically and question authority. Several students expressed feeling validated in their capacity to know and learn through the exploration of their Latinx ethnic identities (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Access to courses that examine sociopolitical contexts also help students develop the tools needed to name their experiences, like identifying microaggressions (Prieto & Villenas, 2012). For the students in Torres and Hernandez's (2007) longitudinal study of Latinx college students, the ability to recognize racism through the exposure to critical courses contributed to their efforts to understand how negative stereotypes influenced their self-perceptions.

In addition to culturally validating college courses, students of color explore their ethnic identities through their participation in ethnic student organizations. Ethnic organizations have

the potential to assist students in the process of ethnic identity exploration (Phinney, 1996). Previous research on Latinx and Chicanx college students has addressed the ways ethnic student organizations provide students spaces to express their cultural identity (Museus, 2008; Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Villalpando, 2003). In his longitudinal study with Chicanx college students, Villalpando (2003) found that Chicanx college students who associated with other Chicanx students reinforced and reaffirmed their cultural practices, beliefs, and norms.

Indigenous Mexican college students are also creating their own epistemological spaces—both in college and in their communities—that support and validate their Indigenous identities (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013; Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018; Mesinas & Pérez, 2016). For Indigenous Mexican students in the Central Valley, "these spaces, outside of the migrant social networks of their parents, have an important influence on [their] civic-political socialization" (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013, p. 117). In their report, many students were exposed to political socialization through their involvement in undocumented student organizations, and MEChA and the Brown Berets (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013).

Nicolás (2012) also found that, in addition to going to college, Zapotec students who were politically involved were more likely to appropriate their Indigenous identities. The combination of college enrollment and participation in political organizations were strong predictors for the participants' raised consciousness about their Indigeneity (Nicolás, 2012).

Access to validating spaces on campus also motivated the participants in my own research to recreate those spaces in their own Ñuu Savi community (Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018). Familia Indígena Unida, a grassroots community-based organization, was founded in San Diego, California, by two young Ñuu Savi women with the purpose of providing

English and Spanish language classes to Ñuu Savi families in their community. In addition to these classes, the organization celebrates Ñuu Savi culture through family-based activities and events that highlight Ñuu Savi food, music, art, and dance. The creation of these validating cultural spaces is in part rooted in the participants' experience in the Tu'un Savi language classes they took in college. The founders' efforts to celebrate Ñuu Savi culture actively challenges the colonial discourse they internalized when they were younger (Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018).

In Fresno, a collective of students created Los Autónomos, a community organization for Indigenous Oaxaqueño students to celebrate their culture and "reclaim [their] roots" (Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013, p. 48). Los Autónomos is comprised of young people from the ages of 15 to 25 with differing levels of education, including high schoolers, current college students, college graduates, and community members.

Along these same lines, Negrin da Silva's (2012) provided a perspective on the experiences of Indigenous students on Mexican college campuses in her work in Nayarit, Mexico. She specifically examined the efforts of Wixarika Indigenous (also referred to as Huichol) students to create supportive spaces that work on "cultural, academic, and social projects that offer renewed vision of the paths that Indigenous students can take in contemporary Mexico" (Negrin da Silva, 2012, p. 141). In an attempt to find refuge within hostile college campuses, Wixarika students in Nayarit are challenging the mestizo imaginary of urban Indigeneity by engaging in student activism and claiming new forms of visibility that go "beyond continued status of Indigenous people as targets of folkloric consumption and racial stratification" (Negrin da Silva, 2012, p. 149). This process includes Indigenous students speaking about against racial hierarchies reproduced in everyday speech and political economic

decision-making that equates Indigeneity with poverty, ignorance, and underemployment (Negrin da Silva, 2012). Furthermore, Negrin da Silva argued that the experiences and activism of Wixarika students in Nayarit "challenge pervading dichotomous notions on Indigenous peoples in Mexico and more importantly, point toward new avenues for intertribal and interracial alliance building and social change" (p. 142).

Collectively, researchers who study Latinx and Indigenous Mexican students suggest that epistemological spaces—metaphysical spaces where students of color explore, exchange, and validate their cultural knowledge—positively influence ethnic identity development (Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Villalpando, 2003; Equipo de Cronistas Oaxaqueños, 2013). These spaces support ideologies, knowledges, and experiences that fall outside the dominant White narrative and provide students of color with the validation they need to feel connected not only to their college, but also to their home community.

Pérez et al. (2016) acknowledged that many Indigenous youth are finding ways to express pride in their Indigenous identities and languages. The extension of culturally validating campus spaces into students' home communities also influences other youth to "take steps to reclaim their heritage" (Pérez et al., 2016, p. 13). The creation of spaces like Familia Indígena Unida in San Diego, California, and Los Autónomos in Fresno, California, are what Pérez and Vásquez (in press) consider a growing movement toward creating greater representation and awareness about Indigenous migrant communities in the United States.

Gaps in the Research

The literature about Indigenous Mexican students in the United States begins to shed light on the challenges students face in U.S. schools, including their racialized interactions with

educators and Mexican/Latinx peers. Still, this body of literature remains limited, as most research about Latinx students continues to be aggregated. Although the aggregate study of Latinx students' ethnic identity development has led to very powerful findings, it is important to consider that using pan-ethnic terms like Latina/o/x can repeat cycles of colonization that perpetuate "the invisibility and oppression of historically marginalized communities" (Machado-Casas, 2009, p. 84). The limited number of studies on Indigenous Mexican students alone represents a large gap in the literature that needs to be filled.

Casanova et al. (2016) also pointed out that research on Indigenous Mexican communities needs to be "understood within a framework that acknowledges Indigenous people's historical battle to resist absorption in the 'democratic imaginary'" (p. 206). While most current research on Indigenous Mexican students provides a historical context about the oppression of Indigenous peoples, few studies analyze how a history of colonialism and subsequent colonial trauma contribute to the present reality of Indigenous Mexican youth as they seek to recreate themselves in transnational spaces in the United States. Barajas (2014) conducted one of the few studies that explicitly addresses the role of colonial logic in shaping Indigenous migrants' emerging transnational identities. He called for the study of Indigenous migration to be "contextualized in the history of colonialism" (Barajas, 2014, p. 53).

Even within this research, some scholars still use language that is steeped in coloniality. P. Sánchez and Machado-Casas (2009), for instance, referred to Indigenous languages as dialects:

> While we can surmise that Spanish is most likely the home language of these students, we should not forget the trend of Indigenous immigrants from Latin America coming to the U.S. whose children often speak a unique, non-Spanish dialect at home. (p. 9)

Calling Indigenous languages dialects is a term historically used to designate Indigenous languages as inferior to the Spanish language. In many cases, referring to Indigenous languages as dialects is not intended to be discriminatory, but is exemplary of the disconnect between the terminology we use and its sociohistorical implications (Kovats, 2010).

Conclusion

The repression of Indigenous knowledges, languages, and histories is violent and long lasting; therefore, it is necessary to account for its presence in the daily experiences of Indigenous Mexican students today. The fundamental problem with current literature on Indigenous Mexican students in the use is the absence of a de/colonial framework. It is not enough to disaggregate students' educational experiences without providing a critical analysis of structure and power and how these reproduce inequality and coloniality. A decolonial research approach, according to Maldonado-Torres (2007), makes the invisible visible and allows us to question why it was invisible. With coloniality being normalized as part of our daily lives (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), I took into serious consideration the legacies and contemporary manifestations of coloniality (Calderón, 2014) within the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in the United States in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As previously stated, in this study, I sought to examine the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in the United States and how they made meaning of their identities during college. Drawing from a decolonial framework, the study acknowledged how multiple colonialities are manifested, challenged, and disrupted specifically in the context of higher education. In this chapter, I first discuss my own positionality in relationship to this research. Second, I provide an overview of my philosophical approach, which grounds my qualitative methodologies. Next, I describe the participants in this study and method for data analysis. Finally, I end with discussion on the limitations of this study, focusing on the complex construction of Indigeneity and the essentializing of Indigenous people as a result of nationalist and colonial structures of power in both the United States and Mexico.

Research Questions

To investigate the experiences of Indigenous Mexican college students, this study uses the following research questions:

1. What is the role of higher education in the identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students? Specifically, what spaces and/or experiences in higher education (e.g., courses, organization, faculty interactions, peer networks, programming) impact ethnic identity development of Indigenous Mexican college students?
2. How do Indigenous Mexican college students challenge or disrupt colonial perceptions of about Indigenous people on their college campus, within the Latinx mestizo community, and within their own Indigenous communities?

Positionality

In line with the use of testimonio in this study, I begin this section with a personal experience that comes from a place of frustration that led to my ongoing interest in the complicated relationship with identity, Indigeneity, and (de)coloniality. Over 10 years ago, I attended a Día de Muertos *velación* at Chicano Park organized by a local *danza Azteca* troupe. After several hours of ceremony and prayer, I joined a few friends to get food. While we ate, someone in the group complimented one of the women on her *huipil*[5] and asked where she had gotten it. The woman responded, "*Se lo compré a una oaxaquita*."[6] I was completely taken aback by her response, specifically her use of the word *oaxaquita* given its incredibly pejorative history against Indigenous people in Mexico. After spending hours honoring our *antepasados* and speaking on the importance of maintaining our Indigenous knowledges and traditions, this person, I felt, had gone completely against all of it. When I commented on her use of the word, the group claimed it was just a term of endearment that "everybody uses." Although surrounded by fellow Chicanxs, I was upset that no one else felt the use of that term was problematic on multiple levels. This is one of many experiences that challenged me to think about my own decolonizing Xicana[7]/mestiza identity and my relationship to Indigenous communities both in Mexico and the United States.

It is of utmost importance to take into account our own positionality and cultural background as we approach our research, especially when we hold both insider and outsider perspectives. Recognizing my own relationship to coloniality as I seek to work with groups that are historically oppressed is equally important. Using decolonial thinking and methodologies

[5] Mexican embroidered blouse
[6] "I bought it from a little Oaxacan."
[7] The spelling of the term Xicana pays homage to the Indigenous roots of Chicana identity by incorporating the use of "X" from the Nahuatl language.

requires us to critically examine where we stand in relationship to Indigenous struggles and involves us deeply engaging with dominant forms of colonialism (Calderón, 2014). Thus, doing decolonial work requires us to understand colonial context and our ability to construct what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls differential consciousness.

My interest in ethnic identity development comes from my own experiences navigating my own identity and my transnational upbringing in both the United States and Mexico. My mother is from Acapulco, Guerrero, and my father was born in Oakland, California, and is of Hungarian descent. While I was born in California, I spent a significant amount of time in Acapulco, living with my grandmother and completing a portion of my elementary education there. After sixth grade, we returned to the United States and I finished my middle and high school years in Merced, a small agricultural city in California's San Joaquin Valley. Growing up in both the United States and Mexico gave me an interesting perspective on unique localities of each country and how at times these intersected and manifested complex relationships not only between U.S. Anglos and Mexicans but also between Mexican/Latinx/Chicanx mestizos and Indigenous Mexicans.

Similar to Leigh Patel's (2014) conceptualization of her positionality on anticolonial research, my history as a second-generation (me)Xicana and my continual negotiation of multiple identities as a biracial, bicultural, and bilingual woman of color impact how I understand myself "in relationship to knowledge and the contemporary conversations about colonization" (Patel, 2014, p. 361). As a Xicana in the United States, I face and embody multiple roles—the colonizer and colonized (Villenas, 1996). I recognize that a history of colonialism stripped my direct link to my mother's Indigenous and Afro-Mexican heritage. I also acknowledge, however, that I have benefitted from colonial structures in both the United States

and Mexico as a result of having an Anglo father. It is also important to point out that regardless of the nuances of our upbringings, many of our experiences are also rooted in the way we are racialized by others. So, while I have a White father, I have never been racialized as White and present as a woman of color in a brown body. Still, my appearance fits the mestiza imaginary and, as such, I am typically not racialized as Indigenous.

Not being racialized as Indigenous alludes to greater conversations about the incredibly complex and sometimes problematic construction of Indigeneity. Alberto (2012) for instance, pointed out that "while Chicanas might have a distant connection to Indigenous people, they are not themselves Indigenous but mestizas, people of mixed ethnic and cultural heritage with a uniquely hybrid history and identity" (p. 41). I became more aware of these conversations as I began to spend more time with Indigenous Mexican friends and community members, specifically Ñuu Savi community members in San Diego, California. In 2006, during the first year of my master's program, I enrolled in Tu'un Savi language classes at San Diego State University. My motivations for learning Tu'un Savi stemmed from a deep respect for Indigenous knowledge and resistance and my familiarity with Ñuu Savis in Merced, California, and the rest of the Central Valley. Through the language learning process, I established meaningful relationships with community members that pushed me to unpack my own internalized colonial logic. During this time, I also became a volunteer at Familia Indígena Unida, a grassroots community-based organization designed to serve the Ñuu Savi community in the area. My time at Familia Indígena Unida influenced my master's thesis research, which called attention to the unique experiences of Ñuu Savi youth in San Diego, California, particularly highlighting the marginalization they experienced as a result of their interactions with non-Indigenous Latinx peers (Kovats, 2010). This research challenged me to become increasingly self-reflexive of the

ways in which colonialism shaped my reality (Patel, 2014; Wane, 2008) and the power nuances among Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators (Anthony-Stevens, 2017). More importantly, my time at Familia Indígena Unida reminded me of my mestiza privilege and the importance of building reciprocal and nonhierarchical relationships with members of the Ñuu Savi immigrant community (Alemán, Delgado Bernal, & Mendoza, 2013).

Recognizing my own relationship to colonialism and how it has shaped the understanding of my own social locations, it is imperative that I participate in the project of dismantling colonialism (Patel, 2016). Rooted in my knowledge and practice of activism and community organizing (Sandoval, 2000), my role as a graduate student, researcher, and critical educator requires a continued commitment to calling out contemporary colonial practices. As I engage in this constant process of decolonization, my research must privilege "narrative, choice, and more responsible forms of social and historical representations" (Urrieta, 2004, p. 439) of the Indigenous communities with whom I collaborate.

Philosophical Approach

Given that I used a decolonial framework in this study to better understand the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican college students, my philosophical approach aims at challenging Eurocentric paradigms and methodologies. Qualitative research is historically embedded in multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009; Smith, 1999). Qualitative research in all its forms, "observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography, serves as metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power and for truth" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Colonial powers relied on disciplines like anthropology and sociology to collect/extract Indigenous knowledge and classify it through a Eurocentric lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As a result of this problematic and

painful history, researchers are afforded "relatively open access to underserved communities of color" (Anthony-Stevens, 2017, p. 93) creating subtle forms of academic voyeurism that allow researchers to "look at non-White/poor communities to reflect on poverty and difference (and perpetuate othering as a reinforce of whitestream values)" (p. 93).

Urrieta (2012) argued that scholarly work specifically on identity "often dehumanizes people's lived experiences in uncritical and unreflective ways because identities in daily life are painful, contradictory, and emotional" (p. 321). The history of Latinx identities, in particular, is attached to what Urrieta (2012) called "painful identity amalgamations" (p. 331) as a result of a colonial history. Studying people in detached and analytical ways ignores the painful and contradictory realities of Indigenous people (Urrieta, 2012). In researchers' efforts to expose structures of oppression, Levins Morales (1998) explained, "We sometimes portray oppressed communities as nothing more than victims, and are therefore unable to see the full range of responses that people always make to their circumstances" (p. 4). She urged researchers to recognize multiple forms of resistance and "dismantle the idea of passive victimization, which leaves us feeling ashamed and undeserving of freedom" (Levins Morales, 1998, p. 4). Understanding this reality in qualitative research allows us to then challenge the notion that Indigenous peoples are passive actors (Calderón, 2014).

Furthermore, for mestizo and Chicanx scholars doing identity research, we must actively engage in self-criticism and self-awareness to avoid perpetuating essentialized and romanticized notions of Indigeneity (Urrieta, 2017). As mestizos, it is important to consider problematizing *mestizaje* as a nation-building project and challenge aspects of coloniality that are normalized in our own realities (Wade, 2005). We must also consider our relationship to academia because, as M. G. Hernández, Nguyen, Saetermoe, and Suárez-Orozco (2013) pointed out, "It can be easy to

fool oneself into thinking that our efforts are meaningful for the community when they are often more meaningful to the institution of academia" (pp. 47-48).

For these reasons, this study aimed at confronting the colonizing reputation that has historically framed work with Indigenous communities (Stanton, 2014). This included carefully considering the epistemologies and methods that shaped my research. Rather than focusing on the damage-centered narratives of oppressed communities and deficit perspectives of fixing students or communities in need, my efforts were focused challenging the colonial and settler colonial ideology of hierarchy and supremacy (Anthony-Stevens, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Supporting Casanova et al.'s (2016) call for centering Indigenous voices, needs, and interests, I approached this study with the goal of reflecting "the agency of actual Indigenous communities in their analyses of adaptation processes" (p. 206).

Guiding Theoretical Perspectives

In their account of critical and Indigenous methodologies, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) called for dialogical counternarratives, stories, of resistance, and structures of hope as tools to decolonize and deconstruct Western knowledge systems and epistemologies. Similarly, Brayboy (2005) upholds narratives and stories as a form of theory and "legitimate sources of data and ways of being" (p. 430). Given the long-term effects of colonialism, this study draws from theoretical frameworks that recognize multiple layers of colonialisms in the analysis of ethnic identity development, particularly critical race concepts that better analyze layers of colonization that impact ethnic identity development. Specifically, I employed *testimonio* in this study as a qualitative methodological approach that place the voices of Indigenous students at the forefront and challenges Eurocentric and colonial norms of educational research (Huber, 2009). The elevation of narratives and *testimonios* provides an opportunity for this study to consider

participants' responses to oppression as forms of resistance and the fluidity of their identities given their multiple contexts.

Testimonios come from the field of Latin American Studies and were typically used to document the experiences of oppressed groups (Huber, 2009). The use of *testimonios* dates back to the 1970s and is specifically tied to the liberation efforts and movements of resistance against imperialism in Latin America (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Historically, *testimonios* have shed light on the ways marginalized communities have responded to and resisted oppressive experiences and dominant cultures, laws, and policies (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012). Pérez Huber (2009) described *testimonios* as the "verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future" (p. 644). *Testimonios* incorporate political, social, historical, and cultural histories that are embedded in participants' lives and ways of knowing and learning among historically marginalized communities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Furthermore, Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) argued that, historically, *testimonios* have allowed us to recover experiences that otherwise were silenced or untold and turn them into narratives that raise consciousness and elicit social change. In this sense, Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) asserted, "The *testimonio* is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, oral history narration, prose, or spoken word. The *testimonio* is intentional and political" (p. 525).

Participant Selection

Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to commencing the study and establishing contact with potential participants. This study focused on describing and documenting the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in higher education. Network

sampling was used to recruit participants. Network sampling consists of asking people in the field of study to recommend participants who are then selected based on establish criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I initiated recruitment at Familia Indígena Unida, the Ñuu Savi community-based organization with which I am affiliated. Once a few key participants were selected for the study, I asked each one to refer me to other potential participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants for this study met the following criteria: (a) identify as Indigenous Mexican (e.g., Mixtec/Ñuu Savi, Zapotec/Bene Xhon, Nahuatl, Triqui, Purepecha, Wixarika), (b) currently attend or graduated from a 4-year university in the United States, and (c) completed at least two semesters of college prior to participating in the study.

An overview of Table 1 demonstrates that the 15 participants were between the ages of 21 and 37. All participants were currently attending or graduated from a 4-year university. Seven participants were women, four were men, and one was nonbinary. Six participants were Ñuu Savi, and five were Zapotec/Bene Xhon, all from the state of Oaxaca. Only one participant was Nahua from the state of Guerrero. At the time of the interviews, Haidy (21), Chris (23), Santiago (22), Vicki (33), and Ocho Movimiento (25) were attending a 4-year university. Ánima (32), BitterQueer (27), Joy (29), Libi (37), and N'dii Kanu (29) had received their bachelor's degrees. Finally, María (33) and Clara (28) were pursuing graduate degrees, respectively, a Master of Arts in Anthropology and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. Table 1 provides personal and academic details for the each of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Personal Demographics

Name	Group	Birthplace	Languages Spoken	Hometown Affiliation
Ánima	Ñuu Savi	Southern California	Spanish Tu'un Savi English	Santa Rosa Caxtlahuaca, Oaxaca
BitterQueer	Ñuu Savi	Southern California	Spanish English	Santiago Yucuyachi, Oaxaca
Chris	Zapotec	Southern California	Spanish English	Santiago Zoochila, Oaxaca
Clara	Zapotec	Southern California	Spanish English	Santiago Zoochila, Oaxaca
Haidy	Zapotec	Southern California	Spanish English	Santiago Zoochila, Oaxaca
Joy	Zapotec	Southern California	Spanish English	Santiago Zoochila, Oaxaca
Libi	Ñuu Savi	Southern California	Spanish Tu'un Savi English	Santa Maria Natividad, Oaxaca
María	Nahua	Southern California	Spanish Nahuatl English	Atzacoaloya, Guerrero
N'dii Kanu	Ñuu Savi	Oaxaca	Spanish Tu'un Savi English	Santa Maria Yucunicoco, Oaxaca
Ocho Movimiento	Ñuu Savi	Baja California	Spanish English	San Jerónimo del Progreso, Oaxaca
Santiago	Zapotec	Southern California	Spanish Zapotec English	Santiago Zoochila, Oaxaca
Vicki	Ñuu Savi	Washington	Spanish English	San Pedro y San Pablo de Tequixtepec, Oaxaca

Table 2

Participant Education Demographics

Name	College(s)	Major	Student Type
Ánima	Public state university in southern California	Sociology	College Graduate
BitterQueer	Public state university in southern California	Medical Anthropology	College Graduate
Chris	Public university in southern California	Chemical Engineering	College Junior
Clara	Private liberal arts college in southern California (BA) / Private university in northern California	Psychology & Hispanic Studies (BA) / Education (PhD)	Doctoral Student
Haidy	Public university in southern California	Physiology & Neuroscience	College Senior
Joy	Public university in southern California (BA) / Private university in southern California (MA)	Music (BA) / Accounting (MA)	College Graduate
Libi	Public state university in southern California	International Business	College Graduate
María	Public state university in southern California (BA & MA)	Anthropology & Chicana/o Studies (BA) / Anthropology (MA)	Master's Student
N'dii Kanu	Public state university in Washington	Integrated Plant Sciences & Agricultural Biotechnology	College Graduate
Ocho Movimiento	Community college in southern California / Public university in northern California	Interdisciplinary Field Studies	College Graduate
Santiago	Public university in northern California	Mechanical Engineering	College Senior
Vicki	Private university in northern California	Human Biology	College Senior

Data Collection

All participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire accessed online. The survey included questions about participants' age, hometown and various places they lived, parents' hometown, languages spoken, college(s) attended, major, and affiliation with on- and off-campus organizations. These responses provided context for students' multiple localities.

Participant *testimonios* were then gathered through individual interviews. Participants took part in 60- to 90-minute semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of questions but permit flexible use of the questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interview focused on participants' ethnic identity and educational experiences. Depending on the participant's availability, interviews were conducted in-person and via Google Hangouts. The semi-structured interview protocol was specifically designed to capture the unique experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in higher education. Participants were interviewed between June 2018 and August 2018.

Data Analysis

Following the transcription of the 15 participants' *testimonios*, I reviewed each *testimonio* to identify preliminary themes and patterns related to race, racism, Indigeneity, and higher education. Using a decolonial lens, I explored the ways coloniality emerged in the participants' educational experiences. Based on this initial analysis, I created a reflection for each *testimonio*.

Data analysis initially involved open coding to identify salient themes and emerging patterns and build the coding structure. A constant comparative approach allowed for narrowing from particular text segments to larger themes and subthemes until I reached saturation (Creswell, 2007). I used concept mapping to make sense of the participants' experiences and find theoretical connections and relationships between categories, particularly related to coloniality and Indigenous identity. Concept mapping is a type of structured conceptualization method

designed to organize and represent ideas drawn from the data (Rosas & Kane, 2012). The final coding structure was entered into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. Theoretically driven queries were run in NVivo to determine intersections between themes and attributes with attentiveness to structural power dynamics to deepen my interpretations of the participants' narratives (Crenshaw, 1994).

Limitations

Considering the legacy of colonialism and its role in essentializing diverse groups into broader categories (e.g., Indian, Black, Latinx), defining Indigeneity or who is Indigenous is incredibly complex. Migration, geographic and colonial displacement, intermarriage, European invasion, and sexual violence complicate the notion of pure decent (Urrieta, 2017). With this in mind, I consciously did not use speaking an Indigenous language as a qualification for participation in this study in an attempt challenge the Mexican "nationalist ethno-racial structure of Indigeneity" (Urrieta, 2017, p. 3). Urrieta (2017) urged us to consider dichotomous ideas and understandings of authentic and inauthentic Indigenous cultures and "competing representations of Indigeneity embedded in binaries and within several colonialist systems like *Indigenismo* that were regularly romanticized notions of cultural purity and essentialist origins" (p. 3). I want to recognize in this study that I am not in the position to determine who can and cannot claim Indigeneity; instead, I hope to shed light on the complexity of defining Indigeneity and its complicated relationship with coloniality.

Conclusion

To recognize my own positionality and the challenge of traditional qualitative research methods, this study used *testimonios* to shed light on the educational experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in the United States. Instead of speaking for the participants, *testimonios*

allowed me to co-construct knowledge about their experiences (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and further reinforced this co-construction through the collaborative stage of data analysis. As Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) pointed out, *testimonios* are uniquely known for being a political and conscienticized reflection. Precisely for this reason, I used this study to shed light on key issues experienced by Indigenous Mexican students that are connected to a long history of racism, discrimination, and colonialism. Lastly, the use of *testimonios* in this study aimed at connecting educational scholars to bear witness to the stories of Indigenous Mexican students that are often untold or aggregated into the broader pan-Latinx mestizo context.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents data to construct an understanding that responds to the following research questions:

1. What is the role of higher education in the identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students? Specifically, what spaces and/or experiences in higher education (e.g., courses, organization, faculty interactions, peer networks, programming) impact ethnic identity development of Indigenous Mexican college students?
2. How do Indigenous Mexican college students challenge or disrupt colonial perceptions of about Indigenous people on their college campus, within the Latinx mestizo community, and within their own Indigenous communities?

Based on careful transcription, extensive coding, and thorough analysis as described in Chapter 3, each section in this chapter is organized by a theme. Within each theme, there were subthemes that further elaborated on the research questions.

Summary of Results

Based on the research questions of this study, the data were arranged into three themes. Table 3 presents a summary of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The following subthemes emerged from each of the four themes. For the theme of defining Indigeneity in diaspora, four subthemes arose: (a) feeling different among mestizo Mexicans/Latinxs, (b) experiencing anti-Indigenous discrimination, (c) developing private Indigenous identities, and (d) reasons for higher education. For the theme of higher education as a consciousness-raising space, the three subthemes that emerged were affirming college courses, validating college faculty, and supportive campus organizations. The third theme, tensions within

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Defining Indigeneity in Diaspora	• Feeling different among mestizo Mexicans/Latinxs • Experiencing anti-Indigenous discrimination • Developing private Indigenous identities • Reasons for pursuing higher education
Higher Education as a Consciousness-Raising Space	• Affirming college courses • Validating college faculty • Supportive campus organizations
Tensions Within Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-based Campus Organizations	• Aztec-centric and pre-Columbian curricula • Indigenous Mexican perspectives about Chicanx Indigeneity and *mestizaje* • Responding to Indigenous reductionism and exclusion in Chicanx spaces • Finding and creating alternative spaces on and off campus
The Urgency for Public Indigeneity	• Creating awareness on campus • Fostering resistance in the community • Outlook for younger Indigenous Mexican generations in the United States

Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-based campus organizations included Aztec-centric and pre-Columbian curricula, critical perspectives about Chicanx Indigeneity and *mestizaje*, responding to Indigenous reductionism and exclusion in Chicanx spaces, and finding and creating alternative spaces on and off campus. Lastly, the urgency for public Indigeneity had three subthemes: creating awareness on campus, fostering resistance in the community, and outlook for younger Indigenous Mexican generations in the United States.

Theme 1: Defining Indigeneity in Diaspora

To better understand the role of higher education among Indigenous Mexican students and the subsequent construction of their identities, I first set out to explore how participants related their childhoods and upbringing to their Indigeneity. Rather than simply defining Indigeneity in biological terms or nationalist ethno-racial structures of identity, it was important

for me to highlight aspects of growing up Indigenous in the United States and how participants developed a strong sense of connection to their Indigenous communities of origin in Mexico. As Sánchez-López (2017) pointed out, "Indigeneity among Indigenous Mexicans is deeply rooted in the relationships with family and their communities of origin rather than their ability to speak, dress, or dance 'like an Indian'" (p. 245). González (2018), Nicolás (2012), Mesinas and Pérez (2016), and D. Sánchez (2018), for instance, have all documented the participation of children of Indigenous immigrants in cultural traditions that tie them to their communities of origin in Oaxaca and how these experiences foster a sense of Indigenous identity while growing up in the United States.

The participants in the study associated various cultural practices during their childhood as foundational to their Indigenous identity. Participants discussed observing and engaging in cultural and religious traditions with family and community members that solidified early on their connection to their Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, or Nahua heritages, and more importantly their connection to their home community in Mexico. Growing up in the Los Angeles, California area, Joy, a college graduate, was fully immersed in her Zapotec culture through the traditional music of *sones y jarabes* from her parents' hometown of Zoochila in Oaxaca. At a young age, Joy joined her father's philharmonic band in Lynwood, California. Philharmonic bands are common among Indigenous towns in Oaxaca, and Oaxaqueño migrants have established their own bands in the United States in an effort to preserve Oaxaqueño music. These philharmonic bands play a very important role in the cultural socialization of Zapotec youth since music plays a central part of almost all Zapotec cultural events (Mesinas & Pérez, 2016). Accordingly, playing in her father's band, Banda Nueva Dinastia de Zoohchila, was incredibly formative for Joy:

> As early as a baby my dad, parents, exposed me to the music and the culture. My dad was always part of community bands. My dad would say, "you always wanted to tag along, you never wanted to stay home." So music just became a part of me. I actually started playing and learning the music. I learned it hand in hand. My dad and my uncle started a community band with *música tradicional de Oaxaca* and they started that in 2001.

Similarly, Haidy, a college senior, associated her Zapotec identity to the same philharmonic band in Lynwood, California. At the age of 5, Haidy joined the band and learned to play a number of instruments, including the drums and saxophone:

> I feel that this experience being part of the band helped me stay rooted to my traditions. I do feel like it had an influence on how I define my identity because growing up I feel very comforted and attached to these traditions because it was what my parents had, it was what my parents would practice at home.

Santiago, a college senior, also developed a deep appreciation for his Zapotec culture and identity by participating in his local philharmonic band:

> I feel like it's been one of the best things that I've done because it's a tradition we have back in Oaxaca. Following that tradition I still kept my identity with them and showed people what kind of things we have back in Mexico or in Oaxaca and the culture. So that really shaped me too be proud of my identity, to be proud of my culture.

In addition to the bands, participants discussed attending community events such as baptisms, birthdays, and patron saint celebrations associated with their parents' hometowns in Oaxaca. D. Sánchez (2018) pointed out that patron saint celebrations are important for children of Indigenous migrants because these spaces transmit cultural values despite being away from their Indigenous homeland. Moreover, these celebrations are opportunities for Indigenous

communities in the United States to come together "to escape the harsh realities of their everyday lives and celebrate community" (D. Sánchez, 2018, p. 317). Similar to D. Sánchez's findings, playing in hometown-based bands and attending patron saint festivities solidified participants' connection to their Indigenous identity and allowed them to develop a strong sense of ethnic pride within their community that is linked to their family's community of origin in Mexico.

Other participants identified their visits to their hometowns in Mexico as integral to their Indigenous identity. Chris, a college junior, described fond memories of traveling to Zoochila, Oaxaca every two years and spending time with his cousins. María, a graduate student, recalled taking frequent trips to her parents' hometown of Atzacoaloya, Guerrero and participating in the community's patron saint celebrations:

> I grew up very much going back and forth because my parents fortunately had that possibility and I did not know anything else. I really thought that was normal and that's what most kids in my school and my classmates did during every time they had a break.

Although several participants traveled frequently to their family's hometown during their childhood, not all participants had the capacity to do so. Those unable to travel still maintained a close tie to their hometown because it was frequent topic of conversation within the home. Ocho Movimiento, a college graduate, described his home dynamic:

> In my family, in my home, identity has always been very strong. . . . We are all from the same pueblo. We are all Mixtecs from San Jerónimo del Progreso. At home this has always been maintained strong, firm, and certain. They wouldn't let us say, for instance, that we were from Tijuana even though we were born there. You are Oaxaqueños, Mixtecos from San Jerónimo!

N'dii Kanu, a college graduate, also spoke about his father instilling the importance of maintaining his Oaxaqueño and Ñuu Savi identity. In his words, "[My dad] would always tell me everywhere we'd go. He'd say, '*somos de Oaxaca, no te olvides*' [we are from Oaxaca, don't forget]." For N'dii Kanu, speaking Tu'un Savi also connected him to his Indigenous community, and while speaking an Indigenous language was not always central to everyone's upbringing, hearing the language at home or in the community was a common experience for participants. Clara, a doctoral student, described how Zapotec was continually present at home and in her community:

> In terms of my childhood one thing I do remember saliently is that Zapoteco was around 24/7. Even though I did not speak it, I heard it every single day because that's what my mom used to speak with her partner, with my aunts, with a lot of the adults in the community.

Similarly, although Vicki did not speak Tu'un Savi, she held a strong sense of connection to her parents' hometowns of San Pedro y San Pablo Tequixtepec, Oaxaca:

> In my family we didn't speak the language . . . one generation removed from my grandma so I think that that contributed to it. So during my childhood, I knew the relationship I had with our pueblo. I knew that was very strong and I visited our village twice when I was young.

It is important to mention that while the traditions and hometown affiliations were ever present in their daily lives, several participants remarked that these traditions were not explicitly labeled as Indigenous. Joy explained:

> I think as a child I didn't realize. Not that it wasn't important; it's just that I grew up with it through music and culture. I grew up with that identity I just didn't realize it was an

> identity until very very very late. I was always in tune because of my dad through music. I was always in tune with my Indigenous identity through culture, the traditions, and music.

Clara added that although today she identifies as Zapoteca, growing up she did not explicitly identify in that way because this identity was embedded in her daily engagement with her community:

> I did understand that my family was from a pueblo because I went to the pueblo from a very young age, since I was like 5 years old. So I knew where my family came from, but it seemed like another thing . . . like we live in Lynnwood. It didn't seem special to me because it was so normal at home and also the community we are engaged with everyone was from the pueblo so it felt normal.

Lastly, BitterQueer, a college graduate, noted that the Indigenous practices in their family were never singled out or categorized as Indigenous because these were everyday lived knowledges. They explained:

> It's not like my grandma every time she grinds f****** chile in the *molcajete* she's like "I'm indigenous." No, she's just doing it! When she would make tortillas she wasn't like "this is indigenous knowledge." No, it's just what they are f****** doing to live just day-to-day s***!

Overall, the participants expressed a strong connection to their family's community of origin in Mexico and identified this connection as integral to their Indigenous identity. This connection was reinforced from a very early age in the home through cultural practices and participation in bands and patron-saint celebrations, and for some, trips to Mexico to visit their families. Additionally, unlike Mexican nationalist ethno-racial categorizations of Indigeneity, the

majority of participants did not perceive fluency in an Indigenous language as central to their Indigeneity. While many of them grew up with native language speakers, they recognized the historical implications for not being taught the language and instead, focused on their deep relationships to their family's communities of origin as central to their Indigenous upbringing.

Feeling Different Among Mestizo Mexicans and Latinxs

Despite their strong affiliations to their communities of origin in Mexico, participants also acknowledged feeling different in relationship to the Mexican and Latinx community. In many cases, growing up in close-knit Oaxaqueño neighborhoods and among people from the same hometown precluded many participants from having to explicitly identify as Zapotec or Ñuu Savi, let alone use a much broader term like Indigenous. However, outside their immediate Oaxaqueño community and within the more dominant migrant mestizo Mexican/Latinx community, they recognized differences among cultural practices and traditions. These differences became even more visible in school as participants interacted with Latinx and Mexican classmates. Joy described:

> I always did feel a little different growing up. I grew up in a predominantly Latin American, Mexican community. I had other classmates that were of Mexican descent or from other Latin American countries but I always felt different from them because I remember growing up it was like, "You don't do this . . . why don't you listed to the type of music I listen to?" . . . I always felt different. I always felt like people didn't understand me, didn't understand my community.

As Libi, a college graduate, entered high school, the differences between she and her classmates became more salient. She had particular trouble connecting to the pan-ethnic term Latina/o, and

it was at that moment that she began to question whether or not she associated with the Latina label assigned to her by her teachers and classmates:

> When I started going to high school, there was a group *que se llamaba* [that was called] Latinas and it was the first time I heard Latinas and I was like what is Latinas? Mainly it was *grupos de niñas que venían de grupos de hispanohablantes* [groups of girls that came from Spanish-speaking groups]. That's what I thought Latinas meant . . . *no importaba si eras* [it didn't matter if you were] Mexicana, Salvadoreña . . . *entonces la palabra* [so the word] Latina was more like that. I would question myself if I was Latina or Mexicana but I would never questions if I was Mixteca. That's was the first time I started to question it.

For María, speaking Nahuatl further distinguished her from her Mexican neighbors and classmates:

> I grew up in Logan Heights which is a predominantly Mexicano or Mexican American/Chicano community so Spanish was a norm, getting hit with the *chancla* was the norm, eating tortillas was the norm. However, there were different things such as a speaking of Nahuatl, which I knew back then as Mexicano because that's how we identified in the community.

N'dii Kanu also knew that the language he spoke at home was different than what was spoken at school or on the playground. He recognized that his parents dressed differently, his grandparents "looked different than everyone," and at a very young age, N'dii Kanu began to question why speaking Tu'un Savi set him apart from his peers. He would ask himself:

> Why do I speak something different but these kids don't speak it? Why am I in special language classes? Why am I learning Spanish and everyone else is learning English? Should I be proud of who I am or should I forget about it and be like everyone else?

From a very early age, participants developed a consciousness about their difference among the broader Mexican/Latinx community. This difference was further magnified in the classroom with their mestizo peers. All of the participants expressed a lack of ethnic representation during their K-12 experience. Their Indigenous, Ñuu Savi, Zapotec, or Nahua identities were never discussed in their classes or addressed by their teachers. While many were exposed to Mexican culture and traditions by way of Spanish language classes, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, and in one case, a middle school mariachi band, the participants never witnessed representation of their Indigenous or even Oaxaqueñx heritage at school. Haidy explained:

> I feel like aside from my family friends that also went to the same high school and stuff not a lot of spaces or like a lot of my classmates had never heard of Oaxaca in general. So I felt there wasn't a lot of spaces that contained this Oaxacan identity.

Haidy's testimony aligns with my previous research on Indigenous students' K-12 experiences. Participants from my master's thesis study addressed the lack of awareness among teachers and administrators (Kovats, 2010). In my attempts to speak with administrators at elementary schools with high Ñuu Savi student populations, I was confronted with staff that had no idea about their Oaxaqueño students and responded, "I don't even think we have any of those" (Kovats, 2010, p. 10). Martínez (2017) points out that Indigenous Mexican children in U.S. schools are often "positioned as part of the 'Latino' or 'Mexican' population that is assumed to be linguistically and ethnoracially homogenous" (p. 87). Since Indigenous children are "essentialized and racialized as 'Latino'" (Martinez, 2017, p. 87), their Indigeneity is

overlooked or erased. To that end, several participants in my previous studies (Kovats, 2010; Kovats Sánchez, 2018) were incorrectly classified as native Spanish speakers despite their first language being Tu'un Savi. Some were even forced to learn Spanish from their mestizo Latinx peers to understand the material in their English Language Learner classes (Kovats, 2010).

Experiencing Anti-Indigenous Discrimination

Blackwell et al. (2017) argued that structures of colonialism and anti-Indigenous domination are transplanted when Indigenous people migrate from Latin America to the United States. The racial hierarchies of Latin America hybridize with racial hierarchies of the United States to shape the identities of Indigenous migrants and their children in the United States. Thus, in addition to the existing modes of marginalization and subtractive schooling experienced by Indigenous students in U.S. schools, the participants in this study also faced anti-Indigenous discrimination. Feeling different from mestizo Mexicans and Latinxs was further magnified by the participants' negative interactions with their mestizo classmates. Teasing and bullying were prominent themes across the participants' testimonies. Some were teased for their physical features, including their short stature and darker skin complexion, and others were called derogatory names, like *indio* or *oaxaquita.* Recognizing the colonial racial structure of Mexican society, González (2018) defined the term *oaxaquito/a* as "a diminutive slur referring to ethnoracial stereotypes that mark people from the southern state of Oaxaca as short in stature, of dark skin complexion, dumb, and dirty" (p. 2). The use of this term in present-day Mexican discourse is a clear example of coloniality and the long-term colonial situations that persist without the presence of a formal colonial administration (R. D. Hernández, 2018).

Vicki recalled being the only student from Oaxaca in a classroom made up of students from northern Mexico (generally fair-skinned and tall, which are physical traits associated with

European heritage). Vicki recognized that she was phenotypically different than her fair-skinned peers and began to internalize negative beliefs about her appearance directly associated with her Indigenous heritage—negative beliefs she still confronts today. She elaborated, "Throughout my whole life the common theme has been that I've always looked very different and when I was younger I used to think I was ugly."

María also experienced discrimination from her peers based on her darker complexion. Mexican mestizo students would single her out and question her Mexican identity claiming she did not look Mexican (viz., not mestiza). Initially, María attempted to share some of her Nahua culture with her classmates but received an immediate backlash. In her words:

> In sharing with some of them my experiences in Mexico, my grandmother, and speaking my language [Nahuatl], and trying to teach them some words I think that's when I started seeing more of that discrimination and being called an *india* and *pata rajada* and things like that where my friends would hear me share with another friend about my language.

Consequently, María became hesitant in disclosing aspects of her Indigeneity to her peers. Although she remained deeply connected to her Indigeneity, she developed a sense of fear. As she explained:

> I never had a problem with my identity. I knew who I was because of my constant going back and forth [to the community]. What I had a problem with was fear, the fear I couldn't share openly and how to describe it so that I wouldn't get hurt with discrimination or being pointed out as being less . . . as I started getting old older, from kindergarten to 3rd grade, I started realizing that some of the things I shared could hurt me.

N'dii Kanu also experienced discrimination from his Mexican peers during high school but his parents addressed these negative experiences by reinforcing the importance of his Ñuu Savi culture and history:

> [My dad] would remind me I'm from Oaxaca even though throughout high school I was facing a little bit of discrimination. You want to be like everyone else but the influence . . . I guess was my parents. My parents always spoke Mixteco to me they never hid it. They would say always remember where you come from, remember your town, remember we are different, our people are different, our people have a long history.

While many participants dealt with discrimination first hand, others lived it through their parents' experiences. Given their personal experiences with discrimination, the participants' parents made important decisions to protect their children, including not passing on their Indigenous language. Seven out of the 12 participants did not grow up speaking their parents' Indigenous language. In Joy's case, her parents did not teach her or her sister Zapotec in an effort to mitigate the discrimination they faced as native Zapotec speakers from Latinx and Mexican mestizos. She explained:

> My dad tells me the reason we didn't teach you Zapoteco is because we didn't want you to be discriminated because we were discriminated against so much because our main language was Zapoteco because we didn't know Spanish properly. So we thought if we taught you Zapoteco you would be discriminated here. We thought we were helping you not to be discriminated by not teaching you Zapoteco.

Joy's reason for not learning Zapotec is directly tied to Mexico's colonial history and its various attempts to erase Indigenous languages and knowledges. The institutionalized government policy of *indigenismo* from the early 20th century, for instance, actively sought to

assimilate Indigenous people into the Mexican national mestizo identity. *Indigenismo* correlated progress with the acculturation to European ways and the educational system and became the State's most effective means of achieving ethnic integration and linguistic uniformity (Bonfil Batalla, 1989; Gutierrez, 1999). Educational curriculum aimed to eradicate Indigenous languages and teachers were sent to rural communities to educate children about national culture and language (Bonfil Batalla, 1989). Indigenous languages were not taught in schools and many children were punished for speaking any language other than Spanish in the classroom (Ramírez Castañeda, 2006). These educational practices, in consequence, elevated Spanish as the national mestizo language and marked Indigenous languages as inferior. To this day, many people refer to Indigenous languages as dialects. It is important to note that referring to Indigenous languages as dialects demonstrates their subaltern position in Mexican society (Barillas Chón, 2018; Kovats, 2010). Despite being sophisticated, complete, and autonomous languages that are not rooted or derived from the Spanish language, the practice of naming Indigenous languages dialects reinforces the idea that they "are not the primary or proper language of community and linguistic interactions, and they cannot yield well-paying jobs. Thus, they are positioned as inferior and powerless languages" (Barillas Chón, 2018, p. 95).

This pervasive anti-Indigenous sentiment against Indigenous languages led BitterQueer's grandparents to not teach their children Tu'un Savi:

> I kind of asked her [mom] why don't you know [Tu'un Savi] and she said my mom didn't teach us because she just didn't. It was just something that was not, just looking at the way society and the ingrained anti indigenous sentiment all over Mexico and its society, it's like the less indigenous you are the better. So like there wasn't even a reason to teach their children the language.

For the majority of parents, being discriminated for speaking Indigenous languages informed their decision to not pass on the language to their children both in Mexico and the United States. These difficult decisions reveal the overwhelming impact of colonial logic in our daily lives. In addition to language discrimination, Vicki spoke about her mother's negative interactions with Mexican mestizos in the workplace. She was regularly referred to as a *oaxaquita* when she worked in the fields and visited the flea market in northern Washington state. Given these very negative experiences with Mexican mestizos, Vicki revealed that her mom was "very much afraid of letting people know we were from Oaxaca because people were always like 'son *indios* o son *patas rajadas*.'" Naturally, Vicki also avoided telling people she was from Oaxaca or specifically Ñuu Savi. She described her hesitation to associate with her Indigenous identity as "internalized fear and shame."

In my previous work (Kovats 2010, 2018) and that of Casanova (2012) and Martinez Morales (2012), discrimination encountered by Indigenous youth triggered feelings of shame about their own Indigenous heritage. Although the participants in this study were immersed in their Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, or Nahua cultures and hometown communities, outside of these safe spaces some described a sense of shame toward their Indigeneity. Other participants expressed not feeling ashamed about their Indigeneity and instead spoke about concealing their Indigeneity outside the home to avoid or mitigate potential discrimination from their mestizo classmates.

Developing Private Indigenous Identities

In her article, "Coming Out as Indian: On Being an Indigenous Latina in the US," Alberto (2017) described two Indigeneities—one private and one public. As a young Yalalteca growing up in Los Angeles, California, Zapotec was the primary language in her household and her family maintained Yalaltecan traditional dress and *cargos* or civil service commitments to

their hometown in Oaxaca. Still, Alberto pointed out that her Zapotec community's organizing, celebrations, and cultural expressions only occurred within private spaces—in people's homes and backyards. She explained:

> Despite our deep commitments to out pueblos, that quotidian reality was never reflected in the world outside my community. I did not see it in our curriculum, on Spanish-language television or even among my fellow Latina/o peers' experiences as racialized subjects in the US. When my Latino indigeneity did appear, it was the colonial schema of my indigeneity; that is, as the "coloniality of modernity," to sue Quijano's concept for the racialized legacies of colonialism in late capitalist societies in Latin America. (Alberto, 2017, pp. 248-249)

Although Alberto's Indigenous identity was fostered and maintained at home, it was never represented in public spaces beyond her community, including school. The participants in this study present a similar case in terms of developing a private Indigeneity. Given the lack of Indigenous representation and awareness in school and the anti-Indigenous marginalization experienced by participants (and their parents) from members of the mestizo Mexican/Latinx community, most associated their Indigeneity as something private and not public. Early on, participants began to associate their Indigenous identity as something exclusively practiced or discussed in the privacy of their home or Indigenous community. Several participants spoke about not disclosing their Indigenous identity to classmates and teachers during their K-12 years, particularly if they had previously experienced anti-Indigenous discrimination. For many participants, deciding not to publicly disclose their Indigenous identity was a form of protection from potential teasing or rejection. While many grew up entrenched in Indigenous practices and knowledges with frequent visits to their hometowns in Mexico, they also experienced a layer of

discrimination that came from living and interacting with Mexican and Latinx mestizo communities.

Not publicly identifying or claiming their Indigenous heritage was a common theme among all 12 participants. Even though Ocho Movimiento had a supportive environment at home where his parents inculcated Ñuu Savi knowledges and traditions, outside of the home he felt differently. He explained, "Outside the home, when you interacted with the world and with multiple identities, some identities more dominant that others, we learned to hide the identity we upheld at home." He actively suppressed his Ñuu Savi identity in public at school. He disclosed, "During my childhood, there was a way to talk about being Mixteco or being from Yogoyavi but we didn't speak about it, we suppressed it. We would say we are all Mexicans."

Just like Ocho Movimiento, in an effort not to disclose their Indigenous heritage, participants would assume the label of Mexican or Latinx when asked about their ethnic background. Libi, María, Vicki, Joy, Haidy, and Clara recalled publicly identifying only as Mexican all throughout high school. Libi added that growing up she would not publicly identify as Indigenous, "I was not ashamed but I wasn't proud. I didn't say I was from Oaxaca because I was born in Mexico [City] and I would say I'm from Mexico [City]." Identifying with the state of Oaxaca would signal to her peers that she was Indigenous so Libi preferred to associate herself with Mexico City, which is commonly perceived as a mestizo and urban context. Just as Libi pointed out, the participants were never necessarily ashamed of their Indigenous identity but actively chose to protect themselves from potential teasing from their peers.

At very early ages, participants' in this study learned to make decisions about whether to publicly disclose their Indigenous identity. Even though their Indigeneity was continually present in their homes through traditions, language, and frequent visits to the homeland, outside these

safe environments was a completely different story. Their negative interactions with Mexican mestizos demonstrated the depth of Mexico's colonial legacy. Even as children, classmates were perpetuating Mexico's historical anti-Indigenous sentiment and directly and negatively influencing the participants' association with their Indigenous identities. Nevertheless, as participants entered college, their public and private identities began to shift and merge. Upon entering college, participants were exposed to spaces and individuals that influenced their decisions to publicly affirm their Indigenous identification.

Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education

As participants recounted their childhoods and upbringing, central to their stories was the importance their parents placed on education. All of the participants attributed their pursuit of higher education to their parents. Most participants described college as a given growing up as their parents made college an expectation after high school. Chris explained that he never thought about anything else other than college after high school because "it felt natural" since his parents perceived college as an opportunity to grow and pursue a career. Haidy also described college as being "primed into [her] head" by her parents. Despite her parents only completing a middle school education, Joy pointed out that they recognized the value of education and encouraged all their children to go to college. In her words:

> There was never a time in my life where college was never the goal. It was always, school and college it was a given. There was no other option but college. When it came time to apply I knew it was the next step. It's weird too because it's not like my dad ever forced us to do college. It was just so engraved in me that it was naturally the next step. And I recently asked my parents that question, because I see other parents in our community and some of them don't push their kids to go to college. So I ask my parents

how and when did you guys know you had to push us to go college? And again, you never forced us you never had to lay down your hand. It was just naturally ingrained in us. My dad, my parents . . . it's like when we came to the U.S. we had to do jobs that we didn't want to do and it was our only option. We knew that wasn't something we wanted for our kids.

At the core of all the participants' testimonies was their parents' desire for them to pursue different careers than their own—careers that would allow them more opportunities for personal and financial growth. María explained:

I always knew that I needed to go to college. My parents instilled that that idea in me since I can remember. I don't think that they were aware as to why I needed to go but they knew that going to college would offer me a better job. I don't think they understood the degree of what this better job or this better reality entailed but it was one that they didn't have and were not ever going to know about because they didn't have an education.

In addition to pursing a better job, N'dii Kanu's parents recognized that a college degree would allow their son to do more for his community:

It was pretty much them that influenced me and kept telling me if I really wanted my community to get better then I had to educate myself, learn and be ready. My dad would say be *como los licenciados del pueblo que pueden hablar con el jefe* [be like the lawyers from the town that can speak to the boss]. If you really wanna be like that then you gotta be able to speak to them and be able to be that front voice if you really want that change. Their whole influence and my need to change made me keep going.

Other participants recounted the sacrifices their parents had made leaving their hometowns and migrating to the United States to access greater educational opportunities. Clara

recalled her mother's difficult journey at the age of 15 as the first one in the family to migrate to the United States:

> My mom has left a lot in her native land to give my siblings and I a better life. I don't know how but I got that sense and that really stuck with me throughout my childhood just to try to do well and not cause issues for my mom and just really do well.

In many ways, Clara's desire to pursue higher education was a commitment to her mother and her sacrifices for the family. Similarly, Santiago perceived his college degree as a way to honor his parents' sacrifices.

Theme 2: Higher Education as a Consciousness-Raising Space

Publicly identifying as Mexican and not with their Indigenous community was common among all participants during their K-12 experiences. Some participants were also intentional during their K-12 years about keeping their public and private identities separate. As Joy explained, "I always kept them apart . . . like my school music and my home music. I always kept those two paths separate because they are so very different." This separation of two worlds, however, began to merge as participants entered college. In part, being away from home and interacting with people from different backgrounds led many participants to reconsider their public ethnic identification. Clara, for instance, spoke of publicly identifying as Mexican until she started college and in many ways was forced to identify herself on a regular basis:

> I never really identified until I got to college. I knew my family was from Mexico but I also knew I was born and raised in the US so that was my identity but I never really put a label on it until I got to college and was asked what are you, where are you from and all those inappropriate questions that only students of color get asked.

For Vicki, the college experience became a space where she began to feel more comfortable disclosing her Ñuu Savi identity to her peers:

> During college it became a lot easier to tell people. Because I feel like during college a lot of people have these experiences where they're connecting to their identity they are able learn more. At least for me I was able to verbalize what I had gone through growing up and learning that there was language for that. So in part yeah, but during college it became a lot easier to refer to myself as that when all my lifetime I heard it as negative.

Similarly, Ánima talked about questioning her identity as she entered college and interacted with her peers:

> I remember my friends and they asked, "Where are your parents from?" and I kinda whispered, "They are from Oaxaca." My friend asked, "Why are you whispering? Are you ashamed?" I said "no" but I didn't know why I couldn't just freely say that.

Her friends' comments began to tap into Ánima's private Indigenous identity and questions the reasons why she (consciously or not) minimized her Indigeneity in public.

Overall, the college experience served in many ways "as a consciousness-raising experience" (Azmitia et al., 2008, p. 11) for all the participants, where the exposure to peers, coursework, and social spheres encouraged them to examine their ethnic identities. Many were exposed to inclusive and supportive spaces that influenced a greater sense of ethnic pride while others experienced discrimination and exclusion which served as powerful triggers for the reexamination of their ethnic identities (Azmitia et al., 2008). These findings support the work of Nicolás (2012) and González (2018) who attribute Indigenous Mexican students' reexamination of their Indigenous identity to the college experience.

In her work, Alberto (2017) refers to this public identity affirmation as coming out as Indian. More specifically, she describes it as

> the moment a Latina/o Indian decides to publicly position themselves as Indigenous (Maya, Mixteco, Zapotec), first and foremost, in relation to their classmates—a declaration that runs counter to the nation-based ethnic identity formation in the US and a declaration that often requires framing, explanations, and ardent defense of their Indianness. (Alberto, 2017, pp. 249-250)

Taking into account Alberto's (2017) important work, this section explores the spaces within higher education that led participants to grapple with their identities and influenced their motivations for coming out as Indigenous—shifting from a once private identity to a public one. First, I discuss the role of college courses, followed by participants' relationships with faculty. Next, I describe participants' experiences within campus organizations. While the first three factors provided validating spaces for the participants, the last section explores the lack of representation within in these same spaces that triggered some to become more publicly vocal about their Indigeneity.

Affirming College Courses

Clara like many other participants attributed her coming out as Indigenous to her college experience. She expressed a yearning for sharing her unique experiences as a Zapotec Indigenous woman once she reached college:

> It wasn't until college that I started realizing that this [identity] was more particular and I started questioning my identity and understanding that it could be fluid and depending on who I was talking to I would say I'm *Indígena* or I would say I'm *Oaxaqueña* or even I'm

> *Zoochileña*. . . . I needed to feel some sort of comfort to share my indigenous identity, I guess.

Clara specifically attributed the initial shift in public affirmation to a college course she took on Latin American social psychology. At the start of the class, the professor explained that a portion of the course would cover Indigenous groups from Oaxaca, including Zapotecs. This was a complete surprise for Clara, who until that moment had never seen her Indigenous community represented in the classroom. In her words:

> It was mind-blowing! I was like what?! This is a teachable topic?! This was my first introduction to understanding how my family's cultural and history and presence in this world was a real valid thing and in anything you want to talk about whether it's medicine or anthropology, health, art, music, whatever. . . . It means we have a presence.

Clara also considered this course as "the catalyst to start coming out . . . where I felt super duper validated in a way I've never had before." For the first time, Clara's Zapotec community was a topic of analysis and conversation, and in many ways she found it very positive. She added:

> I would say that class really flipped the switch and I was like yes! *Sí, soy indígena* [yes, I am Indigenous] and I am proud of this and I think I need to be more outspoken about this and I'm going to do it!

For many participants, the curricular representation of Indigenous communities in the classroom was a common and validating experience. BitterQueer spoke about the importance of their first anthropology course, which explored the pre-Columbian Ñuu Savi codices that survived the Spanish Conquest. They recalled enrolling in the course because they needed an elective, but quickly recognized that the Ñuu Savi codices where from Oaxaca, their home state. Growing up, like many other participants, BitterQueer never identified as being Indigenous even

though they knew their family was from Oaxaca. This particular college course, however, prompted BitterQueer to question their family's history and make connections to their Ñuu Savi heritage. They explained:

> That class is where I started to figure out or started to realize oh s*** I'm native! I started talking to my mom about stuff and she said yeah your grandma speaks another language and I was like what and she said yeah she can speak Mixteco and I was like whoa there's that word again!

BitterQueer credited their self-realization to the anthropology class and recognized that this realization may not have happened had they not attended college. They explained, "I always stop and think about it, would I have realized this if I had not gone to college? Maybe not because I would have not thought about doing this kind of research or looking into this." Nevertheless, the anthropology course became the first college space to provoke BitterQueer's desire to explore their Indigenous identity and heritage, which was always there but never articulated within their family. The course elicited a desire to learn more about their Ñuu Savi heritage which allowed BitterQueer to develop a sense of appreciation for their identity and their appearance. In their words, "Being really proud of literally the skin I'm in and it came from actually learning more about myself." Along these same lines, Chris attributed the exploration of his identity to his anthropology classes. He explained, "One of the biggest classes that opened my eyes to my Indigenous identity was taking an anthropology series in college." In these classes, Chris learned about various Indigenous groups and their cultural practices and beliefs. Content from this course inspired Chris to want to better understand his grandparents' and parents' belief system and their relationship to Zoochila, Oaxaca.

During her sophomore year, Joy came across a course listing for an anthropology course on Mesoamerican Oaxaca, “It had Oaxaca in the title! I was like what?! It was an upper division anthropology class. I was like what is this!? This is really interesting!” Despite the course being upper division, Joy was determined to enroll. Joy emailed the anthropology professor and expressed her interest in taking the course because she was from Oaxaca. She also sought the help of her academic advisor who eventually was able to waive the introductory course requirement. In the class, Joy learned about Oaxacan pre-Columbian history including the Zapotec sociopolitical and economic center of Monte Albán. She remembered that the class really helped her understand Oaxaca.

When Libi entered college, she had the advantage of having an older cousin to guide her during her college experience. Libi described her cousin as “always trying to be in the [Mixtec] culture,” and as a result, she was always encouraging others to continue speaking Mixtec. This desire to speak Mixtec was directly tied to her experience in a Mixtec language course offered at the university. Libi’s cousin urged her to take the Mixtec language class and her initial reaction was, “You can learn Mixteco?” Libi agreed to enroll and remembered feeling surprised that other people, mainly non-Mixtecs, wanted to learn to speak Mixteco. Once enrolled, Libi had the opportunity to travel to Oaxaca during the summer for an intensive language course sponsored by her university, where she gained new knowledge and history about Oaxaca.

Validating College Faculty

Participants also spoke of supportive professors that contributed to their public identity affirmation. Clara described the importance of feeling affirmed by her professors, which influenced her willingness to disclose her Zapotec heritage:

> It wasn't until I was speaking with professors, where I was saying my family was from Oaxaca and this is the kind of stuff we do. It took a lot of affirmation from others for me to realize how special my background was.

Clara's willingness to disclose her identity also influenced her academic work to include elements of her community. Her senior project, for instance, consisted of creating a children's Zapotec language summer course. Prior to developing the course, Clara approached one of her professors for feedback and received an overwhelming amount of support for her project. For Clara, this level of support was incredibly validating:

> I had never felt so much positivity outside my family or community so I was like I'm onto something! . . . I think that's when I started calling myself *indígena*. Not so much *indígena* but maybe more *Oaxaqueña*. Not that I was shy but it was just new territory to me. Like where do I fit best? I can use all of them [terms] because they do all signal some form of Indigeneity when it comes to *Oaxaqueña* or *indígena* or things like that.

Thus, Clara began to explore different terminologies to publicly describe her Zapotec Indigenous identity and much of this was linked to the support and validation she received from her college professors.

Ocho Movimiento spoke very fondly of his community college Chicanx Studies professor who taught a course on the history of social movements in Mexico. Everything changed for Ocho Movimiento after meeting his Chicanx Studies professor. In this class, he learned about the participation of Indigenous communities in the Mexican Independence War and Revolution and the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. It was here where he began to see a connection to his own history.

His professor assigned the Zapatista's Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, which introduced him to the various struggles of the Mayan Indigenous communities in Chiapas. Exposure to the Sixth Declaration was eye opening and prompted Ocho Movimiento to do additional research about other Indigenous movements, which initiated what he referred to as a personal process to "construct consciousness and a desire to be involved" in his own community. Discussing the Zapatistas in class also made Ocho Movimiento comfortable enough to approach his professor and disclose his Ñuu Savi identity:

> I told the professor, "We are Mixtecos from *la Colonia Obrera*. We were embarrassed to tell you but we are from a community where they speak an Indigenous language." That's when the professor was the first person that started to create a new path for me and we started having conversations about Mixtecos and this lit a fire in me.

Unlike his past experiences in the classroom, this time Ocho Movimiento felt confident in revealing his family background to his professor. Additionally, the professor's knowledge about Mexican Indigenous communities along with the course's content fostered Ocho Movimiento's curiosity about his own personal cultural and ethnic identity.

Over the course of the semester, his professor became a key mentor for Ocho Movimiento. After numerous conversations with his professor, Ocho Movimiento began to understand and analyze how feelings of shame had limited his ability to share his Ñuu Savi heritage with others. Through this professor, Ocho Movimiento also learned that his community had been forced to conceal their Indigenous identities for centuries as a form of protection. Later that semester, the professor connected Ocho Movimiento with the FIOB, a binational organization focused on addressing the economic, political, social, and cultural issues confronted by Mexican indigenous migrants in the United States from Oaxaca and other parts of Mexico.

The FIOB also works toward improving the working and living conditions of migrants through legal defense and labor rights workshops.

Ánima and Bitter Queer had an anthropology professor in common; that was formative to their identity development during their college years. Both participants took the professor's Ñuu Savi codices course and developed a rapport with her. Bitter Queer recalled sharing their Oaxacan heritage with the professor. To Bitter Queer's surprise, the professor was familiar with their family's hometown and responded, "Yeah, you're Mixteca!" It is here where Bitter Queer began to articulate the meaning of their own heritage. Influenced significantly by the content from their cultural anthropology course, Bitter Queer credited much of their identity development to their anthropology professor and jokingly commented, "I think it's really funny that I learned I was Indigenous through a f**** White institution and a White woman." Similarly, Ánima remembered her professor being very supportive of the *Oaxaqueño* community given her long-time anthropological work in Oaxacan communities. The professor encouraged Ánima to "write her own story" by working with and upholding her local Ñuu Savi community.

Supportive Campus Organizations

In addition to courses and professors, several participants spoke about developing their identities within campus organizations, particularly those comprised of Chicanx/Latinx and Native American students. The MEChA, for instance, was a formative space for both Ánima and BitterQueer who attributed much of their political formation to MEChA's educational programming. As a first-year student, BitterQueer developed relationships with Chicanx and Latinx peers and learned to identify multiple forms of oppression present in their community. For Ánima, the exposure to social justice concepts inspired her to entirely change her major from biology to sociology and anthropology. María also joined MEChA and quickly became involved

with the Association of Chicana Activists. While she does not identify as Chicana herself, she appreciated learning about Chicana history and making connections to her own history that contributed to her political formation.

Haidy and Joy both joined a Latina-based sorority at their respective universities. For Joy, her sorority became a safe space to explore her own culture and identity:

> Our motto for our sorority is "*Mujeres con cultura, fuerza, hermandad*" [Women with culture, strength, sisterhood]. We always had to do these things that tied our cultura . . . because of the sorority, they really pushed us to really be open about it and not be afraid to express our culture. I think it was a combination of a lot of independent experiences that really helped me become more in tune with my Indigenous side and be more open. Not that I was ever ashamed of it. No, I was never ashamed I was Indigenous but there was always that fear of getting a backlash or getting discriminated for identifying as that.

Joy's sorority encouraged its members to showcase the diversity within the Latinx community and consequently, motivated Joy to transform her private Indigenous identity into a public one. It is important to point out that just like Clara, Joy never necessarily felt ashamed of her Indigenous identity. Instead, keeping her identity private was a coping strategy to avoid discrimination.

Haidy also described her sorority as a space that encouraged her to affirm her Indigeneity and she used the term coming out to describe the process. Haidy was encouraged by her sorority to share aspects of her Zapotec culture to the rest of the members. She developed close relationships with her sorority sisters and eventually felt comfortable enough inviting them to her home in Los Angeles to take part in her community's Christmas *posadas.* Haidy recognized her sorority for influencing how she came to identify herself in college:

> By joining the org, it made me feel more assertive not just of myself as a woman but being a *Oaxaqueña* that is getting a higher education. I feel like it was a comfortable space for me, and I was able to get a lot of sorority sisters involved with the traditions I practice at home. . . . I felt like within that space I was able to come out more I guess you could say and really promote my culture.

Having a safe space to disclose their private Indigenous identities was crucial for Haidy and Joy. The fact that their sororities were open to recognizing Latinx diversity was also critical in creating a supportive space—a space that moved beyond the monolithic representation of Latinxs and validated Indigenous cultures.

Theme 3: Tensions with Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-Based Campus Organizations

The exposure to affirming college courses and validating faculty particularly in Anthropology and Chicanx Studies was central to the testimonies of all the participants. Additionally, about half of the participants recognized the importance of supportive Chicanx/Latinx organizations on campus in fostering their motivations for coming out as Indigenous. Nevertheless, the presence of these supportive spaces was not reflective of all Chicanx/Latinx-focused courses or campus organizations. The absence of Indigenous representation in specifically Chicanx Studies classes and Chicanx/Latinx campus organizations arose as a common theme among several participants.

Nicolás (2012) and Sánchez-Lopez (2012) began to explore the complicated relationship between Indigenous Mexican and Chicanx students. Nicolás briefly proposed that Chicanx Studies too often romanticizes Indigenous people and does not adequately critique *indigenismo* practices that glorify an Indian pre-Columbian past. Nicolás also drew on the work of Davis (2001) to explain that "indigenous immigrants like Zapotecs, Yaquis, Kanjobals, and Mixtecs

struggle to defend their distinctive identities within a hegimonically Mexican/Chicano popular culture" (p. 20). In his essay titled, "Oaxacalifornia in Califaztlán: Decolonizing the Indigenous Ideas," in the FIOB's quarterly magazine, Sánchez-Lopez addressed the discrimination experienced by Indigenous migrants from Chicanxs. He described various occasions where Indigenous migrants are questioned by Chicanxs for not dressing like Indigenous people (*vestirse como indígenas*). Urrieta (2017) described this questioning of Indigenous authenticity as a form of symbolic violence "taken up freely and without solicitation by non-Indigenous people" (p. 7). To that end, I delve deeper into the critiques of these authors and aim to further understand the Indigenous/mestizo paradox brought forth by the political imaginary of Chicanxs in the United States.

Aztec-Centric and Pre-Columbian Curricula

A number of scholars have argued that in an attempt to retaliate against Anglo aggressions and negative portrayals of Mexican Americans, the Chicano movement drew from Mexican nationalism which romanticized the glories of the pre-Columbian Aztec or Mexica empire (Alberto, 2012; Barrenechea & Moertl, 2013; Castellanos et al., 2012; Pulido, 2017; Urrieta, 2012). As a result, Chicanx connections to Mexico relied heavily on reclaiming Mesoamerican Aztec ancestry to provide a direct link to an ancient Indigenous past (Alberto, 2012, 2016; Urrieta, 2012). Alberto (2016) argued that the selective celebration of an Indigenous ancestry and "forging of Chicano history, culture, and identity steeped in pre-Columbian aesthetics" (p. 108) permeated every aspect of Chicano political life and "remains a vibrant component of contemporary Chicano identity" (p. 108). The movement's heavy association with Mesoamerican Aztec ancestry, in turn, ignored present day Indigenous peoples and the colonial history of Mexican nationalism (Alberto, 2012). On these grounds, Alberto (2012) suggested that

Chicanx Studies as a discipline has historically focused on ancient civilizations and the selective appropriation of Aztec culture in formulating a Chicanx identity.

Along these same lines, some participants in this study described their Chicanx Studies courses as Aztec-centric and focused on a pre-Columbian past rather than an Indigenous present. As a first-year student, María enrolled in a Chicanx Studies course with the hopes of learning more about Mexican and Mexican American history. Initially, María appreciated her Chicanx Studies classes as she "learned and understood elements about [herself] growing up in the US" and consequently decided to major in Chicanx Studies. For the first time in an academic setting, María was exposed to Indigenous histories in her Chicanx Studies classes. Gradually, however, she realized these histories were limited to a pre-Columbian past that was not reflective of present-day Indigenous communities like her own:

> It was really cool to learn about this past. Unfortunately, that's all I got was the past. This glorified past and in seeking to learn more about the present and the reality that I was seeing and that I was a part of, I didn't find it in any of these classes. It was about *curanderismo* from the ancestral way, about the folklore, about the Day of the Dead. I was thinking, wait what's going on? I couldn't find it there.

The focus on pre-Columbian Indigenous civilizations left María yearning to learn more about the present histories and struggles of Indigenous Mexican communities. María recognized that the absence of current Indigenous histories and the curricular spotlight on pre-Columbian Indigenous civilizations led many students to believe Indigenous communities no longer existed. She also wanted to learn about other Indigenous groups, as she exclaimed, "It's not just about the Aztec, Mexica way or the Nahua way!"

N'dii Kanu also expressed similar frustrations about his Chicanx Studies classes. While this was the first time N'dii Kanu saw Indigenous people represented in the classroom, he had trouble making sense of his own Indigeneity in relationship to Chicanx Studies' pre-Columbian expressions of Indigeneity:

> I started taking a few Chicano classes and they were talking about Aztec and pre-Hispanic people and all the other ethnicities that lived prior to the invasion of the Spaniards so during that time I was always trying to find what was the identity of these people and what is the identity of my native household. I would ask my parents, "Are we Aztec?" Basically, that was my question. Are we Aztec? I know we're not descended from Spaniards but what are we?

Growing up N'dii Kanu recognized that he was different than his mestizo Mexican peers, and in school these Chicanx Studies courses reminded him of that difference. These classes, however, only portrayed a single pre-Columbian Aztec version of Indigeneity and one that did not include N'dii Kanu's Ñuu Savi heritage. Consequently, N'dii Kanu developed a frustration with "Chicano mentality," which he described as "Aztec-centric and just one culture-centric":

> I started hating it because there's more to our identity. . . . I started seeing other students, they were confused. Everyone was calling themselves, "Oh I'm Aztec too!" and I'm like no you're not Aztec, you're from Oaxaca, you're from Guerrero, you're from Michoacán. There are other groups that you belong to. Maybe part of that influenced me. I just got tired of seeing the same lies perpetuated to the community.

N'dii Kanu and María's frustrations with their Chicano curriculum stem from nationalist ethno-racial structures of Indigeneity that have historically focused on the Aztecs as the sole Indigenous heritage of Mexican mestizos and Chicanxs (Urrieta, 2017). Both I. M. García (1997)

and Urrieta (2013, 2017) point out that Chicanismo from the 1960s and 1970s was heavily influenced by Mexican nationalism, which romanticized the glories of the Aztec empire in attempt to "retaliate Anglo aggressions and to counter negative portrayals of a savage past" (Urrieta, 2013, p. 330). Furthermore, the curricular focus on ancient Indigenous civilizations in N'dii Kanu and María's Chicanx Studies courses reduced Indigenous people to subjects of the past and not actual existing societies (Gibler, 2005).

Indigenous Mexican Student Perspectives About Chicanx Indigeneity and *Mestizaje*

In line with the critiques about their Chicanx Studies curricula, several participants articulated their difficulties understanding Chicanx identification and their frustrations about Chicanxs adopting Indigenous identities. None of the participants considered themselves Chicanxs and most were clear about distinguishing themselves from Chicanx mestizos who, to borrow Alberto's (2012) definition, identified as Indigenous but celebrated or claimed a type of recovered Indigeneity. Alberto (2012) also makes the distinction between Chicanas and Indigenous Latinxs: "while Chicanas might have a distant connection to Indigenous people, they are not themselves Indigenous but mestizas, people of mixed ethnic and cultural heritage with a unique hybrid history and identity" (p. 41). Urrieta (2012) adds that Chicanxs are of "deculturalized Indigenous descent" (p. 331) given the colonial history that forced Indigenous families and communities to lose their languages and traditional ways of being.

It is important to point out that *mestizaje* in the Chicanx context has been central to challenging racial, ethnic, sexual, and class assimilation in the United States. Anzaldúa's creation of a "new mestiza consciousness" served as a bridge between Indigeneity and Mexican migrants in the United States (R. D. Hernández, 2018) and aimed at dismantling colonial legacies that positioned Indigenous people as inferior to Europeans. Moreover, in a U.S. context, *mestizaje*

serves as an identity that resists repressive racial categorization and asserts an Indigeneity that has historically been erased. Still, what *mestizaje* represents in U.S. Chicanx/Latinx contexts is different from how it is used in Latin America (Pérez-Torres, 2012) and, more importantly, how it is interpreted by Indigenous Latinxs in the United States.

Several participants expressed frustrations about Chicanx and Latinx organizations on campus. Joy recalled not wanting to live in her university's Latinx-themed residential hall because she knew as an Indigenous person she would "feel out of place" in a predominantly Chicanx space. Similar to her childhood experiences, Joy had difficulty connecting to the broader Chicanx/Latinx community on campus:

> I was never really part of anything just because I never really identified with anything like that, like the Chicano movement. I respect it and I understand the movement but that was movement that we Indigenous people were not a part of. We are still discriminated from that movement. I've never identified as Chicana or things like that you know with the whole movement so it was hard. The Chicano programs [in college] were heavy *Mechistas* and I already felt out of place there too so I didn't really get involved.

Despite sharing several similarities with her peers, she could not identify as Chicana given the exclusion of present-day Indigenous communities she witnessed in Chicanx spaces on campus. Moreover, the idea of feeling different than her mestizo Latinx peers during her childhood continued to play a prominent role in college as she attempted to interact with Chicanxs and Latinxs. This was a similar case for Ánima, who despite having generally positive experiences within MEChA, recognized a disconnect between her Chicanx peers and her own experiences as a Ñuu Savi woman:

> I think there were some moments even including readings that I didn't feel I connected with the Chicano writers and stuff like that. I couldn't feel connected to some of the work, which later I became aware that my experiences are different that the Chicano experience to a certain extent. I feel at least from my experience with the Chicano community it's more like Mexicans have the same struggle, they are the same, in which they are not. It's not the same thing. It was been a challenge to a certain extent, of course being in those spaces.

Clara too had difficulties identifying with Chicanxs and questioned the inclusion of Indigenous people within the Chicanx spaces on campus:

> The idea of Chicano-ness or that movement, I never identified with and I always feel a little weird about it because I feel like I don't know much about it but I also don't know how much that movement has incorporated indigenous communities as part of their group or the people they're trying to advocate for in a very intentional way, I don't know. I don't feel . . . I feel disconnected from it to be honest, I do.

Likewise, Libi attempted to join MEChA but quickly realized that she did not fit in:

> I gave it try but I didn't feel like I belonged there because everybody was talking about the Aztec but Aztecs is not all . . . that was my thing. Aztec is not everything! They did, they embraced more los Aztecas. . . . People calling themselves [Chicano] because they were born here and their parents from Mexico. I didn't consider myself Chicana either or Latina.

When Ocho Movimiento entered college, he was eager to make connections with other students from similar backgrounds and consequently joined MEChA at his campus. Although his experience in MEChA was generally a positive one, he acknowledged that it was difficult to

share his perspectives within the organization. He described many MEChA members as preoccupied with defining their identities and making connections to their lost Indigenous heritages. While Ocho Movimiento respected their explorative process, he was urgently concerned with addressing present day Indigenous Mexican struggles like those in his own Ñuu Savi community. María also referred to her Chicanx peers as being on a very different process of identity development than her own—one that was focused on making ties to a disconnected Indigenous history. Having a strong connection to her own Indigeneity since childhood, it was difficult to make connections with her Chicanx classmates, particularly those that sought and created pan-Indigenous or Aztec-centric representations of identity:

> That's something that I would also see like Chicanos who wanted to identify more with their Indigeneity but didn't have a connection with Mexico would absorb the Native American Indigeneity, which is different. I could see that. . . . I can't say confused is a correct word . . . but people who were really going through this identity crisis wanted something and they started to develop this pan identity belief. I recognize we are all brothers and sisters but there are over 50 worlds within Mexico. I think 68 worlds all with different worldviews. It's not just the Aztec or Mexica way or Nahua way!

María like N'dii Kanu was critical of her Chicanx peers' displays of Indigeneity, which she noted were rooted in pre-Columbian Aztec heritage. She also expressed her frustrations with representations of Chicanx identity that reduced cultural, linguistic, and historical differences among Indigenous communities into a single pan-Indigenous identity.

Vicki also discussed her complicated experience in MEChA and with her Chicanx peers. Vicki found herself in an unsupportive space that was reluctant to validate non-Aztec Indigenous identities and present-day struggles. Vicki joined MEChA in her first year and quickly took on a

leadership role where she coordinated educational programming for the organization. In her second year, Vicki began to explore creative ways to incorporate programming related to her Ñuu Savi community. On one occasion, Vicki suggested screening a documentary about the impact of agricultural policies on Indigenous communities in Mexico but was met with resistance from the MEChA president who quickly dismissed her proposal. In her words:

> I felt like my perspective and my ideas were not important. . . . I felt terrible because within a minute of the trailer playing he's like can we please move on from this. I don't think we have time. I don't think it's a priority right now. But the thing is the film is very important to me because it was about something that directly impacted my family and impacted our village in the way that all the men have left. The way that my mom talks to be about it now, the village . . . there is only grandparents and children left because all of the adults left. I don't know, that felt really nasty to me too so I removed myself from MEChA and removed myself from the [Chicanx] *comunidad* in general. After that I realized that in *comunidad* that I was never going to have the voice that I wanted to or impact that I wanted to have for my community.

While the purpose of Vicki's film screening meant to shed light on present day Indigenous struggles, it was not perceived as a priority for the organization. The MEChA president's disregard for her proposal was incredibly painful for Vicki and influenced her decision to leave the organization. Vicki felt her Indigenous identity was being disregarded; she explained, "I cried a lot because it was a revealing moment where the reason that I have not been able to fit into the [Chicanx] *comunidad* ever was because my complete identity was never reflected."

In addition to this incident, Vicki recounted interactions and microaggressions that further amplified the differences between her Indigenous identity and that of her Chicanx/mestizo peers:

> This Latina girl who came up to me and said, "Wow, I wish I was like you. I wish that I knew where my family was from. . . . I wish that I was an *india* so I also knew where my family was from." It felt very nasty and I felt really poorly after that because my whole life I'd gone feeling like I didn't belong anywhere and even then she was making it seem, I don't know, it was really weird.

This student's comment, although possibly well intentioned, once again disregarded Vicki's Indigeneity. The oversimplification of Indigenous heritage as knowing where you are from dismissed the historical and colonial implications faced by Indigenous peoples who continually resist to maintain their languages, knowledges, and traditions. Consequently, Vicki found it difficult to build relationships with Chicanx peers that dismissed present day Indigenous struggles but simultaneously coveted and romanticized her Indigenous heritage.

Vicki's experiences are deeply tied to the other participants' observations about Chicanx Indigeneity like María who expressed concerns about feeling romanticized by her Chicanx peers for being a Nahua Indigenous woman. As a first-year student, she was actually advised by an Indigenous Mexican upperclassman not to join MEChA: "He basically told me, they are just going to glorify you . . . who you are because they want to be you in a sense. They want to uphold something you are and they are not."

Throughout their interviews, participants discussed the divide between their own Indigenous identities and the representation of Chicanx identity on campus. While there are many factors that connect Chicanxs to Indigenous communities, participants noted there were

important differences between the two. Clara referred to her Indigenous identity as "innate" and "automatic" because of her upbringing and relationship with her hometown in Oaxaca—unlike her Chicanx peers searching for their Indigenous past. Thus, as Indigenous people who already had close ties to their Indigeneity, their peers' Chicanx politicization and self-realization was in many ways not relatable. Clara's desire, instead, was to address the struggles of present-day Indigenous people—issues she did not see represented during her experiences in the Chicanx spaces.

Similarly, María was intentional about distinguishing the experiences of Indigenous people from those of Mexican mestizos and Chicanxs, including her own:

> There are things that we can all definitely connect on. There's a national Mexicano identity and folklore that we share in common that connects us but there are still things that may seem again from this imagined connection that this is all Mexicanos but I think it's not the same for everyone. There is a difference between an Indigenous person and a Mexicano who maybe acknowledges their indigenous heritage but came to acknowledge it as an adult versus someone who grew up very much aware of this indigenous identity is acknowledging that things happened or things are different.

Moreover, María argued that growing up Indigenous meant dealing differently with coloniality and cultural genocide in comparison to mestizo Chicanxs who often did learn about these concepts until they were typically of college age. For María, dealing with coloniality meant experiencing first-hand anti-Indigenous discrimination from her mestizo classmates who bullied her for having darker skin and Indigenous features. The idea that these same classmates could then turn around and celebrate and reclaim their Indigeneity by identifying as Chicanxs was troubling for María:

> I couldn't take off my skin and become somebody else so those same peers who made fun of me have grown up now and are proud to be indigenous with their mainstream mestizo image and there's this claim now that "I'm indigenous, I'm reclaiming this and this was taken from us and this anger of how it was taken." I understand that but I also understand that as an adult that maybe this is an imagined hurt because growing up they didn't feel that discrimination that I felt or that even themselves made me feel.

In addition to cultural practices and language, experiencing and resisting anti-Indigenous discrimination since childhood was central to how María defined her Indigenous identity. Although today she is very proud of her Nahua heritage, she argued that the pain and trauma from her childhood could not be separated from her Indigeneity. With that said, María argued that mestizos identifying as Chicanxs at a later age were able to bypass the anti-Indigenous traumas rooted in her childhood. Where at one point she concealed her Indigeneity as a form of protection from her mestizo peers, Chicanxs could easily boast their newfound Aztec heritage without experiencing anti-Indigenous discrimination first-hand (it is also possible that they are perpetrators of anti-Indigenous sentiments in their past). María recognized the importance of the Chicano movement in empowering an entire community but noted that this process often disempowered others. Without the lived experiences of growing up Indigenous and being connected to an Indigenous community, María felt Chicanx Indigeneity was in many ways an appropriated identity:

> I do feel like it's an appropriated identity. I totally understand people seeking who they are in their identity and recognizing and validating that the importance of it but there are differences. I think people don't recognize there are elements and there's is a past but are you really living indigenous reality as it is or as you're imagining it is because then again

> they have nothing to go off of. There are lots of circles, environments which Chicano communities where you hear this event and bring up this element this particular history or trait of a culture but it's a pan-identity.

María's interpretation of Chicanx Indigenous identity as appropriated is linked to other participants' critiques about pan-Indigeneity. Both N'dii Kanu and BitterQueer agreed that colonial understandings of Indigeneity allowed for a simplified stereotypical version of what it meant to be Indigenous—something they frequently witnessed within Chicanx spaces on campus. BitterQueer was very explicit in describing a highly aesthetic representation of pan-Indigenous identity in the Chicanx community:

> I see that too when people wear their *huaraches* and the *huipil* and they have long hair and like men that put it in a *trenza* but they are still misogynistic pieces of s***. And they have their ears pierced and they wear those *huichol* flower earrings and those big ass *huichol* beaded necklaces and they wear a bandana and they have a *morral* and they have these pants and they talk about Quetzalcoatl and they're so full of s*** who are playing Indian. That's what a lot of people do in the Chicano movement. Everybody wants to play Indian. Everyone wants to play the noble Mexica, the Mexica warrior bull s***, which is really detrimental to everybody else who is actually struggling to find their Indigenous communities.

To BitterQueer, "playing Indian" meant performing an identity but not actually connecting or doing work for Indigenous communities. They also described this performative identity as "ugly colonial ways of being" since it draws from multiple Indigenous groups to create an amalgamated aesthetic that continues to ignore current Indigenous struggles:

> It's like a free for all. Like Oh! are you becoming conscious that you're not a Hispanic? Go ahead and just pick and choose. I'll take this from the *Purepechas* and I'll take this from . . . just pick and choose. . . . I'll just take these *huaraches* and pretend I'm *Tarahumara* and I'm going to take these earrings and I'm going to be a *huichol*. And I understand that all the s*** from our different communities is beautiful because we make gorgeous ass s*** and that's why are White people steal our style all the time. There's nothing wrong with wearing it and feeling beautiful and feeling cute and feeling more connected. The problem is when we get these egos that I'm better than you because I'm more decolonized and playing Indian. Most of the people who do this are not involved in Indigenous communities or organizing for Indigenous communities.

Deloria's (1998) term playing Indian describes the commodification and appropriation of American Indian culture, which allows Whites to invent and perform "Indianness" on their own terms. In many ways, Chicanxs' efforts to claim their Indigenous ancestry were a response to the racialization and exclusion they faced in the United States. Nevertheless, both BitterQueer and María are explicit in describing these attempts as appropriative. These critiques remind us of the complexity of defining Indigeneity in different contexts and how traditional Chicanx perspectives are being challenged by contemporary Indigenous Mexican migrants in the United States.

Responding to Indigenous Reductionism and Exclusion in Chicanx Spaces

As first-generation college students, the participants in this study entered Chicanx/Latinx spaces in search of community and representation. While many found the validation they were searching for, a number of participants described their discontent with predominantly Chicanx spaces and Chicanx Studies courses. Still, the lack of Indigenous representation prompted

participants to become more vocal about their own Indigenous identities and find alternative spaces on campus outside the Chicanx/Latinx community. In many ways, exploring and developing pride in their Indigenous identity can be seen response to the reductionism and exclusion they faced in Chicanx spaces. Both Nicolás (2012) and González (2018) associate Indigenous Mexican students developing pride in their Indigenous identity as a result of the discrimination they received. Along these same lines, Rumbaut (2008) describes "reactive ethnicity" as a response to "perceived threats, persecution, discrimination, and exclusion" (p. 3) that often leads to ethnic group solidarity and political mobilization.

N'dii Kanu, for instance, expressed his frustration with the Aztec-centric curricula in his Chicanx Studies classes. As a Ñuu Savi person, he expected his culture and community to be part of class conversations about Indigenous history. The lack of representation in the classroom, however, prompted N'dii Kanu to search for answers at home from his parents:

> My mom said, "Well, we're Mixteco." That's what she said and from that point on I just started searching more about Mixtecos. The way they live, the way they talk. That's when I found out I was Mixteco, that is my identity. Finding out there was other people in Mexico that were getting confused with being Aztec and finally finding out that I was Mixteco!

This was a defining moment for N'dii Kanu. Interestingly enough, the lack of representation in his Chicanx Studies classes led him to find ways to publicly and intentionally articulate his Indigenous identity as a Ñuu Savi in his classes and predominantly Chicanx spaces on campus. N'dii Kanu joined MEChA during college and quickly realized the importance of distinguishing himself from his Chicanx and mestizo peers:

> My strategy was every time we were having conversations I would mention that I was Mixteco. "I'm [N'dii Kanu] and I'm Mixteco." When people would say Chicano, Azteca, I'd raise my hand and say, "Sorry, I'm Mixteco." That got other students to question, "Why are you always saying that you are Mixteco? Why are you always saying something else?" Which was an opportunity for me to talk more about my culture, my identity . . . it influenced students to think there's more than just this!

Given his past experiences in his Chicanx Studies classes, he took it upon himself to educate his peers about the Ñuu Savi community. As part of MEChA, N'dii Kanu was even able to provide workshops about Indigenous groups in Mexico, including Oaxaqueño cultural practices. N'dii Kanu's vocal and public affirmation of his Ñuu Savi identity also led other Indigenous Ñuu Savi, Zapotec, and Triqui students to create their own organization on campus. Although having to constantly identify himself as an Indigenous person was sometimes a challenge, N'dii Kanu believed it was well worth it. He elaborated, "Just getting people to understand there's more to it. It was fun. It was challenging but I had fun because it helped a lot of students."

Along these same lines, Vicki took steps to educate her mestizo and non-Indigenous classmates as a residential advisor. After having a very negative experience in MEChA were she felt dismissed, she used her platform as a resident advisor to publicly affirm her Indigeneity and create greater awareness within the residential community on her campus:

> I was able to bring in narratives about Oaxacan people and Indigenous people from all of southern Mexico and Guatemala and be able to talk about them openly without feeling like I was imposing. I think that I got really good reception from the community but people also . . . they didn't understand that when you grow up within a Mexican

> community that there is very active anti-Indigenous sentiment when *oaxaquita* or *indio* and all these terms are used as a derogatory term.

With the ability to develop residential programming, Vicki shed light on present Indigenous Mexican students and brought awareness to the realities of anti-Indigenous discrimination.

Other participants expressed the urgency of being more public with their Indigeneity as a result of the exclusion they experienced in their classes and campus organizations. Ocho Movimiento, for instance, described his disappointment with several of his college classes, including those in Chicanx Studies:

> The way that the history is told has always meant to erase the Indian, the Indigenous person. I've been, for example, in classes where they speak about poor communities, of oppressed communities, but they never speak about Indigenous communities. They always like to say underrepresented, oppressed communities, segregated communities . . . always making it sound like something negative. . . . The Indigenous is erased, it is given a negative image. I have been in classes where the entire existence of Indigenous communities is completely denied.

The fact that Indigenous peoples were excluded from the conversation about oppressed communities prompted Ocho Movimiento to consciously incorporate that discussion into his academic work. For his senior thesis, Ocho Movimiento wrote about the migration patterns of Indigenous Oaxacan communities in the United States because as he explained:

> We gain a little bit of courage so that we can speak up in public and be able to defend who we are! . . . It's where we gather courage and wherever we go we carry the Indigenous in front. Always saying wherever we go, we say we are Mixtecos.

Just like Ocho Movimiento, María's frustrations with pre-Columbian Indigenous representations motivated her to become more vocal about her Indigenous Nahua heritage, in both her Chicanx Studies and Anthropology courses. In an attempt to educate her peers, she became intentional about centering her Nahua community in class assignments. Furthermore, María began to associate the pursuit of higher education with a responsibility to her Nahua community. Currently, María's master's thesis focuses on Nahuatl language revitalization efforts in Mexico.

Finding and Creating Alternative Spaces On and Off Campus

Vicki and Ocho Movimiento's difficult experiences in MEChA led them to pursue other validating spaces on campus. In her second year of college, Vicki, joined a pre-medicine organization for Native American students. Being able to openly talk about generational trauma and healing was incredibly validating for Vicki, as she explained:

> We have a connection to each other and other native positions . . . we talk about healing like *temascal* and all the different healings that we had and I think that at least there we were able to talk more genuinely and more openly about the things I had gone through as a child . . . the remedies that my mother had used. It felt a lot more like people cared about you and they cared about what I had to say than in [the Chicanx] *comunidad*.

María also found a greater connection with the Native American community on her campus when she joined the Native American Student Association. She immediately took on a leadership role upon joining and became involved with the movement to change the mascot at her university.

After Ocho Movimento's experience in MEChA at his community college, he and his two cousins decided to create their own campus organization for Indigenous Mexican students with the support of a Chicanx Studies professor:

> We were in MEChA a good while, but we couldn't find the space to talk about what we were thinking, our way of seeing the world, our identities because my cousins also have a strong identity at home since they speak Mixtec. . . . We decided to make an organization that would focus on Indigenous issues in community and we formed TAINH. We looked for a name that's an acronym but also in Mixtec it means "relative." . . . That's how we created the organization, our constitution, and everything. We did this to talk about Indigenous struggles in Mexico. We also created projects with the Kumiai in Baja. We were an important organization because Indigenous students that were doing work to support Indigenous communities on the other side of the border founded it.

As Ocho Movimiento pointed out, *TAINH* is a word in Tu'un Savi/Mixtec that means *pariente* [relative] and an acronym for *Trabajando en Apoyo por la Igualdad de Nuestros Hermanxs* [Working in Support of the Equality of our Siblings]. In addition to the lack of representation of Indigenous communities within his school's MEChA, Ocho Movimiento was conscious of the negative image often associated with Indigenous people. For this reason, *TAINH* was critical in creating greater visibility on campus. *TAINH* was a turning point in his life where he gained the strength to become more public about his Indigenous identity and community. He described, "*Yo creo que aquí es donde agarro un poco de valor para hablar más en público y poder defended quiénes somos*" ["I think it is here where I gathered some courage to speak more in public and defend who we are"].

Once Ocho Movimiento transferred to a 4-year university, he continued to seek spaces on campus that connected other Indigenous Mexican students. Within broader Latinx and Chicanx spaces, he and several Indigenous peers became intentional about identifying themselves as Ñuu Savi and Zapotec rather than Mexican. In many ways, Ocho Movimiento described this as positive shift that exposed his classmates to Indigenous students and "little by little they begin to recognize those on campus that are Indigenous and they call us as such, they don't call us Mexicans or Latinos anymore."

Ánima also noted the importance of creating spaces outside campus that focused on Indigenous communities and more importantly, Indigenous leadership. As one of the organizers for the Oaxaqueño Youth Encuentro (OYE), she recognized the uniqueness of creating an all Indigenous space, "You have similarities, you have a stronger bond, and I can say that because of OYE the environment and the interactions between ourselves is so much different than other spaces." The OYE is a statewide youth conference designed for Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous youth from Oaxaca, typically from Ñuu Savi, Zapotec, Triqui, and Chatino communities. In contrast to her experiences within Chicanx organizing spaces where she found it difficult to be heard, the OYE represented a supportive space that intentionally centered on Indigenous knowledges.

Theme 4: The Urgency for Public Indigeneity

Even though participants did not publicly identify as Indigenous when they were younger, it became an important part of their politicization and claim of their Indigeneity once they reached college, whether it was a positive or negative experience that triggered that public affirmation. Nicolás (2012) found that college students were more likely to identify as Oaxaqueño or Zapotec, while those that did not go to college were more likely to identify

themselves territorially (based on hometown in Mexico). This does not mean, however, that Indigenous students who do not go to college do not develop an Indigenous identity. Instead, she posits that "for Zapotec youth who are the first in their families and pueblo to go to college, higher education plays a critical role in their political consciousness as Indigenous" (Nicolás, 2012, p. 88).

In addition to developing their political consciousness, I argue that the participants' public declaration as Indigenous is a direct challenge to coloniality. Publicly identifying as Indigenous, particularly, within mestizo Mexican/Chicanx/Latinx spaces, disrupts monolithic images of Latinidad and problematizes Latinx categories of identification. Alberto (2012) contends that,

> when a Latinx speaks their Indigeneity, it becomes a means of critiquing race and ethnicity as formulated by a dominant ethnocentric culture but also these declarations become a powerful tool to unsettle mainstream Chicanx and other Latinx cultures that have their own hegemonic power. (p. 252)

Moreover, the participants' testimonies indicate a level of urgency in transitioning from a private to public Indigenous identity. María, Joy, N'dii Kanu, and Ocho Movimiento expressed disappointment with the representation of Indigenous people in their classes. While in some ways, the fact that Indigenous people were a topic of discussion was exciting and validating, they quickly realized these discussions were limited to pre-Columbian Indigenous history and not the present-day realities of their own Indigenous communities. The reduction of Indigenous people to subjects of the past was a call to action for these participants. Publicly declaring their Indigenous identity to their faculty and peers challenged the notion that Indigenous people only existed in the past. As youth, María, Vicki, and Joy described feeling afraid to share their

Indigenous identity with their peers, mainly because they did not want to be name called or teased for being Indigenous. Nevertheless, as college students, the urgency to challenge inaccurate representations of Indigenous people disrupted their original coping strategies for keeping their Indigeneity private. As Ocho Movimiento so eloquently described, "*aquí es donde agarramos valor y donde sea que vamos donde sea ahora siempre es lo indígena por en frente. Entonces siempre decimos que . . . donde quiera que voy, decimos que somos mixtecos*" ["here is where we gather courage and wherever we go now the Indigenous is in front always. So we always say . . . wherever I go, we say we are Mixtecos"].

Creating Awareness on Campus

Gathering strength and declaring their Indigeneity, as Ocho Movimiento described, is indeed an act of resistance that challenges coloniality. In addition to identifying and introducing themselves as Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, or Nahua in mestizo and non-Indigenous spaces, these participants have taken it a step further. Several participants merged their personal experiences and passions with their academics thus creating greater Indigenous visibility within their disciplines. María and Clara are both emerging Indigenous scholars pursuing graduate degrees. María's work addresses the Nahua language revitalization efforts in Guerrero, Mexico while Clara examines the role of Zapotec philharmonic bands in the Los Angeles area.

To reclaim and publicly declare their Indigeneity, participants also generated awareness on campus about Indigenous Mexican communities. As part of MEChA, N'dii Kanu created programming to educate his Chicanx peers about Oaxaqueño Indigenous histories. As a resident advisor, Vicki created a space to have conversations about anti-Indigenous discrimination. Joy's senior recital was a synthesis of Western European and Zapotec musical traditions—something she never imagined doing at the start of her undergraduate journey. Prior to college, Joy

described keeping her "music worlds apart." In school, she never told her teachers she was in her community's philharmonic band:

> I never told them I was part of a band just because I think it was a lot of factors. One because the two systems of teacher were very different and two, because I feared that the Western world wouldn't accept my Indigenous music . . . not only accept it but they would not see it as a high caliber thing because a lot of people when they think of Indigenous well you know they think less of you and I always was scared that they'd think less of our music. . . . I think it was always that fear of being rejected or not accepted. Also that fear that they wouldn't give my Indigenous music the credit that it deserves.

At a certain point in her educational trajectory, however, Joy could not keep her musical worlds separate. Again, the lack of recognition for her traditional Zapotec music pushed her to become more vocal in her college classes:

> At some point I started realizing that if we don't or if others don't come in to talk about it, nobody is going to talk about it so then at some point when I started identifying as Indigenous because it happened in my undergrad years it's I had that opportunity to at least expose our music world to the quote end quote Western music. So that's what I started doing in my courses. Whenever we had a project or research projects I would veer away from the Western music and focus on our music.

Subsequently, Joy's senior recital was a public celebration of her Zapotec musical identity—the first of its kind at her university.

Fostering Resistance in the Community

The participants' public declarations of Indigeneity also generated awareness and visibility beyond the college campus and influenced them to become agents of change in their communities. The majority were involved in community organizing and advocacy aimed at fostering ethnic pride in their local Indigenous communities. Again, several participants expressed the urgency in creating these spaces because as N'dii Kanu expressed, "There wasn't anybody else doing it." Seeing members of his family taken advantage of by mestizo Mexican landlords and employers elevated N'dii Kanu's urgency to speak out and begin organizing in his community.

The exposure to validating college courses and faculty inspired Libi and Ánima to work toward creating a Ñuu Savi community garden at a local nonprofit organization, Jardín Communitario Mixteco. They use the garden as a space to unite Ñuu Savi elders with younger community members to learn about traditional agricultural and medicinal practices. Libi explained:

> Mostly, it's just a space for them to practice their medicine remedies and show us how they plant this and use it for. Not just medicine but also vegetables. In 2017 we wanted to learn how to plant *las tres hermanas*, the three sisters, which is squash, corn, and beans. That's the system that they use in Oaxaca and many of the women have all the knowledge they have worked in the fields, they worked back in Oaxaca and just wanna create that space for the youth to also learn from them. It's just a way for that community to be involved and because the majority live in apartments and don't have the space to plant so we provide them with that space.

Ánima and N'dii Kanu are both organizers of the OYE. The OYE represents a powerful and validating space for youth to uphold the cultural wealth of their Oaxaqueño Indigenous community. The OYE also serves as a space to counter pre-Columbian and reductionist representations of Indigenous people that Ánima and N'dii Kanu witnessed in the broader mestizo Latinx and even Chicanx community. The work at the OYE has been transformational for Oaxaqueño youth and N'dii Kanu has seen first-hand how they have empowered Oaxaqueño youth:

> What I've seen, they get a sense of value like I am something! Because growing up as a native, as Indigenous, as a Mixteco, you get told you are nothing or that your language is nothing that your identity you should forget that you should just throw it [away]. Then you get to this conference everything is different. You learn that you as a native person you are beautiful! You are a native person, you should be proud! You should cherish it, how valuable it is and how great you are! This is the first time these students hear something positive about their culture about their language and they can connect it to their parents. They could say you know, my parents are great people, my ancestors are great people. They get this whole love for just being native for being indigenous for the first time in their lives! They get pride about being native.

Ánima and N'dii Kanu's public declaration of Indigeneity directly informs their work in the OYE. Their participation in the OYE is an act of resistance against the discrimination and stigmatization they faced in their youth. N'dii Kanu recounted a time he was invited to speak at a conference on behalf of the OYE. In his presentation, he discussed the importance of having pride for his Ñuu Savi identity. After his speech, a high school student approached him:

> I had a high school kid come to me and gave me a hug he told me, "You basically saved my life because I hated myself. I wanted to end my whole life because I wasn't proud about who I was. I wasn't happy with my own skin and I didn't want to be here but hearing you speaking about how much you love your skin and how much it's really worth you basically saved me!" So I think it's life changing for a lot of these students. It gives them a space to finally heal from all these scars that they have.

N'dii Kanu's comment sheds light on the politics of public Indigeneity, the power it can have on younger generations, and why this is all so urgent. Creating spaces to heal was at the core of Clara's community organizing as well. After receiving validation and support from her professors, Clara developed a community project with funds from her university. She developed a summer-long Zapotec language course for youth in her hometown of Lynwood, California. Prior to implementing the course, she spent time in Oaxaca speaking to Zapotec educators and gathering materials for the course. In many ways, Clara attributed her desire to create the course because of the courses she took in college and the relationships she established with her professors. Furthermore, like N'dii Kanu and Ánima, Clara's work was an act of resistance against the anti-Indigenous discrimination she faced in her youth:

> I wanted the opportunity for younger kids to be able to learn or be introduced to Zapoteco partly because I didn't have that and I don't know if it was because of the classes I was taking where I was like how Indigenous communities are treated or have been treated throughout history. I guess a lot of it did come from, I don't want kids to have pride or sense of formation of this Indigenous identity way later in life. It's something that could be useful to them or something that they are proud of but we just don't talk about it that way within our communities. We don't really don't talk about it.

As Clara declared her public Indigeneity, she recognized the urgency to create empowering spaces for youth so that they did not have to wait until they went to college to feel the validation she felt "way later in life." Clara also points out that there is an absence of ethnic pride in her community but instead, it is simply not a common topic of conversation, particularly within her own family:

> I don't want the message to be that we're not proud to be Indigenous because no, I do I think we are but I'm not sure how explicit we are about that. I don't know maybe some people do but at least in my personal family . . . close family, I don't feel like that was always a specific topic of conversation so I just want to kids to have that opportunity.

The participants' transition from private to public indigeneities was central to their subsequent work to make visible and validate their Indigenous communities both on and off campus. The politics of their public Indigeneity actively disrupted coloniality. In non-Indigenous and Latinx mestizo spaces their presence challenged Latinx categories of identification and colonial perceptions of Indigeneity (pre-Columbian and Aztec-centric). In their communities their public identification led to the creation of validating spaces for Indigenous community members.

Urrieta (2017) posits that the survival of Indigenous people,

> in all of our many and creative reinventions, innovations, and resurgences, including through the youth that are embracing and moving forward as Indigenous people even when they were not born in their family's ancestral communities and are denied Indigenous identities, is a testament to colonialities' incompleteness. (p. 7)

In this sense, the participants' declarations of public Indigeneity and their continual disruption of coloniality reminds us that the project of coloniality cannot succeed.

Outlook for Younger Indigenous Mexican Generations in the United States

The participants' community-based work and that of other Indigenous Mexican leaders has generated a growing movement toward creating greater representation and awareness about Indigenous migrant communities in the United States. Access to empowering spaces have encouraged participants to assert their public identities at a much younger age and well before college. While the role of higher education was instrumental in the majority of the participants' public declarations of Indigeneity, it may not necessarily hold the same significance for younger generations who already have access to spaces like the OYE, Tequio Youth Group, and philharmonic band. N'dii Kanu explained:

> I think there's a new wave of awakening. So far what I've been involved in, people are understanding that we're not just one . . . Chicano. I've seen it lately. . . . A lot of the kids that grew up in the movement like Tequio and OYE are going to college. A lot of the students I was working with in junior high they are in college now being advocates. I think they are leading the way and teaching people to do the same thing. It's really cool.

This was evident in the testimonies of the younger participants in this study who were affiliated with a village-based philharmonic band since childhood. Haidy, Santiago, and Chris associated the band with instilling sense of Oaxaqueño pride at a young age. In Santiago's words:

> I feel like it's been one of the best things that I've done because it's a tradition we have back in Oaxaca. Following that tradition I still kept my identity with them and showed people what kind of things we have back in Mexico or in Oaxaca and the culture. So that really shaped me too be proud of my identity, to be proud of my culture.

Santiago's comments highlight the empowering work that is being done within village-based bands in the Los Angeles region. As codirector of Banda Nueva Dinastía de Zoochila in Lynwood, California, Joy agreed that village-based bands were creating different realities for younger Indigenous generations:

> Keep in mind the generation now. It's a whole generation now! We are on our fourth or fifth generation of kids. Since 2001, and it's 2018 now! This whole new generation of kids are really interesting because my first generation I was the only one that grew up listening to *sones* and *jarabes* from my dad but these kids, this generation, they grew up listening to this music. The whole music world in LA has its own history and story. So not only are they more tied to it but they are more rooted within the Indigenous side.

In 2001, Joy was one of the only young people in her band. Now, Banda Nueva Dinastía is primarily comprised of youth as young as seven. Given her own experiences in college and uplifting her Zapotec heritage through music, as codirector, Joy is intentional about providing cultural context when she teaches music:

> We try to expose and teach people, not teach people but expose and make people aware that we are from an Indigenous community. We are not ashamed to say that. The name of the band is the name of our pueblo. The name is Banda Nueva Dinastía de Zoochila and then when people ask where is this and we say it's a pueblo from Oaxaca. And then the kids they are really in tune. It makes me so happy to see the kids. Our youngest kid in our band is 7 years old. These kids are not afraid to play their music or defend it or invite their friends to events and things like that and they share with their teachers. They wear it proudly.

Joy notes that her students are "not afraid" to share their music with classmates and teachers, which is in direct contrast to her own childhood experiences when she felt her music would be dismissed or ridiculed by teachers. What is noteworthy here is that Joy's students did not have to wait to reach college to reach these affirming realizations.

Along these same lines, Ánima credited her higher education journey as instrumental in forming her public Indigeneity. She elaborated, "I think that education has been really important for me . . . going to the university is where we found ourselves or defined ourselves as Indigenous or Oaxaqueño . . . it made that as an affirmation." This affirmation led her to joining the FIOB where she is currently the state-wide youth coordinator. In this role, she recognized that not every student has access to higher education and therefore, addressed the urgency to create validating spaces much earlier for Indigenous Mexican youth. Ánima explained, "I believe that it's important in the K-12 system, it's important for the youth to understand who they are in terms of their culture and who their family is and their history more than anything." While college played an important role in Ánima's own identity development, she took steps to create opportunities for validation and empowerment outside the institution to a much younger audience.

Conclusion

Overall, the participants in this study identified close ties to their Indigeneity since childhood. Indigenous languages, practices, and knowledges were experienced on a daily basis within their homes and local communities. Close ties to their families' communities of origin in Mexico were also key in establishing a connection to their Indigenous identities. Despite these strong and historical ties to their Indigeneity, at a very early age the participants perceived their Indigenous identities as private and exclusively practiced at home. Zero representations of

Indigenous Mexicans in the classroom and anti-Indigenous discrimination from their mestizo peers reinforced the idea that their Indigeneity was meant to be private.

Nevertheless, all participants experienced a dramatic shift in their public and private identification during college. College courses primarily in Chicanx Studies and Anthropology provided validating representations of their Indigenous communities. Additionally, some campus organizations created environments that fostered participants' public affirmation of their Indigenous identities. It is important to point out, however, that the exposure to Chicanx-based spaces on campus also forced participants to develop critical perspectives about Chicanx cultural production. For several participants, the lack of present-day Indigenous representation was reminiscent of their K-12 schooling experiences, which left them feeling excluded from the broader mestizo Mexican identity. Moreover, the hyper focus on pre-Columbian Aztec Indigeneity in Chicanx courses and organizations left little room to envision other types of Indigeneity—more specifically present-day Indigeneity. For this reason, participants were prompted to become vocal about their Indigenous identities as a way to prevent their erasure within mestizo dominant spaces. Participants like N'dii Kanu and Ocho Movimiento became more intentional about publicly and specifically identifying themselves as Ñuu Savi, which inspired the creation of organizations like TAINH that center on present-day Indigenous struggles and magnify the presence of Indigenous Mexican students on campus. Other participants responded by seeking or creating their own Indigenous centered spaces on campus. Interestingly, both Vicki and María found greater connections to Native American organizations after having negative experiences with MEChA.

What is important to point out here is that many participants sought Chicanx organizations and courses as a means to make connections on campus as these were the closest

representations of their communities. On one hand, participants recognized the importance of Chicanx identity in the United States and even attributed it to their own political formation and engagement in anti-racist struggles. Chicanx Studies courses, for instance, shed light on Mexico and Latin America's Indigenous history and validated participants within an academic setting—something that was entirely absent during their K-12 years.

On the other hand, however, some participants experienced unwelcoming Chicanx-based spaces that failed to build horizontal relationships with present-day Indigenous communities. Many participants critiqued their courses' sole focus on pre-Columbian Indigenous societies and the homogenization of different Indigenous histories, languages, and cultures. Participants also witnessed this homogenization of indigeneities among their Chicanx peers who in an attempt to resolve their mixed identity anxiety appropriated various Indigenous aesthetics and practices that were rooted in the past and divorced from present-day Indigenous communities. Ultimately, these difficult interactions with Chicanx peers pushed some participants to seek alternative spaces that were Indigenous or Native American centered and led. Others became more vocal and public about their Indigenous identities as a result of the erasure they witnessed in these Chicanx spaces.

Finally, the participants' transition from private to public Indigeneities was central to their subsequent work to make their Indigenous communities visible both on and off campus. Furthermore, the politics of their public Indigeneity actively disrupted coloniality. In non-Indigenous and Latinx mestizo spaces, their presence challenged Latinx categories of identification and colonial perceptions of Indigeneity (pre-Columbian and Aztec-centric). In their communities, their public identification led to the creation of validating spaces for Indigenous community members.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Discussion, Reflections, and Recommendations

This study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of higher education in the identity formation of Indigenous Mexican students?
2. How do Indigenous Mexican college students challenge or disrupt colonial perceptions of about Indigenous people on their college campus, within their communities?

What follows are discussions, reflections organized by themes, and recommendations based on the findings from this study.

Defining Indigeneity in Diaspora

Chacón (2017) suggests that the rise of contemporary Indigenous migrants from Mesoamerica to the United States has already led to a reconfiguring of Chicanx/Latinx understandings of Indigeneity that does not replicate nationalist and racialized tropes of Indigeneity. Rather than relying on nationalist or even colonial markers of Indigeneity like language and dress, scholars like Kearney (2000), Clark-Alfaro (1991), Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004), and Stephen (2007) have noted that Oaxacan migrants' identities are deeply rooted in their communities of origin in Mexico. Sánchez-López (2017) also points out that Indigenous identification among Oaxacan migrants is based on what they do for their community rather than on physical, biological, or linguistic traits.

Similar to these understandings of Indigeneity, the participants in this study expressed a deep connection to their family's hometown or community of origin. This connection was reinforced from a very early age in the home through cultural practices and participation in bands

and patron-saint celebrations and for some, trips to Mexico to visit their families. Community, familial, and cultural responsibilities were also essential components to their Indigenous identity. These responsibilities became more prominent as participants began to publicly affirm their Indigenous identities during college. Participants like María, Ocho Movimiento, and Clara began using their academic work as a platform to highlight and address their communities' struggles. After graduating from college, N'dii Kanu and Ánima applied their education toward creating supportive spaces for Indigenous Mexican youth at work and through community-based organizations. Moreover, the participants' commitment to their community is reflected in their urgency to challenge inaccurate representations of Indigenous people as was the case for Vicki's educational programming at her residence hall. Overall, the participants' definitions of Indigeneity were directly tied to supporting, validating, and centering their Indigenous communities both in the United States and in Mexico.

An important aspect to note is that language did not play a prominent role in the way participants defined their Indigenous identity. Unlike Mexican nationalist ethno-racial categorizations that use language as a marker for defining who is and is not Indigenous, the majority of participants did not perceive fluency in an Indigenous language as central to their Indigeneity. While many of them grew up among native language speakers, they recognized the historical implications for not being taught the language. Instead, their testimonios focused on their deep relationships to their family's communities of origin. These findings are consistent with previous research about younger Indigenous Mexican generations in the United States that envision their Indigeneity beyond language and dress (Mesinas & Pérez, 2016; Nicolás, 2012; Sánchez-López, 2017). In Nicolás's (2012) study, for example, speaking Zapoteco was not a major concern for her participants' Indigenous identity formation. She contends that language

should not be a determinant factor to define Indigeneity since "using a language as a proxy for Indigeneity relies on the false assumptions that identity remains constant and that one must speak the language to have a type of 'authenticity' that proves one is Indigenous" (Nicolás, 2012, p. 98). By challenging this Indigenous authenticity and moving away from nationalist structures for identification, the participants in this study are disrupting coloniality by establishing new definitions of what it means to be Indigenous, Oaxaqueño, Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, and Nahua in diaspora.

Private Versus Public Identities

As Alberto (2012) suggests in her work, participants in this study negotiated both public and private identities from a very early age. The majority of participants (10 of 12) lived in close-knit Indigenous ethnic enclaves in Southern California and those that grew up specifically in Los Angeles were engaged in cultural practices like their hometown's philharmonic band or patron saint celebration. These cultural and communal spaces were key in transmitting values and fostering Indigeneity. For those participants who did not grow up in a predominantly Indigenous community, their parents instilled in them a deep affiliation to their hometowns in Mexico. Anti-Indigenous discrimination and a lack of representation in school and the broader Latinx community, however, influenced most participants to keep their Indigenous identities private—in the home and local community.

It is important to point out that keeping a private identity does not mean all the participants felt ashamed or embarrassed about their Indigeneity. Joy, Clara, Ocho Movimiento and María all definitively expressed feeling pride in their respective Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, and Nahua identities since childhood. They were quick to note that they never felt ashamed of their identities. Instead, at young age they became conscious of their environment and negotiated

where it was and was not safe to identify as Indigenous. Their conscious efforts to conceal their Indigenous heritage, I argue, were not rooted in shame but rather as a method of protection and even a strategy for survival in hostile spaces. This negotiation of public and private identities is telling of the continual presence of coloniality within the Latinx/Mexican migrant community in the United States. In addition to the subtractive schooling practices experienced by migrant children in U.S. classrooms, Indigenous Mexican students are reminded of their otherness within dominant mestizo Mexican/Latinx spaces.

Nevertheless, as evidenced by their testimonios, all 12 participants attributed their college years as critical to developing their public Indigenous identity. The participants viewed college as the place where they reclaimed their Indigenous identities. College is often described "as a consciousness-raising experience" (Azmitia et al., 2008, p. 11), where the exposure to peers, coursework, and social spheres encourages students to examine their ethnic identities. Such was the case of the participants who were exposed to inclusive and supportive spaces that fostered their sense of ethnic pride, specifically, affirming courses, validating college faculty, and supportive campus organizations. Unlike the subtractive schooling practices during their K-12 education, the cultural aspects that set them apart from the mestizo identity turned into sources of academic and personal interest.

Taking courses in anthropology, Latin American studies, and Chicanx studies was the first time most participants saw their histories represented in an academic setting. These courses were incredibly validating for participants like Clara who described the representation of her Zapotec history in her Latin American social psychology class as "mind-blowing." Additionally, the faculty teaching these courses played a big part in validating students' experiences and supporting their desires to pursue projects and assignments focused on their own Indigenous

communities. Something worth noting is that none of the faculty described in this study were Indigenous Mexicans. Most were Chicanx or Latinx and, in one case, White. Nevertheless, they were able to impart their curriculum and pedagogy in a way that resonated with participants and influenced their subsequent positive self-identity and political activism. Considering the participants' experiences with validating courses and faculty, this study reveals how higher education served as a vehicle for public Indigenous affirmation. This study demonstrates the potential for faculty and courses to serve as sites for decolonization, despite existing within the highly colonial setting that is the institution of higher education.

Addressing Tensions Within Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-Based Campus Organizations

While only three participants actually enrolled in Chicanx Studies courses during college, nine of the 12 participants expressed critiques about Chicanx-dominant spaces on campus. Collectively, these nine participants described feeling unwelcomed in Chicanx Studies courses and Chicanx-based organizations, particularly MEChA, because their Indigenous communities were not represented. These critiques deserve closer attention to understand how and why Chicanx spaces can be unwelcoming to Indigenous Mexican students, whether intentionally or not.

The act of concealing an identity in educational spaces had lingering effects on the participants. Recalling childhood interactions with mestizo peers invoked painful memories for some. Feeling out of place in predominantly Mexican mestizo classrooms or communities and directly experiencing anti-Indigenous discrimination were memories participants carried with them into higher education and shaped how they navigated different college spaces. María and Vicki, for instance, were very conscious of the mistreatment they received as children from their mestizo classmates pertaining to their appearance and skin complexion. Consequently, when

they reached college, they made sense of their interactions with Chicanx classmates through this historical lens. Similarly, N'dii Kanu's early exposure to Chicanx Studies during high school set the tone for how he understood Chicanx Studies and MEChA at his university in Washington. It is important to acknowledge the participants' long-term experiences with mestizos and how this shaped their perceptions of Chicanx Studies at the institutional level.

Nine of the 12 participants made distinctions between their own Indigenous identities and that of Chicanxs. María referred to Chicanxs adopting Indigenous identities as a form of appropriation, and BitterQueer described their Chicanx classmates as "playing Indian" when they displayed superficial pan-Indigenous aesthetics while being disconnected to present day Indigenous communities. Clara described her Indigenous identity as "innate" and directly tied community of origin in Zoochila, Oaxaca. Overall, having close ties to their communities of origin differentiated them from their Chicanx peers who were seeking to recuperate an Indigenous heritage that had been severed as a result of colonialism. For this reason, the Chicanx politicization and self-realization occurring in their Chicanx Studies classes or MEChA meetings were not relatable. For some, this lack of relatability was also unwelcoming and even painful.

Vicki was hurt by the MEChA president's dismissal of her ideas, which felt like a continuation of her invisibility growing up in predominantly mestizo spaces. María was frustrated by the pre-Columbian focus of her Chicanx Studies classes and the lack of present-day Indigenous representation. As a Ñuu Savi person, N'dii Kanu grew to hate his Chicanx Studies classes because they were solely focused on Aztec history. Joy was made to feel "out of place" in Chicanx spaces on campus and for that reason chose not to become involved. It is important to take note of these experiences and the emotional toll they caused for many of the participants. The omission of non-Aztec groups, the focus on pre-Columbian histories, and the dismissal of

Indigenous voices could all be described as colonial microaggressions that invalidated the participants' identities and reminded them that they did not belong to the Chicanx/mestizo majority group.

Alberto (2016) argues that the continued presence of pre-Columbian Aztec history, culture, and iconography in Chicanx spaces, as described by the participants in this study, "reveals the centrality of Indigeneity" within Chicanxs' political identity formation (p. 107)—one that is steeped in pre-Columbian aesthetics and ancient Indigenous ancestry. Along these same lines, Sánchez-López (2017) suggests that Chicanxs' references to Indigenous people as their ancestors perpetuates their portrayal as only existing in the past. Consequently, the representation of Indigenous people as solely pre-Columbian further propelled participants in this study to publicly proclaim their Indigeneity as a way to dispel this idea that Indigenous people only existed in a distant past.

The participants' testimonios remind us of the complexity of *mestizaje* and the problematic it creates when applied to Indigenous Latinxs in the United States. Pérez-Torres (2012) proposes that if "*mestizaje* in Mexico represents a flight from the Indian, we might think of Chicana *mestizaje* as a race towards the Indian" (p. 16). The participants' narratives put these perspectives into question as they grapple with spaces in higher education that both celebrate and disregard their Indigeneity. The manifestation of both early 20th century nationalist *mestizaje* ideology mixed with newer understandings of Chicanx identity, like Anzaldúa's (1987) new mestiza consciousness, are reflected in the participants' testimonios. To this point, Chacón (2017) suggests Chicanxs in the United States engage with *mestizaje* as a way to challenge their colonial legacies and articulate a voice against racial, ethnic, sexual, and class assimilation. Still, Chacón urges us to think beyond the racial discourse in the United States and consider the

differences between *mestizaje* in the United States and Latin America. Although, Chicanx discourse and literature have articulated new ways to address racism, sexism, and homophobia in Chicanx communities in the United States, they have also homogenized "a rich multiplicity of languages and peoples in Mesoamerica in favor of a generic Indianness" (Chacón, 2017, p. 185) that privileges a U.S. brand of mestizo identity. Furthermore, she argues that the use of *mestizaje* in the United States is more about Chicanx/Latinx disenfranchisement and not about the solidarity and horizontal relationships with Indigenous communities of the south.

Along these same lines, Alberto (2012) suggests that even radical and counter-hegemonic narratives rooted in *mestizaje* that liberate many Chicanxs and Latinxs can actually feel oppressive for Indigenous Latinxs. This may explain why so many participants in this study struggled to make connections within Chicanx spaces and never identified as Chicanxs themselves. The participants' urgency to publicly affirm their Indigeneity, I argue, is a response to the pre-Columbian Indigenous focus often seen in Chicanx spaces.

Scholars like Alberto (2012), Pulido (2017), Urrieta (2017), Saldaña-Portillo (2001), and Chacón (2017) have critically written about the problem "of appropriating abstracted Indigeneity grounded in the past and divorced from its historical materialism" (Chacón, 2017, p. 188). Moreover, several scholars are problematizing Chicanxs' relationship with Mexican nationalist ethno-racial structures of Indigeneity (Urrieta, 2017) and their complicity in U.S. settler colonialism (Pulido, 2017). A growing number of scholars are discussing the impact of Mexican nationalism or *indigenismo* on the development of Chicanismo (Alberto, 2012; Blackwell et al., 2017; Pulido, 2017; Urrieta, 2017). While the Chicanx movement of the late 1960s and 1970s led to significant gains for Mexican American communities, Alberto (2012) argues that this empowerment occurred at the expense of Indigenous peoples. Understandably, to retaliate

against Anglo aggressions and negative portrayals of Mexican Americans, Chicanismo drew from Mexican nationalism that romanticized the glories of the pre-conquest Aztec empire (Urrieta, 2017).

There are also responses to these critiques that draw attention to misconceptions about concepts like Aztlán and *mestizaje*. R. D. Hernández (2018), for instance, explains that rather than the basis for a new Chicano nation-state, Aztlán is the spiritual return to self as first defined by Alurista. Some critics also argue that Anzaldúa's use of the term mestiza/o "forecloses the possibility of contemporary Indigenous practice, always relegating Indigeneity to some nebulous past that nevertheless influences individual personhood" (French, 2010, p. 2) Alternatively, French (2010) argues that Chicana feminists like Anzaldúa consciously used terms already available to them, like *mestizaje*, to challenge colonial perceptions and give them new meaning. According to French, Anzaldúa, for example, appropriates and refracts the term to create a new or decolonizing discourse about *mestizaje*. Furthermore, Anzaldúa traces the migration of *mestizaje* from the Mexican nationalist context to the U.S. borderland contexts, which gives the term new meaning (French, 2010). Anzaldúa's work has also been impressively explained and disassociated from the problematic ideologies of Vasconcelos and *la raza cósmica*. R. D. Hernández points out that Anzaldúa uses the new mestiza consciousness as a counter-discourse that embraces a return to the Indigenous—something that Vasconcelos sought to escape and leave in the pre-Columbian past.

In early 2019, a couple of blog articles quickly spread on social media and sparked a heated debate among various members in the Indigenous Mexican and Chicanx communities. J. Hernandez (2019) and Bautista (2019), both Zapotecs from Los Angeles, brought up important critiques about Chicanx Studies in relationship to Indigenous Mexican communities. Yet, the

online debate, I would argue, was not necessarily fruitful. Instead, it revolved around policing Indigeneity with both ends of the spectrum arguing about who can and cannot identify as Indigenous, including hurtful and reductive memes. J. Hernandez' and Bautista's narratives conveyed a level of pain and struggle related to growing up Indigenous within a predominantly mestizo community and how this is extended into Chicanx spaces. While I recognize that both authors described the Chicanx movement in a very simplistic way, their pain and frustration was quickly dismissed by Chicanxs on social media. Most responses by Chicanxs were concerned with the authors' overgeneralizations about Chicanx history rather than engaging with the authors' comments about exclusion and the homogenization of diverse Indigenous communities. The authors' frustration and even resentment towards Chicanxs resonated in many ways with some of the testimonios in this study.

Critiques about Chicanxs are not necessarily new, but social media has created a unique platform for Indigenous Mexicans to share their experiences about Chicanx spaces. The increased representation of Indigenous Mexicans in higher education has made these critiques much more visible. Indigenous Mexicans are a relatively recent migrant group, in comparison to older Chicanx generations, arriving in the United States after the 1980s. It is primarily within the last 10 years that children of Indigenous Mexican migrants have accessed higher education. Consequently, there is an increased participation of Indigenous Mexicans in Chicanx Studies and MEChA that did not exist before. Their participation in these spaces provides a new perspective to concepts like Azltán and *mestizaje* that challenge the ways these terms have historically been consumed in the Chicanx community.

My aim for this study was not to pit these differing perspectives against each other but instead take a closer look at the experiences of Indigenous Mexican college students and bear

witness to their testimonios and reveal personal, political, and social realities that otherwise go silenced or untold in academia. I do this in the hope of engaging in a critical dialogue that explores the possibilities within higher education to support Indigenous Mexican students while building solidarity spaces on campus for both Chicanxs and Indigenous Mexicans. It is important to point out that not all participants agreed that Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-based spaces on campus were exclusionary or problematic for Indigenous Mexican students. The youngest participants in this study, Haidy, Chris, and Santiago did not address any explicit tensions or challenging experiences with Chicanx peers, course, or organizations. Santiago, for instance, explained:

> I honestly never had any conflict regarding where I'm from or the things I believed in or the things I still keep, or the way I identify myself. For the most part they're like that's really cool. For the most part they are surprised about the dialect and stuff like that.

Haidy, in particular, spoke about the importance of her Latina-based sorority as a welcoming venue to explore her Indigeneity and simultaneously share it with her Latina mestiza peers.

It is important to indicate that Haidy, Chris, and Santiago were all affiliated with a Zapotec philharmonic band from a very early age and they attributed this musical space as foundational to their Indigenous Zapotec identity formation and specifically as *Zoochileños*. Furthermore, these three participants did not express an explicit desire for representation at the institutional level in the same way that other participants sought Chicanx courses and spaces as a way to gain a sense of belonging on campus. In this sense, it could be possible that the access to a validating cultural space before college protected or mitigated Haidy, Chris, and Santiago from the stark disconnect other participants experienced as they engaged in Chicanx-based spaces upon entering college.

I should point out that Haidy, Chris, and Santiago's philharmonic band is co-led by Joy. While Joy is of the same generation, she belongs to an older cohort of Indigenous Mexican college graduates who has returned to their community to give back. As such, there is something to be said about this labor and how older cohorts of college graduates are intentionally creating validating spaces for youth based on their own experiences in higher education. The lack of Indigenous Mexican representation in higher education within Chicanx Studies and/or Chicanx-based campus organizations, could have led some participants to want to build those missing spaces in their own communities and outside of the institution.

As evidenced in the findings in Theme 4, several participants saw an urgency to address Indigenous Mexican issues in their own communities. Clara, for instance, organized a Zapotec language summer course for young Zapotec in her hometown of Lynnwood. The motivations behind Clara's project came from her own realizations during college and a desire to provide younger Zapotec generations with a space that validated their culture and language:

> I wanted the opportunity for younger kids to be able to learn or be introduced to Zapoteco partly because I didn't have that and I don't know if it was because of the classes I was taking where I was like how indigenous communities are treated or have been treated throughout history.

Similarly, N'dii Kanu pointed out that as a young person he was "told you are nothing or that your language is nothing, that your identity you should forget that you should just throw it [away]." Given these very negative experiences, it was imperative for N'dii Kanu to play a role in creating supportive and validating spaces for younger Indigenous students in the community through organizations like the OYE and Mixeco Indígena Community Organizing Project.

Theme 4 explores a lot of the community-based work done by several participants and the potential impact it has had and will have on younger Indigenous Mexican generations. Still, these validating community spaces should also exist at the institutional level, particularly if educators, administrators, and scholars are invested in diversity and inclusion within higher education. Therefore, the critiques from the nine participants must be taken into consideration to explore and expand the potential of disciplines like Chicanx Studies for supporting, retaining, and graduating Indigenous Mexican students.

Implications

In 2018, I attended a session led by Lourdes Alberto and Luis Urrieta among other scholars of critical Latinx Indigeneities at the annual conference for the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In their presentations, Dr. Alberto and Dr. Urrieta provided their commentary and analysis of Indigeneity within Chicanx Studies and its roots in Mexican nationalist structures of *mestizaje*. Dr. Alberto also spoke about her essay, "Coming Out as Indian" and the ways Indigeneity in diaspora has opened up new avenues to explore the construction of identity. As someone who has been following their work closely, I was excited to hear their positions in person and within a much-needed space like the AERA. Once the moderator opened the session for questions, the first immediate comment came from a man who exclaimed, "So what am I then if you're saying I can't be Indigenous? What do I call myself?" He went on to briefly explain how meaningful it had been to identify as a Chicano and if he could not identify as such, he would "not have anything left."

This man's defensive reaction to the panelists' critiques is not uncommon and resonates with reactions to the viral blog articles I referenced earlier. Even within my own Chicanx Studies department, the topic of Indigeneity and how you define it are difficult issues to tackle,

especially when some of us are deeply invested in an identity that has personally empowered us. What I do want to point out about this exchange at the AERA conference was that the audience member's commentary centered his own Chicano identity and his frustrations with being denied an Indigenous identity. In doing so, his defensive response disallowed an honest engagement with the critique that the Indigenous Mexican scholars were making about Chicanxs and Chicanx Studies.

As someone who identifies as Xicana but is also invested in the Ñuu Savi/Oaxaqueño community in Southern California, my aim is to reconcile these two camps rather than continue to set them up in opposition. For many of us, Chicanx Studies courses have been instrumental in validating our life experiences, families, and communities. These courses have intentionally disrupted the Eurocentric curriculum of our K-12 education years and engaged us in the political struggles of marginalized communities in the United States. Still, there is room to interrogate the ways Chicanxs and Chicanx educators attempt to embark on this decolonizing journey. While the struggles of Chicanxs are not entirely the same as those among Indigenous Mexican communities in the United States, putting them in relation to each other can create a place of possibility—a possibility that avoids reducing Indigenous subjectivity, exposes the nuances of identification in the United States, and builds relationships and alliances with Indigenous Mexican communities. The participants' testimonios remind us of the complicated nature of attempting to reclaim our Indigenous heritage particularly within a U.S. context.

Implications for Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-Based Campus Organizations

Given the educational nature of this study, I provide some implications for Chicanx Studies based on an institutional and curricular context. Beyond these implications, there is a greater need to explore what this looks like outside the institution and within community spaces.

These implications are based on the participants' testimonios, and it is important to point out that as Indigenous Mexican community members they have historically and repeatedly pointed these things out.

Critically analyzing how Chicanxs reclaim our histories. For many Chicanxs, including myself, our ties to our Indigenous lineage and cultural attachment to a place or people may be unclear because of colonization and subsequent coloniality. As we reach this difficult realization, many times during our Chicanx Studies courses, we begin to search for signs of our Indigenous heritage. It is here where we must pause and interrogate how and in what ways we are recuperating our Indigeneity. Are we relying on pre-Columbian imagery or are we building connections with present Indigenous communities? In this same way, Chacón (2017) poses that recuperating our Indianness should be interrogated. As Chicanx Studies educators we must also be conscious of how we represent Indigenous communities in our classes and how we support students as they reconnect with their histories. As we search for signs of our Indigenous heritage, we should consider the narratives of Indigenous Mexicans as major guideposts—even if it makes us uncomfortable. Sitting with this critique can help us discern if we are using Indigenous imagery as a folkloric backdrop to our Chicanx identity or are we disrupting anti-Indigenous sentiments and building networks of solidarity.

This brings me back to my initial anecdote from Chapter 3—the Chicana *danzante* who referred to Indigenous Mexican people as *oaxaquitas*. The use of this derogatory term reflects a pervasive anti-Indigenous sentiment that exists within Chicanx mestizo spaces. Listening to and learning from the critiques of the participants and scholars like Urrieta (2012, 2017), Alberto (2012, 2016, 2017), Nicolás (2012), and Sánchez-Lopez (2017), we can recognize moments like this as opportunities for intervention and a way to interrogate Chicanx portrayals of Indigeneity.

In this same way, as Chicanx Studies educators, we must hold ourselves accountable by reframing outdated models of Indigeneity that rely on pre-Columbian Aztec-centric curriculum.

Challenging terminal narratives about Indigenous people. One of the more common feelings expressed among participants was the frustration with their courses and certain campus organizations representing Indigenous people as relics of the past. Several participants argued that a curricular focus on pre-Columbian civilizations led students to believe Indigenous people only existed in the past. As María expressed:

> It was really cool to learn about this past. Unfortunately, that's all I got was the past. This glorified past and in seeking to learn more about the present. . . . I didn't find it in any of these classes.

Moreover, the participants believed a curricular focus on Mexica/Aztec civilization obscured opportunities to highlight other Indigenous communities like Ñuu Savi and Zapotec.

In this way, it is imperative that as educators and leaders of campus organizations, we consciously use the present tense when talking about Indigenous communities. Otherwise, we inadvertently contribute to the idea that Indigenous histories and narratives are terminal. As Alberto (2016) points out, "The identification of Indigenous presence should not be a sign of residual Indigenous culture" instead, "Indigenous culture should be recognized as the dominant culture attached to actual villages, places and people" (p. 119). In this way, we can attach a contemporary understanding and recognition of Indigenous peoples within Chicanx Studies.

In my own introductory level Chicanx Studies classes at the community college, I am very cautious of not representing Indigenous communities as relics of a pre-Columbian past and consciously introduce contemporary Indigenous movements and struggles into the curriculum. I also dedicate the entire semester to understanding colonization and its legacy. This way students

recognize why using terms like *indio* and *oaxaquita* are incredibly violent or why Indigenous languages should not be referred to as dialects. Although I am still learning how to be an effective educator, sitting with the critiques of my participants and community members has allowed me to engage in critical conversations with my students about honoring our Indigenous heritage without being complicit in the marginalization of Indigenous people. I am also attentive to the students in my classroom who are Indigenous and ensure that there are opportunities for them to contribute to the classroom conversation.

Acknowledging time and place in relation to critique. I also want to indicate that the critiques about Chicanx Studies in this study are relative to a particular time and place. Some departments, professors, and students are already addressing the implications expressed in this study. I cannot argue that the curriculum for a particular department in Los Angeles, for instance, is the same at the United States-Mexico border or even in the state of Washington. Along these same lines, participants had different relationships with their campus organizations depending on their college. Ndii Kanu, for instance, while initially frustrated by his Chicanx Studies courses, was able to address these issues at his university's MEChA. Unlike Vicki who felt dismissed by her university's MEChA, Ndii Kanu was able to open the conversation about Indigeneity and even host educational workshops through MEChA about contemporary Ñuu Savi communities in the United States. BitterQueer and Ánima also described MEChA as foundational to their sociopolitical awareness and activism.

I want to put forward that Chicanxs, particularly younger generations, are not oblivious to the critiques discussed in this study. Rather than mourning for a distant past, some are engaging in a reflexive process that even includes decolonizing Aztlán. In the essay, "Keep Aztlán Indigenous, Not Colonial," Quimich (2017) challenges the "outdated colonial expression of

Aztlán from the 60s and 70s" (para. 1). He urges us to understand Aztlán as a concept rooted in an Indigenous worldview that contradicts the colonial perceptions taken up by some Chicanxs. Instead of a specific geographical location outlined by Eurocentric colonial lined borders, Aztlán is described as a spiritual place of origin for Mexicans. As such, the author urges Chicanxs to disconnect the meaning of Aztlán from the stagnant and colonial image of Aztlán (Quimich, 2017). In the same way, K. Vásquez (2019) indicates that there is no claim to land or territory for Aztlán because it is "a concept for life and re-humanization" (para. 8).

Some Chicanx college organizations are even moving to exclude the term or concept of Azltán altogether and placing greater importance on their local context. N'dii Kanu, for instance, described the push at Washington State University to remove the word Aztlán from MEChA:

> They are taking the whole term, they're breaking down the term MEChA and taking out Azltán from the organization and there is a whole conflict between them and UCLA and all the *mechistas* from California that are unwilling to let that go.

He attributes this change to the workshops he and other *mechistas* led on *indigenismo* and Chicanx history.

Similarly, San Diego City College's MEChA recently voted to remove Aztlán from their name and replace it with *territorio ocupado Kumiai* [occupied Kumiai territory]. In doing so, the organization is setting an intention to collaborate with local Indigenous groups and align themselves with contemporary Indigenous struggles. Instead of relying on Indigenous tropes to reclaim Indigeneity, many younger Chicanxs are establishing connections with local Indigenous groups to gain a more nuanced and contemporary understanding of Indigenous communities and their struggles.

K. Vásquez (2019) also points to the resurgence of Indigenous consciousness among Chicanxs that is not yet reflected in the literature within academia. In reference to a new Chicanx Studies course at the University of California, Los Angeles and an aspiration to transform the scholarship and curriculum of Chicanx Studies, K. Vásquez discusses the importance of challenging normative frameworks that understand Chicanx people and interrogating Chicanx Indigeneity through an interdisciplinary perspective.

Thus, my hope with this study is to engage in a growing dialogue with Indigenous Mexican communities and Chicanxs that moves beyond identity policing frameworks that "rely on and reify colonially constructed identities" (R. D. Hernández, 2018, p. 19). In doing so, I hope to interrogate how we teach and (re)imagine Indigeneity in Chicanx Studies. Using Indigenous Mexican narratives as a guidepost for our work as educators requires us to recognize the historical and contemporary manifestations of coloniality that shape our own identities and the discipline itself. In the words of R. D. Hernández (2018), "As with any decolonizing process, we must gather the courage to self-correct and self-reflect. We must consider how to empower ourselves without embodying a person that relies on coloniality constructed identities and implicit claims of authenticity" (p. 19).

Implications for Higher Education

Findings from this research study can contribute to a better understanding of Indigenous Mexican students in higher education. Data from this study provide examples of how Indigenous Mexican students negotiated their Indigenous identities growing up in the United States and how they made meaning of their Indigeneity during college. It is a critical time to disaggregate pan-Latinx student experiences to recognize the diversity in Latinx populations in the United States. The results from this study are relevant to institutions of higher education and serve as

interventions in Chicanx/Latinx Studies and education. Understanding the conditions that influence how Indigenous Mexican students situate their identity allows us to imagine local definitions that "can better serve the institution in helping students maneuver the academic environment" (Torres, 2004, p. 458). This study also highlights the importance of college environments that validate the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students, including affirming courses, student-faculty relationships, and ethnic campus organizations. Furthermore, the findings for this study support new ways to frame or interrogate Indigeneity within Chicanx Studies.

Research on ethnic identity development in higher education has documented how cultural dissonance has contributed to students' renegotiation of their ethnic identities. For students of color who are numerical minorities at PWIs, the affirmation of their ethnic identity serves as a mechanism to preserve their "self-concept as a member of a devalued ethnic group" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 31). Experiences of racism and discrimination often serve as powerful triggers for students to reexamine their racial and ethnic identities (Azmitia et al., 2008). Chavous et al. (2002) suggest that students of color negotiate two different domains, "one related to their ethnicity and development of self-identity, and the other relating to adjusting to and negotiating the values and demands of the PWI school environment" (p. 239). These conflicting spaces or experiences of cultural dissonance often force students to bring their ethnic identity to the forefront as they attempt to deconstruct stereotypes about their ethnic group and understand their own cultural and ethnic values and behaviors in connection to the institution.

It is important to indicate that this scholarship is based on PWIs. The participants in this study experienced cultural dissonance but not exactly in the same way that Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) and Chavous et al. (2002) describe. While the students in Chavous et al's (2002) study

negotiated two domains, Indigenous Mexican students experienced a third—one related to a dominant Mexican mestizo environment. The majority of the participants (eight of 12) actually attended Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) for their undergraduate education. With that said, the cultural dissonance revealed in their testimonies was primarily focused on their relationship with mestizo/Latinx/Chicanx students and spaces on campus. The lack of representation or misrepresentation of Indigenous Mexican groups in Chicanx Studies courses and organizations prompted participants to become more vocal and public about their own Indigeneity as a way to demonstrate their existence.

Beyond the implications for Chicanx Studies, the findings from this study raise important issues for HSIs, which serve as key access points to higher education for Latinx students. Sixty percent of all Latinx students are enrolled in HSIs, which makes these institutions particularly important environments that impact the postsecondary experiences of Latinx students (Herrera, Kovats Sánchez, Navarro Martell, & Zeledon-Pérez, 2018). In her work on HSIs and Latinx "servingness," G. A. García (2019) denotes that beyond the metrics of Latinx persistence and degree attainment, HSIs must effectively serve students by recognizing, embracing, and enhancing "the racial and cultural ways of knowing of Latinx students" (p. 73), which includes "recognizing and valuing Spanish as a legitimate language of communication in an educational setting" (p. 73) and providing community engagement opportunities, support programs, and a positive campus climate.

Drawing from G. A. García's (2017, 2019) work, I want to take this a step further and complicate preconceived notions of Latinidad at HSIs. In addition to recognizing the growing enrollment of Latinxs in higher education, educators, staff, and administrators must acknowledge the actual increase in Latinx diversity, which includes Indigenous Latinx students. Chacón

(2017) suggests that the rise of contemporary Indigenous migrants from Mesoamerica into the United States has already led to a reconfiguring of Chicanx/Latinx understandings of Indigeneity and as such, HSIs should be conscious of this demographic shift. Given the potential that HSIs provide in terms of retaining Latinx students, it is important to consider how these institutions can better support Indigenous Latinx students without repeating cycles of colonization that perpetuate the invisibility of Indigenous people.

In the same way that G. A. García (2019) advocates for Spanish-English bilingual courses as an effective way to increase the level of HSI servingness, HSIs must consider their diverse Latinx student population and the corresponding Indigenous Latinx languages that should be represented at the institutional level. Some California State Universities are exploring these possibilities. California State University Channel Islands, California State University Fresno, and San Diego State University, for example, offer Tu'un Savi language courses. Correspondingly, there is a significant representation of Ñuu Savis in the surrounding region of each campus. In my previous research (Kovats Sánchez, 2018), I highlight Tu'un Savi college-level classes as a source of validation for Ñuu Savi students. Participation in the Tu'un Savi language course provided students with opportunities to explore their own culture and history in a college setting (Kovats Sánchez, 2018). As a result of these language classes, students were motivated to organize and create validating spaces in their Ñuu Savi community.

The implementation of Indigenous Latinx language courses could also benefit non-Indigenous, mestizo/Chicanx students by exposing them to contemporary, multidimensional Indigenous communities, cultures, and histories. Institutional support of Indigenous Latinx language courses has the potential to challenge the colonial discourse within Latinx communities that historically deems Indigenous languages inferior to Spanish. Furthermore, the

implementation of such classes provides an opportunity for HSIs to build partnerships with local Indigenous Latinx communities and find ways to support and fund relevant issues. Thus, HSIs have to potential to offer resources that broaden one-dimensional understandings of Latinx students and support their diverse Latinx student population.

Limitations of the Study

The following section focuses on the three main limitations related to this study: (a) small sample population, (b) defining Indigeneity, and (c) researcher bias.

First, this study interviewed a small sample of 12 participants. As such, their testimonios are not representative of an entire population. Given the small sample, I also grouped participants from different Indigenous communities (e.g., Zapotec, Ñuu Savi, and Nahua) into one category. I recognize that each community holds different knowledges, traditions, and histories. Grouping them into an all-encompassing Indigenous Mexican identity conflates different ways of being. Moreover, despite this being a study rooted in decolonial thought, the use of Indigenous and Indigeneity are still colonial terms.

Second, considering the legacy of colonialism and its role in essentializing diverse groups into broader categories (e.g., Indian, Black, Latinx), defining Indigeneity or who is Indigenous is incredibly complex. Migration, geographic and colonial displacement, intermarriage, European invasion, and sexual violence complicate the notion of pure decent (Urrieta, 2017). Urrieta (2017) urges us to consider dichotomous ideas and understandings of authentic and inauthentic Indigenous cultures and "competing representations of Indigeneity embedded in binaries and within several colonialist systems like *Indigenismo* that were regularly romanticized notions of cultural purity and essentialist origins" (p. 3). I want to recognize in this study that I am not in

the position to determine who can and cannot claim Indigeneity; instead my aim is to shed light on the complexity of defining Indigeneity and its complicated relationship with coloniality.

Lastly, I recognize my bias as a researcher in this project, particularly as someone that does not belong to the participants' Indigenous communities. My aim was to approach this research in solidarity with Indigenous Mexican communities, but I am also aware that as a Xicana graduate student, I entered the community with unique power and privilege. Furthermore, as a mestiza or someone who does not have direct ties to an Indigenous community of origin, I ran the risk of essentializing the participants' narratives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Thus, this work required me to be both cautious and introspective about my relationship to colonial logic. With regard to inquiring about participants' perceptions of Chicanx Studies and Chicanx spaces on campus, I did disclose that I was a Chicanx Studies professor, which may or may not have influenced to share their opinions. Many of the participants were also aware of my long-term involvement with Familia Indígena Unida and the critiques about Chicanx spaces among Indigenous Mexican students.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the experiences of Indigenous Mexican students in higher education. Drawing on their personal stories, the participants revealed various themes and subthemes that provided insight to the ways they defined their Indigeneity both privately and publicly. This study reminds us of the important role higher education has in creating spaces that validate Indigenous identities and even challenge oppressive discourses and mechanisms of coloniality in education. This study also sheds light on the various forms of resistance enacted by Indigenous Mexican college students as they work to disrupt coloniality.

This work comes from a place of respect and love for those who came before me and created spaces for Chicanxs in higher education. As a Chicanx Studies educator and a Xicana, I constantly grapple with the possibilities and limitations of Chicanx Studies. In this study, I wanted to acknowledge the important contributions of the Chicanx movement while simultaneously uplifting the participants' *testimonios*. Rather than viewing the participants' critiques of Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-dominant campus spaces as a rejection of the field and the Chicanx community, I believe their points offer opportunities for growth to envision possibilities for solidarity work within Chicanx Studies.

It has been interesting for me to navigate Chicanx and Indigenous Latinxs spaces and engage with the spectrum of opinions and assumptions each group has about each other. In light of the hostile debates on social media, I offer an analogy that has helped me conceptualize the future of Chicanx Studies and Chicanx-based spaces in higher education and approach the participants' critiques from a place of generosity instead of a place of friction. In my conversations with friends, I often compare Chicanx Studies and MEChA to my complex relationship with my mother and the women in my family. I admire my mother and respect the legacy of women in my family. Each generation of women in my family has incrementally challenged patriarchal perceptions of womanhood. Still, I recognize my own internalized misogyny and I am critical of my mother's and grandmother's teachings. Having access to higher education, therapy, and community organizing spaces has allowed me to explore these issues and work toward unlearning them. As I grow and unpack these issues, I am still able to honor and respect my mother's and grandmother's sacrifices. I understand that within their time and place, my mother and grandmother did what they could to envision a better life for their daughters. Critiquing and honoring do not have to be mutually exclusive, and I consider the

participants' comments about Chicanismo and Chicanx Studies in this same way. It is important to contextualize Indigenous perspectives (including critiques) so that as Chicanxs we can construct and deconstruct identity and practices that better serve our current realities.

Borrowing from Rodriguez's (2008) analysis of *transfronteriza* [transborder] and Central American feminisms, the solidarity between Chicanxs and Indigenous Latinxs is not transparent but instead "critically shaped by borders, power, and unequal hierarchical relations" (p. 221), and consequently, Chicanxs and Chicanx educators must be conscious of this historical power dynamic as we reconnect and reaffirm our histories. Finally, with this study, I join my position with those who have spoken before and the many to come who will speak on the unique experiences of Indigenous Mexican students. I give the utmost credit to the Indigenous Mexican people in my life that have pushed me to consider my own positionality, interrogate both Indigeneity and Chicanismo, and align myself with Indigenous struggles.

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