

Latinx Studies Journal

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Volume 15, Spring 2026

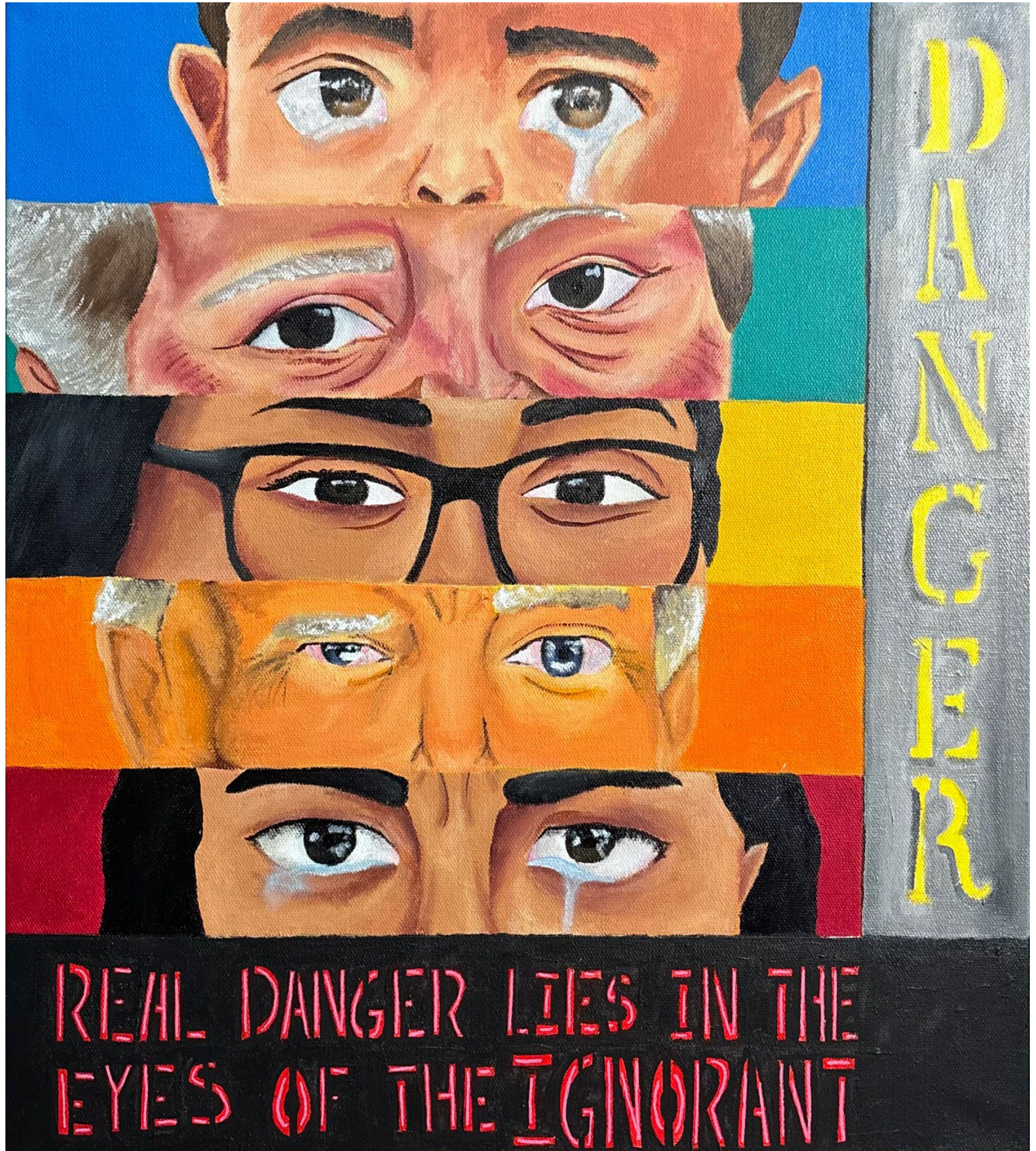


Image Title: “Who’s the Real Villain”

Artist: Reyli Cerda-Martinez

Year: 2026

Artist Biography: Reyli Cerda-Martinez is a freshman at UW-Madison and originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is majoring in art with the hopes of getting her BFA and a minor in CHICLA. A lot of her work revolves around being a Mexican American, and both the pride and struggles that she, and other people in her life, have experienced. In “Who’s the Real Villain,” she wanted to address the current issues affecting the Latine community and how ignorance is such an issue today. She chose to depict a crying child, symbolizing the children in ICE detention centers. She also included her grandma and her mother’s eyes, both women who are very important in her life and who have taught her to be resilient. Next, she included President Donald Trump’s eyes to evoke conversations about ignorance and media. Lastly, she included herself crying out of pure frustration. She chose the people in this piece to highlight the saying that the eyes are the window to the soul. By focusing on the look that each person is giving, she asks the viewer to question who the real villain truly is.

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Latinx Studies Journal, previously named *Concientización*, is an academic student journal dedicated to promoting the study of Chicanx and Latinx experience and thought. We are committed to creating alliances across boundaries of nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, and sexuality. Submissions include essays, poems, and artwork related to Chicanx/e and Latinx/e peoples in the United States. The Latinx Studies Journal gives students the opportunity to participate in the publication process as authors and editors.

The articles for this issue were gathered and edited in 2025 and 2026 by Professor Lola Loustaunau, Professor Revel Sims, Dr. Theresa Delgadillo, Dr. Peter Haney, Professor Sara McKinnon, Estevan Molina, Professor Kate Vieira, and Carmen Ibarra.

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The Legacy of Trujillo: Anti-Haitian Nationalism in the Dominican Republic

Alexa Iraheta

Around the world, governments are building border walls to control migration and define who belongs in their territories. One long-standing case is in the Caribbean, on the island of Hispaniola, which houses Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic has sought to exclude ethnic Haitians through immigration raids, physical walls, and bureaucratic obstructions. Recently, in January, the Dominican Republic had a record of 31,200 deportations due to President Luis Abinader's order to deport 10,000 migrants a week (Coto). These deportation raids included separating children from their families, and authorities targeting Dominican Haitians with no birth certificate or official documentation of legal status (Coto). This recent wave of deportations of Haitians and Dominican Haitians invites a question: Why is the government targeting this group?

One answer may be the legacy of Rafael Trujillo, the past dictator of the Dominican Republic, who influenced this resentment towards Haitians through mass removals. He spread anti-Haitian sentiments and defined Dominican identity in opposition to Haitian ancestral ties. Above all, the Parsley Massacre clearly demonstrated this anti-Haitian ideology. The name "Parsley" Massacre is widely believed to have roots in the word "perejil," Spanish for "parsley." The story is that Dominican soldiers determined whom to kill by ordering people to say the word and seeing whether they rolled their r's with a Spanish accent (Angell). Historians debate whether this actually happened, but the story expresses well the anti-Haitian sentiment that animated the massacre. There is no doubt that President Trujillo ordered soldiers to kill

thousands of Haitians residing in the Dominican Republic, particularly near the border of Haiti. The rift between Dominicans and Haitians continues today through the government and President Abinader's actions. Therefore, this paper asks the following question: To what extent did Rafael Trujillo influence contemporary Dominican immigration? I argue that today's policy is deeply informed by the racialized nationalistic project that began under Rafael Trujillo, particularly as seen through the border wall, Law 169-14, and Law 285-04.

To understand the contemporary migration issue in the Dominican Republic, one needs to unpack the history of differentiation between the two countries. In 1804, Haiti gained independence from France, while the colony of Santo Domingo, which later became the Dominican Republic, was still under Spanish rule. Haiti annexed Santo Domingo in 1822 to try to unify the island, and Haitian authorities attempted this unification by severing church ties, removing Western and Hispanic traditions, and decreasing the amount of slavery (Wiarda). Many rebels rose against the Haitian occupation, ending it in 1842. The two countries have had tense relations ever since.

Almost a century after Haiti's occupation ended, in August 1930, Rafael Trujillo became president of the Dominican Republic, and he transformed his presidency into a dictatorship. In 1937, Trujillo ordered the massacre of 9,000 to 30,000 Haitian Dominicans, which became known as the Parsley Massacre (Angell), as noted above. Trujillo ordered the Dominican government to execute as many Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent as possible with machetes instead of rifles (Bishop & Fernandez). The soldiers' use of machetes was a strategy to avoid tracing these killings back to the Dominican government, as rifles were typically not used by Dominican citizens (Bishop & Fernandez). This tactic of scapegoating Dominican citizens deflected state responsibility, which allowed Trujillo to get away with further acts of hatred and

violence towards Haitians. Since the government of the Dominican Republic was not fully held responsible for the massacre, the event further normalized anti-Haitian rhetoric from the state.

Following the Parsley Massacre, the anti-Haitian attitude continued as Trujillo shifted the government's violence towards Haitians' role in the labor force. After the early 1930s, Trujillo's government forced Haitians who owned land and businesses, or worked in other industries, to transition to working only on sugar plantations (Hintzen). Since the Dominican government did not use physical violence, they instead "had to induce local authorities to comply with this new policy," which was not within the boundaries of law (Hintzen 44). This can be seen as trying to whiten specific areas of Dominican society, as they tried to confine Haitians to sugar plantations. Both the massacre and the labor market push helped to separate ethnic Haitians from the Dominican Republic.

These exclusionary ideas would later support racialized migration policies and enforcement in the country. The enactment of Law 169-14 was a further move in the direction of exclusion. In 2014, the Dominican government created a new legal definition of Dominican citizenship. Under this law, the state defines group A as persons born in the Dominican Republic between 1929 and 2007, from parents with a "nonresident" migratory status, whose births were registered in the Ordinary Book of the Dominican Civil Registry ("Persons Pending"). Group B is defined as persons born in the Dominican Republic to parents in an "irregular" migratory status, whose births were never registered in the Dominican Civil Registry ("Persons Pending"). Under Trujillo's dictatorship, the Dominican state aimed to cut the Haitian population. Law 169-14 accomplishes that goal legally by separating individuals who were registered and unregistered at birth. The process of acquiring a birth certificate is long and does not always guarantee

success. This leaves Dominicans of Haitian descent stateless and living in fear of deportation from the land they have considered their home since birth.

In addition to the law's language, the birth certificates are issued by local Civil Registry Offices and under the authority of the Central Electoral Board.. Discriminatory practices among civil registrars are common, as officials "often demand bribes, request extra-legal parental documents, and employ other arbitrary criteria for exclusion, such as Haitian surnames and accents" (Hunter & Reece 595). Through these practices, anti-Haitian sentiment has become institutionalized within the Dominican bureaucracy. Clerical staff act as daily enforcers of national identity and transform the law into a tool of exclusion. As a result, the state denies individuals who did not obtain a birth certificate at birth, which can include Dominicans with parents of Haitian descent, the documents needed for citizenship. This systemic denial reaffirms the idea that anyone with Haitian ancestry and parents falls outside of the definition of being Dominican. In addition, Law 285-04 considered "temporary foreign workers and undocumented migrant workers as foreigners 'in transit'" ("Dominican Republic" 6), followed by regulations where hospital staff are obliged to distribute pink proof of residence certificates to children of undocumented foreign mothers ("Dominican Republic"). Both Law 285-04 and Law 169-14 help make statelessness for Dominicans of Haitian descent a normal systemic process. Thus, Trujillo's vision of nationalism continues to shape the Dominican bureaucracy's birth certificate enforcement, embedding racial hierarchy into citizenship.

As if the bureaucratic barrier was not enough, in February 2022, the Dominican Republic began building a wall on its border with Haiti at President Abinader's order. This project is fairly recent, but Dominican legislators have long advocated for it, and it follows the nationalist project that began with Trujillo's efforts to define Dominican identity against Haitians. The wall

promises to transform the Haiti-Dominican Republic separation advocated by Trujillo into a physical reality. Although both countries share a history of colonization and racial mixing, the Dominican government wants to separate itself through the argument that economic success is tied to racial identity. The wall thus promises “control over the mobility of impoverished residents and the labour force of non-white populations” (Fernández Bravo 249). Clearly, the Dominican Republic’s government wants to segregate its racial makeup from that of Haiti. As mentioned previously, the Parsley Massacre and the push for Haitians in the sugar plantations were methods to make Haitians the “other” racial minority in the Dominican Republic. Since most Dominicans have African ancestry, it can be inferred that the government’s anti-Haitian actions have likely been normalized in the belief systems of Dominicans on the island, which has made them live in a state of denial, believing that their African ancestry is different from Haitians ancestry. This border wall makes that exclusion a physical reality by restricting the human mobility of Haitians into the country.

President Luis Abinader has described migration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic as a security threat throughout his political career, both during elections and while in office. In October 2022, he announced that he had allocated “six helicopters, 10 reconnaissance and surveillance planes and 21 armored vehicles to patrol the wall for ‘the defense of the country’” (Fernandez Bravo 250). The heavy air surveillance of the Haiti-Dominican Republic border by President Luis Abinader characterizes Haitian immigrants by the border as dangerous villains. This rhetoric belittles their humanity, as they tend to flee from dangerous living conditions in their country. In addition, President Luis Abinader stated in a 2024 United Nations New York Council Meeting that “we will not allow the crisis Haiti is experiencing to spread throughout the entire region” (“UN/Dominican President”). This security threat argument masks an underlying

anti-Haitian sentiment that Abinader has leveraged politically, much like Trujillo did to define and enforce a racially exclusive Dominican national identity.

As Marshall emphasizes, there is a growing notion of the ‘us versus them’ narrative, which causes physical divisions and feelings of superiority (Marshall). Trujillo enforced this narrative by enacting the Parsley Massacre, cutting down the Haitian population and blaming ordinary Dominican people for the massacre. These moves, along with storytelling, education, and stereotypes about Haitians, normalized and strengthened anti-Haitian bias among ordinary Dominicans. Therefore, the continued construction of this wall is likely to be supported by Dominicans who have been taught these anti-Haitian sentiments that stem from Trujillo’s dictatorship.

Each succeeding president has passed down the ideology of Trujillo’s vision of being Dominican. In President Abinader’s recent speech, he stated that “the rights of Dominicans will not be displaced. Our identity will not be diluted. Our generosity will not be exploited.” (Abinader). This excerpt, specifically the use of the word “diluted” to describe the threat he claims Haitians pose to Dominicans, mirrors Trujillo’s idea that Dominican identity relies on whiteness. It can be inferred that Abinader believes Dominican identity does not include Haitians, as their culture and race threaten the essence and identity of Dominicans. As Diener and Hagen state, “every geographic boundary is a symbolic representation and practical embodiment of human territoriality,” which one can continuously observe on the island of Hispaniola (Diener & Hagen 12). The physical border on this island echoes human territoriality as a symbol of who belongs on each separate side of the island. The continued construction of the border wall demonstrates how the Dominican government draws on Trujillo’s anti-Haitian

legacy to legitimize and enforce a racialized boundary, one that frames Haitians as a threat to national identity and belonging.

The Dominican Republic's ongoing deportations, statelessness crisis, and symbolic constructions of national identity all suggest that Trujillo's legacy lives on. Through policies like Law 169-14, Law 285-04, and the construction of the border wall, the Dominican state continues to enforce and normalize the idea that racialized Haitian-Dominicans are not a part of the nation. As anti-Haitian sentiments in the Dominican Republic remain deeply ingrained in nationalistic beliefs, they will continue to influence aspects of government and public beliefs. The Dominican Republic government must reflect on Trujillo's dictatorship history and break away from that government's anti-Haitian regulations to foster better relations with Haiti.

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Displaced & Blamed: The Rise of Xenophobic Narratives Against Venezuelan Migrants Across the Americas

Angeline Morgado

Introduction

The Venezuelan exodus is estimated to have displaced more than eight million individuals. As reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in December 2025, it is the largest exodus in Latin America's contemporary history, caused by political turmoil and one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Such a mass exodus is not only striking due to its size but also because of its demographic. The exodus has been of all social classes and races in Venezuela. There is not a single story about the Venezuelan migration. People have left in planes, buses, boats, and walked through the Darién Gap, risking their lives looking for a better life, a job to send a steady remittance to Venezuela, or to escape the authoritarian regime and the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Venezuela has been experiencing a humanitarian crisis characterized by widespread poverty and shortages of food and medicine since 2015, stemming from an economic collapse that led to an inflation rate of over 10 million percent by 2019 (Van Praag). This has severely impacted public services and infrastructures, exemplified by daily electricity cuts and hindered access to potable water, affecting living conditions and the health care system. These factors, joined with political persecution of those opposing the authoritarian regime, have contributed to the exodus.

The combination of socio-economic and political push factors has resulted in a mixed exodus of migrants—Venezuelans, impoverished or affected by the economic crisis or rising insecurity, who did not openly experience political persecution—and asylum-seekers—persecuted or previously incarcerated individuals due to their political activism or political opinion. Such a complex displaced group poses challenges to the region, as it is vulnerable to

exposure to aggravated xenophobic discourses, human rights violations, trafficking, and unlawful behavior in the regional host countries (Wallace 10). This high level of vulnerability is evident throughout their migration journey, as data from international institutions highlights the severe risks Venezuelans face while fleeing the economic crisis, including exposure to sexual exploitation and abuse. Yet, despite these challenges, they make significant financial contributions to their host countries, as research by the IOM in several Latin American and Caribbean nations demonstrates. One notable example is Panama, where Venezuelan investors created approximately 40,000 jobs (70% held by Panamanians) by investing over \$1.8 billion USD.

The Rise of the Xenophobic Narratives

Despite the Venezuelan diaspora's positive contributions, a xenophobic narrative has been building around Venezuelans that generalizes them as harmful and criminal, essentially dangerous to their host countries. While Venezuelan migration is not new, the narrative surrounding it is. We have now reached a crisis where our country and people are numerous enough in other nations to be politicized and blamed for various issues. For me, as a Venezuelan immigrant in Chile and an international student in the U.S., the commonalities are evident as government officials are blaming the rising crime rates on the Tren de Aragua and unfairly generalizing Venezuelan migrants as part of it, and even though some countries acknowledge the illegitimacy of the Maduro regime, the message remains: "Go back to your country."

In Peru, Congresswoman Esther Saavedra said, "Venezuelans, good or bad, have to get out of the country" (BBC News Mundo). In the U.S., Kristi Noem, the United States Secretary of Homeland Security, justified the end of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans by

claiming that all of them were part of the Tren de Aragua (TDA), a transcontinental criminal organization that originated in Venezuela (Telemundo 51). For reference, according to Aleaziz and Haberman, this decision affects 300,000 Venezuelans. While TPS, a status given to countries going through political, climate, or social crises, was removed, it is noteworthy that Venezuela remains at Level 4, “Do Not Travel,” for American tourists, and recent U.S. involvement in the country elevated the travel advisory to “Depart Immediately” as of January 10, 2026.

The rise of such xenophobic discourse can be characterized by the fact that Latin American countries are already under increasing pressure and scrutiny from their nationals. The Venezuelan Diaspora's influx forces countries to take a stance on the migrant versus refugee dilemma, prevent public institutional failures, and address politically the ongoing crisis that continues to displace Venezuelans. Consequently, the rise of xenophobic narratives against Venezuelan migrants in Latin America can be explained by the regional political response, scale of migration, and criminalization of Venezuelan migrants. I am uniquely positioned to explore these arguments as someone who has experienced firsthand the shifting regional dynamics and the impacts of xenophobic narratives, as well as to draw on both my own experience and existing scholarship to advocate for broader action to address such harmful impacts.

Regional Factors

To truly understand how those regional factors exacerbate xenophobic narratives, it is crucial to understand the issues at play. The Venezuelan exodus crisis prompted the historical creation of a joint platform between the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and IOM (International Organization for Migration) (Van Praag), as it is unique in its nature of displacement. Without a definition for the term ‘migrant’ outlined in international law,

Venezuelan migrants defy the conventional definition, as some are not fleeing persecution but are not leaving completely voluntarily, and they fear not being able to come back.

I was twelve when I left Venezuela. I come from a middle-class family, which meant we had to sell our belongings and our car; other families did not have anything to sell and crossed borders with merely their identification and hope. Our decision to leave was made in a hospital room in Caracas. My little brother, who had just turned one, underwent surgery for an ear infection, and the medicine he needed was shipped from the US by my aunt, as it was not available in Venezuela. My mom decided she couldn't stay in a country where her children's health was on the line. It has been more than eight years since that decision was made.

Regionally, in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are approximately 6.91 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees (R4V) and around 1.2 million in the U.S. (Passel & Fahmy). Their inevitable influence on domestic politics leads to increased feelings of xenophobia among national citizens of the recipient countries, who see migrants as scapegoats to blame in the struggle for their survival, given the lack of resources within the region (Wallace 4). This sentiment is used by political figures to “undermine peaceful coexistence and feed manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia” (United Nations as cited in Wallace 4). Thus, the roots of the increased levels of xenophobia are influenced by the specific characteristics of the Venezuelan exodus and the regional response to it.

The Regional Response

The regional political response to the Venezuelan exodus has exacerbated xenophobic narratives because it brought into question the liberal migration policies previously established. In a new political and migratory environment, in which states have shifted their political

positions, liberal migration policies established during limited migration waves were put to the test. This can be illustrated by the fact that most Latin American countries should officially recognize all Venezuelan migrants, regardless of whether they were politically persecuted, as refugees, but have not (Freier and Parent 57–58). Venezuela’s humanitarian crisis meets three of the Cartagena criteria in the aspects of generalized violence, human rights violations, and other incidents that have seriously disturbed public order (Freier and Parent 57–58). Such criteria were established in the 1980s during a wave of democratization in the region, expanding on the 1951 Refugee Convention to establish what a Latin American refugee looked like (Freier and Parent 57–58). Yet, Latin American governments only approve a relatively small number of Venezuelan refugee cases, only taking into account the 1951 refugee convention. For example, in Peru between 2014 and 2017, of the 971 refugee cases ruled on, only 239 were accepted, and 548 were rejected (Freier and Parent 57–58). The large number of refugee claim denials can be due to a lack of institutional capacity, intentional public policy, or both. Latin American governments have responded carefully to the question of whether Venezuelan displaced individuals would fall under the Cartagena criteria to prevent the political choice of being the first nation-state to recognize the Cartagena criteria.

Due to the political tensions in the region and the lack of a unified mandate requiring other nation-states to follow a specific approach toward Venezuelan migrants, many countries have adopted alternative visa regimes (Freier and Parent 61). They fear that applying the Cartagena criteria would lead to an increased influx of Venezuelans, placing additional stress on their public institutions and services. However, their migratory restrictions should not be based on the possibility of a larger influx, because the lack of refugee status protection for Venezuelans will not stop crossings if the push factors remain unchanged. Instead, it increases the likelihood

of irregular entry through unofficial border crossings (Hammoud-Gallego 2). This, in turn, fuels expressions of intolerance and xenophobia, as the Venezuelan migrants' lack of status protection puts them at risk of deportation and exposes them to socially and politically constructed narratives that categorize them as "illegals" and criminalize them. This creates a vicious cycle of increasingly restrictive, sometimes symbolic measures that lead to irregular stay and work, further marginalizing migrants (Rosina) and—in the absence of institutional support to access formal employment, health care, and education—exposing them to a higher likelihood of involvement with criminal activities.

The lack of an appropriate response to Venezuelan migration is echoed and recognized by those working at the highest levels of government, who described the influx as a concerning issue for the state and region but fail to address it through existing regional mechanisms (Wallace 231). For example, in September 2018, countries signed the 'Quito Declaration,' a non-binding agreement in which governments across the region committed to keeping their borders open to Venezuelans fleeing the crisis and to accepting expired passports at the border crossings (Hammoud-Gallego 5). However, as the number of Venezuelan migrants increased and public opinion grew hostile, many of those same countries increased migratory restrictions. The lack of a unified front leads the citizens of such countries to respond to this politically driven atmosphere of hostility that shapes the cultural narratives on immigration by generating immigrant resentment and populist nationalism, having negative impacts on those who are targeted (Alizadeh Afrouzi 17), as it creates social vulnerability for migrants already vulnerable in a region with no effective regional mechanism for migration, exacerbating such xenophobic narratives against them. It reflects how the regional political response both responds to and fuels xenophobic narratives, inserting Venezuelan migrants into social systems without protection,

leaving them vulnerable to discrimination from locals who blame them for straining an already ineffective social welfare system.

Case Study: Colombia

Colombia exemplifies how policies respond to and fuel xenophobic narratives, shaped in part by the scale of the Venezuelan migration. While the Colombian state followed humanitarian recommendations and granted temporary protected status to Venezuelans, simultaneously a term started to circulate in Colombia: *Veneco*. Originating, according to popular sources, from a time when migration flowed in the opposite direction from Colombia to Venezuela, it was generally used to refer to Colombian immigrants or second-generation Venezuelans with Colombian parents. Words are not only defined by their meaning; they are shaped by their usage. In contemporary discourse, *Veneco* has taken on a pejorative sense, often used to refer to Venezuelan migrants as a derogatory term.

While the initial welcome of Venezuelans depended on acknowledging their suffering and need for protection, over time, social discrimination increased. Martínez et al. analyzed tweets using the terms “*veneco*” and “*veneca*” to understand public attitudes toward Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. Their analysis of 1,664,903 relevant tweets revealed that positive uses of “*veneco*” declined from 18% in 2015 to none in 2021, while negative uses increased from 67% to 83% during the same period (Martínez et al.). To contextualize the Venezuelan diaspora in Colombia in this period, the International Organization for Migration reported that the diaspora grew from 53,747 migrants to more than 1.7 million between 2015 and 2021 (Ramírez Herrera and Mendoza).

Although this does not provide a complete picture, it helps establish a trend on how the level of political and social openness to migrants in communities decreases as it is perceived that

resources are strained due to a larger influx of migrants who will significantly impact the lives of national citizens and access to services, job opportunities, and institutions. Many Colombians remain worried about the possibility of Venezuelan immigrants straining Colombian public institutions, because they want to help the migrants but do not want to do so at the cost of directly involving their home institutions (Muñoz-Pogossian and Trufó 21). In that context, a prevailing narrative emerged: the idea that supporting Venezuelans would become the sole priority of the Colombian government.

As a result, some Colombians felt the need to protect their nation and assert their right to be prioritized over foreigners. This sentiment did not arise in a vacuum; it was politically driven. During the local elections in 2023, candidates for mayor in Bogotá and Bucaramanga attributed increased insecurity to Venezuelan migrants (O’Neil and Freeman), despite studies showing that Venezuelans, relative to their share of the population, committed fewer violent crimes (Bahar, D., Dooley, M., and Selee, A). Although the proportion of arrests involving Venezuelans was higher for petty offenses, it was mostly in cities with higher concentrations of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, such as border cities. This pattern was closely linked to unemployment and the presence of criminal networks. Moreover, in cases of violent crimes, Venezuelans are more likely to be victims than perpetrators, with Bogotá having the highest homicide rates of Venezuelans (Garzón). This demonstrates how the selective presentation of data and its manipulation for political gain, coupled with the exodus scale, can allow xenophobic narratives to shape social discourse on the Venezuelan diaspora.

Media Criminalization and Public Discourse

The media and political criminalization of Venezuelan migrants has contributed to the rise of migrant hatred in the social discourse as well, as locals spread a single, one-dimensional narrative about Venezuelans. Using the case study of Peru, Freier and Perez exemplify the impact of criminalization on the rise of xenophobia. First, it is important to note that Peru is the second-largest host country of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the region, according to Freier and Perez (114). To understand the scale of the Venezuelan migration in Peru, it is key to refer to the political response of President Martín Vizcarra, who held office from March 2018 to November 2020, and who pushed for the closure and “securitization” of migratory policy, pushing Venezuelans in the diaspora into irregularity (114). Within this political framework, it is not surprising that institutions, with the excuse of following the restrictive policies of Vizcarra, reinforced narratives that criminalize Venezuelan migrants and helped shape public perceptions accordingly. In 2019, Peru’s Ministry of Justice and Human Rights reported that Peruvian traditional national media outlets often highlighted the Venezuelan nationality of criminals or suspects, even when it was not pertinent to the incidents being covered (MINJUSDH as cited in Freier and Perez 115). This evidence demonstrates an intentional effort to spread a narrative that frames Venezuelans as criminals, thereby fueling the rise in xenophobia.

Criminalization narratives are socially and politically constructed to feed xenophobic narratives. The socio-political process of criminalization refers to the way immigrants are socially and rhetorically framed as a threat. That process leads to the detrimental portrayal and criminalization of migrants and refugees in hegemonic public discourse, such as traditional media, as well as in public policies and practices. Even though there is academic evidence that

proves the correlation of an increase in migration and an elevated fear of crime, there is little to no qualitative evidence supporting a direct link between immigration, regular or irregular, and actual crime rates. On the other hand, some research suggests a negative correlation between immigration and crime. While the stigmatized perceptions are not based on tangible data, as exemplified above, they do have tangible consequences on the lives of Venezuelan migrants, as they affect socio-economic integration. Media-driven xenophobic narratives contribute to increased tensions among national populations and have even been linked to a rise in xenophobic violence arising from a dehumanization of the Venezuelan migrants from the media and institutions (Freier and Perez 116).

Case Studies: Chile and Perú

In Chile, the criminalization narrative has framed Venezuelans as members of *Tren de Aragua*, as if it were possible that all of us belonged to a criminal organization. Some even argued against oppositions to the narrative, saying that those who were not merely “exceptions,” implying that criminality was the rule. A 2024 survey found that 63.4% of the Chilean population associated migration with the increase of crime and attributed it, in part, to criminal bands such as Tren de Aragua (Vergara). Yet, an analytical report on data from Colombia, Peru, and Chile by the Migration Policy Institute concludes that in Chile, the criminality rate among Venezuelan immigrants was only 0.7 percent in 2019, meaning that members of the diaspora commit crimes at a lower proportion than their share of the population, and according to the Chilean Gendarmerie, 0.4% of Venezuelans were condemned for crimes (Bahar, D., Dooley, M., and Selee, A). My argument is not to deny that the Venezuelan exodus poses challenges for host countries across the continent, but the emphasis on crime rates does not reflect the genuine challenges at stake; instead, the narrative of criminality often serves political interests.

When narratives with false claims are socialized despite evidence, the goal is not accuracy but political gain. Regardless of ideological stance, political actors leveraged this narrative to advance their political strategies. Mass deportation and restrictive immigration measures will not solve the issue at hand, but they do move voters and feed xenophobic narratives as political campaigns are won on creating us versus them stigma and proposing restrictive migratory policies. To countermeasure that, it is to be expected that every Venezuelan serve as ambassadors for our community, advocating for our people to every xenophobe with our stories and the empirical data.

For me, that need hit home after my family and I arrived in Chile. In our new home, we were greeted by the cold of winter. Over time, I became accustomed to it, as eight years have passed since we had the privilege of establishing our family in a small town near the capital, Santiago. I arrived in 2017 and spent six months without access to school, and even in a country where I spoke the same language, the words didn't always make sense. School didn't make sense. Why was it my fault that other kids saw me as different? Why was it my fault that being from another country became exhausting for others so quickly? When did I stop being seen as a tourist, thus likable and exotic, and start being seen as just a migrant, undesirable and criminal?

To exemplify further, the impacts of jointed xenophobic and criminalization discourses in Chile, in 2019, Venezuelans began to be called “Caribbeans”—a term once seen as a compliment, associated with desirable tourist destinations, but later used pejoratively against the Venezuelan Diaspora in Chilean mainstream media, as words are shaped by their usage and the power of those who dictate them. According to Hall, a media theorist, “messages work in complex ways, and they are always connected with the way that power operates in any society,

together at the same time” (3). These impacts have been increasing; for example, in 2025, 85.2% of Chileans expressed social distance and prejudice against Venezuelan migrants compared with only 55.2% in 2019 (Activa). Those perceptions of Venezuelans contrast with the International Organization for Migration's report, which states that the Venezuelan contribution to tax revenue is 1.03% of all national taxes, with a fiscal impact of about USD \$409.7 million in 2022.

The prevailing narrative on using Venezuelan migrants as scapegoats and establishing retaliatory migrant policies fails to understand that policies negatively affecting Venezuelan immigrants will not solve all the country's issues. These sentiments can be seen in the commentaries expressing variations of 'Peru must come first for Peruvians,' even if this comes at the detriment of Venezuelan immigrants. The World Bank report in 2024 highlights something that does not fit into those nationalist political strategy campaigns: Migration brings economic growth not only for foreigners but for the entire population, as the Peruvian state earns 2,6 soles for every single “sol” it invests in Venezuelan migrants and refugees (World Bank). Such economic influence of the Venezuelan diaspora in both Chile and Peru impacts policy; even if their policy strategy is to prioritize their “citizens,” they must also prioritize the tax income and labor contributions that Venezuelans bring, which benefit Peruvians and Chileans too, whether they admit it on television or not. Thus, the criminalization discourses on the Venezuelan Diaspora bring specific policy impacts and tensions to the region.

Xenophobia vs. Aporophobia

Ospina and Moya argue that the emergence of hate narratives surrounding the Venezuelan exodus is less a result of xenophobia driven by political actions or criminalization of the diaspora and more a consequence of the demographic shift toward lower-income Venezuelan migrants, which has fueled aporophobia. They illustrate this using the case of Colombia, positing that the

xenophobic narratives concerning Venezuelan migrants reflect a normalized form of aporophobia, a concept introduced by Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina. Aporophobia is the fear and prejudice against underprivileged or poor individuals, and it functions as a social bias similar to xenophobia, homophobia, and Islamophobia (Ospina Celis and Moya Ortiz 6). Ospina and Moya argue that the social bias against Venezuelans has less to do with their nationality and, thus, less with the points mentioned above, and more with the fact that they are fleeing a country with inflation rates exceeding 100%. The media categorize them as poor migrants; the focus, they argue, is not specifically on Venezuelans' nationality. They illustrate their argument by noting that in Colombia, Venezuelans are labeled as migrants. In contrast, almost all other non-citizens are considered foreigners—a division, they argue, based purely on economic grounds (Ospina Celis and Moya Ortiz 11).

For Ospina and Moya, economic factors play a crucial role in Colombians' determination of whether someone is classified as a 'migrant' or a 'foreigner' (11). Such categorization is key, as it shapes perceptions of 'desirability' and marginalizes certain migrants, influencing who gets blamed, politicized, criminalized, and placed at the center of xenophobic narratives. They add that Venezuelan migrants face exclusion not due to cultural differences but because of widespread misconceptions that associate them with poverty, crime, dependency on public assistance, and an overall burden on society (Ospina Celis and Moya Ortiz 8). Those misconceptions offer an excuse to nullify compassion and empathy towards Venezuelan migrants.

Cortina's arguments are important to acknowledge as part of the intersecting hate narratives surrounding the Venezuelan diaspora. Still, Devis-Amaya highlights the weaknesses in

Cortina's argument. Devis-Amaya argues that there is a weakness in Cortina's theory and in the arguments of those who place it at the center of their reasoning, such as Ospina and Moya, which is that it overemphasizes discrimination against the poor to the extent of disregarding other forms of unfair treatment. The author poses the need for intersectionality in Cortina's framework to fully capture the complexity of oppression, as Hill, Collins, and Bilge (2 as cited by Devis-Amaya 10) assert: "... power relations of race, class, and gender, for example, are not discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but rather build on each other and work together." Ospina and Moya suggest that discrimination against migrants is primarily driven by economic status rather than race, ethnicity, or religion. While it is true that wealthier migrants are less likely to face xenophobia, their economic status does not entirely shield them from it, because their identity as a 'migrant' or 'foreigner' still continues to play a significant role in their positionality within the society they are trying to integrate into; thus, aporophobia and other identity-based phobias do not diminish the impact of political responses, the scale of migration, and the criminalization of specific migrant groups in intensifying hate narratives.

Devis-Amaya, to complement her arguments, interviewed Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and asks them to recall xenophobic interactions. One recalled an experience at work where a colleague from a rival company got upset at him because the client decided to speak with him first, saying comments like 'this Venezuelan comes here to steal jobs from the Colombian people,' and 'this Venezuelan this' and 'this Venezuelan that' until a coworker from his own company asked her to please stop (Devis-Amaya). This experience, in which the actors at play had the same job and thus similar economic status, showcases that there are structural factors that

add layers of pressure to xenophobic attitudes, showing that discrimination is not solely driven by class but also shaped by broader social and political forces.

Conclusion

América has always been and will always be a region in constant movement—Colombians migrating to Venezuela in the 1970s, Peruvians migrating to Venezuela in the 1980s, and Chileans fleeing to Venezuela to escape Pinochet’s dictatorship. América is a continent of resilience, struggle, tears, sweat, and blood—a land that was colonized but never tamed, never fully surrendered, and never will. The Venezuelan exodus has generated a migratory crisis across the Latin American region, which has been exacerbated by the scale of migration and the failure of regional institutions to provide an adequate response to the crisis. This institutional failure has contributed to the media's criminalization of Venezuelan migrants, portraying them as guilty of security threats, and, more recently, has allowed external forces to capitalize on a region not unified enough to address the Venezuelan crisis. As a result, xenophobic narratives have intensified, negatively impacting the experiences and treatment of Venezuelan migrants throughout the region.

Upon reflecting on the root causes of the rise in xenophobic narratives, it is imperative to address them through the lens of social cohesion, as described by the International Organization for Migration (IOM): “Social cohesion is a crucial dimension of societal well-being, and in the context of migrant and refugee integration, it involves reducing xenophobia and discrimination.” Achieving social cohesion for Venezuelan migrants is not an easy task, especially in times of deportation. However, the first step is to acknowledge that while Venezuelans fled a political crisis, they are now experiencing a xenophobia crisis that actively harms their integration and well-being.

More than ever, centering the voices of Venezuelans and the diaspora has become crucial, as regional discourses have focused on the Venezuelan crisis and the events that transpired on January 3, 2026. Political actors across the ideological spectrum, instead of responding to the displacement crisis and the human rights abuses faced by Venezuelans amid the political instability in Venezuela and deportations, continue to use our stories to advance their own agendas. More scholarship and literature reviews are needed to explore and discuss the dynamics of current U.S.–Venezuela relations and the precedent they set in the region, topics that were not addressed in this paper. Further research should also examine the specific diplomatic relationships between countries that shape their migratory policies, such as the case of Colombia and Venezuela, including their historic ties and the influence of the global turn toward migratory restrictionism and its associated narratives, and exploring the influence of the Venezuelan diaspora on the rise of right-wing nationalist narratives in the region. Most importantly, it is essential not to overlook those most affected, both domestically and abroad, and to center their voices and stories in their fight for democracy.

We must report misinformation and single-story perspectives on social media, educate our peers and communities about Venezuela and the diaspora, and, most importantly, listen to and promote stories that challenge xenophobic and hateful narratives. Furthermore, the IOM recommends “actively recognizing the harm that discrimination causes within society and seeking to address it, both rhetorically and through policy.” We must not allow Venezuela or its people to become a single story that politicians exploit for their interests. This is not a task Venezuelans should bear alone; it is a collective duty to democratize and promote narratives that

support the protection, integration, and representation of the diaspora and to advocate for solutions created for and by them.

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Chingonas Unveiled: Untold Narratives, Intersecting Identities, and Empowering Latina Resilience

Ava Tijerina

Introduction

“The identity of being Latina always had to be presented in the best way,” said Kenia Servin, a previous student at UW-Madison. “It was never raw; I could never present myself in a raw form” (Kenia Servin, personal communication, 2023). Servin captures a tension that several Latinas experience; the pressure to be able to perform an appropriate version of themselves and suppress their authenticity. This tension is crucial to the evolving translation of the term “Chingona.” Once used as a slur to degrade Latinas who were seen as aggressive or uncontrollable, it's now used to embrace Latinas' confidence, resistance, and self-definition. Reclaiming Chingona is not merely linguistic; rather, it is tied to how Latinas navigate the space in which intersecting identities come together to build authenticity.

Latines emerged as the fastest-growing minority, surpassing other ethnic groups as the largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau). Despite this significant demographic shift, they lack a dedicated space to navigate and express their identities. This challenge is especially prevalent among Latinas, who grapple with a dual identity as they navigate between American society and their cultural contexts. In numerous instances, Latinas are traditionally relegated to a role that merely complements machismo; they are expected to marry, bear children, and manage the household. These barriers have roots in colonial history, as exemplified by figures such as La Malinche, whose legacy has been weaponized to shame Latina agency. Nevertheless, Latinas continue to undergo cultural transformations, despite the negative shifts they may encounter. They continue to assert themselves, advocating not only for their own

rights but also for those of other women. It is essential to understand how Latinas navigate their identities, as this can provide unheard counter stories about building solidarity. This understanding will provide insight into the untold narratives that challenge and oppress mainstream perspectives that limit the opportunities and well-being of Latinas.

Exploration of Theoretical Framework

This essay will draw from works surrounding Latina feminism and self-identity by Latina scholars and activists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Alma Zaragoza-Petty, and Margaret Montoya to examine existing literature regarding the research question. Additionally, this research draws from ideas of Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCRIT), specifically in intersectionality and the power of counter-narratives. LatCRIT is essential to understanding this research as it centers the specific histories of language suppression, colonization, immigration, and racism experienced by Latine communities (Valdes 5; Bender 42). Within a LatCRIT framework, intersectionality is referred to as the understanding of a plethora of social identities such as race, gender, economic class, language, religion, and citizenship status that do not function independently but intersect to shape the narratives that individuals face. Intersectionality is credited to Black feminists, specifically to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 140; Crenshaw, “Mapping” 1245), who analyzed the conjoined role of multiple identities and highly influenced the work in LatCRIT and Latina feminist theory. Reducing Latina experiences to a single lens risks ignoring the oppressions and resilience that shapes these identities. Within this framework, counter-narratives are defined as stories that challenge dominant historical and cultural narratives that have marginalized Latina voices. Rather than treating dominant narratives as complete or neutral, counter-narratives highlight lived experiences from the oppressed and are seen as a needed source of knowledge in the academic world. Ultimately, these frameworks serve as navigational tools in a landscape where Latinas often lack adequate social spaces. Using Latina

feminism as a historical instrument that empowers Latinas, I explore how they transform negative stereotypes into expressions of positivity. By delving into these scholarly contributions, I aim to expose the often-overlooked narratives of Latinas and provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersecting identities they navigate on their journey towards self-realization. Interviews with Latinas from diverse backgrounds have been conducted to shed light on untold narratives and offer insights into the multifaceted nature of their identities, particularly in the context of what it means to embody the concept of Chingona.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, I address the following research question: How do Latinas navigate intersecting identities while reclaiming Chingona as a source of empowerment? Research will be conducted by integrating textual analysis with qualitative interviews conducted with Latinas from diverse backgrounds. Narratives from these women will be used to highlight their lived experiences with identity constraints and how they have challenged them.

For this essay, qualitative methodology was utilized to explore current narratives regarding Latina identity. The author centered on semi-structured interviews with Latinas who embody professional, academic and creative identities that all engage with barriers of identity, empowerment and cultural navigation. Participants were selected via referrals from the author's supervisor, allowing for inclusion of individuals whose narratives were relevant to the research question. Centering these voices is essential to this research, as their lived narratives function as counter-narratives that challenge dominant mainstreams portraying Latina identity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted utilizing a mixed-format approach (Zoom, in-person, and phone call) based on participant availability and preference. A total of three interviewees were interviewed; it is essential to note that permission from the interviewees to use their names in this

essay has been collected by the author. Together, these interviewees represented three different generational perspectives in the Latine community, offering different insight of how identity change and empowerment manifest across differing social and cultural contexts.

Interview questions focused on identity formation, language use throughout the interviewee's time regarding Chingona, and their interpretation of the newly defined empowerment that the term delivers. Interviewees were given the freedom to answer as honestly as they had wanted to highlight their legitimate experiences of oppressions and boundaries when considering their identity formation. This is consistent with the LatCRIT framework and these interviews highlight how Latinas navigate intersecting identities and reclaim their agency. A central figure embodying this concept is La Malinche, whose legacy has shaped cultural perceptions of womanhood. Examining La Malinche provides relevant context in understanding how modern reclamations of Chingona have emerged as acts of resistance against historical boundaries of authenticity.

La Malinche

La Malinche is a central figure when understanding this analysis due to her narrative being one of their first and most enduring to discipline Latina identity, sexuality, and agency. In Chicana feminism, scholars have noted that La Malinche symbolizes how colonial power and gendered violence have established what is considered “acceptable” and “unacceptable” for Latinas to hold in their identities during their womanhood (Pérez 63; Lugones 190). Furthermore, she is a prominent figure in contemporary Chicana literature whose narrative has been defined by oppressive perspectives and the complex departure from these integrated perceptions. It is essential, however, to give a brief historical context of La Malinche to understand how Chingona developed its roots.

La Malinche, or Malintzin, was an enslaved indigenous woman given to the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Her role as a translator for the Spanish army provided valuable insights into Aztec strategies, contributing significantly to the Spanish conquest. She bore a child with Cortés, metaphorically representing the birth of mestizx peoples. However, in postcolonial Mexican narratives, La Malinche was portrayed as a traitor, with her assistance to the Spanish framed as a betrayal of her own people. The consequence of this perceived betrayal is encapsulated in the derogatory slur "la chingada," a term laden with the insinuation that she accepted her own violation. This idea of Latina betrayal has not been left in the past; it continuously resurfaces in contemporary perceptions and language used to degrade Latina behavior and assertiveness (Moraga and Anzaldúa 45; Pérez 67). Traditionally, Chingona was a label that Latines may know about but did not say. Elosia Gomez, co-author of *Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists* and a Latina activist from Milwaukee, WI states: "It really was a fight word back in the day, so if you used it, you had to be willing to back it up" (Gomez). Delving into its modern meaning in Mexican slang, Alma Zaragoza-Petty, author of *Chingona: Owning Your Inner Badass for Healing and Justice*, defines it as a derogatory or vulgar term for a woman deemed too aggressive, difficult, or out of control (Zaragoza-Petty 18). Zaragoza-Petty is a social justice advocate who is passionate about using education to create change. Being the daughter of immigrant parents, an identity that has heavily influenced her identity of being a Chingona. Referring to her work, being labeled a Chingona implied that one's identity was under scrutiny, leading to a sense of rejection by one's own community due to perceived undesirable behavior. This historical narrative serves as a foundational element for understanding why negative stereotypes persistently cling to Mexicans and Chicanas but there are strong efforts to reverse this story.

Shifting from “La Chingada” to Chingona: Reclaiming Power

Chingona has undergone a transformative shift, evolving into a positive descriptor that uplifts Latinas. Today, embracing the identity of a Chingona signifies being an independent woman forging her own path in life. Essentially, the shift in meaning can be applied within a LatCRIT framework, specifically its main ideas of intersectionality and alternative narratives. Accordingly, intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold multiple social identities (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.) that interact and influence one another. The experiences of individuals cannot be fully understood by examining a single identity; instead, they must be embraced. Embracing only one identity can lead to misunderstanding an individual, leading to a false idea of who they may be. For some, it may lead to distress. Additionally, LatCRIT encourages the exploration of alternative narratives that challenge dominant ideas. This includes questioning mainstream historical accounts (in this case, La Malinche) that marginalize the experiences of minorities. Additionally, this tension is evident in Servin’s reflection (seen in the introduction) on feeling pressure to perform an artificial version of Latina identity in dominant spaces, furthering the concept of how intersecting identities converge. These ideas can be further demonstrated in the work of Alma Zaragoza-Petty, Margaret Montoya, as well as the narratives provided by Latinas in the local area. It can be argued that the borderlands, first described by Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, can deepen understanding of cultural duality.

Anzaldúa and The Borderlands

According to Anzaldúa, the borderland refers to an area where two cultures combine. In *La Frontera*, she writes: “the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (25). Anzaldúa mentions that the space between individuals shrinks with intimacy. This implies

that the borderlands are not just a physical or geographical concept but also a psychological and emotional one. It is a place where personal relationships develop, and understanding between individuals grows, overcoming the barriers imposed by cultural, racial, and social differences. The borderlands can be a site of tension and conflict, but it also presents opportunities for dialogue, learning, and cultural exchange. By acknowledging and navigating the complexities of these intersections, Latinas could build bridges to better themselves and others. Highlighting the concept of the borderlands is essential to this essay, as it relates to the stories described by Zaragoza-Petty, Montoya, and the interviewees in terms of describing their intersecting identities. Gomez, Esparza, and Servin, as told through their interviews, each embody their own borderlands as they describe navigating through cultural expectations, the use of language, and maintaining professional norms while remaining authentic to themselves. Their experiences demonstrate the borderlands as a lived and emotional space rather than just a theoretical construct. Traversing this complex space becomes an intricate dance, as Latinas find themselves moving in and out of the borderlands that separate societal expectations and the authentic expression of their Chingona identity.

Masking Identity in Predominant White Spaces

In her book, Zaragoza-Petty described a situation in which she recognized all her identities surrounding her but hesitated to accept them all. She writes: "...spiraling in and out of a state of panic, I could no longer sustain all my roles and identities. Mother, scholar, wife, researcher, sister, colleague, chola, activist, friend, daughter, spiritual person: could all those even coexist?" (42). She describes a moment in her life when she became aware of her multiple identities combining. Specifically, she explains how they impacted her professional identity, an identity that she performs in a predominantly white environment.

Similarly, in *Mascaras, Trenzas, Y Greñas: Un/Masking the Self while Un/Braiding Latina Stories and Legal Discourse*, Montoya describes a moment in which she is conflicted about her use of Spanish and English, two languages that overlap in her overall identity. She writes the following: “I am scheduled to present a version of this paper on the following day. But what language do I use? I want to speak in Spanish, to be understood by the largest number, but to do so puts me at psychological risk: using a limited vocabulary, fractured syntax and accented tones” (200). In one of my interviews, Kenia Servin, a recent alumna of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, stated: “The identity of being Latina always had to be presented in the best way...The typical stuff of Taco Tuesdays, speaking a little bit of Spanish here and there. It was never raw. I could never present myself in the raw form” (Servin). In these instances, we can see how Latinas often struggle with multiple identities. Within these experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of the intricate layers that comprise a Latina identity. Rather than presenting identity as a cohesive whole, the excerpts show how cultural expectations, gendered norms, and community pressures can create tension within the self. These narratives reveal how Latinas may feel pulled between identities and expectations, leading to moments of internal conflict rather than integration. In this sense, the excerpts highlight how identity is not shaped by intersecting influences but can also be fractured by them. Overall, this reflects the tricky balance that Latinas must navigate in cultural and social spaces. It expresses the concern and anxiety that Latinas may face regarding the “mask” that they want to present. In the first excerpt, the author illustrates the weight of cultural expectations imposed by the community, while the second excerpt emphasizes the conflict between societal perceptions and Servin’s personal aspirations. Together, these moments show how these competing pressures can create tensions in Latina identity.

Paving the Way to Authenticity

Understanding how identities can contribute to one's overall identity is a main attribute of being a Chingona. Like how Zaragoza-Petty and Montoya have described how their intersecting identities have caused them to question their overall identity, they go on to describe how they embrace them together. Zaragoza-Petty effectively demonstrates this concept throughout her book. She describes her struggles in separating her chola identity from her professional identity. She explains that having such opposing identities cannot work out; she must choose which conveyor belt she will travel on. Zaragoza-Petty defines conveyor belts as the paths individuals decide to navigate their intersecting identities. However, each of these conveyor belts comes with its own set of circumstances, requiring individuals to make sacrifices to progress. For those with intersecting identities, such as Zaragoza-Petty herself, this can be a source of distress. Instead of conforming to a predetermined conveyor belt, Zaragoza-Petty illustrates how she has forged her own path, creating a new identity for herself. She articulates this transformation, stating, "I now realize that the chola spirit I thought I had to relinquish—the energy of challenging systems that harm people, rejecting the status quo—can actually endure within me. In fact, this very identity is embedded within my newfound identity as a sCHOLAr" (57).

Furthermore, Montoya's exploration of language as an integral part of her identity adds another layer to the discussion. The melding of Spanish and English becomes a metaphor for the broader experience of straddling multiple worlds. Using mascaras as a metaphor for her intersecting identities, Montoya writes: "But this new identity, this contradictory and ambiguous identity, was my own. I felt authentic. My public persona, like my private face and private speech, no longer reflected only those who had dominated me and my people. I found my voice, mis voces" (215). Montoya describes this moment as breaking free from the colonial chains historically placed on Latinas. She knew that her greñas (messy, uncombed hair) were exposed;

however, she had found her inner Chingona in recognizing that hiding behind an artificial mask continued the historical colonization that dominates the Latina community.

The Power of Language in Latina Identity

This linguistic duality is not just a matter of communication but an embodiment of the multifaceted nature of Latina identity. Araceli Esparza, an award-winning Chicana author and poet, as well as the founder of Midwest Mujeres, an organization that embraces women's empowerment, explained that the use of Spanglish can evoke a range of mixed feelings among Latinas. In her experiences, Araceli has stated: "And oftentimes, Latinas come to me who don't speak Spanish. They were like, 'Oh my gosh, thank you for validating my identity even though I don't speak Spanish.' [And] I'm like, 'You have no idea that for many years, I hated the fact that I could speak another language because that only meant that I was hurt in two ways. And that the only compliments I could get were the breadcrumbs that were sometimes thrown to me in Spanish'" (Esparza). Araceli's hatred of speaking another language, specifically Spanish, speaks to the internal conflict many Latinas may face when their linguistic abilities become a source of pain rather than pride. Furthermore, her experiences demonstrate how language can function as both an identity marker and a tool of exclusion. Despite these challenges, Araceli's perspective, along with several other Latinas, introduces a transformative narrative—one that reframes linguistic "in-betweenness" as a source of strength. The notion that embracing this fusion is not a compromise but a powerful affirmation of a diverse heritage challenges conventional expectation. It positions the journey towards finding one's voice within this linguistic amalgamation as an empowering quest for self-discovery. In doing so, it takes a proactive stance against limiting stereotypes, fosters agency, and contributes to a broader cultural narrative that embraces and celebrates the complexity of identity.

Crossing the Borderlands

Zaragoza-Petty and Montoya's narratives highlight the absence of a predefined trajectory for Latinas and the significance of embracing their journeys. In the absence of a predetermined path, Latinas often grapple with forging an identity that authentically reflects the amalgamation of their cultural, linguistic, and personal experiences. This lack of a "conveyor belt" signifies a departure from stereotypical narratives and emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse identities. This recognition is not merely a matter of cultural sensitivity; it is essential to fostering a more inclusive society that values and celebrates how Latinas navigate their intersecting identities.

The concept of "crossing the Borderlands" further underscores the importance of embracing the unknown in the pursuit of authenticity. This metaphorical border-crossing is not just a geographical transition but a symbolic act of breaking away from societal norms and expectations. It represents a courageous step towards self-ownership, allowing Latinas to assert their identities beyond prescribed roles. This act of crossing into the unknown is essential for personal growth and societal progress, as it challenges outdated narratives and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of identity. Ultimately, encouraging Latinas to embrace their inner strength, referred to as their inner Chingona, becomes a transformative call to action. By taking ownership of their resilience and agency, Latinas redefine notions of femininity and strength, challenging historical impositions and contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society. This assertion of inner strength is not just a personal triumph but a collective empowerment, inspiring others to navigate their unique paths with courage and authenticity. In a world that often imposes rigid expectations, recognizing, celebrating, and empowering all Latinas on their diverse journeys is not only an act of justice but also a catalyst for societal evolution.

Being a Chingona also means having confidence regardless of the setting. When asked what an empowered Latina meant to her, Servin answered that having confidence is key. “It doesn't matter if you are applying to be in the top law firm or applying to McDonald’s, you have to have confidence in who you are as a person” (Servin). Servin reveals how spaces can reward cultural expression while discouraging genuine authenticity to maintain the dominant (and racialized) norms of professionalism. Similarly, when asked if she had to present an artificial version of herself while in professional settings, Gomez states: “If you know who you are as a Latina, then that should come through no matter what context you grew up in” (Gomez). This counters dominant narratives that view Latina success as complete assimilation and emphasizes that self-definition is a major source of empowerment across diverse contexts. Finally, Esparza’s response reflects the continuing influence of La Malinche on Latina identity. In reclaiming language historically used to shame women, she asserts agency against stereotypes that have long framed women associated with Malinche as traitorous. Her declaration, “You can put me down in history as a hoe, but I still came out on top,” challenges these narratives by rejecting the power of these labels and reframing them as evidence of resilience (Esparza). In essence, the Chingona identity becomes a celebration not just of cultural authenticity but also of personal triumphs over societal expectations. It signifies a journey of self-discovery and mastery—an ongoing process that showcases the enduring resilience of Latinas. These untold narratives challenge the limitations imposed by external perceptions and position Latinas as dynamic individuals who can authentically thrive in any setting, embodying the true essence of Chingona spirit.

Conclusion: Chingonas Unveiled

This essay explores the multifaceted landscape of Latina identity, focusing on the challenges Latinas face in navigating intersecting cultural, linguistic, and societal dimensions. As

Latines continue to emerge as the fastest-growing minority in the United States, the need for spaces where Latinas can express and navigate their identities (i.e., community organizations, cultural collectives, educational environments) becomes apparent. Through the lens of Latina Critical Race Theory, Latinas are empowered to redefine their identities, challenging historical stereotypes perpetuated by narratives like that of La Malinche. The concept of the borderlands, as articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa, emphasizes the psychological and emotional dimensions of navigating intersecting identities, providing opportunities for understanding and cultural exchange. The untold narratives of Alma Zaragoza-Petty, Margaret Montoya, and others exemplify the struggles and triumphs of Latinas as they embrace their complex identities.

While the essay attempts to highlight the untold stories of Latinas through lived narratives and various theoretical frameworks, I acknowledge the limitations of my analysis in that it does not capture the spectrum of Latina identities formed by external factors (such as nationality, class, sexuality, immigration status, generational experience and more). Future analysis in this concept can offer more rich details in incorporating a larger range of voices (i.e., including voices of Latinas from different cultures, such as Puerto Rican, Colombian, Cuban, etc.) and using multiple disciplinary approaches that uncover how Latinas resist and create spaces within dominant institutions such as law, STEM-centered spaces, education and more. The transformation of the term Chingona reflects the resilience and agency of Latinas, inspiring a collective journey of self-discovery and challenging societal norms. In essence, being a Chingona entails navigating intersecting identities with confidence, reclaiming agency, and celebrating personal triumphs over adversity, contributing to a more equitable, inclusive, and empowered society. As Latinas assert their resilience and authenticity, they inspire a broader societal

evolution towards understanding, acceptance, and celebration of diverse identities, serving as a beacon for others to navigate their unique paths with courage, intention, and authenticity.

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Impact of Sport on Adolescent Latinx Identity and Academics

Alexandra Galang

Introduction

Historically, sports have been a major part of Hispanic and Latinx life inside and outside of the US. From times of early migration to present day, and from first-generation migrants on, sports have played a significant role in both preserving Latinx heritage and assimilation to Anglo culture. The literature review portion of this paper discusses the history of Mexican American culture and sport, as well as case studies, aiming to provide support for the impact of youth sports participation on identity and academics. The literature review is complimented by an interview with an academic professional with related grassroots and professional experience. This paper makes the assertion that youth sports participation can help Latinx youth develop a sense of cultural identity and belonging. Sports participation fosters social development, physical and mental wellbeing, and can strengthen academic performance.

Literature Review

Sport and Identity: History

U.S. institutions introduced sports to Mexican Americans as a method of promoting “muscular Christianity” and Americanization. While Mexicans adopted American sports, they created a unique Mexican sporting culture and strengthened their national identity. During the interwar period in the US, this was seen in the Euro-American use of sports to encourage immigrant assimilation. American sports were used by settlement houses, YMCAs, and municipal employees to “Americanize” Mexican immigrants. The YMCA played a significant role in advertising both “American” sports and “muscular Christianity” to middle-class men. It established a physical education movement centered around moving young Mexican men closer to Christianity, the purpose of which was “improving their moral character and physicality”

(Alamillo). Making the most out of the situation, middle-class Mexican men used the programs to build their leadership skills, masculinity, and national identity. American writers, researchers, and the like populated the thought that Mexican athletes were racially inferior to white athletes. The perpetuation of the concept of “Americanization” communicated the narrative of Mexicans as a racial problem (Alamillo). However, the development of a Mexican sporting culture was aided by *México de afuera* institutions, including mutual aid organizations, the Spanish-language press, and the Spanish consulate. The spaces created to Americanize Mexicans through sport evolved into spaces for community building and organizing. It is in this way that, dating back to the interwar period, sport was a mechanism for developing the Mexican American identity, incorporating a degree of both cultures (Alamillo).

Sport and Identity: Community

The benefit of organized sports in the community is evident in examining interwar Mexican South Chicago. Migrant teams helped build a sense of community between participants and spectators. Extending beyond themselves, organized sports exposed them to other ethnic groups and communities. First- and second-generation children became more assimilated by participating in recreational activities like those of American children. Further, in promoting assimilation, social service organizations and settlement houses organized baseball leagues that played both Mexican and non-Mexican teams. Mexican community organizations sponsored activities other than sports, including dances and concerts. These types of social activities provided community members the opportunity to expand their social networks and facilitated communication between Mexican clusters in the area. Organizations were also a support network, providing services to Chicago-area Mexicans. These organizations were influential despite boundaries like ethnic prejudice and a lack of resources (Innis-Jiménez). Scholarship by

Julia Haß and Stephanie Schütze furthers this concept, explaining that for migrants and transnational communities, sports provide a place of community gathering and feeling of belonging. They also express that sports spaces can be used for social networking and assimilation (Haß and Schütze).

In Metropolitan Washington, D.C., soccer league players highly valued Latino leagues, and many thought they were important to participants and the community. The leagues were a safe, family-oriented environment for young immigrants. Soccer was seen as an activity to keep young men healthy and prevent drug use. They were also important venues for coethnic interaction and staying in contact with friends and family in their native countries. The leagues functioned as a “Secondspace,” or a memory of a native country and connected children born in the US to their heritage. The concept of a “Thirdspace” in these environments is valuable, especially for immigrants, in establishing status, whether that be to oneself or socially (Price and Whitworth).

Sport and Identity: Education

Particularly applicable to academics, Leticia Villarreal Sosa conducted a study titled “Latinx and African American Youth Participation in Sports and Leisure: The Impact on Social Identity, Educational Outcomes, and Quality of Life,” with the primary source of data being attendees of Chicago Public High Schools in their sophomore year. She first acknowledges the disparity in Latinx high school completion rates and educational outcomes. She then highlights the pre-existing understanding that active participation in school and community activities are protective factors that support student mental and physical health, which relates to academic success. She identified that students need to have access to activities in which they are able to build relationships with peers and adults and develop prosocial skills. They also require a

positive perception of their school environment, self, and future. Access to sports and leisure activities positively impacted the likelihood of graduation and quality of life. Activities also help students navigate and cope with negative school environments and experiences. Villarreal Sosa also noted that “students in this study reported positive relationships with peers and coaches, opportunities for challenge and support, feeling valued and competent, and feeling engaged when playing sports or other activities such as band or dance.” She also notes that students who feel connected to school put in more effort academically. Participation in extracurricular activities offer positive experiences that will potentially increase student connectedness and commitment. A strong cultural identity is associated with positive self-esteem and development of skills to cope with racism (Villarreal Sosa).

Villarreal Sosa used student interviews as her form of data collection. One student who participated in basketball in eighth grade expressed that basketball was largely what motivated him to get good grades. In high school, the student was prevented from participating in sports due to low grades. After 10th grade, the student did not have the desire to attend high school. Another student, who identified as an immigrant, participated only in community sports, not school sports. He played on a soccer team composed of young immigrant men. In terms of academics, the student stated that despite being a community-based activity, the coach would make sure that the players were doing well in school, and he would deny them playing time for poor grades. The student did not have close connections with his peers or adults at his school. However, he still performed well academically with the connections and relationships he had because of community sports. Additionally, his separation from school was helpful in avoiding the negative stereotypes associated with Latinx boys (Villarreal Sosa).

Just as significant as the above study is literature on Youth Development Programs (YDPs) and Sport for Development models. Robledo et. al. identified sport as a venue for collaborative relationships and increased parental participation. Sports were also a way of celebrating Latinx culture and managing social barriers experienced by Latinx youth. The authors detailed the following findings in the context of “Juntos,” a YDP in North Carolina meant to support Latinx youth and their families in the pursuit of high school education and beyond. The Juntos program included two soccer tournaments that were the source of most of the authors’ data. The purpose of YDPs is to be resources for Latinx youth dealing with academic challenges such as discrimination, limited resources, parental education, language proficiency, and external pressure. Sport can help support YDPs, especially soccer as it is seen as a familiar cultural space. Already culturally relevant, soccer provides both youth engagement and community involvement.

The Juntos program tournaments specifically targeted barriers to Latinx parental involvement, as previous research found parental involvement is more likely if parents believe they possess the knowledge necessary to participate. One of the tournaments incorporated cultural food at their concession stands via parent volunteers. The other tournament included Latin music for people to dance to, catering to the knowledge that programs that reinforce culture and ethnicity work in favor of the program’s goals. These efforts uplifted cultural needs and fostered group connection and family support. Youth involved were most aware of the ability to build social relationships with other youth and parental presence. In terms of education, participants had to be Juntos members to participate in the tournament. Juntos’s goal with the tournament was to provide members with information about college and motivate them to pursue

higher education, which they did in a variety of ways during the event, including pairing youth up with college students (Robledo et al.).

Barriers to Sport: Gender

Gender historically has been and remains a prevalent barrier to sport participation in Latin American culture. The marginalization of women's sports during the interwar period was present in both Mexico and the United States, with female athletes being pushed toward sports like tennis, gymnastics, and volleyball, which were seen as more suited to the preservation of their femininity and physical attractiveness. This was perpetuated by Spanish language newspapers that produced content relating to female sport attire, physicality, and maternal potential (Alamillo). This perpetuated the social construct that associates soccer and its environment with masculinity, which often keeps Latinx girls from participating, along with cultural biases and domestic responsibilities (Robledo et al.). This deprives them of the benefits associated with participation in sport. Elizabeth Bendick authored a paper entitled, "Latina Organized Athletic Participation and the College Transition" exploring this topic. Bendick's paper discusses the positive impacts athletic participation can have on Latinx women transitioning into college and how it helps combat negatives. She asserts that athletic participation has benefits associated with self-esteem and social connection and offers a community of support for participants. Family support for their student athlete was helpful to the college transition, while a lack of familial support was associated with a more difficult transition. Bendick suggests that athletic programs for young Latinx girls would maximize the benefits of sports participation and future success (Bendick).

Barriers to Sport: Socio-demographic

Other socio-demographic factors besides gender also create barriers to participation. Disparities in youth sport participation can be attributed to the pay-to-play concept and sports specialization. Specialization and club-based sports with a pay-to-play model are less accessible to minority populations and those of low socioeconomic status (Hernandez et al.). The time commitment, cost, and transportation requirements placed on children and their parents greatly reduces access, especially to low-income and single parent families. Some Hispanic/Latinx families utilized their culture in ways like selling cultural foods and creating side businesses to finance participation. Families also relied on kinship to participate in youth sports, particularly to the detriment of older siblings, mainly daughters. Older siblings faced more barriers associated with money and time than their younger siblings. Older Hispanic/Latinx daughters are more often responsible for taking care of the family than older sons (Hernandez et al.).

Interview Description

To compliment the information provided by the literature review, I interviewed Dr. Vincent Ramos. Dr. Ramos received his PhD in school psychology from Texas A&M University, where he also worked as a member of the university faculty and an administrator for 16 years. He has conducted research in ethnic identity development of Mexican American youth. He has personal and grassroots experience with these topics as well. He grew up in Texas, participating in sports himself, and coached youth soccer in Wisconsin and Texas for a total of 20 years. Additionally, he has been very involved with Mexican American communities in Texas through community organizing and local politics.

Interview Transcript

This interview transcript has been revised and shortened for the purpose of conciseness.

Dr. Ramos: When I've had conversations with friends --- these are adults who've been out of high school for 30-40 years, right? And you hear these adults talk about their athletic experiences, their athletic achievements when they were in high school, if you were in an adjacent room, overhearing the conversation, what you would hear is our stories of tremendous achievement that would sound like it was a professional athlete achieving these things. You know, because our memories of them and the impact it had on us is that profound. So for a 15-year-old kid, that experience is, your world, right? I mean that that is impacting you very directly, and it fills you with emotion, and it can be a defining moment. I say that just to kind of highlight how profoundly impactful those experiences are, and how important, coaches are, and teachers are. And the influence that they have on shaping a kid's sense of identity and self-esteem and their motivation --- shaping that personal vision of themselves.

Alex: Does being surrounded by people of your same race/ethnicity in community sports and building that community bring up your self-concept? Or is it school sports that are within a community of mixed people, that helps you to not feel so differentiated?

Dr. Ramos: If you go to South Texas, it's 85% Mexican American, predominantly Hispanic kids. Up until the 90s, South Texas existed like an apartheid system. So even within a predominantly Hispanic community like South Texas, you have Hispanic kids whose sense of ethnic identity and ethnic self-concept is low, because, again, the school systems. The institutions and structures that are in place communicate to these kids that they're not only on an equal playing field. The disparities that the numbers point to are real. And so, the question has to be, why? I think it has to do with accessibility. You know, do the programs exist? And if they do, are they affordable? Do the families have the resources for it? And there's another dimension in terms of being socialized to understand that those programs and resources are accessible to them. When I was

growing up, my family didn't grow up with sports. But they didn't finish high school, so educational experiences really weren't something that they understood very well. So, they didn't know how to support me and my sports interests. They just didn't think there was a place for them.

Alex: Do you think that one of the biggest barriers is just families not knowing how to support and socioeconomic related things?

Dr. Ramos: Absolutely, socioeconomic and the resources and accessibility. I coach soccer at [a school in Wisconsin], and I convinced the head coach to start a soccer club that targeted Hispanic kids. Because, you know, club soccer is expensive and so we wanted to create a club that was inviting to the Hispanic kids in our community, and that was affordable. So, we did that for a couple of years, and we had participation from mostly Hispanic kids in the community who otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity. There has to be adults who are interested in providing those opportunities and there has to be the resources available to help bridge that economic gap that often exists.

Alex: In terms of family support, what do you think would make a difference there? What would make it easier for them to feel like they had a place there?

Dr. Ramos: Meet them in their communities. Instead of saying, “come to the school cafeteria, and we're going to have a parent meeting, and bring a snack.” We don't know how to do that, especially first-generation and second-generation parents. But if you reach out to them and say, “Hey, you know, could you get other families together and let's have a dinner, you know, you guys cook” and do whatever, you know, they can do that, and they'll be happy to do that.

Alex: In a school with a small Hispanic population, have you seen that participation helps create a sense of belonging or separation?

Dr. Ramos: I grew up predominantly in a rural, predominantly white community. The Hispanic community was small and so the impact that sports had on me was huge, it's where I got my taste of success and pride. I could see myself beyond, you know, that small Hispanic kid, who isn't at the level of my Anglo peers. In athletics, I earned respect and some successes that helped shape my self-esteem and my motivation.

Alex: Do you think that sport helps female athletes? Or if athletic achievement as a young child would help parents feel more okay with moving up to higher levels of education, like playing in college?

Dr. Ramos: I mean, it's just the fact that, if they're that successful, if they're able the resources and the scholarship invitations to go play at a college, that's a game changer. Are the family still going to have the same fears? "I don't know where my kids are going. Are they going to be safe? Are they going to be taken care of?" Families will have those questions and hopefully, kids leave with parent's blessings, even though they're scared to death. I know that there have been cases where they leave without their parent's blessings, because their parents are so fearful and upset about it. It's just hard for them to be okay with it.

Alex: Do you think that can be related to the idea of meeting parents where they're at? Do you think that would help break gender role barriers in sport? Just talking to parents and saying this is what we're doing. This is what a lot of people do. This is our program.

Dr. Ramos: Absolutely, and it's something that those programs are guilty of not doing at all. You know, I said you got to think outside the box. The way I conceptualize this is that a lot of Hispanic kids don't get to college because they're having to deal with this tension and pressure to stay home to help contribute and the fear that parents have. Well, what would happen if a representative from the college visited the community, went to their home and say, "Hey, what

are your concerns?" Is my kid going to have something to eat? Who's going to take care of him if he gets sick? Who's going to take care of him? Who's going to meet their needs? These are the questions families had. Imagine the effect of having somebody assure you, "This is what we're going to do for your kid. Here's my number if you have any questions, you can call me, and, not only that, but we'll make sure that we'll get your kid home for the holidays." I know there was a college, Texas Woman's University, that actually started doing some of those things that I'm talking about, they literally would have meetings in Hispanic communities and meet with parents and provide those assurances. And their enrollment of Hispanic students doubled and tripled because of that.

Alex: What are your thoughts about cultural identity within community sports that are similar to a small enclave?

Dr. Ramos: You're with your people, you know, and it creates a lot of pride in their culture, and they can, they can live their culture without apologies, you know, and without being self-conscious of it. If I live in a community where I feel like I'm a part of that community, and enhances my, you know, my idea of who I am. Well, that increases a sense of security, yeah, which obviously impacts our whole world. And, and the research I did --- the higher your ethnic self-concept and ethnic identity, the higher the likelihood that you were going to be successful in academic achievement, yeah. That was a direct correlation, a strong core, I think it was like a point seven correlation, right? And it was real high, you know. And these were kids in South Texas, where you would assume that 100% of them would have high ethnic identity because they're all Hispanics, they're all brown. But the fact is that some don't.

Analysis of Interview

One of the fascinating things I learned in the interview was the influence of generational status on behavior. I was able to recognize generation as an important element, but it seemed to perpetuate throughout the interview. It is evident that in order to break down barriers to sport, individuals with the necessary resources are required to make a conscious effort in these areas. Specifically identified in this interview was the fact that colleges reaching out to Latinx parents to reassure them would reduce the fears that drove them to try and keep their children home, specifically their daughters. Athletics can offer Latinx youth access to college via avenues that are not typically known. This is one of the reasons why outreach is important, especially for first-generation families as they are navigating a new world. The conversation about female athletes and college was especially indicative of this. In the context of outreach to families Dr. Ramos mentioned, “I know there was a college, Texas Woman's University, that actually started doing some of those things that I'm talking about, they literally would have meetings in Hispanic communities and meet with parents and provide those assurances. And their enrollment of Hispanic students doubled and tripled because of that.”

Outreach is also helpful in youth sports. Making a point to involve parents can prevent youth participants from feelings of isolation and, as mentioned above, calm any fears parents might have. One of the ways to get parents involved that Dr. Ramos mentioned was to take a direct approach, “Meet them in their communities. Instead of saying, ‘come to the school cafeteria, and we're going to have a parent meeting, and bring a snack’... reach out to them and say, ‘Hey, you know, could you get other families together and let's have a dinner, you know, you guys cook’ and do whatever, you know, they can do that, and they'll be happy to do that.” In youth sports specifically, making a space for first-generation parents can help them to feel like

they have a place in their children's lives and in the new world they have become a part of.

Again, as detailed in the interview, for this to happen there must be people to identify this need and take specific action on it.

Another thing that was particularly surprising to me was that being surrounded by members of your same race/ethnicity does not always equate positive ethnic identity and self-concept. This can be caused by systemic factors that have held up over time which served the purpose of situating white people above people of color. Not included in the interview transcript is Dr. Ramos's explanation as to what specifically causes this negative ethnic and self-identity in places like Texas that have a large Hispanic population. He explained that he feels it has to do with the influence that teachers have on children. He elaborated on this by explaining that teachers are trained through a standardized model that caters to the white people and perpetuates the idea that Hispanics are beneath white people. This feeling is imparted onto students, whether teachers are aware of it or not. Dr. Ramos expressed that it would take an individual with an incredibly solid and positive self-concept to impart those same traits onto a student.

In many ways the information in this interview aligned with the literature. The value sports have in the lives of youth was reinforced. Dr. Ramos even mentioned that after reviewing my notes for the literature review in the areas of sport building self-esteem and identity, and how it teaches kids teamwork and perseverance, he found to be true himself. Dr. Ramos mentioned from his own experience, "I grew up in a rural, predominantly white community. The Hispanic community was small and so the impact that sports had on me was huge, it's where I got my taste of success and pride. I could see myself beyond, you know, that small Hispanic kid, who isn't at the level of my Anglo peers. In athletics, I earned respect and some successes that helped shape my self-esteem and my motivation."

When asked about community, culturally-based sports versus school sports that are often made up of other races/ethnicities he highlighted evidence against the assumption that being surrounded by one's race, does not always lead to positive self-concept. While it could be seen as a discrepancy with some of the literature, he also emphasized that everyone has a unique experience in life, and everyone's perceptions of the world are different. In explaining the disparities that exist, Dr. Ramos highlighted accessibility as a driving factor, raising questions about visibility of programs to Latinos and whether they were affordable, both concepts that are consistent with the literature. He again referenced difficulties associated with early generation families by highlighting the idea of being socialized enough to understand the programs and resources available to them. In considering barriers to youth sports and ways that those barriers can be removed, these concepts aligned with the literature. He emphasized socioeconomic status, accessibility, family support, and resources. He explained that he had helped form a soccer club for Hispanic youth that was accessible, but that to improve accessibility overall there needed to be more individuals taking action, like himself.

He also discussed coaches and their impact on education and the holistic success of youths. This conversation was consistent with literature exploring how coaches and teachers can have a significant influence over positive or negative self-concept, specifically as discussed in Leticia Villarreal Sosa's research. When asked about areas with a small Hispanic population and how sports participation impacted a sense of belonging, he recounted growing up in a predominantly white community and how he was able to experience feelings of success and pride through participating in soccer. He noted that in middle school he had an Anglo coach that, despite his successes in practice, would never play him in a game. This was an experience that stuck with him and was hard for him at the time. His previous positive experiences with soccer

helped him to continue to participate in high school soccer. Overall, he recounted his participation in sports to be a positive experience that helped shape his self-esteem and motivation.

When addressing Latinas in sports and the different gender expectations and roles in Hispanic culture, he shared his own experience coaching with these barriers to Latinx girls. Most consistent with the information found in literature was the barrier of traditional Hispanic gender roles. In the literature, less emphasis was placed on parental fear as one of the larger driving forces behind parents' desire to keep their kids home. In the interview, Dr. Ramos emphasized that parent's reservations and the reason why they kept their children home was mainly out of fear for what they did not know. They were not familiar with the world around them and many had never experienced college before. They did not know how to keep their kids safe in those situations or if their kids would be taken care of if they went off to college. Dr. Ramos mentioned, "The way I conceptualize this is that a lot of Hispanic kids don't get to college because they're having to deal with this tension and pressure to stay home to help contribute and the fear that parents have. Well, what would happen if a representative from the college visited the community, went to their home and say, 'Hey, what are your concerns?'" These were reservations Latino parents felt with their sons and daughters, however the traditional cultural values and gender roles seemed to provide parents further desire to keep their daughters at home. Another layer to this mentioned in the literature and brought up on multiple occasions in the interview is socioeconomic status. The literature noted that, often, if children did play sports, it was the youngest ones (Hernandez et al.). This was because with the time and money sports required, the help of older siblings, most often daughters/sisters, made participation in sports more accessible to younger siblings than they were to older siblings.

Something not explicitly stated in the literature was the challenge that came after kids earned athletic scholarships and were able to go off to college. Dr. Ramos pointed out the issue of students feeling imposter syndrome. Even with high self-esteem, the deeply rooted concept impressed on them, explicitly or non-explicitly, was that they, and other people of color, were below white people. Likewise, college was often an unfamiliar and scary world for not only parents, but also the children, which was a problem recognized and addressed in the literature. One of the programs mentioned was one that exposed kids to opportunities for college, college visits, and had children interact with current college students. These efforts were made by an organization that held soccer tournaments with the idea that it would bring Latino children into their program so they could be educated and exposed to opportunities for higher education (Robledo et al.).

Dr. Ramos' interview was particularly insightful. He came from an academic background, having a PhD in school psychology, and has done his own research on ethnic identity, ethnic self-concept, and academic achievement. He also has had personal experience participating in sports himself as a kid and being a first-generation high school and college graduate. He coached youth soccer for many years and successfully created a club soccer team accessible to Hispanic youth. Dr. Ramos' experiences and knowledge offered a unique perspective on the topic. The questions I had prepared to ask in the interview were on topics that were naturally brought up in our conversation. I think this can be attributed to Dr. Ramos' experience with the topic from many different perspectives and the way he intellectualized his experiences. He also offered stories and examples of people he knew and their significant experiences. His vast knowledge and experiences demonstrated in the interview left little room for criticism.

The purpose of this paper was to assess the impact of youth sports on Latinx identity and academics. The assertion was made that sports participation can foster the development of a sense of cultural identity and belonging in Latinx youth. With that, it promotes social development, physical and mental wellbeing, and can strengthen academic performance. These points were generally found to be supported in the literature and interview. It was identified though, that despite what one might predict, even in environments where there is a large Hispanic population, negative self-concept can still exist. Given the support found for the positive effects associated with Latinx youth participation in sport, it is worth promoting awareness, research, and action towards reducing barriers to participation.

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