THE T IS SILENT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAYAL OF LATINX TEACHER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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ABSTRACT

JATNNA ACOSTA. The T is Silent: An Autoethnographic Portrayal of Latinx Teacher Identity Development and Consciousness (Under the direction of Dr. Lisa R. Merriweather and Dr. Spencer Salas)

Despite evidence of the rapid growth of Latinx students throughout the country (Gándara, 2017; He & Yu, 2017), there has been inadequate critical examination of the educational policies and practices impacting this population and their self-identification. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that all students, regardless of cultural or linguistic background, receive a quality education that will equip them for post-school success in an increasingly diverse society. Studies suggest that teachers who share the racial, cultural, and/or ethnic identity of their students can play an important role in their success. Unfortunately, Latinx teachers remain starkly underrepresented within the field (Shapiro & Partelow, 2018), even though Latinx teacher representation plays a critical role in not only the academic achievement of Latinx students but is also prevalent in the solving of larger issues related to ethnic and racial identity development and consciousness (Goldhaber et al., 2019) because of the postcolonial structures in schools. Postcolonial structures are implicated by the structural inequality and racial and economic disparities that continue to plague racialized groups throughout society. In order to fulfill this role, Latinx teachers need to richly understand their Latinx identity development and consciousness.

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. Using Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit) as the

theoretical framework, this dissertation focuses on Latinx teachers and the impact of identity development on their role in the classroom. I examined my Latinx identity at different stages of my life and positioned this within the collective experiences of other Latinx teachers to better understand the factors that have contributed to my evaluation of self.

The data collected for this study consisted of a life timeline, transcribed journals I kept throughout my teaching career, cultural artifacts, and an individual autobiographical narrative. This highly reflective process was then analyzed thematically to identify themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The findings revealed three major themes: *ongoing identity detachment, Latinx imposter syndrome,* and *unveiled hypocrisy in education. Ongoing identity detachment* highlights my continued loss of identity. *Latinx imposter syndrome* depicts the feelings of doubt, fear, and fraud I had to overcome in my role as a bilingual teacher of emergent bilingual students. Lastly, *unveiled hypocrisy in education* captures my awareness and understanding of the marginalization and exclusion within the education system. This study has significant implications for the understanding of Latinx teacher identity development and the influence their self-perception has on their work within the classroom. Recommendations on how to further the discussion on identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling are made to teacher preparation programs, school and district leaders, Latinx teachers, and for future research.

Keywords: postcolonial structures, raciolinguistic ideologies, internalized oppression, immigrant experience, Latinx teacher identity

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DEDICATION

For teachers everywhere. Particularly teachers who are having to unpack their trauma alongside their students. I see you. I value you. I'm rooting for you. I don't blame you one bit for wanting to be selfish. Your students WILL thank you for investing the time into knowing yourself, however that may look for you. There is great power in being intentional about learning and exploring your identity as often as you need. Especially the aspects of yourself that might feel underdeveloped and unclear to you. Reclaim any and all parts of yourself you may have lost along the way. Yes, you will be a better teacher for it, but most importantly you will come to know and love yourself. You deserve that.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I started school in the United States, I thought I had a superpower. I was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Brooklyn, New York when I was six years old with my dad and younger sister. Like many other immigrant children, I had no say in the decision that was made on my behalf. I can hardly remember how the decision came to be or the specific rationale behind it. I have vague memories of my years in the Dominican Republic before moving to Brooklyn. I do remember, however, the many sacrifices that came with living in a new country where we tried desperately to belong. Sacrifices such as the cold weather, not speaking the language, and living in a constant state of confusion at the newness of it all.

My first personal sacrifice was my name. My dad often tells the story that within a week of starting elementary school in Brooklyn, he encouraged me to believe that I had a superpower. Within a short period of time, my six-year-old mind was thrilled at the opportunity to have something special to share with my sister who had not yet started school. My superpower was that I was effortlessly able to morph into two different people. At home I was one person (Jatnna *silent T*) and at school and to our neighborhood friends I was another (JaTnna *emphasized T*). Starting school revealed to me what would eventually become a permanent reality of living in a new country: everyone mispronounces my name. Although the mispronunciation of my name confused me at first, I quickly embraced it. This seemingly insignificant detail made my true self, the one I unmasked when I got home, feel sacred. Up until the end of high school, I allowed any and everyone who was not family to pronounce my name however they felt was right.

In my younger years, I was proud of my superpower. I had somehow developed a mechanism that allowed me to protect the parts of my identity I did not want this new country to strip away from me. As I got older, I developed a sense of passive acceptance that allowed me to

convince myself that it was normal. I willingly relinquished any rights I had to my own name because I thought it was expected of me. Without fully understanding what was taking place, I slowly began to mold different versions of myself for the benefit of others. The confusion I once felt about having shifting identities in different social spaces became a normalized part of my immigrant experience in the United States.

While I found a unique resilience through the concept of superpowers, stories of "re-naming" immigrant children in American schools are not uncommon. Such examples of linguistic racism are plentiful. For example, Peterson et al., (2015) discussed the ways in which using students' personal names "has the power to positively affirm identity and signal belonging in the classroom" (p. 40). Conversely, the mispronunciation, misspelling, or shortening of a student's name undermines their sense of identity and can foster the unfair exclusion of those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Peterson et al., 2015). Similarly, Marrun (2018) maintained that at the core of being a culturally responsive educator is demonstrating respect for students' names. A name holds a multitude of personal and cultural significance for an individual. The lack of consideration for re-naming and other culturally insensitive experiences minoritized students are subjected to can have long lasting effects on both their academic progress and personal identity development.

Statement of the Problem

Within a classroom setting, teachers have the unique responsibility of ensuring that all students, regardless of cultural or linguistic background, receive a quality education that will equip them for post-school success in an increasingly diverse society, a society that He and Yu (2017) argue is becoming increasingly multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, and multiracial. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, He and Yu (2017) estimated that by the year 2060, the

foreign-born population in the country will make up 19 percent of the total population, equaling 417 million people. Within the United States these growing rates of immigration have contributed to the increased presence of culturally and linguistically diverse students in K-12 classrooms.

The passing of the 1965 Immigration Act contributed to the rise of Latin Americans throughout the country seeking economic and educational opportunities (Brown et al., 2018) and/or varying degrees of asylum (Torre, 2020). In 1980, the Latinx population in the United States made up 6.5 percent of the total population and 8 percent of the K-12 school population (Gándara, 2017). According to Gándara (2017), this same group grew to 17.6 percent of the total population and 25 percent of the K-12 school population in 2017, making Latin Americans the nation's largest minority group. Gándara (2017) cited that by as soon as 2023 approximately one-third of all students throughout the nation will be of Latinx descent. Trends in settlement depict that "new pockets of immigration have resulted in concentrations of Latino students in places that haven't had a substantial number of Latino immigrants before" (Gándara, 2017, p. 5). At the K-12 level, the Latinx student population continues to grow both directly and indirectly from the rise in immigration to the country. The demographics of Latinx immigrant students in American schools varies greatly from those who are and are not Spanish speakers, originate from Latin American countries with varying social and cultural traditions, and arrive at the United States under different individual and familial circumstances. While many Latinx students are immigrants themselves, a vast majority are also U.S. native-born descendants of previous generations of migrants from Latin American countries (Gándara, 2017). Despite these notable and prevalent differences amongst Latinx students, Gándara (2017) points out that "these students tend to share many demographic characteristics, such as low educational attainment,

high rates of poverty, and a longtime presence in the continental United States" (p. 5). The individual and collective challenges endured by Latinx students, and their immigrant families are indicative of deeply rooted systemic issues that depict ongoing structural inequality benefitting society's majority groups.

Systemic Issues in Education

While adult immigrants learn to navigate their new society in terms of housing and employment, immigrant youth are primarily socialized within school settings that can either value or diminish the cultural and linguistic assets they bring to the classroom. As the arrival of immigrant newcomers to American schools continues to increase at a steady pace, educators and policymakers bear the responsibility of challenging the deficit perspectives that frame Latinx students and their immigrant families. Rather than highlighting strengths, deficit perspectives of language, academic underachievement, and poverty, amongst others, frame members of the Latinx community within an ideology of inferiority. Factors such as not speaking English as a native language, underperforming according to the measures of standardized testing and being of low socioeconomic status diminish the culturally rich lived experiences of Latinx students (Carales & Lopez, 2020). Additionally, Darling-Hammond (1998) pointed out that "the educational outcomes for minority children are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race" (p. 28). Therefore, minoritized student groups live within a contradictory system that disproportionately limits their access and opportunities for growth. Latinx students and their immigrant families experience cultural and social barriers that further emphasize the need for transformative educational reform. The following sections provide more detail on the systemic issues of academic achievement, poverty, and postcolonial structures in schooling that negatively impact this student group.

Academic Underachievement

The American education system is noticeably failing the Latinx student population at an alarming rate. In the Condition of Education 2020 annual report, Hussar et al. (2020) stated that while the percentages of Black and White students enrolled in public schools decreased between fall 2000 and fall 2017, "the percentage of public-school students who were Hispanic increased from 16 to 27 percent during the same period" (p. 32). Although the enrollment of Latinx K-12 students is on the rise, the academic achievement of this student subgroup is showing an adverse trend. In 2019, 4th grade Hispanic students had an average reading scale score of 209 compared to the scale score of 230 of White students (Hussar et al., 2020). In 8th grade, Hispanic students had an average reading scale score of 252 while White students scored 272 (Hussar et al., 2020). The 2019 4th grade average math scale score for Hispanics was 231 and 249 for White students (Hussar et al., 2020). Similarly, the 8th grade math scale score was 268 for Hispanics and 292 for White students (Hussar et al., 2020). In this same report, the status dropout rate in 2018 was 8.0 percent for Hispanic students and 4.2 percent for White students (Hussar et al., 2020). The White-Hispanic achievement gap is prevalent in both reading and math nationwide. The disparity that exists in the academic achievement of minoritized and marginalized student groups has come to be known as an opportunity gap.

Poverty

The issue of academic underachievement can be further complicated by taking into consideration the influence of poverty on minority groups. Gradín (2012) discussed the key role educational attainment plays in the racial poverty gap in the United States. Various indicators on the Condition of Education 2020 annual report depict high poverty levels and English language learner (ELL) status as the two most prominent characteristics for lower academic achievement

across multiple subject areas (Hussar et al., 2020). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that in 2018, 31 percent of Black children and 26 percent of Hispanic children under the age of 18 were in families living in poverty compared to the 10 percent of White and 10 percent of Asian children living under the same conditions (de Brey et al., 2019).Therefore, as Latinx students continue to demonstrate lower academic achievement and decreased high school graduation rates, they also become more susceptible to multigenerational poverty.

Postcolonial Structures in Schooling

Postcolonial structures are implicated in the systemic failures of schools. Cash and Kinnvall (2017) spoke of postcolonialism as "the emerging ontological insecurities that are manifest in the (re)bordering of identities, cultures, communities and states" (p. 267). More specifically, postcolonial structures represent the systems and ideologies that influence the lived experiences of individuals because of colonization and imperialism. These structures can be further described by the existence of exclusionary systems and practices that disproportionately favor a majority ruling class. Frantz Fanon's conceptualization of postcolonial theory speaks to the "psychology of colonization and its effect on both the colonized and the colonizer emphasizing the antagonistic relationship between them" (Nagy-Zekmi, 2007, p. 129). While colonialism refers to the acquisition of land through settlement that forcefully overthrows the systems and ideologies of a colonized society (Raina, 2017), postcolonialism highlights the ongoing shifts that continue to take place because of political, cultural and linguistic domination (Nagy-Zekmi, 2007). Although the prefix "post" alludes to an aftermath that has been finalized or completed, Fanon emphasizes postcolonialism as the ongoing psychological impact of colonization on the structures of society (Luxon, 2021).

As a result of postcolonialism, exclusionary, or discriminatory, borders (Cash & Kinnvall, 2017) are placed around the access to education, economic advancements, and housing, among other factors. The exclusionary systems that have become embedded in society's postcolonial structures are also linked to the maintenance of subtractive schooling experiences. Subtractive schooling refers to the educational policies and practices that reject students' cultural and linguistic diversity as assets to their learning and instead pushes for their assimilation to mainstream culture (Chavarria, 2017). Some examples of subtractive schooling practices include disregarding students' linguistic repertoire when measuring cognitive ability, not offering advanced placement classes, zoning policies that perpetuate racial/economic resegregation, and the lack of preparation for post-school success. Many scholars in the field have studied and discussed the ongoing negative consequences of subtractive schooling (Chavarria, 2017; Garza & Crawford, 2010; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999, 2008; Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018; Worthy et al., 2003) on the academic achievement, post-school success, and identity development of minoritized student groups.

The increased presence of culturally and linguistically diverse students within the K-12 sector brings to the forefront a critical examination of the educational practices and policies impacting this population and their self-identification. As a society, substantial emphasis is placed on the practice of attending school to attain an education. However, it is equally necessary to recognize the ways in which the postcolonial structures in schooling serve to shape the ways in which members of society see and understand the world around them. Valenzuela and Rubio (2018) made a compelling point about the socially constructed borders that are evident within school settings leading to the "othering of students as a prevalent practice" (p. 3). These socially constructed borders are influential in stripping those who are not members of society's economic

and racial majority groups from opportunities for personal advancement. As students of diverse backgrounds transition from K-12 to postsecondary schooling and beyond, systems of structural inequality markedly evoke a sense of "othering" that becomes detrimental to their post-school success. That is, the postcolonial structures and exclusionary systems in schools are prominent characteristics of the ongoing marginalization unjustly impacting minoritized communities.

Bilingual/Bicultural Identity

The experiences of Latinx students in the United States call for the understanding of personal identity that is often problematized through a bilingual/bicultural upbringing. Several scholars (McLean & Syed, 2015; Rogers, 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019) within the field define personal identity as the intersection of or the exchange that takes place between self and society. As first and second-generation immigrants become immersed in a new country, they are actively reconfiguring their identity and embarking on a journey to discover the new one that will emerge based on societal expectations. Although moving to a new country significantly influences the lived experiences of all family members involved, the identity development of Latinx youth is grounded in a bicultural adaptation (Motti-Stefanidi, 2019) during pivotal years of self-formation. The displacement that takes place in Latinx families of first and/or second-generation immigrant status adds layers of complexity to the negotiation of identities between the individual and society that are commonplace for all (Svensson & Syed, 2019). Socialization is an integral part of identity formation. Latinx students must confront the simultaneous socialization in the culture of their origin and the new culture of the society they reside in (Paat & Pellebon, 2012) as they begin to make sense of who they are.

The postcolonial structures in schools position culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families within an educational system that promises acceptance but instead

strips their authenticity as they become unconsciously socialized to mainstream cultural standards. According to Norton (2006), social identity refers to an individual's social interactions, while cultural identity pertains more to an individual's identification as a member of a particular ethnic group. Bilingual individuals have the capability of self-identifying as a member of more than one social and/or cultural group (Fielding & Harbon, 2013). When developing a heightened sense of self, emergent bilinguals navigate social and cultural pluralities that ultimately position them as having hybrid identities. The exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling further complicate the bilingual/bicultural identity development of Latinx students by conditioning them to internalize an ideology rooted in practices of assimilation (Garza & Crawford, 2005; Nuñez et al., 2020). The underlying expectation of these postcolonial structures is for Latinx students to attain a vision of success through education that is driven by the rejection of their cultural and linguistic differences and evokes the belief of racial inferiority. However, various racial identity models exist to demonstrate how an individual moves through stages/phases where a rejection of one's culture eventually gives way to an acceptance of biculturalism if positive development is to occur. A more robust discussion of these models will be provided in Chapter 2. The following section brings teachers to the discussion on the dismantling of exclusionary systems that are prevalent in schooling.

Latinx Teachers

Teachers play a critical role in ensuring that culturally and linguistically diverse students feel valued and recognized throughout their learning trajectory. Recent data on the demographics of the United States student population highlighted that "one-quarter of all students in public elementary and secondary schools identify as Latinx, making them the largest ethnic minority in the nation's schools" (Shapiro & Partelow, 2018, p. 1). As the Latinx student population depicts

a steady increase, Latinx teachers are starkly underrepresented making up less than eight percent of the workforce's demographics (Shapiro & Partelow, 2018). A robust accumulation of research exists on the implications of diverse teacher representation (Brown, 2014; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Faez, 2012; Kohli, 2009; Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016; Sheets, 2001) on the overall achievement of all student groups. The recruitment and retention of teachers of color contributes to the work that is being done towards the closing of the academic achievement gap that continues to negatively impact students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Research on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy also emphasizes the added non-academic benefits of having a teacher role model who can draw on similar cultural contexts for instruction and interpreting students' behaviors (Goldhaber et al., 2019). Latinx teacher representation plays a critical role in not only the academic achievement of Latinx students but is also prevalent in the solving of larger issues related to ethnic and racial identity development and consciousness (Goldhaber et al., 2019) because of the postcolonial structures in schools.

Regardless of immigration status, Latinx families often rely on Latinx teachers to serve as advocates and "cultural guardians" to help them navigate a complex educational system (Griffin, 2018, p.1). Aside from the similarity of language, Latinx teachers can offer Latinx students and their families heightened levels of familiarity and understanding on what it means to embody a Latinx identity in this country. However, Latinx teachers are also susceptible to the ramifications of the structural inequality perpetuated in schools that uphold conformity as a cultural norm. While Latinx teachers willingly obliged to take on the roles of advocates or cultural guardians for the sake of their students and their families, they are often not afforded the opportunities "to critically reflect and examine their lived experiences" (Nuñez et al., 2020, p. 2). In not doing so, Latinx teachers often find themselves conflicted between nurturing their students' cultural and

linguistic authenticity and struggling to establish their own. To best support their students in sustaining their native culture and language, Latinx teachers also benefit from having the time and opportunity to do so within themselves. Therefore, the hiring of Latinx teachers does not properly fill this growing gap if the emphasis is not shifted towards better understanding the ramifications their self-perception, or lack thereof, has on the students they teach.

A notable gap exists in the field related to the impact of identity development and the level of consciousness of Latinx teachers in dismantling the postcolonial structures in schools and implementing a more additive approach. Michael (2015) proposed that "teachers cannot support their students to have a positive racial identity unless they as teachers already have a positive racial identity themselves" (p. 44). Without the careful and thorough examination of their own identity development and consciousness, Latinx teachers are at risk of unknowingly influencing emergent bilingual students to internalize the oppressive dominant discourse that is customary of subtractive schooling. First and second-generation immigrants are categorized as hybrids who must balance their American upbringing with their ancestral cultural heritage (Molinary, 2007). Latinx teachers, like emergent bilingual students, are faced with an ongoing battle of having to navigate the complexities of being culturally sustaining while embodying hybrid identities. Teacher preparation programs and educational stakeholders must take into consideration the ways in which the positive racial identification of Latinx teachers, or the lack thereof, can serve to promote or hinder an anti-racist model of schooling. Monzó (2016) asserted that while oppressed people can recognize their oppression, it is likely that they fail to realize the ways in which this perpetuates structural inequalities. While Latinx identity development generally has been explored over the last few decades (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco Reyes, 2020; Coronel-Molina, 2017; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007), there has been scant attention to how

Latinx teachers, in particular, negotiate their identity development in postcolonial structures. Thus, now more than ever, extensive research is undoubtedly needed on Latinx teachers' identity development and consciousness and the implications this has for the students they teach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study were as follows:

RQ1: How did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?

RQ2: What does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?

RQ3: In what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?

Theoretical Framework

Using Valdes's (2005) Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit) as the theoretical framework, this study offered a robust discussion on the processes of identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. Through LatCrit theory, Valdes (2005) proposed the rejection of oppressive narratives towards the Latinx community. Extending the work of Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit theory discusses the marginalization and invisibility of the Latinx community across various social sectors (Valdes, 2005). More specifically, LatCrit theory acknowledges and

analyzes the ways in which the intersectionality of the various social identities for members of the Latinx community influence experiences of race and racism. By examining the experiences of Latinx individuals through the lens of the unique forms of oppression they encounter (Pérez Huber, 2010) related to language and physical displacement, this theory promotes the use of educational research to foster social justice and equality. LatCrit theory adds to the understanding that race and racism are central to the lived experiences of minoritized groups throughout society (Pérez Huber, 2010). This study aims to utilize this theoretical framework in the discussion of postcolonial structures in schools as detrimental to the growth and prosperity of the rapidly growing Latinx student population throughout the United States.

Autoethnography and Subjectivity

The qualitative research design that was used for this research study was an autoethnography. Ellis et al. (2011) describe autoethnography as the combination of autobiography, the analysis of personal experience, and ethnography, the understanding of cultural experiences. This research study employed tenets of Anderson's (2006) *analytic autoethnography* "to refer to research in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (p. 373). A defining characteristic of analytic autoethnography, which was pursued through this study, is the use of self-reflection as data to gain insight into broader social phenomena taking place (Anderson, 2006). The primary data collection methods for this study included the development of a life timeline, analysis of journals kept throughout my teaching career, the collection of cultural artifacts from my years of teaching, and an individual autobiographical narrative guided by

writing prompts. A thematic analysis (Anderson, 2007) approach was employed to identify the common themes and repeated ideas that emerged from the data.

As the author and only participant of this study, my subjectivity was particularly prevalent in this autoethnography. To adequately address subjectivity in this research study, I acknowledge that I identify as a Latina woman who is an immigrant to the United States, a former classroom teacher, and a researcher of emergent bilinguals and bilingual education. As such, it is evident that this research topic was closely related to my past and present lived experiences. This autoethnographic study provided me with the opportunity to conduct an in-depth analysis on the ways in which I may have been unconsciously socialized at different stages of my life. I intend to examine my lived experiences as a Dominican immigrant and my own process(es) of identity development and consciousness. Lastly, it was my goal to embark on a reflexive journey of my educational trajectory as a K-12 student, a classroom teacher, and a graduate student to determine the contributions these had on the identity I currently embody.

Significance of the Study

The Latinx population, like many other diverse cultures, is an interestingly heterogeneous community of various in-group differences that make each of us unique. In my seven years of teaching, I have come to learn that although a common language brings my students and me together, we are still left with the task of understanding ourselves before we can understand each other. As a teacher, I was pained by what Molinary (2007) called the hypocritical realization that the ways I perceive my Latinness have relied heavily on the labels put on me by others. Not only did I no longer want this for myself, but I could never willingly facilitate this experience for my students. Year after year, I agonized over how I would promote classroom practices that were culturally sustaining for my emergent bilingual students when I was still dealing with my own

internalized oppression. Although I pride myself in striving to provide a familial atmosphere and a sense of community within my classroom, I often struggled with reinforcing this same push for cultural and linguistic authenticity in other spaces. This study was of personal significance to me by allowing me to engage in an introspective practice of reflection to both highlight and counter the cultural deficit (Monzó, 2016) perspective and racial/economic disparities that are supported by our educational system.

Second, this study offered significance for the dismantling of the postcolonial structures by emphasizing the prolonged harms of the deficit perspectives used to shape diverse communities. This study contributes to the ongoing work on the identity development and consciousness of Latinx teachers. Few studies have examined the educational experiences of Latinx teachers and even fewer have provided a first-hand perspective. Additionally, a pervasive gap exists in the understanding of the ways in which bilingual/bicultural identities are shaped through an internalized oppression stemming from postcolonial structures in schools. Therefore, this research study was necessary for understanding the significance of these points within the teaching profession. Underrepresented teachers of color are rarely given opportunities to critically reflect on the ways in which their experiences in school influenced their way of thinking about and seeing the world. It is vital for teacher preparation programs and school districts to recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity of teachers and students as assets for a more inclusive multicultural educational system. This study contributes to the development of a robust understanding of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity of teachers and their identity development and consciousness which will offer important implications for policy and practice.

The third area of significance of this study was within theory. This study aimed to address the gaps in the current research on Latinx teacher representation, Latinx identity development, and the reversal of subtractive schooling through an additive model. The literature based on the Latinx community is missing critical components on the ways in which racial and linguistic identities are complicated by immigration status. As the population continues to grow throughout the country, it is imperative to develop an understanding of the Latinx youth experience by way of schooling in this country. The academic and opportunity gap plaguing students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds highlight an important shortcoming of our educational system. This study aimed to add to the literature base that informs the theoretical understandings of postcolonial structures in schooling and identity development.

Lastly, the significance of this study was also rooted in policy. As the Latinx student population continues to rise throughout the country, effective policies and practices need to be put in place to help close the academic achievement gap as well as lower the dropout and poverty rates nationwide. This autoethnographic study invited readers and researchers to engage in conversations related to reconnecting and reclaiming (Nuñez et al., 2020) the bilingual identities of the Latinx community. The racial and economic disparities that negatively impact ethnic minority groups throughout society portray a need to dismantle systemic barriers to progress towards a more just and equitable existence for all. By positioning my lived experiences within the collective experiences of other Latinx teachers, I intended to address the ways in which key educational stakeholders can uphold the mission of transformative reform that will enhance the quality of education throughout the country.

Outline of the Study

This autoethnographic research study begins with a review of the literature covering key topics related to the Latinx schooling experiences in Chapter 2. In this section, I provide a critical analysis of the research on cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom, the role and experiences of Latinx teachers, key issues related to the postcolonial structures in schooling, internalized oppression, raciolinguistic ideologies and the development of bilingual/bicultural identities. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology chosen to conduct this study. I provide a more detailed account of myself as the participant, the process of data collection and the use of a thematic data analysis method. The data collected for this autoethnographic study came from reflective writing prompts that shaped my autobiographical narrative, as well as journal entries and cultural artifacts gathered from my years of teaching. Chapter 4 identifies the key findings that emerged from the data through the presentation of three super themes. These three super themes are representative of the overarching themes and patterns within the data that reveal the ways my identity was transformed from periods of loss to exploration and increased awareness of the systems and structures within the field of education. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature, the implications of the study, and recommendations for practitioners as well as future research.

Definition of Terms

Additive Schooling: practices that equip students with the understanding that cultural and linguistic diversity is an asset for both learning and post-school success.

Bilingual/Bicultural Identity: the identification of self through two or more languages and/or two or more cultural experiences (Nuñez et al., 2020).

Consciousness: the awareness of an existence.

Emergent Bilinguals: this phrase is being used within the field of bilingual education to replace the use of English Language Learners (ELLs) to highlight the preservation of the heritage language of non-speakers of English.

Hybrid Identity: the identification of self of immigrants, particularly immigrant youth or children of immigrant parents, after merging society's dominant culture with their heritage culture (Molinary, 2007).

Internalized Oppression: "a social process of domination implicated in maintaining White supremacy within capitalism" (Monzó, 2016, p. 148).

Postcolonial Structures: the exclusionary systems that have been put into place as a direct result of colonialism and imperialism.

Racial Identity: the identification of self, grounded in the social construct of race.

Subtractive Schooling: educational policies and practices that reject students' cultural and linguistic diversity as assets to their learning and instead pushes for the assimilation to mainstream culture (Chavarria, 2017).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. The following literature review begins with a definition of Latinx to emphasize the target population being explored in this study. A detailed overview of Latinx Critical Theory follows as the theoretical framework used to guide the discussion. The concept of identity development and consciousness is unpacked to highlight the tension that arises from being perceived as a racialized subject. This is followed by a discussion on postcolonial structures in schooling, raciolinguistic ideologies, bilingual education, and emergent bilinguals to problematize what it means to be Latinx within the American educational system. This discussion is then furthered by an overview of the role of Latinx teachers in helping to mitigate the issues associated with postcolonial structures. This literature review ends by bringing Latinx teacher identity development and consciousness to the discussion of the acknowledgement and dismantling of the inequitable and oppressive structures reproduced in schools.

Defining Latinx

The term *Latinx* has become increasingly popular in both academic and activist spaces seeking to denote a sense of inclusivity for those who originate or descend from Latin American countries (Salinas, 2020). Britannica (2017) defined Latin America as the "entire continent of South America in addition to Mexico, Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean whose inhabitants speak a Romance language" (para. 1). Examples of Romance languages include French, Italian, and Spanish. The identification of Latin Americans in certain settings has

evolved from that of Latino, Latina, Latino/a, Latin@, Latin, or Latin American (Salinas, 2020) to the use of Latinx as a way of highlighting identity issues related to gender and queerness (Milian, 2017). Various arguments have been presented on the use of *Latinx* as controversial as a way of un-gendering the Spanish language (Milian, 2017), displacing gendered identities (Trujillo-Pagán, 2018), and the Americanization of the term (Salinas, 2020). Proponents of the term *Latinx* argue in favor of the use of the term as "a gender-inclusive cultural identifier that aims to acknowledge the vast spectrum of gender identities, and to address the invisibility and oppression…that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people face within Latin American countries and their diasporas" (Scharrón-del Río & Aja, 2020, p.7). This study uses both Latinx and Latino/a interchangeably as a descriptor for people of Latin American descent. More specifically, the use of Latinx in this study encompasses those who identify as either Latino, Latina, or Latin American. Although members of the Latinx community are primarily Spanish-speaking, the use of the term in this study is not limited to language. Instead, the terms Latinx and Latino/a are used to describe individuals who can trace their family background to a Latin American country.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this discussion is Latinx Critical Theory (LatCrit). LatCrit theory brings the lived experiences of members of the Latinx community to the conversation of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is widely known amongst scholars invested in examining the correlations between race, racism, and power (Shelton, 2018). Shelton (2018) outlined the major tenets of CRT to "include: (1) that racism is normal and ordinary; (2) interest convergence, or material determinism, exists; (3) race is a product of social thought; and (4) that the voice of People of Color is essential in CRT" (p. 129). Understanding CRT is integral for

moving towards social justice that centers race and racial experiences influenced by systems of structural inequality. More specifically, CRT has been significant in theorizing the impact of race and racism on American society (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Shelton (2018) explained that CRT stems from the deeply rooted acceptance of inequality, injustice, and oppression wrongfully directed towards marginalized communities. Building on Critical Legal Studies, CRT engages in the discussion of the unequal distribution of power throughout society (Shelton, 2018) as a way of emphasizing the intersectionality of race and racism as major components of commonly accepted social practices (Fernandez, 2002). These social practices ultimately drive individuals' ways of thinking and being which lead to the formation of their identity and sense of belonging throughout society (Shelton, 2018).

Stemming from CRT, LatCrit contextualizes the institutional oppression endured by Latinx students as the subjects of policies and mandates that limit their overall educational opportunities (Davila & de Bradley, 2010). LatCrit originated in 1995 as a "scholarly movement responding to the long historical presence and enduring invisibility of Latinas/os in the lands now known as the United States" (Valdes, 2005, p. 148). The invisibility of the Latinx community throughout the United States was originally a direct reflection of low population rates throughout the country. However, the rise in immigration brought with it a need for individuals of Latinx descent to see themselves reflected in aspects of law, theory, policy, and society (Valdes, 2005). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) defined LatCrit theory within the field of education as "a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which *race and racism* explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically" (p. 479). They extend this further to discuss the ways in which "racism *intersects* with other forms of subordination such as

sexism and classism" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479). LatCrit theory addresses issues related to social progression that are overlooked by CRT such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit theorists emphasize the need for progressive discourses on issues related to the marginalization of the Latinx community.

Latinx students encounter instances of oppression and subordination that are integrated within an educational system meant to maintain structural inequality (Davila & de Bradley, 2010). To this point, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) explained that "LatCrit scholars in education acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 479). Moreover, LatCrit theory, in line with the work of CRT in educational research, aims to analyze and reveal the ways in which the schooling experiences of Latinx students are impeding the progressive and equitable practices that should be taking place.

The prolonged invisibility of the Latinx community in discourses relating to law, theory, policy, and society (Valdes, 2005) forged a movement committed to the recognition and exploration of the "multiple 'internal' diversities that simultaneously help to constitute multiplicitous 'Latina/o identities" (p. 154). Rather than accepting monolithic narratives, LatCrit theorists strive to provide opportunities to amplify Latinx voices and perspectives to embrace the differences throughout the community. Leaning into the tenets of intersectionality, LatCrit theory acknowledges the ways in which members of the Latinx community experience "race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging the Latina/o experience with issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity and culture" (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 79). LatCrit theory centers the Latinx experience in the United States to highlight the ways in which societal systems

can work against or in favor of the community's development in all spaces. By critically examining the Latinx experience, LatCrit theory advances the knowledge within the field on a growing population.

LatCrit theory facilitates a necessary conversation on the ways in which members of the Latinx community confront a systematically flawed system that neglects their visibility throughout society. By employing LatCrit theory as the theoretical framework, this study portrays a counter-narrative that critically examines the structures of schooling aiding in the construction of racialized subjects forced to understand themselves through an oppressive postcolonial instrument. The following sections offer more detailed accounts of the processes of identity development and consciousness that impact members of the Latinx community.

Identity Development and Consciousness

Every person undergoes a process of identity development that allows them to develop a better sense of self as individual members of society. Urrieta (2018) defined identity "as a self-concept, or self-perception, that is both existential and categorical, both individual and sociocultural, and that shifts and develops over time" (p. 4). McLean and Syed (2015) similarly argued that examining personal identity development involves giving attention to the intersections between self and society. Rather than viewing each person as an isolated entity, identity can be best understood through the significance of our collective experiences and interactions. Rogers (2018) extended this discussion by theorizing Erik Erikson's definition of identity as a transactional approach that takes place between an individual and their surrounding community. The transactional nature of identity formation places emphasis on "the idea that self and society are interwoven and jointly (re)constructed" (Rogers, 2018, p. 285). The denial of the

cultural and social contexts that shape people's beliefs and behaviors take away from the holistic understanding of the human experience and identity (McLean & Syed, 2015).

Urrieta (2018) proposed that identity and the study of identity is primarily rooted in the understanding of power due to the ways in which it is "systematically distributed in society, most often unevenly, with some sectors of society exerting it as a form of domination over others" (p. 4). Being that identity development deals closely with the ways in which individuals come to see and understand themselves through the social and cultural structures around them (Urrieta, 2018), members of marginalized groups may come to know themselves differently than members of majority groups. Within the context of a racialized society, cultural/ethnic identification plays a significant role in the negotiation of an individual's daily needs, desires, and wants (Cross et al., 2017). More specifically, the actions and attitudes of individuals from minoritized groups become largely responsive to the differential treatment they receive from society (Cross et al., 2017) which in turn informs their processes of cultural/ethnic identity development.

Consciousness is integral to the understanding of personal identity. Varying levels of consciousness, or awareness, influence an individual's perception of themselves within the spaces they inhabit. Being a member of a minoritized group in American society entails the recognition of disconnected identities within personal, social, and professional spaces. In other words, mainstream society makes it so that those who do not identify with majority groups have to be highly conscious of how they present themselves depending on where they are. The conflicts that arise from the processes of various identity negotiations are integral for uncovering a deeper understanding for the lived experiences and cognition of marginalized members of society. The investigation of the role of consciousness on identity development serves to guide the much-needed discussion on the perpetuation of racial disparities throughout society. Identity

consciousness does not intend to assume a resolution or simple understanding of self. Drawing from Crenshaw's (1991) work on intersectionality which will be discussed in more detail later in this section, Hernandez (2020) affirmed the identity consciousness of members of marginalized groups as the emergence of an added layer of identity that they then must learn to navigate. The following section provides a more in-depth background on the process(es) of identity development amongst culturally/ethnically diverse individuals.

Cultural/Ethnic Identity Development

Cultural/ethnic identity is a prominent component of an individual's sense of self. Cultural/ethnic identity refers predominantly to an individual's identification to certain groups within the larger society related to origin, language or shared traditions, values, and beliefs. Urrieta (2018) defined cultural identities as "learned repertoires of practices for participating in collective, cultural communities with different degrees of involvement and competence that develop and change over time" (p. 19). This definition takes into consideration the personal commitment an individual makes to the collective values of varying social groups. Embodying a cultural identity is an ongoing process of defining and redefining one's alignment to group norms and beliefs. Ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group by way of a shared culture. Whereas race is most commonly used to categorize individuals based on physical and/or biological traits (Cross et al., 2017), cultural/ethnic identity is more closely aligned with shared characteristics related to practices and beliefs.

Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) discussed how lived experiences rooted in discrimination and marginalization can lead members of a minoritized community to ultimately question their sense of belonging due to issues related to identity. For all members of society, identity development can be highly complex and involves moving through phases or stages in a

way that is not linear. For minoritized populations, such as Black, Latinx and immigrant communities, moving through these phases or stages involves internal conflict and intense emotions that reflect the external marginalization they receive from society. More specifically, the Latinx community deals with issues related to language barriers, displaced immigration status, and cultural uncertainty amongst other things. Urrieta (2018) attributed this to the "colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism that have justified the oppression and exploitation of people of color through the positioning of some races and ethnicities as inferior to others" (p. 13). Cultural/ethnic identity plays a significant role in the fight for equity for minority communities due to ongoing systems of structural inequality that dictate their lived experiences (Urrieta, 2018).

Sue and Sue (2013) revised their Racial and Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) model to address the significance of an individual's self-perception depending on their cultural/ethnic identification. The R/CID model is made up of five stages: *conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection,* and *integrative awareness*. A brief breakdown of each synthesized from Arumugham (2017) is provided below:

Conformity Stage: At this stage, members of marginalized and/or minoritized groups embody the belief that the characteristics and values of White society are superior to their own due to the internalization of oppressive views. Self-depreciation and low self-esteem are common in this stage.

Dissonance Stage: Individuals at this stage experience strong conflicting emotions challenging their own self-concept. This stage denotes a gradual process of beginning to question commonly accepted stereotypes and increased awareness of cultural values that evoke a sense of pride.

Resistance and Immersion Stage: This stage marks the beginning of a rejection of the dominant values of society. At this stage, individuals initiate the process of discovery of their own history and culture driven by feelings of connectedness to members of their cultural/ethnic group. *Introspection stage:* This stage is once again marked by conflicting feelings that are rooted in a lack of complete trust for dominant ideologies or the patterns of behavior of those experiencing oppression. Self-exploration and personal autonomy are integral components of this stage. *Integrative Awareness Stage:* This stage marks a period of resolution leading to inner peace and a sense of security related to the ways in which individuals' cultural/ethnic beliefs and traditions can become integrated within mainstream society. At this stage, individuals feel a sense of control and flexibility that comes with embodying an openness to only identify with what they truly believe.

Sue and Sue's (2013) R/CID model is intended to demonstrate the internal processes of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals that are shaped by external influences. Each stage of the model, which does not suggest a linear progression, showcases varying levels of consciousness to depict acceptance or resistance to cultural values and beliefs. As cultural/ethnic identity is developed, an individual undergoes experiences that lead to self-exploration. In the *integrative awareness stage* (Arumugham, 2017), the resolution that ensues points towards an empowered state of knowing personal preferences and dispositions related to cultural/ethnic identity. Rather than passively accepting cultural/ethnic labels decreed by others, a more individualized approach is afforded to individuals looking to intentionally align themselves with the identification that feels true to them. The following section provides an overview of the ways in which Latinx identity development is shaped by both internal and external factors.

Latinx Identity Development

The social construct of race in the United States was originally framed within the categories of Black and White and has taken some time to adjust in ways that reflect the Latinx experience (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007). Castillo-Montoya and Verduzco Reyes (2020) argue that "Latino identity labels are contentious not only because of the lack of consensus among Latinos and racial classification, but also because the term purports to represent an extremely diverse population" (p. 134). As mentioned previously, the Latinx community is not monolithic. On the contrary, the realities and experiences of individuals of Latinx descent vary so widely that it is difficult to fully capture every identity within one model or theory. Much like the everchanging use of terms like Hispanic, Latino/a, Latin@, Latinx, Chicano, etc., Latinx identity is a complex concept that is constantly being constructed and reconstructed (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco Reyes, 2020). The term *Latinidad* has been explored by various scholars of Latino studies "in reference to a host of social, cultural, and linguistic practices of Latino/a in the United States" (Coronel-Molina, 2017, p. 9). Latinidad is understood within the field to be encompassing of the largely complex and diverse attributes that describe the Latinx community. Some of these attributes include nationality, languages and dialects, indigenization, racialization, and immigration status, amongst others (Coronel-Molina, 2017). Although the grouping together of the Latinx identity has provided a foundation for understanding how members of the community identify in society, it is also problematic in that it emphasizes the generalization of group characteristics over the individual. As the Latinx population continues to rise steadily throughout the country, it is becoming increasingly significant to explore Latinx identity development to meet the needs of a historically marginalized group of people.

Perez (2021) cited that "Latinx identity formation is both relational and contingent, shaped by individual and group perceptions about their position relative to other racial groups"

(p. 1997). A thorough understanding of Latinx identity development encompasses the recognition of the relevant sociopolitical contexts, immigration policies, and individual-level factors during formative years (Perez, 2021). Similarly, Meca et al. (2020) supported the claim that a correlation exists between a broader social atmosphere and members of minoritized groups such as the Latinx community. Castillo-Montoya and Verduzco Reyes (2020) added that "Latino identities are fluid, situational, and context specific" (p. 134). In the midst of civil unrest and anti-immigrant rhetoric, Latinx individuals, particularly the youth, develop a self-perception that is rooted in discrimination. Experiences of external exclusion can lead to processes of internal conflict and confusion related to belonging. Therefore, although Latinx identity development is a very personalized and individual process, external social factors heavily influence whether the identities are rooted in feelings of exclusion or inclusion.

Gallegos and Ferdman (2007) developed a Latino Identity Development model that recognizes that being Latinx in the United States means navigating systems of racial classification that are not always inclusive. The Latino and Latina Racial Identity model is made up of six non-linear orientations: *Undifferentiated/Denial, White-identified, Latino as Other, Sub-group Identified, Latino-identified,* and *Latino-integrated*. A brief breakdown of each synthesized from Gallegos and Ferdman (2007) is provided below:

Undifferentiated/Denial: In this orientation, Latinos view themselves as individuals who are color-blind and accepting of societal norms that do not recognize cultural differences.

White-identified: Individuals who embody this orientation believe themselves to be racially White and present a demeanor of racial superiority that depicts assimilation.

Latino as Other: Within this orientation, individuals are primarily concerned with how they are viewed by others and lack connection to any set of cultural values or norms.

Sub-group Identified: In this orientation, individuals identify more closely with subgroups of their nationality of origin (such as Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican), but view other subgroups as deficient.

Latino-identified: This orientation describes those who view being Latino as its own racial category and can make connections across various subgroups.

Latino-integrated: This orientation depicts an individual who leverages the intersectionality of their other social identities with their Latino identity and are known for openly challenging practices of exclusion.

Latinx identity development is a highly complex and often overlooked process of understanding what it means to be Latino/a in American society. Although equally important, Latinx identity in Latin American countries does not need to be negotiated in the same ways that it does within the context of the United States. This is due in part to the heightened levels of consciousness that are associated with being a member of a minoritized community within a space that functions on the societal norms of a White majority group. Further, the Latinx community in the United States is susceptible to issues of language barriers, displaced immigration status, and cultural uncertainty, and therefore undergo process(es) of identity formation that are unique to their personal experiences and social encounters with others. The following section provides a more in-depth analysis of Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality and the ways in which this is embodied by the Latinx community.

Intersectionality and Being Latinx

Intersectionality is a framework used to understand the ways in which an individual's social identities come together to shape a multidimensional existence (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). These identity categories according to Collins (2015) can include "race, class, gender,

sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age" (p. 2). The overlapping of two or more of these categories has the potential to either heighten discriminatory experiences or serve as advantageous within predetermined social structures (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw's (1991) discussion on the structural intersectionality of various forms of oppression emphasizes the increased risk of violence faced by immigrant women of color. As mentioned previously, immigration status can serve as a social marker for exclusion that disproportionately impacts the Latinx community. Alemán (2018) pointed out that before intersectionality can be employed as a tool for analysis for issues impacting Latinx communities, there must be an acknowledgement of the prevalence of in-group heterogeneity to fully capture the various domains of power that can be applied to their individual and collective experiences. Understanding the Latinx community must also consider the complex role of language, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, in either supporting or hindering social advancements.

Mestiza Consciousness

The Black and Latinx community share similar characteristics of historically enduring oppression and marginalization due to their minority status in society. Gloria Anzaldúa extended the work of W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) on *double consciousness* through her concept of *mestiza consciousness*. Du Bois (1903) coined the term to refer to the ways in which Black people must move throughout society by seeing themselves through the lens of others due to their race. According to Anzaldúa, mestiza consciousness deals with the process of reclaiming the indigenous authenticity that colonization may have tried to destroy (Hernandez, 2020; Perez, 2005). Hammad (2010) provided a detailed analysis of this consciousness emerging "from a subjectivity structured by multiple determinants–gender, class, sexuality–in competing cultures

and racial identities" (p. 303). The intersections of varying aspects of one's identities develop a multidimensionality that allows for hybridity, shifts, and contradictions within an individual's self-formation (Hammad, 2010). Additionally, Hernandez (2020) proposed that mestiza consciousness can be used to analyze the lived experiences of Latinx individuals in the United States by emphasizing intersectionality and the existence of racial and/or gendered oppression. Both Du Bois and Anzaldúa have theorized the ways in which race and consciousness are interconnected in the identity development of minoritized groups. Though often complex, there are larger implications for the role of race and the racialized experiences of an individual's perception of self within society. The following sections provide context on the ways in which postcolonial structures that forge inequality are reproduced in schools and ultimately influence the identity development and consciousness of diverse students.

Postcolonial Structures in Schooling

The literature on identity development and consciousness emphasizes the critical role of external factors on internal processes. Identifying with diverse backgrounds in America entails deeply rooted layers of complexity that attempt to be simplified through conformity and passive acceptance of postcolonial dominant ideologies. The seminal contributions of Frantz Fanon on the study of postcolonial theory highlight the detrimental influence of colonialism on the development of a racialized society (Mbembe, 2012). Fanon's conceptualization of postcolonialism points towards the psychological effects of racism on the colonized (Mbembe, 2012) whose self-perception is derived from the external factors taking place within society. Postcolonial structures refer more specifically to the systems and ideologies that have been adopted throughout society as a result of colonization. These systems and ideologies assume an unfair advantage, also referred to as privilege, to society's dominant groups of White middle-

class men. The concept of race, a social construct that is based on collective acceptance, has historically been used to justify ongoing inequities and practices of exclusion (Shringarpure, 2015). Therefore, postcolonial structures allow society's dominant groups access to power and privilege that is not as accessible for those who have been racialized by way of colonialism.

Postcolonial structures in the American educational system have been identified by the phrase subtractive schooling. Subtractive schooling is a phrase coined to refer to the educational experiences of minoritized student groups that devalues their cultural and linguistic diversity to assimilate them to the norms of a majority group (Chavarria, 2017; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). As the originator of the phrase, Valenzuela (1999) sought to explore the differences in the academic outcomes of immigrant students when compared to their non-immigrant peers. A three-year ethnographic study found that immigrant youth demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement and more profoundly negative perceptions of school than their peers (Valenzuela, 1999). Decades later, some of the program models implemented to support learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds still "focus on teaching English, such as submersion into English-medium classrooms, sheltered English classrooms, and pull-out ESL support" (Hawkins, 2019, p. 17). These programs portray characteristics of a subtractive schooling system within postcolonial structures that depicts those who are not fluent in the English language as deficient or lacking sophisticated linguistic abilities (España & Herrera, 2020). Devaluing the cultural and linguistic practices of diverse learners disregards "the role of language and power in our lives, how they connect to who they are, their past, their present, and their future" (España & Herrera, 2020, p. 12).

Immigrant youth are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of postcolonial structures in schooling. Migrating to a new country entails an ongoing commitment to

understanding the sociocultural context of the new environment. While it is common for immigrant families to learn the ways in which a new society functions and strive to position themselves within that, subtractive schooling practices are particularly detrimental to students' sense of belonging within diverse spaces (Chavarria, 2017). Examples of postcolonial structures in schooling include English proficiency requirements administered through standardized testing, language programs that diminish native language preservation, limited availability of school personnel familiar with students' cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds and the lack of representation amongst the teacher workforce and in the curriculum. The following sections go into more detail on the internalization of oppression as a direct effect of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Internalized Oppression

Members of marginalized communities grow accustomed to viewing oppression as a normal part of life. Internalized oppression refers to the eventual personal acceptance of inferiority and deficit when compared to others (Castillo et al., 2020; Padilla, 2004). Being an immigrant to the United States means, among other things, finding ways to become part of a new community with different cultural and linguistic practices and beliefs. Within the United States context, society's dominant group is the White middle-class male. As this group benefits from the privilege of familiarity and social acceptance, immigrant families find themselves striving to meet unrealistic standards that undermine their diverse identity. In school settings, immigrant youth are on the receiving end of subtractive practices that depict the societal expectation of assimilation to American norms. Internalized oppression is a direct outcome of postcolonial structures in schooling that aim to maintain race and class based on hierarchical structures within an increasingly diverse sociocultural climate (Castillo et al., 2020).

According to Ayon and Philbin (2017), the institutional and interpersonal forms of discrimination faced by Latinx immigrants, and their children leads to the belief of stereotypical narratives that support hegemonic domination by a ruling class. Rather than questioning or challenging the norms that may position them as lesser members of society, those with internalized oppression become unconsciously socialized to accept the "ideologies that become deeply embedded in our institutions and cultural practices" (Monzo, 2016, p. 149). Diaz (2020) identified schools as the predominant setting of children's socialization. For native-born students, it is within school settings that they begin to receive social empowerment by way of a curriculum that aims to support their American identity. Culturally and linguistically diverse students, such as Latinx immigrant youth, are instead implicitly and explicitly taught things that debase their historical background and personal identification.

Raciolinguistic Ideologies

Flores and Rosa (2015) recognized the significance of language diversity in education as integral to the schooling experiences of minoritized students. Immigrant youth are on the receiving end of language education that either targets their development of English proficiency or strives to promote bilingualism through additive practices. However, Flores and Rosa (2015) challenged the use of additive approaches in language education by highlighting the issue of "appropriateness" that continues to be prevalent within linguistic practices. The term raciolinguistic ideologies describes "racialized speaking subjects who are constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150). In further theorization, Rosa and Flores (2017) presented the term raciolinguistic perspective to "develop a more robust understanding of the historical and structural processes that organize the

modes of stigmatization in which deficit perspectives are rooted" (p. 2). While raciolinguistic ideologies specifically interrogate the systems that stigmatize racialized populations (Flores & Rosa, 2015), a raciolinguistic perspective "theorizes the historical and contemporary co-naturalization of language and race" (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 1). Both raciolinguistic ideologies and perspectives highlight the interconnectedness of race with language and the influence these have on the identity construction of racialized individuals.

Connecting Race and Language

Rosa and Flores (2017) argued that race and language have become co-naturalized in certain social contexts because of systemic stigmatization and standardized norms (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Research on the policies and practices related to linguistically marginalized students is vast. However, the interconnectedness of race and language makes it necessary for scholars and practitioners to more closely examine the ways in which racial and linguistic differences come together as one. Connecting race and language implies that certain racial characteristics are automatically associated with specific linguistic practices and vice versa. Although this may appear to be a natural union, it allows for systemic structures of inequality to maintain a hierarchical order benefitting society's majority groups. In school settings, this practice of connecting race and language can be detrimental to the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students who are being required to meet White normative standards (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Additionally, the standardization of the American educational system evokes a racialization of ideologies (Rosa, 2016) that limits the social inclusion of those who do not fall into majority social categories.

The interconnectedness of race and language presented by Rosa and Flores (2017) through raciolinguistic perspectives are integral to the ways in which Rosa (2019) explained how

Latinx students are viewed by others and ultimately come to view themselves. Rosa (2019) specifically called to question the socially accepted assumptions of racial identities and language practices that position Latinx students as inferior based on raciolinguistic hierarchies. American schools and educational settings play a critical role in the adaptation and socialization of Latinx youth embodying intersecting identities. The implementation of varying bilingual program structures in schools throughout the country has normalized both raciolinguistic ideologies and perspectives (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Bilingual education exemplifies the use of additive schooling practices that intend to raise awareness on cultural and linguistic diversity while simultaneously upholding postcolonial structures of oppression. The following sections provide a more detailed account on the bilingual education of language minority students.

Bilingual Education

Most of the academic instruction in classrooms throughout the United States is delivered in English, the country's official language. In an examination of the history of bilingual education in the United States, Gándara and Escamilla (2017) presented the conflicting nature of a country that proclaims to embrace immigration while exhibiting heightened levels of discomfort towards immigrants and their languages in certain social spaces. The Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968 came as a response to the recognition that linguistic minority students were being denied access to a quality education which hindered their upward mobility within society (Garcia & Sung, 2018; Nieto, 2009). Prior to the implementation of the BEA, English-only instruction and standardized testing put language minority students at a perpetual disadvantage when compared to their peers. Therefore, BEA aimed to address issues of equity related to language minority students by allocating funds for programs and resources to attain

native language preservation (Wiese & Garcia, 1998). Although BEA has received praise for paving the way for bilingual education programs throughout the country, Garcia and Sung (2018) argue that the passage "was never meant to fully support the 1960s Latinx activists' goals for bilingual education as part of a broader agenda to confront the racism and structural inequalities in U.S. society" (p. 318). Escamilla (2018) extended this claim by stating that the act failed to achieve its goals due to a lack of specificity on whether the intent was to improve English proficiency or promote complete bilingualism.

Language discrimination poses a growing concern for a multilingual society and has led to the development of various bilingual education program models (Bialystok, 2018). The reauthorization of the BEA in 1994 posits a national drive to provide long lasting benefits to student communities undergoing the process of second language acquisition (SLA) (Garcia & Sung, 2018; Nieto, 2009). According to Bialystok (2018), bilingual education in the United States has historically been more focused on using the home language as a resource or tool for eventually demonstrating proficiency in English language literacy. The social and political evolution of bilingual education in the United States has been deeply rooted in the pursuit of educational equality for all student groups (Kim et al., 2015). However, issues that arise related to the implementation of bilingual education stem from a societal structural inequality that sets the assimilation of language minority groups to American norms as the standard to be upheld by all (Garcia & Sung, 2018).

Emergent Bilinguals

Language minority students have historically been identified for their eventual development of English language proficiency rather than their ability to attain complete bilingualism. The replacement of the phrases English Language Learner (ELL) and Limited

English Proficient (LEP) with the use of “emergent bilinguals” is an effort being made within the field to avoid perpetuating a deficit-based perspective (Garcia, 2009; Kleyn & Garcia, 2019; Ortega, 2020). Whereas phrases like ELL and LEP depict the misconception that language minority students are lacking in English proficiency, the term “emergent bilinguals” helps to showcase students’ increasing abilities in both languages (Ortega, 2020; Sayer, 2013). As a student population, emergent bilinguals are students who are learning a second language. Rather than highlighting what students are lacking, emphasizing what they will acquire offers a positive perspective on a growing occurrence throughout the country. Instead of placing the emphasis on English speaking abilities as a dominant language, emergent bilingualism establishes a bilingual continuum for students to measure the use of language practices in both English and their native language(s) (Garcia, 2009; Kleyn & Garcia, 2019).

Emergent bilinguals as a student population in American schools are susceptible to exclusionary or subtractive classroom practices that go against the acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity. Menken (2013) addressed the ways in which “the adoption of restrictive language education policies, which limit the usage of students’ home languages in school to support their learning, has characterized the U.S. language policy landscape in recent history” (p. 160). Garcia (2009) proposed that emergent bilingualism has larger implications for policymakers to make strengths-based educational decisions for culturally and linguistically diverse children that will provide intellectual enhancement instead of focusing on remediation. Emergent bilinguals are vastly diverse students whose cultural and linguistic background can positively influence an educational system focused on society’s eventual contributions to a globalized world.

Additive Schooling

As immigration continues to rise throughout the country, school officials and state policymakers must begin to make adjustments that adhere to the countering of postcolonial structures in schooling impacting vulnerable student population groups. In an analysis of teacher preparation programs, Liu and Ball (2019) recognized that "success in teaching for diversity and equity remains as elusive now as it was 50 years ago" (p. 69), highlighting the necessity for additive schooling practices. Additive schooling practices intentionally aim to support the social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of diverse students' educational experiences (Alvear, 2019). Milner (2011) credited teachers' ability to develop cultural competence as a critical component of working in urban settings. Cultural competence, as explained by Ladson-Billings (2008) refers to the ways in which educators can empower students to seek out knowledge on their cultural group as a way of making sense of larger social structures. Ladson-Billings' (2008) conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy aids in the disruption of the harms caused by the practices of postcolonial structures in schooling by emphasizing the benefits of allowing students to become invested in the knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds. Paris and Alim (2017) extended the work of Ladson-Billings through their work on culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy emphasizes the need to sustain "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). Both culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy contribute to the growing demand of additive schooling practices.

Latinx Teachers in the United States

The rapid growth of the Latinx student population in recent years has made the teacher diversity gap for this community the largest out of all racial groups (Shapiro & Partelow, 2018). According to The Condition of Education 2020 provided by the National Center for Education

Statistics, 27 percent of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary school during Fall 2017 were of Hispanic descent compared to only 9 percent of teachers under those same indicators (Hussar et al. 2020). The lack of Latinx teacher representation denotes that while student demographics are continuing to change, the teacher workforce and teacher preparation programs remain predominantly White and female (Tirado, 2019).

A detailed breakdown of Latinx teachers' countries of origin and/or cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the United States does not yet exist within the literature. However, personal stories on the distinct cultural, linguistic, and immigration experiences of Latinx teachers have been researched and documented within the field. Latinx teachers, not unlike the Latinx community as whole, make up a vastly heterogenous group that differs based on "their country of origin, their immigration status, their language, and their race" (Griffin, 2018, p. 1). Latinx teachers embody diverse characteristics. Having diverse teacher representation in the classroom benefits all students "by reducing students' stereotypes and encouraging cross-cultural social interactions" (Shapiro & Partelow, 2018, p. 2).

Although qualifications should be at the forefront of teacher recruitment, Latinx teachers either position themselves or are positioned by others as change agents and cultural advocates in diverse schooling communities (Colomer, 2019). Tirado (2019) further explained that Latinx teachers offer more to a school than just diverse teacher representation through the ways in which they can help unite families and communities of emergent bilingual students. Bristol and Hernandez (2019) spoke to Latinx teachers' ability to establish classroom environments that foster positive and emotional support through shared cultural and linguistic values. The title of "cultural guardians" (Griffin, 2018, p. 1) bestowed upon Latinx teachers is not one that they walk into the classroom already claiming. On the contrary, being a cultural guardian is a notion Latinx

teachers grow to embody due to the voids of representation they are left to fill (Bristol & Hernandez, 2019). Due to a lack of emphasis placed on preparing teachers for working with diverse learners (Liu & Ball, 2019), many Latinx teachers enter the profession unaware of their role as role models and/or advocates for their students. Griffin (2018) stated that Latinx teachers share the overwhelming sense of familial ties they have with their Latinx students and their families. Griffin (2018) also reported that while Latinx teachers feel obligated to advocate, they also risk being "perceived as adversarial and aggressive" (p. 7) or potentially face judgment for not speaking up. Latinx teacher representation has become increasingly necessary given the rise in culturally and linguistically diverse student groups. However, Griffin's (2018) holistic representation of the issues facing Latinx teachers addresses the need for school leaders and policymakers to recognize the significance of centering and valuing their voices.

Latinx Teacher Representation

Teacher turnover rates in American schools are the highest for educators who identify as Latinx and/or Black (Griffin, 2018). The recruitment and retention of Latinx teachers has become increasingly important as higher instances of immigration have contributed to the influx of diverse student populations in school settings. As the country's cultural and linguistic demographics continue to shift, classrooms and schools must be reflective of these changes. Having diverse teacher representation in the classroom is an integral part of ensuring that the needs of all students are being met (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Immigration not only plays a critical role within student demographics, but it also informs much of what is known about Latinx teacher representation. Although the demand for Latinx teachers may be high, many encounter barriers and limitations due to their immigration status that prevent them from advancing within the field. For example, the testing for certifications that are required in order to be employed by a

school system poses a challenge for teachers who are not as familiar with their content in English. Additionally, once hired, Latinx teachers are subjected to adhering to policies and practices that are vastly different from what they were exposed to in their upbringing. In a societal context, Latinx teachers "may be socialized to embrace and uphold Latinx norms" (Colomer, 2019, p. 274). However, within an educational context they have been taught and hired by educational systems that diminish their diverse identities (Colomer, 2019). The postcolonial structures that have shaped the practices of schooling have contributed to the challenges and struggles endured by Latinx teachers.

Latinx teachers encounter unique barriers due to prevalent social misconceptions related to the group's diverse characteristics (Griffin, 2018). The stereotypical expectations of the Latinx community attempt to group a vastly diverse community within characteristics and behaviors that may not necessarily apply. Because of these stereotypes, Latinx teachers are undermined and face many challenges within the field. Latinx teachers encounter both implicit and explicit discrimination and mistreatment against themselves and their students. Griffin (2018) highlighted that Latinx teachers express sentiments of being stereotyped as inferior teachers, feeling belittled for infusing Latinx culture or the Spanish language in the classroom, and being overlooked for advancement opportunities outside of translating. The enactment of language policies and legislations place a limit on the use of the native tongue within school contexts. Latinx teachers also face the pressure of wanting to uphold their role as cultural advocates for their students and their families while recognizing their levels of professionalism that will keep them employed. In other words, Latinx teachers may not agree with the practices and legislations that impact the students they work with, but they also have to consider their need for employment when deciding whether or not to challenge it.

Latinx Teacher Identity Development and Consciousness

The Latinx teachers' perspective is one of closeness and familiarity to their students' lived experiences (Griffin, 2018) while also being "employed in a culturally subtractive context" (Colomer, 2019, p. 275). Colomer (2019) called the challenging circumstances of Latinx teachers a systemic double bind where they are ill-equipped to combat their own oppression and that of their students. A prominent yet underexplored tension exists for Latinx teachers with their identity and consciousness which ultimately impacts their ability to serve the increasingly diverse student populations in their classrooms. Reeves (2018) proposed that the practice of teaching consists of the conscious adoption of a multiplicitous identity as a teacher. The multiplicity of the teacher identity, according to Reeves (2018), denotes the negotiation of the internal identities an individual claims as well as the external identities imposed on them by others. Extending this argument, Colomer (2019) discussed the ways in which "Latinx teachers negotiate the double bind of fulfilling both implicit and explicit social duties to their Latinx community while working in schooling communities shrouded in Whiteness" (p. 273). The double bind Colomer (2019) suggested is indicative of the conflicting perspectives of Latinx teachers who choose to become employed by a system that has historically excluded their voices, identities, and experiences.

The distinct cultural and linguistic positioning of Latinx teachers highlight the ongoing contradictions of identities that are socially constructed and negotiated amidst systems of inequalities. The professional identity development of a teacher is both complex and dynamic given the ideological systems that shape the way they see themselves and others within certain societal structures (Colomer, 2019; Reeves, 2018). For Latinx teachers, the complexity of developing a professional identity is augmented by the recognition of the postcolonial structures

that ultimately impose a sense of ambiguity over who they are. Whether or not Latinx teachers were formally educated within the American educational system, they must align themselves with it by way of their employment. Monreal (2021) spoke to this point by describing the teaching profession as the negotiation of spatial practices that inform who they see themselves as both within the field and within society.

Using racial literacy as the basis for understanding Latinx teacher identity, Colomer (2019) revealed the underlying tension that exists between educators' internalized racism and the development of a positive identity. More specifically, Colomer (2019) cited that "Latinx teachers who do not have the racial literacy skills to recognize and counter oppressive narratives cannot teach their students racial literacy skills" (p. 196). Given that Latinx teachers' perspectives and experiences are so vast and diverse, gathering a holistic understanding requires making space for the telling of more individual stories. A notable gap still exists within the study of Latinx teacher identity development. Although the literature on Latinx identity is plentiful, more is needed to fully understand the processes of identity formation of Latinx teachers. In doing so, significant contributions will be made to what España and Herrera (2020) described as liberating and transformative schooling. The following sections continue the discussion on Latinx teacher identity development and consciousness by discussing the intersections of teacher identity and race as well as the emergence of disruptive voices necessary for dismantling the postcolonial structures perpetuated through schooling.

Intersectionality of Teacher Identity and Race

The literature on the disenfranchisement of Latinx youth in the American educational system (Aleman, 2018) speaks directly to the widespread disparities that exist in achievement and retention amongst other factors. Intersectionality is a focal point of the existing scholarship

that attributes various experiences of oppression as contributing to inequities plaguing the Latinx community (Aleman, 2018). The experiences of Latinx teachers navigating the intersections between their professional identity and their race offer significant insight towards understanding the systems they either must learn to accept or determine to resist. Murakami et al. (2018) asserted that "the analysis of intersectionality of race and identity for Latinos, especially Latina/o educators, is critical as spaces of political power within the spheres of education continue to situate Latino identity in marginalized contexts" (p. 3). Becoming a Latinx teacher involves situating themselves within a system that outwardly portrays them as inferior while internally attempting to gain fulfillment and a sense of empowerment through the work that they do. As a professional identity, being a teacher initiates the processes of differentiating between personally and/or socially constructed pedagogical beliefs and values. For Latinx teachers, and other teachers from minoritized communities, the intersectionality of professional identity and race raises personal and professional ramifications related to their sense of empowerment, or lack thereof, to contribute to the systemic change needed in the schooling system (Colomer, 2019). As mentioned previously, the limitations of immigration status disproportionately impact the lived experiences of members of the Latinx community. Bressler and Rotter's (2017) discussion on the relevance of a migration background to the professional identity of teachers speaks to the multilayered expectations and scrutiny placed on their potential to lead a classroom of learners. For Latinx teachers, the intersectionality of professional identity and race can become further convoluted by immigration status. Undergoing processes of racial identity development while simultaneously sifting through pedagogy that does not reflect their visibility and representation in various social spaces positions teachers to endure the burden of positioning themselves as change agents seeking to demarginalize the intersectionality of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).

Disruptive Voices

Examining the intersectionality of teacher identity and race specifically impacting Latinx teachers calls for what Colomer (2019) referred to as the (re)casting of "mainstream deficit theories" (p. 278). Colomer (2019) emphasized the external communal efforts that are necessary for Latinx teachers to situate themselves within the postcolonial structures that both silence and exclude them. While community support is integral for the professional empowerment of Latinx teachers striving to "decenter Whiteness" (Colomer, 2019, p. 279) in schools, their identity development and consciousness is a focal point that should not be overlooked. Instead of passively accepting the policies and practices that have positioned them as ambiguous racialized subjects, Latinx teachers are able to (re)position themselves as disruptive voices within structurally racialized spaces (Bonam et al., 2017) such as schools. The disruption that needs to take place extends beyond the content of the curriculum and the implementation of best practices.

Though undeniably necessary components of the widespread systemic change that is critical for the teaching and learning of diverse learners, changes in the curriculum and instructional practices cannot be comprehensively effective until the postcolonial structures of exclusion are dismantled. Barkhuizen (2016) described an individual's identity as "inextricably linked to the languages we know and use" (p. 26). Through daily interactions and ongoing meaning-making, individuals come to internalize the language that is used to describe them within the spaces they inhabit. However, being perceived through a colonial instrument significantly alters the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse members of society grounded in oppression. The discovery and application of disruptive voices amongst members of marginalized groups recognizes the sociocultural factors that contribute to the

shaping of their identity and consciousness. Latinx teachers who serve as disruptive voices within the schooling system consequently amplify the voices, identities, and experiences of those who have been historically excluded by the postcolonial structures set in place by society's majority groups.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic study seeks to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. This literature review examined identity development and consciousness, postcolonial structures in schooling, and Latinx teachers. These topics aim to portray that there is a tension within Latinx teachers about their identity development and consciousness that impacts the students with whom they work. The significance is driven by the systemic changes that need to take place within the practice of teaching, theory, and policy. Beyond hiring for the benefit of diverse representation, school leaders and key stakeholders must also take into consideration the social and personal implications that come with taking on the responsibility of educating and equipping youth to navigate a society that upholds postcolonial structures of inequality. Using LatCrit theory to guide the discussion, this study framed my lived experiences within the collective experiences of other Latinx teachers. Through the content explored in this literature review, this study highlighted the postcolonial structures that are reproduced through schooling and the significant role of identity development for Latinx teachers seeking to engage in socially transformative and restorative practices on behalf of themselves and their students.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to thoroughly describe the research methodology for this qualitative autoethnographic study. The use of autoethnography allowed me to implement self-reflection and personal experiences to make sense of the broader social phenomena of Latinx teacher identity development and consciousness. My proximity to the topic as a Latinx teacher exploring my own identity development and consciousness gave me an added closeness to interpret the significance of self-exploration as a Latina teacher towards the dismantling of systems of structural inequality. This chapter provides an overview of the research design, participant, data collection, data analysis, and ethical concerns. Strategies for quality and trustworthiness are also included in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study were as follows:

RQ1: How did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?

RQ2: What does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?

RQ3: In what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?

Methodology

Qualitative research encompasses a wide array of approaches depending on the nature of the study. Careful consideration for the intended investigation being sought through the research questions aids in the selection of the most appropriate methodology (Creswell et al., 2007). This study examined my personal experiences and reflections, so therefore an autoethnographic approach is an appropriate choice. As an analytic autoethnography, this study gives leverage to the introspective practice of self-reflection as a powerful tool for gaining a better understanding of a larger worldview. As the author of this study, I was also the only participant being studied. I chose to conduct an autoethnography study to examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States. By analyzing my personal identity development and consciousness, and schooling experiences as a student and a teacher, I was able to gain a better understanding of identity development, consciousness, and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Autoethnography is defined as a research methodology that uses cultural and personal experiences to tell stories (Adams et al., 2014). The term itself portrays attributes of the self (auto), cultural (ethno), and writing (graphy) (Adams et al., 2014). The process for the autoethnographic approach involves joining practices of an autobiography with those of an ethnography. Tsuchimoto (2021) argued that autoethnographers use autobiographical accounts to tell their narratives. The researcher's subjective explorations of personal experiences bring an autobiographical component to the methodology. Ethnography is "the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives" (Emerson et al., 2011). In order to conduct ethnographic research, an ethnographer becomes immersed in the social setting under study and takes notes on the happenings of this environment (Emerson et al., 2011). Through the participation and observation of participants in their day-to-day interactions and engagements

with others, an ethnographic study is able to provide a thorough analysis of the cultural systems of interest.

Autoethnography is similarly an ethnographic study, but of one's own group and/or personal narrative. Culture also plays a key role in autoethnography because it has the potential to influence an individual's way of thinking and being (Chang, 2016). Adams et al. (2017) highlighted a key purpose of autoethnography being "to articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience" (p. 3). The researcher of an autoethnographic study presents a personal account of experiences related to cultural issues to call attention to the ramifications of the phenomena in study. Autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology requires a heightened sense of self-reflection, or reflexivity, on the part of the researcher (Adams et al., 2014). As individual members of their social and cultural groups, autoethnographic researchers engage in a cyclical process of understanding society by way of understanding the self. By analyzing personal experiences through cultural lenses, researchers can make important implications about the ways in which these connect to larger societal and social structures. These social structures are significant for the understanding of certain personal beliefs and practices as well as cultural experiences. The overall purpose of autoethnographic research is to establish meaningful connections between self and a wider social context.

In essence, the process of conducting an autoethnographic study involves practices similar to those of ethnographic research. Duncan (2004) pointed out that ethnographies and autoethnographies primarily tell stories, and the stories become the data used to examine larger social phenomena. Autoethnographers analyze personal narratives in order to create stories that lead to bigger understandings about individuals who share similar culture and/or experiences. Wall (2008) argued that "autoethnography is an intriguing and promising qualitative method that

offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding" (p. 38). These personal experiences are oftentimes written as epiphanies that are closely related to one's belonging to a specific culture or embodying a particular cultural identity (Ellis et al., 2011). Collecting this form of representative data when completing an autoethnographic research study contributes to the larger purpose of analyzing individual experiences within the collective.

Some methods of data collection for autoethnographic studies include "participant observation, reflective writing, interviewing, and gathering documents and artifacts" (Duncan, 2004, p. 31). Autoethnography brings together the process, or the acts of reflection that come along with the study, with the product, which is the written autobiographical component (Ellis et al., 2011). With the subject as self, the aforementioned methods of data collection are employed in a more self-reflective nature. The self-reflective nature of autoethnography research provides opportunities for the researcher to make significant contributions towards our understanding of society. Ellis et al. (2011) emphasized that ethnographic writing necessitates a thick description of a culture. Within autoethnography, the style of the description can vary depending on the author and the intended purpose of the study. Some authors prefer the telling of a story through writing while others may incorporate artistic representations such as images and/or poetry to convey the meaning of their cultural experience(s) (Ellis et al., 2011).

Several forms of autoethnography exist within qualitative research, each serving a distinct purpose and offering a specific outcome. Some of the forms of autoethnography include evocative, interpretive performance, analytic and collaborative (Tsuchimoto, 2021). Tsuchimoto (2021) categorized the various styles of autoethnography into four methodological orientations. These orientations are: autobiographical autoethnography, interactional autoethnography,

ethnographic autoethnography, and deliberative autoethnography (Tsuchimoto, 2021). Analytic autoethnography is categorized under the ethnographic quadrant (Tsuchimoto, 2021). Evocative autoethnography, one of the more commonly known and used styles of the methodology, falls under the umbrella of autobiographical according to Tsuchimoto's (2021) matrix. Ellis et al. (2011) described evocative autoethnography as research that sensitizes readers to cultural issues being explored through narrative writing and storytelling that seeks to engage and allow us to empathize with others.

This study will use analytic autoethnography. Anderson (2006) proposed the term analytic autoethnography to show value for what he refers to as the "analytic ethnographic paradigm" (p. 374). Anderson (2006) coined the term as representative of the ways in which autoethnography is incorporated into the practice of analytic ethnography. Analytic autoethnography allows the researcher to go beyond the isolated use of narrative representations towards a more theoretical explanation of a given topic that is placed "within a social analytic context" (Anderson, 2006, p. 378). A social analytic context refers to the social or cultural spaces within which the study is being analyzed (Anderson, 2006). Additionally, both Vryan (2006) and Ellis and Bochner (2006) agreed that the term *analytic* should not be taken to mean that evocative styles of autoethnography are non-analytical. Ellis and Bochner (2006) agreed with Anderson's (2006) assertion that analytic autoethnography emphasizes the theorizing of the data, while also pointing out that theory does not necessarily have to be superior to story. The five key features of analytic autoethnography as explained by Anderson (2006) are described below:

1. *Complete member research (CMR) status:* the researcher identifies as a complete member of the social world being studied giving new dimensions to the constructs in focus,

2. *Analytic reflexivity:* the ability to introspectively analyze actions and perceptions in order to form a better understanding of both self and others,
3. *Narrative visibility:* the researcher is able to demonstrate ongoing engagement with the social world being studied,
4. *Dialogue with informants beyond the self:* the ability to actively engage with others in the field,
5. *Commitment to theoretical analysis:* "to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves" (p. 387).

Research Design

Autoethnography uses the researcher's personal experiences to generate knowledge that can enhance others' understanding of society and culture (Tsuchimoto, 2021). As a qualitative research design, autoethnography involves a participant, data collection methods, and the analysis of said data.

Participant

Unlike other forms of research, autoethnography typically involves one participant, the researcher. Though born in the Dominican Republic, I was raised in Brooklyn, New York. Ethnically, I identify as Latina/Hispanic of Dominican descent. I completed my entire K-12 education in Brooklyn. Moving to the South, I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education, my Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction and am currently working on my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. At the time of writing, I have seven years of teaching experience. I began my teaching career at 22 years old and am currently 29 years old. I have taught 2nd grade developmental bilingual for two years, 3rd grade developmental bilingual for two years, 6th-8th grade Spanish for half a year, 2nd grade Spanish for the remainder of that year, 5th

grade Spanish for one and a half years and am currently an Instructional Designer for a Latino Community Center. It is important to note that I was only taught by a total of two Latinx teachers throughout my entire K-12 educational and postsecondary experience. However, most of my classroom teaching career involved working directly with culturally and linguistically diverse students, primarily Latinx students. My personal experiences as an immigrant youth and Latinx teacher are appropriate for the concepts being explored in this study.

Data Collection

Ellis et al. (2010) defined autoethnography as "both process and product" (p. 2). For me to fully understand my identity development and consciousness, I engaged in a self-reflection data collection period guided by the following phases:

- Phase 1: developing a life timeline detailing major events that have taken place in my life up to the present moment. A short description will be included to explain the significance of each milestone highlighted in the life timeline.
- Phase 2: transcribing journals that I have kept throughout my teaching career and using these to write short vignettes about each of my seven years of teaching.
- Phase 3: collecting cultural artifacts related to my Latinx identity and/or my teacher identity. Cultural artifacts are items that provide information about the culture of those who make it or use it (Ellis et. al, 2010). These cultural artifacts will include relevant pictures, student notes, and cherished objects. A narrative description of each cultural artifact will be written to explain what it is and its significance.
- Phase 4: writing an individual autobiographical narrative guided by the reflection prompts outlined in the Reflection Guide (see Appendix A).

The data collection methods for this study were primarily driven by the purpose and research questions outlined at the start of this chapter. The duration period for each phase varied depending on the nature of the work being done. In totality, the data collection process took approximately six weeks to complete going in order from Phase 1 to Phase 4. Due to the all-encompassing nature of autoethnography and the focus of this study on my lived experiences at different stages of my life, the data collection naturally included aspects of my professional as well as personal life. A Reflection Guide (see Appendix A) was used to invite rich descriptions of experiences and formulate a more in-depth inquiry of the data sources collected. The ultimate goal during the data collection period was to capture data relevant to my identity development and consciousness as a Latinx educator.

Data Analysis

The data for this autoethnographic research study was analyzed using a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis refers to the identification of common themes that emerge from texts used as data sources. Clarke and Braun (2014) defined thematic analysis as a method for identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning (themes) in qualitative data. Using a thematic analysis approach, the life timeline, journals, narrative descriptions of the cultural artifacts, and autobiographical narrative were each coded individually for themes and patterns present throughout the data. The entire process of thematic analysis involves rereading and revisiting the data several times to ensure as much accuracy as possible (Anderson, 2007). There were five steps in the process:

(1) Raw words related to the topics covered in this study were electronically highlighted using a deductive process. The topics being used to guide the selection of raw words focused on identity, teacher identity, identity development and consciousness,

internalized oppression, and exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. That is, raw words that seem to highlight aspects of the aforementioned topics were selected for further analysis in step 2.

(2) The raw words were then coded individually to help further describe the data. The codes were used to purposefully label aspects of the data that were potentially relevant to the research question(s) of the study (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

(3) Categories based on similarities amongst the codes and relevancy to the research questions posed (Anderson, 2007) were formed.

(4) From the categories, themes were determined to capture the patterns within the data. Overarching themes and subthemes were determined from the patterns in the categories. This process was repeated several times and involved the regrouping and relabeling of codes, categories and themes for accuracy purposes. The triangulation of the data allowed for further synthesis of the data collected and provided additional opportunities to critically analyze the categories and themes that were originally developed. This process was conducted individually for each data set.

(5) Lastly, I synthesized themes developed from each data set to develop super themes.

Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

Autoethnography as a research design has many known risks and benefits. The heightened risks of personal exposure associated with autoethnography were carefully considered throughout this study. My vulnerability both personally and professionally were a prominent feature of this study. I am sharing part of myself to others in ways that open me up for scrutiny. My self-identification as a Latina and former teacher was the focus of many lines of questioning that was central to the data analysis process. However, the vulnerability that comes

with telling my own story is also a powerful tool for helping to disrupt the practices of subtractive schooling that marginalized me, and many others like me. In line with the intended goal of qualitative inquiry, this study emphasized the exploration of meaning attributed to critical issues throughout society. Therefore, my personal exposure as a researcher will be reframed to highlight the growing need for Latino/a teachers' voices and personal accounts within the field. This study provides a theoretical interpretation of the lived experiences of a growing population to establish a more equitable existence for all. Additionally, this study contributes to the work being done within teacher preparation programs to sustain the bilingual/bicultural identities of Latinx teachers and students.

To dispel some of the concerns associated with this study, I employed specific practices to promote ethical conduct of research. The writing of the narratives used as a data source was done with integrity and careful consideration of the depictions being made. I ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of everyone who was mentioned in my reflections and/or my journal entries. This poses a potential risk being that this is an autoethnographic study and anyone familiar with me/my life may identify individuals based on their relationship to me. To aid in reducing this risk, pseudonyms were used in data collection and data representation. The names of people and places were intentionally changed throughout the study. In the relaying of my story, I remained respectful and avoided the "potential misuse of interpretational and authorial power" (Sikes, 2015). Although I am telling my own story, I also remained aware of the ways in which my interactions and relationships with others have shaped my current identity.

Strategies for Quality/Trustworthiness

The following strategies were employed to ensure the quality of this research study. First, multiple methods of data collection such as the life timeline, journals, cultural artifacts, and autobiographical narratives were utilized. Utilizing multiple methods of data collection contributed towards the triangulation of the data. Guion et al. (2011) described the process of data triangulation in qualitative research as the use of "different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study" (p. 1). Second, using the writing prompts as a guide, I included rich descriptions to allow the readers to have a thorough understanding of my lived experiences. The rich descriptions strengthened the intended contribution of the writing to offer a better understanding of society's inner functions (Chang, 2016). Lastly, I discussed my findings to receive feedback with a professor who is knowledgeable of the autoethnographic process and one who is well-versed in the area of identity development and consciousness.

Establishing trustworthiness is an integral part of conducting a qualitative research study. Shenton (2004) cited Guba's four criteria to be considered for the trustworthiness of qualitative research as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to an internal validity that depicts that the "study measures or tests what is actually intended" (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). I established credibility throughout this study by familiarizing myself with the autoethnographic research process and employing triangulation of the data sources. I remained committed to continuously evaluating the accuracy of this study in answering the research questions posed as well as constantly reflecting on the data being gathered. Transferability was attained by showcasing the ways in which the results of this study "can be applied to a wider population" (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Using the theoretical framework to help guide the inquiry, I made broader social and cultural connections that can provide meaningful context to the phenomena. Shenton (2004) described dependability as the use of "techniques to

show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results will be obtained" (p. 71). Dependability was sought by providing a detailed description of the entire research process. Lastly, confirmability refers to "the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). I was forthcoming with any bias I may have due to my closeness with the topic as the researcher and the researched. As the sole participant of the study, I recognized the challenges in remaining objective throughout both the processes of data collection and analysis. However, I remained committed to following the phases for data collection and procedures for data analysis outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The T is Silent

The T is silent
It doesn't talk about the loss
It forcefully forgets the regret
It lives in a state of constant questioning
Wondering
Why am I here?
How did I get here?
Who am I?

The T is silent
It doesn't want you to hear it's sorrow
It doesn't want you to feel it's pain
It's silent
And wants to be alone
Because in solitude it doesn't have to try
It doesn't have to fake
Or perform
Or make foolish attempts at audible sounds
It just has to be silent

The silence is both comforting and unbearable
It covers its mouth and widens its eyes
At the audacity of everyone else
Their audacity to be loud
To be bold
To be free
To be certain

It doesn't understand
How it comes so naturally to them
And feels impossible for me?

The T is silent
Though it has so much to say

(Excerpt from Individual Autobiographical Narrative)

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary

practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. The research questions used to guide this study are as follows:

RQ1: How did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?

RQ2: What does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?

RQ3: In what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key findings that emerged from the data through the presentation of three super themes. The collection and analysis of the data used to guide this study highlighted the transformations, both knowingly and unknowingly, that I have undergone throughout my life because of my Latinx and teacher identities. As a child immigrant from the Dominican Republic, I spent much of my childhood and college years navigating systems that were unfamiliar to my family and myself. Becoming a teacher of emergent bilingual Latinx students prompted a difficult journey of self-exploration uncovering the losses and shifts that have been prominent features of my identity development. The three themes that will be discussed in more detail in this chapter are *ongoing identity detachment*, *Latinx imposter syndrome*, and *unveiled hypocrisy in education*. These three super themes are representative of the overarching themes and patterns within the data that reveal the ways my identity has transformed from periods of loss to exploration and increased awareness of the systems and structures within the field of education.

Findings

The transformations I have experienced in my identity have been a direct result of the shifts in my level of consciousness. In my younger years, I allowed myself to be guided and

influenced by those around me because I felt I had no other choice. During crucially formative years in my youth, I searched for answers to questions I could not even verbalize. Throughout college and the earlier parts of my career as a teacher, my level of self-awareness began to take shape and I found myself in a constant state of dissonance between who I wanted to be and how I was being perceived. At this stage, I was conflicted about my own lack of understanding of my own Latinx identity. The awareness I developed throughout my seven years of teaching fueled my anger and disappointment with my own passive acceptance of my identity shifts. The themes of *ongoing identity detachment*, *Latinx imposter syndrome*, and *unveiled hypocrisy in education* encapsulate the journey of my personal transformation as depicted by the data.

Theme 1 - Ongoing Identity Detachment

> *All my life I have had to transform. At six years old, I abruptly went from being a local to an immigrant based on my father's decision to leave the Dominican Republic and migrate to Brooklyn, New York. In Brooklyn, the acceptance and embrace we received from our predominantly Black neighborhood did not shield me from the recognition of our cultural and linguistic differences. Throughout much of my elementary, middle, and secondary schooling experiences I learned to shed layers of my Latinx identity to make room for a more Americanized version of myself. Thinking in Spanish made me feel and appear slow in social settings, so I learned to think in English. With my mother still living in the Dominican Republic and unable to acquire the proper documentation to migrate to the states, I learned to become emotionally detached from family I may never see again. Due to my father's limited English abilities and long work hours, I learned to see myself as independent and responsible at a young age. Over time, making shifts and changes became a constant part of my identity. However, this same social adaptation came with*

the recognition of loss. My identity as an immigrant in the United States means that while I can speak English and Spanish fluently my Dominican accent has become neutralized in both languages. While I enjoy listening to hip-hop as much as I do bachata, I never learned to dance to the rhythmic music of my culture. While my palette has grown accustomed to American dishes, I am embarrassed to admit that I do not know how to cook Dominican food. The transformations and shifts of my identity have not come without sacrifices and ongoing detachment rooted in loss.

The theme of ongoing identity detachment is highlighted in the data through the loss of my name, voice and self. The loss of my name was reinforced by my father's guidance to accept that my name would always be pronounced differently in English. At that time, he unknowingly disempowered me to demand the correct pronunciation of my name because he also felt disempowered by his limited English abilities. As a young emergent bilingual, I gradually lost my voice by intentionally neutralizing my Latinx accent to not stand out as different. In my younger years, I became self-conscious of hearing myself speak and knowing that my accent was different from those around me. The same ultimately happened in college when I made the move from a Northern to a Southern state. Lastly, I experienced a loss of self throughout my teaching career as I wholly committed myself to my work and to my students. With each passing year I felt myself moving further away from my understanding of who I was as a Latinx person to adopt a teacher identity.

Loss of Name

My earliest recollection of detachment was that of my name. My father named me after a famous Dominican TV show host who he admired. In the Dominican Republic, though my name is not as common as others, it is easily recognizable. This has not been the case in the United

States. At six years old, I did not understand the mispronunciation of my name. My name is pronounced Jahn-na, where the ‘T’ plays a silent role of separating the two ‘Ns’. As soon as we arrived in the United States, my name became JaTnna, where emphasis is incorrectly placed on the ‘T’. During the first few weeks of school, I would come home and complain to my dad that people were constantly saying my name wrong. I have always had a quiet and shy personality, but it was even more prominent during those initial stages where I literally could not understand anything anyone was saying around me. Naturally, as a child, I turned to the person who I considered to have all the answers, my dad. In my young mind, I wanted him to go up to the school and fix it on my behalf. In hindsight, I have grown to understand that my dad was also struggling to make sense of all the newness we were encountering in our lives. As a non-English speaker himself, my dad was placed in a difficult position of wanting to help me but not really knowing how to do so. Instead, he assured me that there were two ways to say my name, the one I knew in Spanish and the one I would have to become accustomed to in English.

My dad’s response to the challenge I was encountering with the pronunciation of my name was to view it as a superpower. From his perspective, he wanted me to feel comfortable within my new reality by reframing the powerlessness we both undoubtedly felt. In my autobiographical narrative I wrote, *my superpower, according to my dad, was that the uniqueness of my name allowed me to morph into a different person.* The excerpt below further explains how my dad’s suggestion of viewing my name as a superpower eventually intersected with my Latinx identity:

> By framing it as a ‘superpower’ I was drawn to the appeal of being able to do something that made me more special than those around me. However, I now recognize that I was

> being asked to keep the authentically Dominican parts of me sheltered while this new name gave me another identity that was primarily shaped by those around me.

My confusion grew into frustration as I started to realize that along with the variations of my name, I was also starting to recognize that there was a notable difference between the person I was at home around my family and the person I was in other social spaces. Culturally, we maintained many of our Dominican practices and traditions within our home. My grandmother went to great lengths to shop for ingredients that would allow her to cook Dominican dishes for us. During the first few years of our childhood, no English was spoken inside of our home and even the television programming we watched was solely in Spanish. I can still remember sorting through my dad's CD collection he brought over from the Dominican Republic whenever we wanted to listen to music on the radio. The excerpt below from my autobiographical narrative elaborates on the dualities of my immigrant existence:

> Even worse, I lived a double life. At home, I was Jatnna. I listened to bachata and merengue freely. I spent hours in front of the tv watching novelas and béisbol with my grandparents. I drank café con leche and ate platanos several times throughout the week. Outside of my home, I became JaTnna. The one where the T isn't silent. I listened to hip hop and r&b. I walked to the park to watch pickup basketball games that I did not understand. I accompanied all my friends to the bagel shops and ate pizza like it was a part-time job.

The two variations of my name eventually turned into the separate versions of myself housed within one body. This was another way detachment occurred.

Over time, identity detachment manifested in my childhood through my experiences as a Dominican immigrant to the United States. The detachment was evident in how I had to

transform myself based on my social environment. At home I was one way but outside of my home, I became different. In the excerpt below from my autobiographical narrative, I explain how I began to internalize the shifts in my identity:

> However, being Hispanic felt like a burden. Every day that I left my house to attend school I would have to undergo a transformation from the Jatnna I was to my family and the Jatnna everyone outside of my family knew.

I started to view being Hispanic as a "burden" due to the characteristics I felt like I had to adopt or leave behind to feel a sense of belonging. It was becoming increasingly difficult for me to merge my two existences because the experiences were so culturally and linguistically distinct. I learned very quickly that the most effective way to navigate between the two was to keep them separate. I decided to abandon my Latinx identity whenever I crossed the threshold from my home into the world.

At home, my family did not understand or welcome the American practices I was starting to adopt. Outside of my home, I had little connection to my Latinx roots. Although my younger sister and I were learning English in school, the adults in our home did not speak the language. We were often scolded for responding to our dad or grandparents in English. We were also only able to watch television programs or listen to music that was in Spanish because that was the only way our dad or grandparents could tell if it was appropriate or not. On the other hand, we lived and attended school in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Therefore, outside of our home we were introduced to rap, hip-hop, basketball, football, and other customs and practices that were completely different from what we knew within our home. The confusion I originally felt at having my name pronounced differently became a normalized

part of my identity. My name was only the beginning of what eventually became my internalized perception of how loss and identity detachment would be a consistent part of my life in America.

The loss of my name was my first encounter with identity detachment at a young age. By teaching me to accept that my name would always be pronounced differently by others, my dad reinforced conformity as part of my new reality. The excerpt below from my life timeline speaks to this concept in more detail:

> Unintentionally, my dad introduced me to conformity. As a newly arrived immigrant to the United States, he glamorized the abandonment of my identification with my own name which ultimately led to me suppressing my cultural identity in public. The good intentions behind my father's words were not enough to keep me from believing that, in this country, conformity was the only option. I quickly learned that it was easier to succumb to the pronunciation of my name than to try to explain myself to every single person I interacted with.

I never received guidance on how to properly correct the pronunciation of my name. From my perspective as a child, I felt there was nothing I could do other than accept it for what it was. As an adult, I now see how the loss of my name paved the way for the ongoing separations that I would establish amongst my identities as a Dominican, Dominican immigrant, and emergent bilingual. Being a child immigrant made me more susceptible to American cultural socialization through my experiences at school. The loss of my name was the first of many occurrences of identity detachment that shaped my self-perception. I quickly learned that conforming to my social environments, whether at school, in my neighborhood, or at home, was easier than attempting to establish a consistent persona that could move naturally between them.

Loss of Voice

Another form of identity detachment I experienced at a young age was that of my voice. Learning English at a young age was both a gradual and challenging process. My dad taught me how to read and write in Spanish when I was four years old. I naturally gravitated towards learning in a way that made it possible for him to teach me enough of the basics to become literate in my native language at a young age but being immersed in an English speaking society and attending a school with no bilingual program, I had no choice but to learn English and I had to learn fast. Every day I found myself marveling at all the new words I had been exposed to and desperately wanting to say them the right way. Having to learn to speak, read and write an entirely new language all at the same time paralyzed me with fear and discomfort.

In class, I was the observant child who never said much but was absorbing as much as I possibly could. To not sound silly or dumb, I went through my first few years in my new American school completely silent. Spending most of my days completely silent and unable to fully take part in the reading and writing activities like my peers left me feeling sad and defeated. However, my innate love for learning allowed me to make steady progress and I found joy in learning and defining new English words daily. Unfortunately, this joy was often stifled by my heavy Dominican accent. Although I was slowly beginning to understand what my teachers and peers were saying, it did not take long for me to realize that they had a hard time understanding me. Year after year, my report cards did not reflect the progress I was making because I refused to speak in school.

The loss of voice in school was indicative of the fear I had internalized of being ridiculed and feeling othered in social spaces. Within the safety of my home, I was the eager and overly excited child wanting to tell my family as much as I could about my day. As the oldest, I often demanded that my little sister and younger cousins participate in a game of ‘School’ with me

where I, as their teacher, replicated much of what I silently observed my teacher doing in our classroom. In the following excerpt from my life timeline, I share in more detail how the loss of my voice manifested itself in school:

> I remember being in the 2nd grade and wishing that I never had to talk. I was still a fairly "fresh" immigrant to the United States and well into my English-language learning journey. I still remember my ESL teacher that pulled me out of class once a day. Her name was Ms. Bernard and she was my absolute favorite part of the day. I loved sitting with her in her small room where she gently guided me through songs, stories, and new vocabulary. She didn't make me feel small. She didn't diminish me. She didn't point out any of my linguistic deficiencies. All she did was guide me. She took me out of the classroom where I refused to talk and gave me a safe space to practice and stumble over words I had been thinking about all day. Then she would bring me back to my classroom where I was reminded that I did not speak the way my peers spoke.

Attending ESL once a day was the only opportunity where I allowed myself to speak. Outside of this safe space with Ms. Bernard, my accent made me feel uncomfortable speaking to others. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I was exited from receiving ESL services. Although this should have been an indication of the progress I was making, I still struggled with finding my voice due to my accent. For the remainder of my elementary and middle school years, I became a bookworm. I occupied most of my free time by reading books because I loved the feeling of being mentally stimulated without needing to speak. My neighborhood friends, classmates, and even members of my family often made jokes about my constant obsession with reading.

As the years went by, I slowly began to develop the confidence to speak in English. However, this did not come without the loss of my voice in a different way. By the time I got to

high school, I had learned to neutralize my Dominican accent when speaking so as not to stand out as different. Whereas I once felt othered for not speaking the language, I then became othered for having a Northern accent. In the following excerpt from my autobiographical narrative, I share how my loss of voice and feeling othered followed me into my college years:

> It wasn't until high school that I finally started to feel like I could blend in. My accent was no longer a defining feature of my identity. Without realizing it, I forced myself to speak like everyone around me because I was so tired of people pointing out my accent. It worked. In high school, no one questioned my accent. When I got to college that all changed. As soon as I opened my mouth to speak, everyone wanted to know where I was from. "What are you?" "Where are you from?" "Are you mixed?" The questions were constant and then again, I felt the anger. It seemed like no one could move past my accent and actually listen to what I had to say. The anger that developed within me once again convinced me to stay silent. If speaking and using my voice was only going to get me noticed as different from others, then I wanted to fit in. Standing out because of my accent meant having to justify myself. It meant having to explain myself. And I didn't really know who that was. So once again I decided that I was going to change my accent.

In my younger years, I struggled to become fluent in and understand the English language to communicate with those around me. As I got older, I resented my accent as a feature of my identity and slowly began to detach myself from it to blend in. When I relocated to the South for college, I was once again confronted with feeling othered, and I felt that my only option was to neutralize my accent once again.

Looking back on the transformations I have made with my accent; I realize that the detachment I experienced through the loss of my voice was not always a conscious decision. In

hindsight, the loss of my voice was indicative of the ongoing powerlessness I felt I had in the social spaces I inhabited. Feeling othered was uncomfortable for me. In those moments, it meant that I had to define or explain myself and I was not sure I was fully capable of doing so. In Brooklyn, my Dominican accent marked me as different. In college, my northern accent marked me as different. In both instances, my differences made me stand out in a way that prompted questions from others that I was not fully prepared to answer. Answering those questions meant having to reveal parts of myself that I had learned to keep shielded and protected from others. In college, I felt exposed for the voice I adopted in high school that was still not my own. This northern voice with the neutralized Dominican accent was now being called into question in a way that felt similarly uncomfortable. The only option I felt I had, the only option I had learned up until this point, was to once again lose the voice that marked me as different.

The loss of my voice has caused me feelings of internal conflict due to my ongoing identity detachment. In the following excerpt from my autobiographical narrative, I elaborate on the inner turmoil the loss of my voice has caused me:

> Fast forward to now, I have lived in the South for eleven years. Anytime I talk to my friends from New York or when my family members come to visit, I cringe when they tell me I have a Southern accent. Again, I hate it! I hate that it now serves as a reminder that all my life I have adapted and adjusted to my surroundings instead of being grounded in who I truly am. Can you miss an accent? Is that a thing? I miss my Dominican accent? I miss my Northern accent? I hate that it feels like I cut off my own roots. Me. I did it. I really hate that I allowed my anger and fear of vulnerability to strip me of my authentic self before I really got a chance to know her.

Losing my voice has meant changing and adjusting to my surroundings repeatedly throughout my life. Like my experience with my name, I internalized the belief that detaching from the characteristic that caused me to stand out was the only solution. Due to the ongoing transformations I have consciously and unconsciously made throughout my life, I have struggled with finding a truly grounded sense of my Latinx identity. The loss of my voice at a young age by way of my accent was a result of my own fear and discomfort with being different. In my adult years, I have started to reconcile with the significance of this loss and the long term impact it has had on how I view myself. I know that I am Dominican. I know that I am an immigrant. However, I also know that being a Dominican immigrant has meant making changes and adjustments from feelings of powerlessness.

Loss of Self

The third way ongoing identity detachment was observed was in detaching from my teacher identity. I started my teaching career right out of my undergraduate teaching experience as a second grade bilingual teacher. The school I was working at was the same school where I had completed my field lab observations and student teaching with students who like myself were of immigrant backgrounds and emergent bilinguals. Working at this school was the first encounter I had ever had with a bilingual program and what it meant to be a bilingual teacher to Latinx students. Growing up, I can only recall having one Latinx teacher during my middle school years and she was not fluent in Spanish. My teaching approach, which was framed by my teacher identity, from the very beginning was to establish comfort, trust, and familiarity between my students, their families, and myself. My identity as a teacher encompassed selflessness that emerged from the desire to prioritize the students' needs above my own. Various times throughout the years, I would attend birthday parties and other familial celebrations that I was

invited to by my students. I willingly allowed myself to become consumed by my work because I was committed to making sure my students felt loved and cared for throughout the year. In doing so, I found myself confused by the realization that taking on my teacher identity left little room for me to explore other parts of myself. The following excerpt is a cultural artifact from a blog post I shared describing my understanding of teacher identity:

> Teacher identity is embodied so fully, that when you step into it you are forced to view yourself as only that. You want to be a good teacher for your students so badly that you are willing to sacrifice yourself for it. The thing is that eventually the true you, the one you're suppressing and keeping only to yourself, will fight to break free.

Over time, I began to detach myself from my identity as a teacher as I yearned to nurture parts of myself outside of teaching.

By my third year of teaching, I began to realize that there was more to me than just being a teacher. The following excerpt from my autobiographical narrative summarizes my recognition of the feelings that were beginning to surface within me at the end of my third year of teaching:

> I was slowly detaching myself from my profession and beginning to explore myself as a person. I wanted to know more about the Jatnna behind Ms. Acosta. I wanted to know who I was beyond my day to day profession as a teacher. I needed to explore the missing piece in order to complete the puzzle.

Detaching from my teacher identity meant allowing myself the space and opportunity to know myself outside of the classroom. I was so committed to my work and the students I served that I was starting to neglect the other parts of myself that were still developing. Being a bilingual teacher to Latinx students, I felt an internal pressure to serve as a role model and exemplar of

authenticity for my students. However, when I completed my third year of teaching, I started to realize that I was losing sight of the "Jatnna behind Ms. Acosta".

By this point in my teaching career, I was conflicted by the realization that although I felt the innate desire to embrace my Latinx identity, I had to first understand that it had been lost. In my moments of reflection, it was becoming clear to me that the Latinx version of myself I was presenting at the time had not been defined by me. On the other hand, my Latinx identity was primarily shaped by how I learned to shift and adapt to my surroundings. The Jatnna behind Ms. Acosta was not confident in her knowledge of her cultural history. The content she consumed - books, television, and music - was all in English. She communicated and interacted in English with more ease and less effort than she felt she could in Spanish. Without even realizing it, I had become so immersed and socialized to my surroundings in the United States that I felt disconnected from my authentic Dominican self.

Once again, I transformed from who I understood myself to be - a teacher of bilingual students - to become this new teacher version of myself - rediscovering my authentic self - but it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to navigate the constant identity transformations -my name, my voice, and now myself - that I was required to undergo to adapt to my external environments. The shifts I made between detaching myself within my teacher role and detaching myself from my role as a teacher became evident during summer breaks. In a journal entry written at the start of my fourth year of teaching, I wrote:

> So, I start work again today… Summer is over. Freedom over what I do with my days is over. No longer will I be able to wake up and plan my days with all of the things that I like to do. Starting today, my days will be consumed with meetings, planning, teaching and worrying. Unless you're a teacher, it's hard to explain. 'School mode' for teachers is

> an all or nothing bargain. I can't possibly leave my work entirely at school. Whether mentally or emotionally, I will be invested in my work until the next summer vacation rolls around. It's hard not to be.

This journal entry reflects my awareness of the identity shifts I had to make to fulfill my role as a teacher. By this point in my career, I was beginning to understand that making sacrifices and being fully invested in my work was an integral part of the job. However, at this point in my life I was also interested in getting to know myself better as a person. In the following excerpt of a blog post written during the same school year, I expound on the transformation that has to take place from the end of summer to the start of a new school year:

> Teaching is my passion. Every summer I rejoice at the opportunity to get some time to myself. I love being able to relax and do all of the things I am unable to do throughout the year. Every summer I try my best to just do all things fun and relaxing. Every August, I get an anxious feeling in the pit of my stomach thinking about going back. I worry about whether or not I will be able to jump right back into it and get everything done. I always get circumstantial amnesia and forget how it was that I was able to get through this the year before. Yet, every year it gets done.

Again, I emphasize summer breaks as my opportunity to momentarily detach from my teacher identity to do things that I found to be fun and enjoyable. Summer breaks allowed me the guilt-free opportunities to embark into my own self-exploration.

In my younger years, I grew to accept my identity transformations as part of my reality. Although I felt confusion and anger about the ways I had to morph into different versions of myself depending on where I was and who was around, I learned to view the process as part of my growth and development. Becoming a teacher of Latinx students, I knew that I did not want

the same for them. I was adamant that I wanted my students to feel safe and supported to evolve into their whole selves. However, this also came with the self-awareness that I was not making space for my whole self within my profession. The following journal entry written during my fourth year of teaching signals the toll my detachment and loss of self was having on my mental health:

> I love teaching. I really do get in my classroom and feel right at home. However, teaching is time consuming. Teaching is draining. Teaching requires me to be on 100% at all times and that can start to take a toll on my mental health. Teaching is what I love to do. Teaching is not who I am.

In this journal entry, I was able to acknowledge that there were other parts of my identity that I was neglecting to be a teacher. My devotion to my work meant that I was no longer reading as much as I liked, I did not visit my family as often as I once did, and my circle of friends was made up of teacher colleagues. The all-consuming nature of the profession highlighted the detachment I had from myself in ways that were slowly becoming unbearable.

The ongoing detachment I made from myself eventually turned into confusion as to who I was and how I presented myself to others. I taught second and third grade bilingual for a total of four years before relocating to a new city and working in the capacity of a Spanish teacher. Becoming a Spanish teacher, I found myself even more conflicted to fully understand my Latinx identity than ever before. From my perspective, knowing and teaching the language of my culture was intricately connected to knowing and understanding myself as a Latina. After three years of teaching Spanish, I made the difficult decision to leave the profession. The following journal, written during my seventh and final year of teaching, sheds light on my own desire to know myself better:

> Who am I? Is the Jatnna the world sees the same Jatnna across the board? The answer to both of those questions is I don't know. I would love to say that I know exactly who I am and what I want from this world. But I don't. Instead, I feel like I am using each day as an opportunity to know myself. Truth is, I don't always know who I am or what I want.

Over time, my identity shifts no longer felt natural. Instead, I began to question myself and my own understanding of my identity. This journal entry was written after a deeply reflective period brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The nationwide shutdown allowed me the opportunity to become deeply introspective and prioritize the time to get to know myself. As things began to open back up, I realized that I lacked awareness of who I truly was. It was difficult for me to imagine staying in the classroom as a Spanish teacher without this understanding.

The detachment I had to make from myself to become a teacher felt different than from other identity detachments I had to make. In other instances, I detached to be more like what was expected of me. Detaching from my teacher identity was a result of my desire to begin the process of true self-discovery. The joy and sense of fulfillment being a teacher brought me during my first few years in the profession began to dissipate as I became more conscious of the new version of myself I was slowly becoming. Although I knew wholeheartedly that I wanted to be a good teacher to the students I served, I was also aware that I did not want to do so at the expense of once again losing myself to the world I inhabited.

Theme 2 - Latinx Imposter Syndrome

> *Becoming a bilingual teacher of Latinx students was a responsibility that I held with high regard. When I first started visiting the bilingual school where I eventually completed my first four years of teaching, I felt a deep connection to the student population I worked*

with. During both my field lab observation hours and my semester of student teaching I noted similarities between my students' experiences and my own. I knew what it was like to have to miss school to have to translate at appointments for other family members. I was familiar with the embarrassment of not being able to attend school events due to parents' long work hours. Of course, I also resonated with the experiences of students who had names that were difficult to pronounce. At this school, from day one, I felt welcomed and embraced. I also felt needed. Before having been officially hired to work at the school, I was asked to come in several times throughout the week to either substitute for teachers who were absent or to help translate during conferences and events. In the four years I spent teaching at this school, I was showered with heartfelt appreciation from parents who were so happy their children had a Latina teacher. There was only one bilingual classroom on each grade level and parents often submitted requests to have their students enrolled in the program. I knew right away that my work was both meaningful and important. I did not take for granted the opportunity to be for my students what I never had growing up.

The significance with which I regarded my role as a bilingual teacher to Latinx students is captured in the second theme, Latinx imposter syndrome, which represents a new phase of my identity transformation. I was so deeply committed to the lives and experiences of my students, that I wanted to get it right by any means necessary. I could not allow myself to contribute to the harms that were already being caused to them by way of their Latinx experience. Therefore, as their teacher, I held myself to high expectations and I became critical of my ability to meet them. More specifically, as a Latinx teacher, I felt that I had a different level of awareness of what their schooling experiences would be like. In my role, my identity transformed into that of an

advocate on behalf of my students and their families to help mitigate some of the struggles of being Latinx and having an immigrant background in this country. My Latinx imposter syndrome appeared in the data as feeling like a fraud and overcoming fear. Year after year, I struggled with feeling like a fraud and like I was not doing enough for my students. Oftentimes, fear stopped me from doing what I felt I should be doing. I also experienced feelings of self-limiting beliefs and self-doubt that made me question my identity as a role model for my students. Towards the end of my career and in my role as a Spanish teacher, I became consumed with feelings of Latinx imposter syndrome centered around my ability to show up authentically for my students.

Feeling Like a Fraud

Receiving the recognition of Teacher of the Year (TOY) is one of the highest honors a teacher can receive. Being named a school's TOY means bringing awareness to the meaningful work of educators and praising them for their efforts. During my fourth year of teaching, I was awarded as the TOY for my school. My students and their families celebrated me with gifts and kind gestures that I gratefully received. However, it was also during this year that I felt intense feelings of being a fraud. I was resistant to receiving external praise and recognition because internally I was critiquing myself and the work I was doing. In my life timeline for this recognition, I wrote:

> When I won teacher of the year, I felt unworthy. I felt like a traitor. I was being recognized as teacher of the year, but I never felt like the teacher of the year, I just felt like a fraud.

When I began my teaching career, I had an image of what being a bilingual Latinx teacher for my students would look like. I imagined myself capable of helping them develop a

deeper appreciation for their cultural heritage. I wanted to be the liaison helping their parents access resources to help meet some of their financial and/or medical needs. I had high hopes for what I felt like I could accomplish within my role as a teacher. I felt that with my dedication and work ethic, I could help fill the academic gaps my students were coming to me with from previous years of interrupted or disrupted schooling.

My identification as a bilingual teacher and advocate for the Latinx students I served meant going above and beyond to provide them with everything I felt they needed. I was hyper-focused on making sure that my students' needs were being met both academically and personally. Being a Title I school, many of my students were experiencing financial needs that negatively impacted their learning. Many of them were living in conditions that were not conducive to their growth and development such as sharing a small space with several other family members to lower the costs of living. Oftentimes, I personally covered the costs of field trips for students whose families could not afford the added expense. Still, I felt that I was not doing enough. The following excerpt from my life timeline provides a reflection of my second year of teaching:

> This school year I taught with a similar fervor I had taught the year before. I wanted the absolute best for my students. At this point, we were family. I had a personal commitment to my students that I couldn't quite yet explain, but I felt it within me. It just didn't feel like I was meeting my own expectations. I was starting to feel like a fraud and the guilt was slowly eating me up.

From my perspective, I was not meeting the expectations I had set for myself. I wanted to be doing more for them because I was so deeply committed to seeing them succeed and overcome the challenges they encountered. The further I progressed into my teaching career, the more

difficult it was becoming to see myself as capable of accomplishing all of that. I was a fraud. I felt undeserving of my TOY award because I felt that I should have been doing more. I wanted so badly to do more for my students and their families that I was overly critical of what I had accomplished thus far. I went into my career hopeful and inspired by all that I felt I would be able to accomplish. However, the mental toll teaching was taking on me led to negative shifts in my teaching identity that led me to feeling like a fraud.

The feelings of fraud and guilt started to emerge due to my own self-critique. In the following journal entry from my third year of teaching, I reflect on my internal lack of satisfaction with myself:

> I feel so unhappy with myself. I am so hard on myself and it's starting to take a toll on me. I want to be productive. I want to feel accomplished and successful. I need to push through this hump. I really do. I feel like there are so many areas of my life not under control. Everyone thinks I have it all together, but I don't. It's all an act that I just keep managing to pull off somehow.

Although externally it might have appeared like I knew what I was doing, internally I was beating myself up for reasons that I did not fully understand. Instead of recognizing the areas on which I was potentially excelling, I became fixated on pointing out the areas in which I felt deficient. Feeling like a fraud stemmed from my perceptions of what a Latinx teacher would and should be doing for her students. By this point, I had established such a close knit relationship with my students and their families that they came to me often for help with challenges they were facing. In the Latinx community, being a teacher is a highly-esteemed and honorable profession. Although I was younger than most of my students' parents, I was treated with the respect and reverence of an admirable leader. I grew to understand the potential magnitude my

contributions could make in the lives of my students, and I often felt that I was falling short. Even though I did not have a Latinx teacher in this capacity growing up, I was holding myself up to an imagined standard of what I thought it would have been like to have one. In my mind, I was not doing enough to meet my own standard of what it meant to be a Latinx teacher, and I instead became overly critical of myself, leading to me feeling like a fraud to and for my students.

Overcoming Fear

The imposter syndrome I felt regarding my role as a Latinx teacher of emergent bilingual students also presented itself as fear. I was fearful of trying things that fell outside of the norm and was paralyzed by fear of failing my students and myself. I was aware that to do some of the things I aspired to do on behalf of my students and their families, I would have to overcome my own sense of fear around reaching for opportunities that excited me. For example, during my third year of teaching I completed my master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. My final project was on the importance of providing workshops and educational opportunities to increase parent and community involvement. At the time, I wanted to propose a parent workshop on reinforcing literacy skills at home. However, I never shared my ideas with my grade level team out of fear that they would reject or find the topic useless. In a journal entry reflecting on the awareness of my fears during this third year of teaching, I wrote:

> I need to stop being scared to get out there and try things. Fear can't get in the way of me doing all of the great things I want to do in my life. I need to just do it. I am worth more than that. My students are worth more than that.

Oftentimes, I would talk myself out of doing or trying things personally and professionally because fear held me back from believing in my own potential. My journal entries demonstrate

that although I was able to acknowledge the presence of fear, I struggled to find the courage to overcome it.

In the process of transforming into the version of the Latinx teacher I aspired to become, I was hard on myself for allowing fear to stop me from doing more for them. I wanted my students to fully embrace their cultural and linguistic richness. It was important to me for my students to be proud of their diverse Latinx heritage. Overcoming fear was a barrier I faced in my own identity shift towards rediscovering my authentic Latinx self that kept me from fully embodying the role I had been appointed and meant more to me when I considered the ways it was preventing me from doing the work I envisioned I should be doing for my students. In the image I had formed of what it meant to be a Latinx teacher, I knew that being a Latinx teacher involved more than just the academic instruction that took place inside the classroom. To feel successful as a teacher, I needed to have a holistic understanding of who I was as a person in the fullness of my Latinx identity and what success could look like in all areas of my life. In a journal entry written during my fourth year of teaching, I reflected:

> I am trying to overcome many fears. One of my biggest fears in this season is the fear of failure. That goes for professionally, academically, and personally. I fear that I don't really know what 'success' looks like for me and so I don't really know if I have what it takes to attain it. I've dealt with my own disappointment, but I don't think I could stand to disappoint my students.

My fear of failure kept me from seeing what success could look like for me professionally, academically, and personally. Not only was I having a hard time defining my own vision of success, but I was also dealing with the inner conflict of not wanting to disappoint my students. However, my own Latinx imposter syndrome kept me trapped within a bubble of fear that I

desperately wanted to overcome. Fear prevented me from having the clarity I desperately wanted on the identity transformations that were taking place within me.

At the start of my fifth year of teaching, I relocated to a new city to pursue my doctoral degree. With this move, I also went from being a bilingual teacher to a Spanish teacher for emergent bilingual students for four years. Along with these changes came my feelings of imposter syndrome that caused me to question myself and the work I did in the classroom. In a journal entry written during this fifth year of teaching, I wrote:

> My mind continues to try to take me to dark places where I feel like I should be fearful of what is to come. This morning I concluded that I am having very serious confrontations with imposter syndrome. I'm constantly doubting myself and my ability to do the right thing for my students.

Similar to my feelings of fear, I was able to recognize that I was battling imposter syndrome, but this did not make it any easier to overcome. Imposter syndrome during this year of teaching came up for me in my ability to teach Spanish to native English speakers. In my previous role as a bilingual teacher, I was teaching Latinx students who already spoke Spanish to maintain their native language abilities while learning English. Teaching Spanish as a world language was completely different for me and I often doubted and questioned my own Spanish language abilities. Not only did I not want to incorrectly teach my English speaking students the Spanish language, I also did not want to diminish the Spanish abilities of the Latinx students who were present in my classes.

Moving and teaching in Charlotte, NC brought me the closest I have ever come to my feelings of fear within my Latinx imposter syndrome. For the first time in my career, I was teaching at schools where the student population was highly diverse. In previous years, I had

taught at a school that was predominantly Latinx. Both the school and the neighborhood faced systemic issues and barriers related to the cultural/ethnic and socioeconomic identifications of the residents. Poverty was a major part of the lived experiences of my former students. Many of them relied on the school to provide backpacks of food every Friday to make sure they had sufficient food to last throughout the weekend. Language was also a barrier as many of the families of my students were not fluent in English and struggled with access to resources and services that were not available in their native language. In the area where I lived and worked in Charlotte, things were completely different. The following excerpt is a reflection from a journal entry during my sixth year of teaching after two years in my new environment:

> In my classes, I can now see that a silent minority are suffering at the expense of a privileged majority. The inequities and injustices are impossible to miss. This recognition is important and heartbreaking. It makes me feel like I am constantly not doing enough. Like I am letting some students slip through the cracks because I have to meet standards that were set without them in mind. Teaching in Charlotte, a more diverse and urban city than Winston Salem, has completely shattered my understanding of the role of a teacher. I've always been an advocate. I've always been a liaison for my students. It's just that now, they may be easier to miss. They are hidden in plain sight and I have to intentionally combat the powers that try to shield my eyes to their struggles. It's that much harder. I need to see them. And when I do, I need to help them. I know I do. I just can't call attention to them or single them out because they may be discreetly portraying a falsified strength just to make it through the day. That's a lot for a child. It's a lot for me to know it's happening. I've been there. It makes my job that much more meaningful. And it makes me that much more afraid to get it wrong. I'm so scared to potentially do

> the opposite of what I intend to do by advocating for them. Precious lives are impacted daily by my behavior, my voice, my thoughts. No pressure, right?

This excerpt highlights the seriousness with which I viewed my role as a teacher and an advocate for my students. First, I was able to recognize that the students I taught may not always display the struggles and challenges they were facing. It was becoming evident that I would need to do more and take my advocacy a step further to truly meet their needs. Additionally, as an advocate I would have to be strategic about making sure that my work was not having adverse effects on their growth and development. This reflection was at the peak of my confusion on whether or not I felt myself worthy of being a teacher for years to come. The worry and guilt of potentially doing more harm than good, thoughts that stemmed directly from my feelings of imposter syndrome, were all-consuming. Above all else, I wanted to help my students. I did not want to single them out or call attention to their struggles. Instead, I resonated deeply with their experiences and had a profound understanding of the ways in which they may have felt silenced or excluded throughout their lives. The ongoing challenge for me became learning to navigate and handle my bouts with imposter syndrome while embodying my role as an advocate for my students in meaningful and impactful ways.

Theme 3 - Unveiled Hypocrisy in Education

> *I went from completing my K-12 schooling experiences in a predominantly Black neighborhood, to attending a predominantly White college, to starting my teaching career at a school that served a predominantly Latinx student population. Reflecting on my education, I can say that the diversities I encountered have contributed to my current awareness of what it means to grow and learn in the American education system as a socially minoritized individual. I never imagined that I would be able to attend college.*

My dad made it very clear to me when I was in high school that he could not afford to pay for my post-secondary schooling, and I did not know enough about the system to know what other options were available to me. With the help of a loving teacher, I was admitted into a youth mentoring program that guided me through the process of applying for and obtaining a scholarship. Initially, I did not understand the magnitude of being the recipient of the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Through this scholarship, I have been able to complete my undergraduate and graduate studies completely debt free. Having this scholarship facilitated my educational trajectory which ultimately allowed for the transformation of my identity towards a socially conscious activist educator and scholar.

The immense gratitude I feel in having been awarded a scholarship that fostered my educational and professional growth does not come without the recognition of the hypocrisies that exist within the system. My identity transformed drastically from that of a young Dominican immigrant child experiencing continuous loss, to a Latinx teacher navigating fear and feeling like a fraud due to an incessant battle with imposter syndrome, to the scholar I am now with a deeper sense of awareness and understanding of the marginalization and exclusion within education. The theme of unveiled hypocrisy in education is presented in the data as unfair advantage, a flawed system, the disparities of bilingualism, and uncomfortable growth. While attending a predominantly White institution (PWI), I became aware of the unfair advantage my White peers had over me. In my role as a Latinx teacher of emergent bilingual students, I discovered the flaws in the system that would serve to limit the growth and success of my students. Going from being a bilingual teacher to a Spanish teacher, I noticed the linguistic disparities that existed in the bilingualism of my Latinx students when compared to their English speaking peers. Lastly, I

experienced heightened levels of discomfort in the process of attaining my doctoral degree on urban education.

Unfair Advantage

Moving to the South for college was my most memorable encounter with culture shock. For the first time, I was completely immersed in an environment without the loving and supportive presence of my family. I felt completely alone on a campus where no one around me looked or spoke like me. From the very first day, I stood out because of my name, my Northern accent, my wild curly hair, and my seemingly racial ambiguity. It was not rare for my peers to look at me inquisitively and ask, "What are you?" However, one of the most notable differences I encountered was in the level of academic preparation I had received when compared to my peers. The following excerpt from my life timeline describes how I came to understand the unfair advantage others had over me:

> College was not at all what I expected it to be. I went into college proud of myself and prepared to be challenged. I was not expecting to constantly feel judged, racialized, and even treated differently for being on scholarship. It didn't take long for me to realize that my education coming into college was nowhere near what some of my peers were coming in with. They benefited from ongoing access. I was constantly trying to play catch-up.

My undergraduate experience at a PWI began what I would soon come to know as hypocrisy within the system. Instead of feeling recognized and supported for my accomplishments as a first-generation college student of immigrant background, I was made to feel different. My peers were able to have conversations about opportunities and experiences that I had never even dreamt of. For many of them, holiday breaks were for travel and relaxation while I, on the other

hand, opted to pick up extra hours of work with my extra time. By my senior year, I was working three jobs - at a call center on campus, in the library as part of my appointed work study through financial aid, and subbing at an elementary school several times a week. Working was not an option for me. Although my scholarship covered the costs of my tuition and books, I had to make up for other expenses such as food, clothes, and transportation that my family could not afford to help me with at the time. Therefore, while many of my peers were able to focus solely on school and their classes, I was doing that plus so much more. Up until this point, I was convinced that furthering my education was the key to overcoming potential challenges throughout my life. However, I quickly realized that my peers would always have an unfair advantage due to systemic barriers and inequality.

A Flawed System

Becoming a teacher revealed so much more to me about the flaws within the educational system than I could have ever known from my perspective as a student. The things I learned throughout my career were accompanied with feelings of anger, confusion, and hurt. In a journal entry reflecting on the challenges my students were facing, I wrote:

> My students deserve so much better. They deserve better from me. They deserve better from their school. But most of all, they deserve better from this messed up system they're in. This system that wants them to be something they're not. It wants them to fit nicely into the margins placed around them with little to no room for growth.

I was enraged by the unequal distribution of resources within the system. In order for my students to have access to bilingual books, I had to find and purchase them with my own money. Although they were enrolled in a bilingual program, there was no predetermined Spanish curriculum for my students as native speakers. Instead, they had to rely on me and my bilingual

colleagues adapting English or Spanish world language resources to meet their needs. Recognizing the flaws in the system did not make it any easier to navigate. Instead, I started to realize that the hopes and aspirations I had for my students to excel went far beyond what I could ever provide for them. The following excerpt is from a journal entry where I reflected on this concept:

> *Sometimes the thing your students need the most has nothing to do with your lesson plan."* I used to think that if I designed amazing lesson plans I could help my students. Once upon a time, I really thought that in a year's time I could reverse all the damage done. That's just not true. I hate to admit it, but I have to. I can do everything within my power to equip my students for success during the time we spend together, but I would be lying if I said I could guarantee that the rest of their educational journey would be easy because of it. They will ALWAYS come up against systemic barriers that intend to keep them from generational advancement.

This journal entry depicts my understanding and awareness of the flawed system that is education. Seeing my students come up against challenges that were outside of their control made it evident that these were structural more than they were situational.

The hypocrisy in education was also evident to me as a teacher in the administering of standardized tests. When I was a student, I always struggled with standardized tests. I often became overwhelmed because I recognized the significance of the test, and my own anxiety would prevent me from demonstrating my understanding of the content. As a former ESL student, taking standardized tests posed the additional challenge of having to familiarize myself with the language used on tests to even understand what was being asked. Teaching third grade showcased the magnitude of the significance of testing on the educational trajectory of my

emergent bilingual students. The following excerpt is a journal entry written about one of the many tests I had to administer to my third grade students:

> It's not their fault. Don't take it out on them. These stupid tests are designed for them to fail. They are doing what they can. I want nothing more than to help prepare them better for these tests. I want them to feel successful and know that they are so much smarter than those tests could ever show. But it's me against long established systems. How do I stack up against that?

I was aware from the very beginning that the tests were designed for my students to fail. However, this realization and acknowledgement of the truth did not make it any easier to understand. From my position as their teacher, I knew how hard my students were working. I was there with them daily undergoing and overcoming academic challenges. When it came time for them to demonstrate their growth and proficiency on these tests, I recognized the blatant hypocrisy within the educational system. Rather than highlighting growth, these standardized tests were deeply flawed and depicted my students as non-proficient, negatively marking their educational trajectory for years to come. My recognition of the many systemic barriers my students would have to overcome, I encountered a new phase of my identity transformation. Within this space, I had to determine the role I was willing to play. Beyond the anger I felt that this was their experience, I began to understand how my unconscious complicity was potentially contributing to the problem.

The Disparities of Bilingualism

One of the things that led me to a profession of teaching was the opportunity to work in a bilingual program that recognized diverse linguistic abilities as assets rather than limitations.

However, over time I came to realize that the bilingualism being promoted was not what I envisioned. The following excerpt from my autobiographical narrative highlights this sentiment:

> In my previous years as a bilingual teacher, I was inspired by my students' desire to learn English but also disheartened to see that the Spanish language, their native language, was being diminished and deemed inferior.

The bilingual program at my school was considered developmental, meaning the students were taught foundational skills in their native language before making the transfer over to English. From Kindergarten to second grade, students were taught primarily in their native language and from third to fifth grade they received more English instruction. I completed my student teaching in a kindergarten class and taught second grade for my first two years of teaching. When I was moved to third grade, all the work I had done to help preserve my students' native language abilities seemed to be completely disregarded. Instead, emphasis was placed on preparing students for the standardized tests that would be administered solely in English. I appreciate that the program allowed our students to develop foundational skills in their native language, but I was disappointed by how this quickly changed when they entered third grade. By design the system favored their English language acquisition to demonstrate proficiency on tests. Therefore, promising bilingualism was ultimately being made under false pretenses.

The more I familiarized myself with bilingual education throughout the state, the more I uncovered the hypocrisy and disparities that existed within the system. The following excerpt is from a cultural artifact of a note written during my sixth year of teaching on a potential research topic of interest to me:

> Discerning the ways in which bilingual students (ELLs) unconsciously establish dual identities in order to feel accepted or to better assimilate into the American educational

> system. The ways in which this differs from immersion students who are glorified for their bilingual/language abilities and can embrace their identity as whole. ELLs have to deny certain parts of their identities in order to achieve success while immersion students are able to build on to theirs. The ways in which immersion students are awarded opportunities in language that are denied to ELLS through instructional practices and federal policies.

There were blatant disparities in the ways that bilingual programs for emergent bilinguals were formatted differently from the dual language programs that were tailored for native English speakers. Although I loved the concept of promoting bilingualism across the board, I could not help but notice that my Latinx students had to embody dual identities while in the immersion programs students were celebrated in their wholeness. There is a significant difference in the experience of a Latinx student having to learn English to navigate the educational system they attend and an immersion student who is celebrated for adopting a new language. The hypocrisy I quickly noticed was that although both programs presented a similar outcome in bilingualism, there were sacrifices Latinx students would have to make that their native English speaking peers would not.

A physical relocation to a new city also led to a career transition out of the bilingual program I had grown accustomed to and into the world language Spanish department. The disparities of bilingualism became highly prevalent during my time as a Spanish teacher. In a journal entry reflecting on my new role during my fifth year of teaching, I wrote:

> It is extremely difficult for me to commit to teaching native English speakers the language that is oftentimes forcefully stripped from Latinx students. My career began in a bilingual education program. In this program, I learned and taught my students the value

> of their native tongue. I spoke to them and their families in ways that are real and authentic to us. However, even within this program I noticed the subtle microaggressions that portrayed the blatant denial of our cultural and linguistic authenticity. Students who, like me, come to this country and have to adapt to norms that relay messages of inadequacy and assimilation.

This reflection once again points out my recognition of the hypocrisy and disparities of bilingual education while also acknowledging how my new role as a Spanish teacher also plays into it. I struggled with coming to terms with my own contributions to the hypocrisy. In a journal entry reflecting on my decision to resign from teaching during my seventh year, I wrote:

> For all the years I was teaching Spanish, I was constantly confronted with strong emotions about the hypocrisy in the system. When I taught in the bilingual program, we had to fight for our students to maintain their heritage language. Various assessments and policies were put in place that made learning English the priority and diminished our students' native Spanish ability. When I was teaching Spanish, I was able to see a different side of the system. In these programs, native English speakers were being offered the skills and abilities that were being stripped from the Latinx students I once taught.

Teaching Spanish felt both empowering and hypocritical. By this point in my career, I was fully committed to helping Latinx students feel pride in their authentic cultural and linguistic differences. I thought becoming a Spanish teacher would make doing this work easier and I quickly realized that this was not the case. Instead of feeling like I was contributing to the cultural and linguistic empowerment of my Latinx students, I felt like I was aiding in the hypocrisy of a system that stripped from them what was blatantly being given to others. In this

phase of my identity transformation, I recognized my power and agency. Although leaving the profession was a very difficult decision, it signaled the growth I had made in my identity transformation as a socially conscious activist educator and scholar.

Uncomfortable Growth

The unveiling of hypocrisy in education culminated when I decided to pursue my doctoral degree. My desire to earn a terminal degree was a shock to both me and my family. Being the first to graduate from college in my family, I had already attained a higher level of education than anyone else by also completing my Master's. However, for much of my teaching career I dealt with an underlying sense of imposter syndrome that convinced me that to be the best teacher for my students I had to grow professionally. I was fully prepared to uncover a new depth of knowledge on education, but I was not prepared for the discomfort of this growth as I began to question my career choice due to how hypocritical it felt. In the excerpt below from my autobiographical narrative, I reflect on the discomfort I experienced through acquiring a deeper understanding of the educational system in which I taught:

> I knew starting a PhD focused on Urban Literacy would help me gain a new understanding of our educational system, but I didn't know it would be like this! All these years I kept saying I wanted to grow and flourish professionally. I was uncomfortable at the thought of staying stagnant. Now, my professional and educational growth are causing me new levels of discomfort. I can't unlearn what I've been learning and I can't unsee what I've been seeing. With more knowledge comes more responsibility.

By this point, I was starting to uncover how the educational system was never designed for communities of color to prosper and thrive. Growing up, I was taught very minimally about the

struggles of individuals of diverse backgrounds who impacted change by seeking more than what was being offered to them. In my doctoral classes, I was learning about concepts of critical issues, power and privilege, and globalization from the perspective of urban education. These classes exposed me to the deeply rooted hypocrisy that existed within a system that ultimately aims to sustain the structural inequality that exists throughout society. The learning and growth opportunities I was being granted through the furthering of my education became uncomfortable. Personally and professionally, I had to reconcile my own desires of who I wanted to be as a Latinx teacher and the systemic structures that would potentially impede me from attaining that vision. As I acquired more knowledge on the structural designs of the education system, I had the responsibility to decide what role I wanted to play within that. The choice eventually felt obvious, I would no longer be abiding with the ongoing oppression of minoritized groups through exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Conclusion

The three themes presented in this chapter were *ongoing identity detachment*, *Latinx imposter syndrome*, and *unveiled hypocrisy in education*. In my lived experiences as a Dominican immigrant, I found myself detaching from my identity through the loss of my name, the loss of my voice and the loss of myself. In my younger years, the mispronunciation of my name led me to perceive two separate versions of myself housed within one body. I lost my voice as I continuously attempted to neutralize my accent so as not to sound different from those around me. Embarking on my teaching career, I noticed that I lost myself as I became fully committed to my work. Throughout my teaching career, I became highly critical of myself in my pursuit of authenticity. This internal criticism caused me to feel like a fraud in the work I was doing with my students, challenged me to overcome the fear I felt around my own potential, and

led me to dealing with imposter syndrome rooted in self-doubt. In furthering my education through a doctoral degree, I began to unveil much of the hypocrisy within the American educational system. Within this hypocrisy, I discovered the unfair advantage my White peers would always have over me, the flaws in the system my students were facing, the disparities in education, and discomfort that came with my own professional and educational growth.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this dissertation includes a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature, the implications of the study, and recommendations for practitioners as well as future research. In this chapter, I will offer further interpretations of the findings presented in Chapter 4 based on prior literature and the framework of LatCrit theory to reflect critically on the research questions posed.

Recap of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand Latinx identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

The research questions used to guide this study were:

RQ1: How did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?

RQ2: What does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?

RQ3: In what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?

An autoethnographic approach was used for this qualitative research study. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography brings together aspects of autobiographies and ethnography to provide critical analysis of personal experiences within a cultural context. By using both cultural and personal experiences in the telling of stories (Adams et al., 2014), autoethnography as a methodology allows for increased subjectivity and vulnerability on the part of the researcher. The increased personalization of an autoethnographic research study aids in the

connections that undoubtedly exist between an individual and the larger cultural context in which they live. The topic of identity development and consciousness requires the telling of highly personal and individual stories. By telling my story as a Latinx teacher I am making contributions to the field that will ultimately help to better understand and address the needs of this growing population. As the sole participant of this study, I am offering my experiences and my voice as part of the collective movement to combat the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. This autoethnographic study highlighted my lived experiences throughout my upbringing, college education and career as a teacher. The data collection of this autoethnographic study consisted of a life timeline, transcribed journals I kept throughout my teaching career, cultural artifacts, and an individual autobiographical narrative. This highly reflective process was then analyzed thematically to identify the themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include having just one Latinx teacher's perspective to inform the inquiry. The narrow focus of one demographic limits the overall understandings and implications that can be drawn from other racial groups such as Black or Asian teachers. Another limitation of this study is the heightened subjectivity associated with the researcher also being the sole participant. This increased subjectivity has the potential to interfere with the analysis of the data due to my personal biases.

Discussion of Findings

Completing this autoethnographic research study required me to critically analyze my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States and a Latinx teacher within the American educational system. I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the role that Latinx teachers play

in helping to combat the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling. I did not have much Latinx teacher representation in my educational experiences growing up. However, this same concept, Latinx teacher representation, became pivotal in my profession and beyond. I wanted to be the best teacher for my students and doing so meant embarking on a journey of self-discovery and understanding my own Latinx identity. The following sections provide further discussion on the overall findings by positioning the themes within the research questions used to guide this study. This discussion also includes connections to the literature and the theoretical framework as well as addressing the gaps to which this study contributes.

RQ1, ***how did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?***

The *ongoing identity detachment,* described in theme one, I experienced at different stages of my life depicts my internal struggle with knowing and showing up as my authentic self, a struggle often resulting from external factors. My analysis highlights that although I was not always conscious of what was occurring, I learned to detach from aspects of my Latinx identity that left me feeling marginalized and othered. As a result, I negotiated my identity by constantly constructing and reconstructing it. Castillo-Montoya and Verduzco Reyes (2020) provided insight into this experience in their study, conceptualizing Latino identity inquiry as "the process of actively probing one's ethnic/racial identity through individual or collective reflection and analysis" (p. 8) drawing from prior knowledge to make sense of their own ethnic/racial identity. Whereas Castillo-Montoya and Verduzco Reyes (2020) explore this inquiry taking place during college years, my study noted that these negotiations begin early in life, particularly for me as a child immigrant to the United States from the Dominican Republic, struggling to make sense of the language discrimination and physical displacement that quickly became part of my new reality. Within a short time frame, I had to learn to immerse myself in the newness of my

surroundings while trying to find ways to honor the authenticity of my Latinx identity. A vast majority of the existing research on this topic provides analyses that are more specific to one particular age group. My study contributes to filling in the gap by describing the longevity of this consciousness through different stages of my life. My perceptions of how my Latinx identity underwent multiple transformation over time are consistent with many of the theories on racial development.

For example, using Sue and Sue's (2013) revised Racial and Cultural Identity Development model, I determined that my identity detachment in my childhood throughout college was primarily indicative of Sue and Sue's conformity and dissonance stages. At those stages, I perceived and negotiated my Latinx identity based on my immediate surroundings. During my teaching career, I began to demonstrate more of what Sue and Sue (2013) refer to as introspection. The theme of *Latinx imposter syndrome* speaks to the conditions that ushered me toward introspection. At this stage, I slowly detached from the teacher identity I had embodied through the self-exploration of my personal and Latinx identity. While many studies (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco-Reyes, 2020; Coronel-Molina, 2017; Meca et al., 2020; Perez, 2021) highlighted external factors as being influential in this process, few studies on Latinx identity development described these ongoing shifts as loss. This is a unique contribution to the literature offered by this study. It demonstrates the power of awareness for effectuating change in perceptions.

Latinx teachers must not only be aware of the various stages in life that they "lost" their Latinx self, but as theme two revealed, they need to recognize that limitations and barriers are both products and instigators of the process of identity formation. For much of my career as a teacher, I felt like an imposter. My feelings of inadequacy shrouded the potentiality of my Latinx

identity to act as a shield against the imposter syndrome I was experiencing. Fear obscured my awareness. The role of emotions in identity development and consciousness is a concept explored in my study. Studies and theories on identity development often foreground emotions and psychological distress as catalysts in the identity development process (Arumugham, 2017; Sue & Sue, 2013; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007). Overcoming fear and identifying circumstances surrounding the diminishment of my Latinx identity as a student and teacher brought me into a more intimate understanding of how easily other identities, such as model student and teacher, can be used to crowd out the Latinx identity. The desire to be a perfect student and teacher as defined by external, hegemonic driven realities can result in an absence of more culturally driven understandings of the same. That is, an appreciation, awareness, and acceptance of Latinx identity offers an opportunity for engaging the understandings and sensitivities of being Latinx into everyday life situations, resetting the barometer for what matters and what counts. I found that only through this heightened level of consciousness was I able to honor the parts of myself that had been lost for so many years. This is consistent with Goode's et al. (2021) work on identity gaps.

In a qualitative study examining identity development amongst 49 cultural and ethnic minority college students, Goode et al. (2021) found that the tension that exists between intersecting identities, such as teacher and ethnicity, lead to what they refer to as identity gaps. According to Goode et al. (2021), identity gaps emerge between how a racialized individual perceives themselves and how they are perceived by others. My study also illustrates that the gap is contributed to by perceptions of others that are accepted by self, resulting in ongoing identity detachments. Goode et al. (2021) presumes that individuals have an awareness of their racialized self but findings from my study suggest that this is not always the case. The gap exists between

the accepted perceptions and the authentic self hidden or detached from the individual. Perez (2021) speaks to the significant influence sociopolitical contexts, immigration policies, and other personal factors have on the identity development of racialized individuals, particularly those of Latinx descent. These factors shape and influence the identity gap. An examination of how I perceived and negotiated my Latinx identity throughout various stages of my life highlights the complexities and nuances of Latinx identity development. This is echoed by Guajardo et al. (2020) who critically evaluated the fluidity of intersectional Latinx identities as "stratified through the practices of individuals, institutions, and cultures" (p. 71), depicting the way my perception and negotiation of my Latinx identity shifted as I moved from one social context to another and was impacted by external conditions.

Existing models for Latinx identity development, such as the Latino and Latina Racial Identity model (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007), highlight the processes of acculturation, assimilation, and biculturalism that take place amongst members of this community. However, the contributions this study offers to the existing literature on Latinx identity development showcase the varying degrees of resistance and/or acceptance of external influences depending on internal levels of consciousness. From childhood years, throughout college, and in the earlier years of my career as a teacher, I perceived my Latinx identity based on how it was defined by others. This framed in unflattering ways my identity as a Latinx teacher. The data shows that I constantly found myself detaching from previous associations I had made to one identity as I embodied the next. While this phenomenon is hinted at in the various identity development theories, it is not transparent. The import of the conflicting internal and external realities resulted in me wrestling with myself as I negotiated my Latinx identity. The rejection and acceptance of my whole self occurred in jagged fits of regression and progression. Ultimately, in my adult

years and in my profession, I found myself questioning this ongoing detachment and realized that I needed to nurture the sense of belonging I wanted to foster for my students within myself. By analyzing my lived experiences at various stages of my life, I was able to see how my consciousness and understanding of my Latinx identity evolved over time.

The intersectionality of racial and linguistic identity development is another focal point highlighted by the findings of this study. My perception and negotiation of my Latinx identity at different stages of my life has not been fully captured by existing racial identity development models. Viewing cultural and linguistic identities as separate entities poses a fragmented and inadequate portrayal of the holistic Latinx experience. Rosa and Flores' (2017) conceptualization of the interconnectedness of race and language as raciolinguistic ideologies and perspectives offers a robust discussion on the identity construction of racialized individuals from the lens of the systems and structures that perpetuate their marginalization. However, this study contributes to this body of literature by emphasizing the undeniable intersectionality of race and language within Latinx identity development. At different stages of my life, it was both my race and language that influenced my Latinx identity. Whereas existing models depict these nuances individually, my study portrays it as an inclusive both/and perception that cannot be disentangled if we are to fully acknowledge the complexities of the Latinx identity. Rosa and Flores' (2017) discussion on raciolinguistic ideologies and perspectives offers a critical analysis of how Latinx individuals are viewed by others. This study contributes to this discussion by extending the understanding of how Latinx individuals view themselves.

RQ2*, what does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?*

Although the process of teacher identity development varies depending on factors such as age, gender, race, and educational level, to name a few (Golzar, 2020), a noted commonality within the literature is the need for educators to have a strong understanding of self beyond the profession (Michael, 2015). The *Latinx imposter syndrome,* described in theme two, I was exhibiting in my profession was indicative of years of internalized oppression that put me in a place of disempowerment that is often common among members of minoritized groups. The literature on imposter syndrome refers primarily to feelings of doubt and unworthiness of praise and recognition despite ongoing accomplishments (Edwards, 2019). Internalized oppression further complicates these feelings due to the gradual acceptance of inferiority and deficit when compared to others (Castillo et al., 2020; Padilla, 2004). My analysis depicts that my imposter syndrome as a Latinx teacher was a byproduct of the guilt and shame I had developed regarding my lack of authenticity and understanding of my own racial identity. In a systematic review of 37 empirical studies exploring English teacher identity development, Golzar (2020) found that emotional tensions are salient in the formation of a teacher's professional identity. My study also depicted the inner turmoil that is evident throughout the process of shedding old identity levels and rediscovering an authentic self. The loss of self that is described in theme one, *ongoing identity detachment*, highlights this shedding of a racialized identity experienced by Latinx teachers. While many scholars have discussed the conflicting and contradictory feelings that emerge in the process of teacher identity development (Colomer, 2019; Golzar, 2020; Nuñez et al., 2020; Reeves, 2018;), my study offers the unique contribution of speaking directly to the loss of self experienced by Latinx teachers. This racialized self that I negotiated and eventually lost illustrates the lasting effects of internalized oppression and the eventual surfacing of imposter syndrome rooted in this same narrative of inferiority.

The literature on internalized oppression recognizes that members of minoritized groups are more susceptible to the detrimental effects of postcolonial structures that convey harmful messages related to racial, class, and linguistic diversity (Castillo, 2020; Monzo, 2016; Padilla, 2004). The social construction of race throughout society is predominantly shaped by the experiences, perspectives, and ideologies of majority groups. Therefore, the development of a racialized identity is oftentimes contingent upon external factors that shape an individual's perception of self. In my role as a Latinx teacher, I internalized the belief that I was not competent in the fulfillment of my duties and responsibilities for my students. For most of my life, I had grown accustomed to shifting and changing my identity based on what I felt was deemed acceptable for the environments I occupied. Mendoza et al. (2019) claim that the most effective way for Latinx teachers to offer solidarity and nurture the identity development of our students is to examine our own biculturalism. Missing from the literature is a critical analysis of the resurfacing of the internalized oppression that shapes Latinx teacher identity development. My study speaks to this nuanced phenomenon. In the examination of my lived experiences with internalized oppression, I uncovered that my Latinx teacher identity development was convoluted by the beliefs and perception I already had about myself. Instead of feeling empowered and certain about my ability to serve as an exemplar and role model for my students, I was convicted by my own feelings of fraud and inadequacy. Early on in my teaching career, I had to reconcile with the reality that I did not know enough of my racialized history to model for my students how they should embrace their own.

Mendoza et al. (2019) discuss the simultaneous burden and honor that comes with being a Latinx teacher and embracing a social responsibility to students and the community. Colomer (2019) similarly discusses the systemic double bind of Latinx teachers being confronted by their

own internalized oppression and that of their students. Extending the work of Mendoza et al. (2019) and Colomer (2019), my study noted that the social responsibility and systemic double bind also come with harmful personal sacrifices made by teachers. The loss of self described in the theme of *ongoing identity detachment* illustrates my increased selflessness that emerged from the desire to prioritize my students' needs above my own. By this point in my life, suppressing my feelings had become a learned behavior. My internalized belief that it was more important to please others, in this case my students, over attending to my own needs trickled over into my teacher identity. A contribution made by my study is the acknowledgement of the internalized oppression that instigates selflessness and altruism in a way that is harmful to a Latinx teacher's own identity development. That is, as Latinx teachers naturally undergo the process of wanting to explore aspects of themselves that were lost and focus on the rebuilding of an authentic self it is okay to be selfish. Ultimately, self-prioritization and developing a more assured sense of self will undeniably have a positive impact on the work done with students. I found that instead of leaning into this process, I was suppressing my feelings and desires to tend to my own needs because it went against my understanding of what it meant to be an effective teacher.

The presence of unresolved internalized oppression amongst members of minoritized groups manifests as the unconscious acceptance of ideologies and cultural practices that have become institutionalized throughout society (Monzo, 2016). Existing studies and theories that have explored the rejection of these dominant ideologies among Latinx teachers attribute it to the development of cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2008; Milner, 2011) and/or racial literacy skills (Colomer, 2019) to model the countering of oppressive narratives for students. Missing from this discussion is the recognition of the transitory space Latinx teachers find themselves in throughout their identity development and consciousness. In working to overcome my feelings of

imposter syndrome, fear, and fraud, I found myself in the midst of a transitory state between the unconscious complicity I had been accustomed to and the embodiment of an authentic, self-defined Latinx identity I desired for myself and my students. Few studies (Colomer, 2019; Mendoza et al., 2019) speak to the experiences and the mindset that is indicative of this transitory space. My study contributes to filling in the gap by addressing the significant influence of internalized oppression in Latinx teachers' identity development and consciousness.

RQ3*, in what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?*

Nuñez et al. (2020) define bilingual/bicultural identities as the identification of self through two or more languages and/or two or more cultural experiences. Urrieta (2018) discusses the "oppression and exploitation of people of color" (p. 13) that play a role in their cultural/ethnic identity development due to the ongoing systems of structural inequality that dictate their lived experiences. Theme three, *unveiled hypocrisy in education*, speaks to the complexities of existing within a system that implicitly and explicitly functions under postcolonial structures rooted in the ongoing oppression of minoritized groups. In my position as a teacher, I developed a heightened awareness of the ways the educational system was inherently failing my students because of the similarities of subtractive schooling practices which I had also experienced. The literature on subtractive schooling points to the educational policies and practices that promote rejecting cultural and linguistic diversity in light of assimilating to a mainstream culture (Chavarria, 2017). Beyond the negative implications of subtractive schooling, scholars attribute the systems and ideologies as socially constructed borders and postcolonial structures benefitting society's economic and racial majority groups (Cash & Kinnvall, 2018; Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018). The othering I experienced through the loss of my

voice described in theme one, *ongoing identity detachment,* and the unfair advantage my White and more privileged peers had over me in college described in theme three, *unveiled hypocrisy in education,* are two examples of how these postcolonial structures negatively impacted me. My study contributes to the literature by illustrating how my awareness of exclusion due to personal experiences as a Latinx teacher influenced my commitment to preventing the same from happening to my students.

Svensson and Syed (2019) speak to the complex identity negotiations Latinx families of immigrant descent have to undergo due to physical displacement. Having been a child immigrant myself, my students' educational experiences resonated with me deeply as their teacher. My awareness of experiences of exclusion led me to a journey of identity formation that not only shaped the way I showed up for myself, but it also shaped how I showed up for my students. My study speaks to the magnitude of being a teacher having lived a racialized existence versus just knowing about it. While the literature on diverse teacher representation is plentiful (Brown, 2014; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Faez, 2012; Kohli, 2009; Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016; Sheets, 2001), fewer scholars have discussed teachers' sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities beginning with their own. Theme two, *Latinx imposter syndrome,* depicts the emotional distress I had to overcome in order to be the best teacher for my students. My recognition of the flaws in the system and the disparities in bilingualism described in theme three further speak to the revelations that ultimately led to me leaving the profession altogether.

Within the schooling system, postcolonial structures are evident by way of standardized testing, language programs that diminish native language preservation, and limited school personnel and teacher representation of diverse backgrounds. My awareness of experiences of exclusion negatively impacting my students also led to me recognizing the role I was choosing to

play in the acceptance or rejection of these oppressive narratives. Bristol and Fernandez's (2019) discussion on the added value of Latinx students taught by Latinx teachers speaks to the importance of establishing a classroom environment based on positive social and emotional support. Shapiro and Partelow (2018) add to this claim by describing the benefits of diverse teacher representation for all students in helping debunk socially accepted stereotypes and supporting interactions between cultures. My study offers the contribution of detailing how my ability to be culturally and linguistically sustaining for my students was dependent on my conscious and intentional decision to counter oppressive narratives. Becoming a teacher, particularly one of emergent bilingual Latinx students like I had once been, I began to develop a heightened awareness of the structural inequality they were experiencing within the school system. This recognition led to me furthering my education in an attempt to gain a better understanding on why this was happening and how it could be stopped. This growth was accompanied by an extreme discomfort, described in theme three, that I knew I would have to reconcile within myself. I had to make the decision of how this information would translate into my role as a teacher.

Teachers play a significant role in facilitating the learning and socialization of diverse learners. While several studies and scholars have explored the concept of agency within the teaching profession (Biesta et al., 2015; Calvert, 2016; Molla and Nolan, 2020), fewer studies have described the reclaiming of teacher agency as a byproduct of identity work. Calvert (2016) defines teacher agency as "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues" (p. 52). The literature on teacher agency predominantly speaks to it as it pertains to learning and educational opportunities that will strengthen them in their capacity to facilitate learning amongst their

students (Biesta et al., 2015). My study points to my agency emerging from my commitment to rebuilding an authentic Latinx identity. Although I chose to further my education through a master's and doctoral degree, neither of these provided me the confidence and voice I was searching for. On the contrary, I ultimately chose to leave the profession because I was adamant about no longer being complicit with the experiences of exclusion I was aware of and because I struggled to authentically integrate my voice into my work. The difficult decision of stepping away from teaching, which I do not believe to be permanent, is part of my personal journey of reclaiming and rebuilding my identity. When I choose to return to education I will be doing so from a more empowered and authentic sense of my Latinx identity and consciousness. My awareness of experiences of exclusion contributed to my profound recognition of the magnitude of my role as a teacher to sustain the bilingual/bicultural identities of my students.

The findings of this study also connect to existing work around the critical consciousness of Latinx teachers. Alfaro (2019) draws from the work of Freire (2005) to argue for the use of ideological clarity as the process that facilitates the development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, according to Freire (2005), refers to "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). Ideological clarity, according to Alfaro (2019), refers to the needed critical self-reflection that "requires that teachers' individual beliefs and values be repeatedly juxtaposed with the systems of belief of the dominant society" (p. 195). In other words, all teacher candidates should have heightened levels of awareness of how dominant ideologies and systemic structures have influenced the beliefs and values they have adopted along the way. From this perspective, enacting positive and transformational change for culturally and linguistically diverse student groups is highly dependent on teachers' ability and willingness to critically self-evaluate and

examine the ideology and pedagogy they are passing along to their students. According to Alfaro (2018) both ideological clarity and critical consciousness are essential, particularly within bilingual education programs, because so many teachers enter these programs "without ever having had to deconstruct their unconscious ideologies and free their minds from hegemonic teaching and learning practices" (p. 5). Personally, I entered the teaching profession without having taken the time to truly reflect on the beliefs and practices I had internalized and inadvertently brought with me into the classroom.

I realized that I was not properly equipped to sustain the bilingual/bicultural identities of my students because I still had to navigate the realization of having to do the same for myself. My awareness of experiences of exclusion impacting my students was the first time I was able to acknowledge that the same may have occurred to me in ways that ultimately shaped my ideologies and beliefs as a teacher. Up until that point, I viewed the microaggressions and marginalization I had experienced as an individualized and solely personal experience. As theme three, *unveiled hypocrisy in education,* explains, my awareness of experiences of exclusion within the education system eventually led to my recognition of the systemic structures that were rooted in the oppression of minoritized groups. Although Alfaro (2018; 2019) speaks to the significance of critical consciousness and ideological clarity in regards to bilingual teacher preparation programs, my study highlights the ways in which awareness ultimately propelled my own processes of self-reflection and self-evaluation as a teacher. Having never been afforded the opportunity to engage in this kind of identity work during my pre-service preparation program, I found myself conflicted by my own limited understanding of how to create "equitable teaching and learning spaces" (Alfaro, 2019, p. 194) for my students.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has significant implications for the understanding of Latinx teacher identity development and the influence their self-perception has on their work in the classroom. The findings of this study suggest that Latinx teacher identity development and consciousness is crucial for the dismantling of exclusionary practices reflective of a cultural deficit perspective (Monzó, 2016) and racial/economic disparities that are perpetuated through schooling. To begin, the use of postcolonialism throughout this study is not intended to imply that we are living in a time where the ongoing effects of colonialism cease to exist. On the contrary, Black and Brown people will continually have to contend with a colonized existence that has been historically marginalized and excluded throughout society. Therefore, this study engages with discussions on dismantling the systems and structures that have been put in place as long lasting racial and linguistic ramifications of postcolonialism.

This autoethnographic study offers theoretical implications for the development of a Latinx teacher identity theory that emphasizes the losing and reclaiming of racial authenticity. Beijaard (2019) proposes that "learning to teach is an identity making process" (p. 1) that requires teachers to have a thorough understanding of who they are personally and professionally to find growth opportunities within those two identities (Capps et al., 2012). Existing universal teacher identity models do not speak to my experiences as a racialized individual and a Latinx teacher. One implication from this study is that the effectiveness of Latinx teachers is impacted by how effectively they have integrated their authentic and self-determined Latinx identity into their practice and evaluation of self. Developing a critical awareness of the ongoing loss of cultural and linguistic authenticity is crucial for a Latinx teacher's identity development. The process of reclaiming these aspects of identity is further complicated by the roles and responsibilities bestowed upon a Latinx teacher, particularly one of emergent bilingual students.

The findings of this study point to the significance of heightened emotional awareness through the rejection of the perceptions of others and the acceptance of self. Therefore, the theoretical implications of this study point to the importance of critically examining the varying intersectionalities of cultural and linguistic diversity in the identity development of Latinx teachers.

This study offers practical implications for Latinx teachers, school and district leaders and teacher preparation programs. School and district leaders include principals, instructional coaches, curriculum coordinators, and/or superintendents. Each of these stakeholders are invaluable for ensuring that the schooling experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students are inclusive of their differences. This study has practical implications for Latinx teachers engaging in self-reflection and active questioning of their own identity development before facilitating the same for their students. This implies that teachers of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are more susceptible to the internalization of the oppressive narratives surrounding their daily lives. Therefore, within their roles as advocates and role models for their students, teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are better equipped to positively influence academic, personal and social outcomes amongst their students (Barni et al., 2019). The findings of this study demonstrate how my low self-efficacy as a teacher was intricately linked to my racialized identity and the experiences of invisibility I had encountered throughout my life.

Latinx teachers need to understand the role and importance of identity work for more efficacious practice. It is a significant disservice to Latinx teachers to not provide them with the opportunities to come to these understandings during their pre-service preparation programs. Therefore, this study also has practical implications for teacher preparation programs to implement a more targeted approach to facilitate the exploration of teacher identity development

of pre-service teachers of racially and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A more concerted effort is needed to move away from doing universal teacher preparation and recognize the widespread benefits of modeling culturally responsive practices and pedagogy at the pre-service stage. For Latinx teachers more specifically, this preparation involves the intentional representation of both racial and linguistic identities within Latinx identity development models. In doing so, Latinx teachers will be better equipped to recognize and facilitate the same amongst their students.

Lastly, this study also has implications for education policymakers, particularly in the areas of recruiting and retaining Latinx teachers. Bristol and Fernandez (2019) discuss the "added value–benefits to social and emotional development, as well as learning outcomes–for students of color taught by teachers of color" (p. 147). Their findings on the overall benefits of diverse teacher representation provide significant implications for policymakers "to craft legislation aimed at increasing the ethnoracial diversity of the U.S educator workforce" (Bristol & Fernandez, 2019, p. 147). An implication from this study is that opportunities for ongoing identity work is significant for the effective recruitment and retention of Latinx teachers. Situating the personal Latinx identity within a developing teacher identity allows Latinx teachers to reconcile with the parts of themselves they may have lost and wish to reclaim. The emotional toll of my increased awareness on the parts of my Latinx identity I had lost impacted my decision to stay in the classroom. The lack of recognition of my racial identity loss within the field of education ultimately impacted my decision to leave the profession that I was once so deeply passionate about. This study offers significant implications for changes in policy and legislation that support Latinx teachers in their identity development and consciousness for the purposes of intentionally sustaining the bilingual/bicultural identities of diverse learners.

Based on the findings and implications of this autoethnographic study, below are some recommendations on how to further the discussion on identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling:

Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

1. Provide ongoing opportunities for critical reflection and the examination of lived experiences within racialized contexts to foster identity development of Latinx preservice teachers.
2. Support prospective Latinx teachers in connecting their personal identity to their developing teacher identity by modeling the value of cultural knowledge.

Recommendation for School and District Leaders

1. Offer professional development for teachers that facilitates identity development and consciousness from a racialized perspective.
2. Hire teacher leaders, mentors, and coaches that can provide ongoing support to Latinx teachers in valuing their own cultural and linguistic diversity as well as that of their students.
3. Implement opportunities of critical self-reflection for teachers to explore the ongoing development of their professional and personal identities.

Recommendation for Latinx Teachers

1. Engage in reciprocal self-reflection with both students and colleagues to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of lived experiences on identity development and consciousness.

2. Examine the ways in which aspects of the teacher's identity may have been silenced or marginalized in their schooling experiences and how this is potentially being perpetuated in their classroom with their students.
3. Use storytelling and/or autobiographical reflection practices to gain a deeper understanding of their history, experiences and identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct longitudinal qualitative studies on the experiences of Latinx teachers to examine the impact of critical reflection on identity development and consciousness.
2. Critically analyze the self-perceptions of teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds on serving as advocates for their students.
3. Develop a model looking specifically at the intersectionality between racial and linguistic identities as its own Latinx identity development model.

Conclusion

This deeply personal and reflective autoethnographic study was equal parts emotional and therapeutic for me. Reading back through the journals I kept during my career as a teacher allowed me to confront many of the grievances I developed within the profession. By conducting this study on my own lived experiences, I was able to revisit many of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that I learned to be silent about because of my uncertainty on how to interpret them at the time. Being separated from those occurrences by time and space made it possible for me to truly examine and analyze my Latinx teacher identity. I have since been able to forgive myself for walking away from a profession that I will always hold near and dear to my heart. I know now that I would always be searching for answers to questions I did not even know I had if I had not taken the time to step away and examine my personal identity development as a Latina

immigrant. This study allowed me to come to terms with the fact that my undeveloped teacher identity was not my own doing, but rather the lasting effect of an educational system that expected my silence and complicity.

Celebrating my seventh birthday, eight months after migrating to the United States, and blowing out the candle on a cake where my name is spelled incorrectly without the "T"

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Appendix A

Reflection Guide

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to systematically examine and reflect on my lived experiences as an immigrant in the United States to better understand identity development and consciousness and the role of Latinx teachers in combating the exclusionary practices of postcolonial structures in schooling.

Research Questions: The research questions used to guide this study are as follows:

RQ1: How did I perceive and negotiate my Latinx identity at different stages of my life?

RQ2: What does an examination of lived experiences with internalized oppression reveal about a teacher's identity development and consciousness?

RQ3: In what ways does a teacher's awareness of experiences of exclusion contribute to the sustainment of bilingual/bicultural identities?

Reflection Guide

The following questions will be used to invite rich descriptions of experiences and formulate a more in-depth inquiry of the data sources collected:

- How do I see myself?
    - How do others see me?
- What experiences have shaped the way I view myself?
- What were the moments of discomfort during my schooling experiences as a student?
    - As a teacher?
- Reflect on the lived experiences that shaped my Latinx identity at different stages of my life.
- What various identities do I embody?

    - Do any of these identities intersect? In what way(s)?
- At what moments have I been aware of my Latinx identity during my schooling experiences as a student?
    - As a teacher?
- What were the moments I experienced exclusion because of my Latinx identity?
- What does it mean to identify as a Dominican immigrant?
- What does it mean to identify as a Latinx teacher?
- In what ways do I embody my Latinx identity in my daily life?