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# Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

## Abstract

Situated at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), this postcritical ethnographic and photovoice study sought to explore how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement. Theoretically framed by Latino Cultural Citizenship (LCC), the study explored how current Latinx student civic engagement practices inform a Hispanic-Serving Institutions' civic engagement efforts. Data collection took place over the 2021-2022 academic year and an exhibition of the study's findings was made publicly available at the culmination of the study. Findings from the study indicate that Latinx postsecondary students define civic engagement as knowledge and resource sharing (KRS) and achieving success. Findings for how Latinx postsecondary students practice civic engagement include interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving – two activities that are informed by Latinxs' collectivist culture. Findings indicate that Latinx identity has a major impact on the civic engagement behaviors and activities of Latinx postsecondary students. The study also introduces research, theoretical, practice, and policy recommendations to university leadership and administrators on how institutions, specifically HSIs, can better support the civic engagement efforts of their Latinx students that move an institution from Hispanic enrolling to Hispanic-serving.

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Juntos luchamos: A postcritical ethnographic and photovoice study on Latinx student  
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University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Liliana Diaz

November 2022

Advisor: Dr. Cecilia M. Orphan

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Author: Liliana Diaz

Title: Juntos luchamos: A postcritical ethnographic and photovoice study on Latinx student civic engagement practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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## ABSTRACT

Situated at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), this postcritical ethnographic and photovoice study sought to explore how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement. Theoretically framed by Latino Cultural Citizenship (LCC), the study explored how current Latinx student civic engagement practices inform a Hispanic-Serving Institutions' civic engagement efforts. Data collection took place over the 2021-2022 academic year and an exhibition of the study's findings was made publicly available at the culmination of the study. Findings from the study indicate that Latinx postsecondary students define civic engagement as knowledge and resource sharing (KRS) and achieving success. Findings for how Latinx postsecondary students practice civic engagement include interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving – two activities that are informed by Latinxs' collectivist culture. Findings indicate that Latinx identity has a major impact on the civic engagement behaviors and activities of Latinx postsecondary students. The study also introduces research, theoretical, practice, and policy recommendations to university leadership and administrators on how institutions, specifically HSIs, can better support the civic engagement efforts of their Latinx students that move an institution from Hispanic enrolling to Hispanic-serving.

Keywords: *Latino Cultural Citizenship, Latinx students, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, civic engagement, photovoice, postcritical ethnography*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*I remember protesting with my mother as a child, holding homemade signs and using a bucket as a drum. Even though I was a child of about seven years of age, I understood the importance of that protest. Years later, I would understand these actions as the language of the marginalized. I would understand the power that can come from forms of direct-action including community organizing, protesting, and unionizing. I remember the sea of Latinx faces which had come together to demand fair pay, health insurance, and respeto from an employer whose idea of a raise was a nickel once a year or a dime - if they felt generous. The hard labor of janitorial workers is usually invisible as it occurs after white-collar employees and their employer have gone home for the day. It is this invisibility that leads to the lack of respeto from corporations that seek profitability off the backs of hard working Latinxs and other minority groups. I saw first-hand how organizing and protesting disrupt the invisibility of these people whom corporations are dependent upon. Protesting and organizing bring “second shift” employees like my mother to the foreground by making space and uplifting the voices of often marginalized and invisible groups of people. I was pushed to interrogate why I buried this memory for many years and why I am interested in the topic of civic engagement in higher education. I realized this interest started when I saw and began studying the ways in which institutions of higher education were approaching civic*

*engagement through apolitical and race-neutral ways.* The impact administrators, faculty, and staff at institutions of higher education (IHEs) have on the civic engagement behaviors of students has been heavily studied by scholars (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Putnam, 2005; Ehrlich, 2000), yet scholars have conducted few studies on the civic behaviors of Latinx student's and how IHEs, specifically Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), contribute to that development (Barnett, 2018). Scholars exploring Latinx student civic engagement behaviors often rely on measurements that were not originally developed with Latinx students in mind (Alcantar, 2014; García Bedolla, 2012; Putnam, 2005). Research on civic engagement is by and large, identity agnostic, meaning that research on civic engagement behaviors rarely looks at how race and ethnic identity play an important part in how diverse groups of people engage civically (Alcantar, 2014).

The limited research that exists exploring Latinx civic engagement often takes a pan-ethnic approach that disregards the heterogeneity and diversity within the Latinx community and ignores the experiences different Latinx communities and cultures have had in the United States. For example, the experiences of Mexicans in the United States southwest, Puerto Ricans in the northeast, and Cubans in the southeast are vastly different (Pertuz, 2018; Verduzco Reyes, 2018; Mora, 2014). Examples highlighting the different experiences of Latinx communities include the United States' Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, which granted Cuban refugees' permanent resident status after two years in the United States. The U.S government later adjusted the policy through the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1996, which allowed any Cuban that set foot on United States land the opportunity to remain in the country, while any Cuban intercepted in U.S. waters, by the

U.S. government, were returned to Cuba (Cuban Adjustment Act, 1966, 1996). The U.S. government granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship in 1917 through the enactment of the Jones-Shafroth Act allowing them to move freely between the island and the United States (The Jones-Shafroth Act, 1917). Mexicans have not enjoyed such mobility as they have faced hostile U.S. policies such as the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program, which deported an estimated one million Mexicans, both U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens, to Mexico (*SB-670 Mexican Repatriation Program of the 1930s*) and in more recent times, have faced anti-immigrant and social hostility (FitzGerald et al., 2019).

The historical relationship between the United States and Latinx communities have lasting impacts on the political identity of Latinxs in the United States. Impacts can be seen in the party alignment of Latinxs. Collectively, Latinxs tend to lean democratic, yet when political scholars explore political affiliation via national identity, Cubans tend to lean Republican because of the party's historically tough stance on Fidel Castro (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010). Cubans fled their home country for a variety of reasons, among them restrictive policies enacted by an authoritarian socialist regime led by Fidel Castro and an economic crisis that limited the economic opportunities of the island's residents (Díaz-Briquets & Perez-Lopez; 2003; Blanco et al., 2011). This example demonstrates how context matters, both in temporal and historical terms, when researching Latinx civic behaviors, as Latinx are not monolithic and differ based on more nuanced national and community identities (Navarro, 2004).

The civic engagement behaviors of Latinxs compared to the civic activities of the entire U.S. population are also important to consider because of ethnic and national

differences among Latinx communities. Comparing Latinxs' civic behaviors to the U.S. population, writ large, disregards the relationship diverse communities have with colonization and racism within the United States. The experiences of Black Americans, Asian Americans, Indigenous communities, and White Americans are all vastly different within the United States' historical context (Acuña, 1972; Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010) and unique within Latinx communities (Navarro, 2004). Administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs need to consider inter-group differences and unique historical contexts in their civic engagement approaches with Latinx students (Garcia & Cuellar, 2018). Additionally, IHE professionals should be intentional about paying particular attention to the political and social climates in which their Latinx students exist, as these experiences may impact the ways in which Latinx students practice civic engagement on campus (Garcia & Cuellar, 2018).

Understanding the current political and social climate is important as it illuminates Latinxs' relationship with civic engagement. Media in the United States has presented Latinx communities as a dormant segment of the population awaiting politicians to mobilize them to vote at the polls. The media frequently uses the term "sleeping giant" during election cycles to refer to the large population of Latinxs eligible to vote that are not represented in the country's voter rolls or in voter turnout numbers often (Jackson, 2011, p. 691; Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2020, p. 1019; Beltrán, 2003, p. 4). However, the "sleeping giant" narrative (Jackson, 2011, p. 261; Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2020, p. 1019) ignores the ways in which Latinxs have been civically engaged throughout United States history. Media in the United States has written countless news articles

about the impact Latinx voters could have on the outcome of an election if they were to turn out and vote (Alberta, 2020; Ballí, 2020; Escarce, 2020; Medina & Fernandez, 2020). Rarely these articles discuss the United States' history of suppressing Latinx voter participation (Grossman, 2016). In 2020's presidential election, the media's coverage of Latinxs as a sleeping giant was a bit different, as President Trump's attack on immigrants, specifically those from Latin America and of Mexican descent, publicly amplified Latinx's complicated history with the United States. The president's remarks, captured at a campaign rally, and published by the *Washington Post* (Scott, 2019) were as follows:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

The anti-immigration, and explicitly anti-Mexican, rhetoric of Trump and his administration has been well documented by the media (e.g., Desjardins, 2020; Finnegan & Barabak, 2018), scholars (e.g., Pain & Chen, 2019), in his Twitter posts (e.g., *The Washington Post*; *Los Angeles Times*), and in his White House briefings where he often blamed Latinx immigrants for human trafficking, drug smuggling, and overrunning the United States (Trump, 2018).

President Trump's attack on immigrants of Color emphasized the racism enshrined in U.S. policy and the xenophobia experienced by Latinxs. Trump's incendiary language led to an increase in anti-Latinx violence. Anti-Latinx hate crimes rose 8.7% from 2018 to 2019, the highest percent since 2010 according to a 2020 report released by



California State University – San Bernardino’s Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism (Levin, 2020). President Trump’s xenophobia disparaged immigrants he deemed unworthy to the United States and his xenophobia was evident when Trump referenced immigrants from African and Caribbean countries and the caravans of migrants coming from South and Central America as coming from “shithole countries” during an oval office meeting with policymakers (Dawsey, 2018). Later, Trump spoke to the need for immigrants to come to the United States from nations such as Norway and regions such as Asia, who Trump believed could help the United States economically. While I do not explore how immigration policy and rhetoric shapes the experiences of Latinx communities in this dissertation, this example contextualizes the political climate in which this study took place which has important bearing on how Latinx communities engage civically.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars have touted the higher education field as a laboratory for democracy, where faculty teach students how to become engaged citizens who in return practice their civic duties (Colby et al., 2000). However, postsecondary institutions were created by White individuals and religious and faith-based organizations for the sons of wealthy White families (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Randle Scott, 2000). The democratization purpose of postsecondary institutions, where faculty instill students with a civic and democratic purpose, was never meant for Latinx students or other diverse student populations. In response to this exclusion, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) were developed to support Black

and Indigenous students who would receive more formal civic education, informed by and, committed to serving their student's communities (Davis III et al., 2020; Gasman et al., 2015; Stull et al., 2015; Crazy Bull, 2015). Latinx students have not experienced such formalization of a civic education developed or targeted specifically for Latinx students, although the United States is experiencing a proliferation of HSIs.

Latinxs are the largest ethnic minority in the United States with a population of 60.6 million in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), of which an estimated 26.7 million are eligible voters, and where an estimated 12.7 million cast votes in the 2016 elections (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). Similarly, in higher education, Latinx enrollment has tripled from one million to 3.2 million over the last 20 years (Santiago et al., 2016) and HACU estimated that Latinxs will compose 25%, or 4.4 million, of all higher education students by 2025 (Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities [HACU], 2021). IHEs are enrolling more Latinx students than ever before (HACU, 2021), but the extent to which civic engagement practices on campuses, especially at HSIs, support the civic preparation of Latinx students in culturally appropriate and accessible ways is still unknown. Administrators, faculty, and staff at HSIs, and other IHEs, have neglected to learn from HBCUs and TCUs on the ways they prepare Black and Indigenous students in culturally responsive ways for civic and democratic participation.

HBCUs and TCUs are two institutional types committed to civic engagement practices that support Black and Indigenous students and do so because their missions are explicitly committed to educating and preparing their students to engage in social justice issues, civic participation, and self-determination, while instilling a strong commitment to

their communities (Randle Scott, 2000; Larson-Keagy, 2015). HBCUs have a strong commitment to civic engagement, as this was part of their original mission to educate and support Black students and Black communities (Randle Scott, 2000). HBCUs embraced a civic duty to intentionally prepare Black students to address large societal issues. Leadership at HBCUs demonstrate their commitment to prepare civically engaged Black students through their missions, curriculum, and civic engagement activities (Gasman et al., 2015; Randle Scott, 2000). HBCUs embodied civic engagement by cultivating an institutional culture that recognized and taught the important contributions of Black individuals to society, heavily collaborated with communities surrounding an institution with “community redevelopment and improvement,” organized and nurtured relationships with Black youth, and invited communities to utilize an institution’s campus as a space for collective work (Randle Scott, 2000, p. 270). HBCUs were deliberate and explicit in their commitment to Black students and their communities, something that is not prominent among all institutional types.

Similarly, TCUs are committed to the development of Indigenous students and their communities. TCUs are committed to the cultural revitalization of their students and Tribal Nations (Crazy Bull, 2015). TCUs engage in “community connectedness” through acknowledging knowledge, both within the institution and by community members who possess diverse types of knowledge (Crazy Bull, 2015). TCUs also play a significant role in developing community and nation building. Nation building is integral to the identity and mission of TCUs, as these institutions serve as Tribal cultural and community centers focused on providing access to health and wellness, economic development, financial

literacy programs, cultural activities, community education, and leadership development (Crazy Bull, 2015; Stull et al., 2015). The civic engagement activities of HBCUs and TCUs are robust because they have been committed, from the start, to supporting students who faced additional challenges such as racism and colonization.

HBCUs and TCUs refuted an apolitical and race-neutral approach to their civic engagement activities because their mission was responsive to the politicization of their student's identity. Unlike HBCUs and TCUs, who have an explicit commitment to Black and Indigenous students, research on HSIs has not explored how this institutional type advances the civic development of Latinx students. The U.S. Department of Education's (n.d.) only requirement for HSI designation is a 25% Hispanic full-time student enrollment rate. Many HSIs gain this designation because of geographic proximity to large Latinx population centers and because Latinx students tend to remain close to home when pursuing higher education (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Santiago, 2007). Our understanding of how HSIs develop their Latinx student's civic engagement practices is largely unknown. Civic engagement at postsecondary institutions broadly operates using normative behaviors that center the experiences and practices of White students (Mitchell, 2012; Bocci, 2015; Butin, 2006; Latino, 2010).

Whiteness can be used to describe what Cabrera (2009) terms "hegemonic Whiteness," which is the normalization of the privileges White people experience based on their racial identity (p. 13). Privileges Whiteness imbue is the normalization of structures or measures that center the behaviors of White individuals and communities as the standard by which people of color are assessed (Latino, 2010). In the higher education

and civic engagement field, scholars, and practitioners at IHEs have upheld Whiteness as the standard by which a students' civic engagement behaviors and activities are measured and assessed (Mitchell et al., 2012; Bocci, 2015; Butin, 2006). Civic engagement efforts by professionals at IHEs have remained largely apolitical (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011) and although there are exceptions (e.g., HBCUs and TCUs) most activities at IHEs have remained race neutral (Bocci, 2015).

Scholars (Bocci, 2015; Butin, 2006; Mitchell, 2012) have described civic engagement as an activity that upholds Whiteness. White faculty primarily organize civic engagement activities, such as service-learning, who bring students - usually white students, into communities -usually communities of color, to provide their expertise and knowledge. Wade (2001) and Mitchell (2008) describe how Whiteness in civic engagement activities can become reinforced if the learning experience is not reflexive and aware of systemic injustices and social issues affecting the communities in which the learning occurs. White students who approach service-learning experiences as experts, leaders, and knowledge holders, poised to solve the problems affecting communities of people of color, reinforce Whiteness by ignoring the agency and work people of color do to address social issues affecting their own communities (Bocci, 2015). Bocci (2015) calls this the "White normativity" of civic engagement (p. 19). White normativity (Bocci, 2015, p. 19) can lead to civic engagement activities being viewed as charity. For example, Morton (1995) argues that a service-learning program or activity not engaging students in addressing social change can lead the service to become a form of charity, because it is not concerned with social change, but simply provides a service with no

concerted effort to change the underlying issue. Morton (1995) and Bocci (2015) warn that this approach to service-learning and, thus, civic engagement, reinforce inequalities and lead to discrimination and oppressive power dynamics between White students and communities and people of color. Civic engagement work that does not address social issues are apolitical and race-neutral because it upholds the learning outcomes and experiences of White students and faculty instead of undertaking the social issues affecting communities and people of color.

Apolitical and race-neutral civic engagement practices do not support Latinx students. Society in the United States politicizes the identity and bodies of Latinxs (Lima, 2007). Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1990), Mexican ethnologist and anthropologist, described narratives that present Latinxs as apathetic toward the country's political and civic life as a "colonial project" in which dominant groups affirm their ideology as superior by denying and excluding the culture of individuals and communities who have been colonized (p. II). Ignoring or rejecting different forms of civic engagement practiced by different racial and ethnic groups, relegates groups and individuals to a "second-class citizen" position where their culture and citizenship is undermined (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402). IHE administrators, by ignoring different forms of civic engagement practices and behaviors Latinxs may practice, reject Latinx agency, identity, and status as full citizens practicing their civic responsibilities.

Adding to the apolitical and race-neutral nature of civic engagement is the isolation of civic engagement efforts from other institution-based diversity initiatives that rarely inform an institution's civic preparation work (Hartley, 2011). Traditionally, civic

engagement activities enter communities, often communities of color, and attempt to *save* these communities without understanding social and historical nuances affecting communities of color such as racial and ethnic based oppression (Lin et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012). Approaches, such as IHE administrators, faculty, and staff entering communities of color in order to save them is a problematic approach as it ignores the agency of Latinx students from communities surrounding the college and how they interact with notions of civic engagement to better their lives and those of their community. University and college administrators often believe their institutions are important to the development of civic engagement behaviors for their students, as IHEs are where students are taught how to become civically informed and ready to participate in society (Hartley, 2009). Unfortunately, many administrators often approach civic engagement behaviors through a race-neutral lens and fail to consider how a student's racial or ethnic identity informs a student's relationship with civic engagement and associated behaviors (Marichal, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2012). Latinx students may not benefit or be responsive to the ways in which many campus administrators, faculty, and staff have built and continue to conduct their civic engagement education.

Most institutions have largely maintained civic engagement practices that remain inflexible, ahistorical, and colorblind and practices enacted by civic engagement leaders have been reluctant to adapt to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Mitchell et al., 2012). Marichal (2007) aptly argues that civic engagement practices on campuses occur parallel to diversity initiatives, as do many multicultural on-campus co-curricular activities. Civic engagement and diversity efforts at IHEs are often

in silos and do not intersect (Marichal, 2007). Secondly, administrative, and academic professionals at IHEs often fail to collaboratively work with the communities in which they enter to address social issues and are unsuccessful in aligning to their democratization identity (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). For IHEs to be true to their democratization mission, they must learn how to support new student populations and their communities by paying particular attention to these students' identities and historical contexts within the United States.

### **Background of the Problem**

The following sections highlight several issues with how civic engagement efforts interact with Latinxs in the United States and within institutions of higher education, specifically HSIs. IHE administrators, faculty, and staff have largely overlooked the relationship between racial and ethnic identity and civic engagement (Geertz González, 2008). The historical disenfranchisement of Latinxs in the United States has been very well documented (Chávez, 2004). IHEs approach civic engagement efforts as apolitical enterprises (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), is at odds with the lived experiences of Latinxs – one that is contentious because of their interactions with systemic racism and disenfranchisement. In the following sections I explore these issues further.

### ***Pan-ethnicity and Latinx Bodies as Political Spaces***

As noted above, Latinxs are not a homogenous or pan-ethnic group. Latinx communities are diverse due to a variety of factors such as nationality, immigration status, generational experiences, unique historical ties to the United States, and interactions with colonization and racism (Gutiérrez, 2004; Sánchez, 2013). The Latinx



community's diversity is at odds with the pan-ethnic approach taken by the media on its coverage of the United States' Latinx population (Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2020). Latinx communities include individuals with diverse educational attainment levels, incomes, and age ranges (DeSipio, 1996; Magaña, 2005, Jackson, 2011). In addition to diverse demographic traits, Latinxs also have vastly different experiences with the U.S. government. For example, in the U.S. southwest, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have a tumultuous history with the United States. The Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s expelled an estimated 500,000 to one million Mexican and Mexican-Americans to Mexico through coercive measures, including among them U.S. citizens (Hoffman, 1974; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020a). Then during the 1940s' depression, The Bracero Program imported five million workers from Mexico to provide labor in twenty-four states (Chávez, 2004) only to replicate what had occurred in the 1930s with the 1950s "Operation Wetback" where an estimated 1.3 million Mexicans were removed from the United States by the U.S. government (Chávez, 2004, p. 24). Such examples of United States intervention programs demonstrate how Latinx bodies are politicized.

In the following section, I highlight the pan-ethnic differences of three major Latinx communities to demonstrate how Latinx identity can become politicized. Discussions on the lower rates of Latinx voter turnout fail to capture the historical exclusion Latinxs have faced in everyday spaces and the challenges to Latinx political participation that continue to this day (Garcia & Sanchez, 2004). One example of how this exclusion and mistrust began among Mexican-Americans can be dated back to the mid-1800s. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American war

seceding Mexican territory (geographically now much of the southwest) to the United States, including many of the Mexican people living in the region who were involuntarily absorbed into the United States as new residents (DeSipio, 2006). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo granted Mexicans living in the territories U.S. citizenship; however, their political participation was weakened through “manipulation – through political machines – and neglect” (DeSipio, 2006, p. 451). DeSipio (2006) describes this “manipulation” as the guaranteed election of Mexican-American officials that could be manipulated to serve the economic interests of non-Hispanic White people in the region, which lead to a slow erosion of political participation among Mexican-Americans in the newly absorbed southwest. The mistrust toward the region’s elected officials led to political apathy among Mexicans (DeSipio, 2006). The political manipulation of Mexican-American elected officials in the southwest led to the political disenfranchisement of Mexican-Americans in the region.

Puerto Ricans, both on the island of Puerto Rico and in the United States, experienced similar disenfranchisement but have a vastly different relationship with the United States. For example, Puerto Rico is a United States Commonwealth, where the island and its residents have lived under colonial rule for more than 100 years and started when the island was taken over by the United States after the Spanish American War (Chávez, 2004, p. 25). The transfer of colonial rule from Spain to the United States meant that Puerto Ricans no longer had the right to self-govern, a freedom they had under Spanish rule. Rarely does the public recognize or is aware that land in Puerto Rico, after colonial transfer from Spain to the United States, was ruled by foreigners who owned

many of the island's sugar cane and tobacco production. Puerto Rico was not allowed to self-govern, as the United States appointed government authorities to govern the island, and this practice continues today. Puerto Ricans, in the U.S. mainland, did not fare much better during the 1960s and 70s, as large Puerto Rican communities in New York were often displaced by city redevelopment programs and faced employment and educational hardships by virtue of their racial/ethnic identity (Chávez, 2004). Today, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, yet they still face challenges as the island's status as a commonwealth of the United States remains a contentious topic (Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act, 2020). Mexican-Americans in the southwest and Puerto Ricans did not experience the autonomy to self-govern or have their political interest upheld. The disenfranchisement of these groups throughout history by discriminatory U.S. policies, although similar, politicized their identity with the United States in different ways. The experiences communities have with discrimination inform the racialized identities of people in the United States, such as those of Latinxs.

Latinx identity is informed by the environment in which Latinxs live. Susan Bickford (1995), a political theorist, argues that who we are is informed and shaped by our social identities. Social identities are the visible identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class) that shape our interactions with others and inform our understanding of self. Visible identities, such as race and ethnicity, shape how we interact with our environment and how we appropriately respond within society. Lima (2007) argues that Latinx bodies are political spaces of contention in the United States. Programs such as The Bracero Program, Operation Wetback, and the Mexican Repatriation of the

1930s are just a few examples of how the United States bestows upon the Latinx body a political status that requires government intervention to exert jurisdiction and management of Latinx individuals based solely on visible characteristics. Latinx students bring onto college campuses their experiences and histories of their bodies being politicized, which administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs fail to take into consideration when developing civic engagement opportunities for Latinx students.

### ***Introduction to HSIs and Civic Engagement***

The civic engagement literature is extensive (see Ehrlich, 2000; Putnam, 2005; Prentice, 2007; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Mitchell, 2008), yet research exploring how civic engagement efforts at HSIs support Latinx student's civic identity is almost non-existent. Civic engagement literature exploring issues of diversity primarily focus on two areas: the failure of college and university professionals to recognize the power dynamics between communities of color and IHEs and how people of color are missing from the larger body of literature on civic engagement. Scholars (see Mitchell et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2008; White, 2008) argue that the use of race-neutral approaches to civic engagement disregard the racial and ethnic identities of students and how these interact, if at all, with communities in which civic engagement efforts occur. Bocci (2015) attributes the omission of people of color from larger civic engagement conversations to the ways in which individuals are attributed for the work in the area. This omission is seen in the lack of research on how Latinxs are engaging and practicing civic engagement at IHEs (see García Bedolla, 2012; Segura et al., 2001; Navarro, Mejia, 2004).

Research is growing, albeit slowly, on indicators to assess HSIs' commitment to serving Latinx students. Indicators can include nonacademic outcomes such as leadership and academic development, racial and critical consciousness, and pursuit of graduate school and civic engagement. However, most research continues to rely on traditional measures such as academic performance (e.g., persistence, transfer rates, course completion, graduation) to assign "servingness" of an HSI (Garcia, 2019b, p. 3). Garcia and colleagues (2019b, 2019c) describes "servingness" as a conceptual approach to understanding what it means to support Latinx students in multiple ways through their entire educational trajectory over an institution that simply enrolls them but does not provide the support necessary for Latinx students to be successful. Research on civic engagement has primarily focused on political engagement, which is often associated and represented by White, middle class male students at four-year institutions (Alcantar, 2014). Anoll (2018) describes the tendency of scholars to generalize research findings on political engagement using primarily White samples. The civic behaviors of students of Color have not been studied extensively and current research focuses narrowly on certain dimensions of civic engagement such as political participation and volunteerism (Alcantar, 2014). Co-curricular opportunities have been slow to readjust for supporting Latinx students (Garcia, 2019b), making the study of civic engagement and Latinxs at HSIs an important area of exploration.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation explored the inseparable relationship between civic engagement and Latinx identity at an HSI. In recent years, discussions of diversity in the civic

engagement activities of IHEs has received more focus (Garcia & Cuellar, 2018; Barnett, 2018); however, little research on how Latinx identity informs the civic behaviors of Latinx students, specifically those attending an HSI has been explored. This study fills a gap in our understanding of how Latinx students view, engage, and define civic engagement, how identity may play a role in Latinx student's civic engagement behaviors and how they manifest, if at all, on a college campus, specifically one classified as a HSI. The purpose of this research is threefold. First, this research increases understanding of different forms of civic engagement practices that Latinx students engage in that better their lives and those of their communities. Second, this study disrupts negative narratives that could lead Latinx individuals to internalize messages that describe them as apathetic toward the country's political and civic life.

Latinx identity is not only individual but also layered to include family, friends and colleagues who build a shared sense of "social and political commitments" that serve to define community (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 72). Latinxs' understanding of self is also closely tied to the United States' current climate and attitudes toward Latinxs at any given time (Lima, 2007). Latinx identity is interwoven with civic participation in the United States and is also tied to vast familial and community connections. Latinx communities are not individualistic as Latinxs are collectivist in their strong familial connections (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015). Strong and wide familial connections mean that Latinxs respond not only to issues that affect them individually but also to those affecting anyone in a familial network, increasing civic participation through familial activism (Pallares, 2014).

Third, this study provides administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs, specifically HSIs, with a framework for understanding their Latinx student's civic engagement practices and civic identities so they can develop civic engagement programs that truly support Latinx students and move higher education toward its commitment of strengthening democratic society. This study supports HSIs committed to moving from enrolling to serving Latinx students and communities effectively through culturally responsive and appropriate ways. HSIs' commitment to servingness integrates both a responsibility to serve Latinx students effectively and higher education's mission to prepare students for civic and democratic participation within society.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Cultural practices, community membership, and a fraught historical position in the United States have informed a unique Latinx political identity and consciousness (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). To best understand how Latinx students at an HSI define and practice civic engagement, we must understand the political identity and consciousness of Latinx students, thus, this study employed two theoretical frameworks to ease our understanding. The first, Latino Cultural Citizenship (LCC), was developed in 1987 by a Latino Cultural Studies Working Group, whose membership was built to understand the experiences of Latinxs, through an interdisciplinary application of how racial and cultural experiences inform Latinx political participation in the United States. LCC helps us understand how Latinx identity is shaped and molded by the country's national and political landscape and will help us explore how that identity forming relationship manifests on a HSI campus. The second theoretical framework used in this

study is decolonial theory. Decolonial theory has many origins that are contextually bound by geography, time periods, and experiences (Mignolo, 2002), and as such, I align discussions of coloniality and decoloniality to Peruvian sociologist, Aníbal Quijano and his Latin American perspectives. It is important to recognize the long historical and unique interactions different societies and cultures have had with colonization. These interactions shaped why I use a Latin American perspective of coloniality centered on the history of Latinxs found in the United States' mountain west. Decolonial theory informed how Latinx students may be redefining and practicing civic engagement for themselves in ways that may not align to dominant forms of civic engagement practices by White individuals and communities. The theoretical frameworks for this study are discussed in more detail in chapter two. In chapter three, I will discuss how LCC and decolonial theory informed the research design of this study.

### **Research Questions**

Due to the tendency of Latinx students to attend institutions close to home, and the fact that these patterns cause institutions to achieve HSI status, civic engagement efforts at HSIs are usually located within the communities of an HSI's Latinx student populations. Additionally, the politicization of Latinx identity in the United States indicates that Latinx students may interact with civic engagement in unique ways not currently recognized broadly within higher education. This information can be utilized to augment the civic engagement work students and surrounding communities are already conducting, or to inform new ways of developing culturally relevant civic engagement practices. Three questions guided this study to understand Latinx civic engagement at an



HSI more clearly. My first guiding question is: How do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define and practice civic engagement? Understanding how Latinx students define civic engagement provided a decolonized view of civic engagement by uplifting the voices of Latinx students in order to define civic engagement for themselves. The second guiding research question for this study is: how does identity inform the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students? LCC posits that Latinxs' civic identity and accompanying practices are informed by their racialized identity in the United States (Rosaldo, 1994b, 1997). Therefore, it is critical to listen and understand how Latinx students interact and practice civic engagement. Exploring how Latinx student's practice civic engagement may help reveal and affirm different ways in which Latinx students live and lead civic lives that may be unknown or unrecognized by postsecondary education professionals. The third research question guiding this study is: How do Hispanic-Serving Institutions contribute to Latinx civic engagement? Understanding how Latinx students define, and practice civic engagement is important for institutions that are committed to their democratic purpose. Latinxs are a growing student population (Santiago, 2006, 2007, 2016) with vastly different historical interactions within the United States where race and ethnicity have played an important role (de la Garza et al., 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 1999, García Bedolla, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Lima, 2007; Martinez, 2005; Mora, 2014; Morales, 2018). IHE administrators, faculty, and staff, specifically those at HSIs, need to learn how Latinxs as a new student population, may require different types of civic engagement approaches or programming that is intentionally supportive and responsive to the lived experiences of Latinxs and

their communities in relation to the United States. Before we can understand effectively how Latinx students at an HSI define and practice civic engagement and how an HSI could support their development, we must orient ourselves to recognize how Latinxs develop their civic identity. Latinx students bring with them to college and university campuses an identity closely linked to a history of colonization that marks the Latinx body as a political space and whose culture informs a civic engagement identity. LCC and decolonial theory create the theoretical foundation upon which this study was built. The following section briefly describes how the theoretical frameworks guided the research design and analysis of this study. I will describe in more detail this relationship in chapter three.

### **Research Design**

This study employed two methodological approaches. The first, photovoice, a form of arts-based research and participatory action research, was chosen for its ability to uplift the voices of participants to enact the changes they want to see in their communities (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants can mobilize and serve as researchers who are experts of their lived experiences who can highlight issues impacting their lives through elucidation of photographic images they capture as part of a study (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997).

The second methodological approach is postcritical ethnography. Postcritical ethnography explicitly challenges researchers to evaluate the power dynamics between researcher and a study's participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Postcritical ethnography asks that a researcher be transparent with participants by sharing their positionality and

inviting a researcher to consider their identity as motivation for the design and decisions made within a study. It socializes the researcher to engage in co-construction of knowledge with participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Together these two methodologies align closely to explore how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement by centering their experiences and voices.

To answer this study's research questions, this study employed postcritical ethnography and photovoice to facilitate our understanding of Latinx student's practices of civic engagement at their HSI. I use *Universidad de la Gente* as a pseudonym for the institution at which this study was conducted. I selected participants for this study using "homogeneous sampling" and "snowball sampling" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 135; Patton, 2002, p. 235). I invited students who identify as Latina/o/x, Hispanic, or Chicanx and are enrolled at the Universidad de la Gente to participate. A sample size of ten participants were invited to participate in the study. The setting is Universidad de la Gente, a public four-year Regional Comprehensive University (RCU), as well as a HSI, located in an urban area in the mountain west. I selected Universidad de la Gente as the study's site because of its historical connection to a large Latinx community that was displaced to develop the land on which Universidad de la Gente exists today (Page & Ross, 2017). Universidad de la Gente is also an HSI representing 28% Latinx enrollment, supports primarily in-state and commuter students, nearly 80% of which work either part-or-full-time (Universidad de la Gente, 2022b; IPEDS, 2019).

This study's theoretical frameworks, LCC (Flores & Benmayor, 2007) and decolonial theory (Quijano, 1992), ask that researchers be reflexive and engage in

research that uplifts the voices of participants by providing opportunities for their voices to be front and center, to share their stories, and to share what changes they would like to see in their lives and those of their communities. I selected photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and postcritical ethnography (Noblit et al., 2004) for this study because they decolonize research by inviting participants to co-construct knowledge with the researcher. Participants are active, not passive, members of the study in these methodological approaches – a concern for both LCC and decolonizing research. To decolonize research, knowledge is developed from the perspective of participants thus disrupting power dynamics that can occur between participant and researcher (Noblit et al., 2004).

I invited participants to document, through photography, how they conceptualize civic engagement. Participants attended three 90-minute in-person meetings. The first was an orientation where participants learned more details about the study and received project materials such as consent and photo release forms and received a prompt participant used to take pictures. The second meeting was a single focus group interview where I asked participants questions about the photographs they took as part of the study. The third meeting was to discuss how participant photographs and messages would be presented to the wider Universidad de la Gente community as part of an exhibition. The photograph collection phase lasted one-month, and the exhibition was conducted in fall 2022.

During Data analysis I employed concept coding as a first round of analysis of the single focus group interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2016) and axial coding, during a

second level of analysis to develop categories. I presented categories derived from the analysis of data to participants to align to postcritical ethnography and photovoice's call to utilize "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236) and to uphold the co-construction of knowledge with participants to decolonize research (Noblit et al., 2004). A presentation of findings was made publicly available during an exhibition where Universidad de la Gente administrators and participants, if they chose to, engaged in conversation about the findings.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study contributed to the civic engagement literature by using a race-conscious approach to civic engagement in higher education that is defined by Latinx students themselves. This study extended the use of LCC and decolonial theory into the civic engagement space as two theories that facilitate our understanding on how identity informs the civic engagement practices of Latinx students. This project is significant because it encourages HSIs to reimagine how their civic engagement efforts can move the institution from being identified as simply enrolling Latinx students to serving them in more comprehensive ways and how to best support the civic engagement of Latinx students. Gina Ann Garcia (2019a), a leading HSI researcher, argues that HSIs are currently "redefining what it means to serve minoritized students" and what it means for HSIs to operate in ways that remove Whiteness as the normative standard (p. 3). The civic engagement field, its literature, and movement primarily center the experiences of White students (Lin et al., 2009). This study added the perspectives of Latinx students into the field of civic engagement and provided much needed approaches that

administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs, specifically HSIs, can use to develop culturally relevant civic engagement practices.

Conversely, conversations about diversity and multiculturalism in civic engagement did not emerge broadly until the mid-1990s (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Research on civic engagement and Latinx students often portray this student population as less prepared with civic knowledge and with lower civic engagement participation rates (Barnett, 2018; Torney-Purta et al., 2006); however, my findings indicate a much more complex relationship between Latinx students and civic participation. Similar research indicates that Latinx students demonstrate higher levels of civic participation when their communities are affected or when there are strong social ties with community networks and organizations (Martinez, 2005; Kitts, 2007). My findings corroborate Martinez (2005) and Kitts (2007) findings.

My findings indicate Latinx postsecondary students enact their civic engagement activities through interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving – two activities that are directly informed by Latinxs’ intersectional and collectivist identities. Participants, in this study, enacted civic engagement behaviors and activities that focused on the health of family and community networks and regarded the success of the individual as the success of the entire Latinx community. Through my research, I contribute two novel concepts, interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving, which are important and significant because these concepts broaden our understanding of civic engagement to include how racial/ethnic identity and culture create distinct forms of engagement and help Latinx students develop a civic identity that has yet to be

recognized in the civic engagement field. Additionally, this study advanced research on how institutions such as HSIs can support Latinx student's civic engagement development. In this study, I present policy, theory, research, and practice recommendations that disrupt Latinx postsecondary students' marginalization and lead higher education professionals at IHEs, specifically at HSIs, to better support Latinx students' civic engagement activities and behaviors.

Larger conversations on the historical legacy of U.S. discrimination toward Latinxs and how this may affect the civic engagement behaviors of Latinx students at IHEs is limited; however, this study broadens our understanding. LCC, as a theoretical framework, is a tool that can be used to interrogate and expand our understanding of how a history of Latinx discrimination informs the civic engagement behaviors of Latinx students. HSIs are critically important to the development of Latinx students, not only because HSIs enroll almost two-thirds of all Latinx undergraduates (HACU, 2021), but because these institutions are geographically located in or near predominately Latinx communities (Núñez et al., 2011).

Finally, this study provided an opportunity for commuter and online students to participate in a research study in and about their own communities. All participants in this study were commuter students, several were fully online, and one participant lived almost two hours away from campus. Participants requested to meet virtually, as many were working full-time while attending classes and several were parents with children at home with limited daycare options. My study corroborates research (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Perrin & Turner, 2019; Brown et al., 2016) that found Latinx students' reliance on

cell phones and other mobile devices for internet access. My study expands the use of technology to include Latinx, commuter, online, and non-traditional students in research studies.

### **Key Terms**

In order to facilitate understanding of this study, I define the following terms:

*Latinx, Cultural Citizenship, Mixed-status families, Respeto, Civic engagement, Community engagement, Service learning, Critical service-learning, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Interrelational engagement, Intergenerational paving, and Intersectionality.*

First, *Latinx* is used throughout this manuscript to acknowledge individuals that identify across the gender spectrum. I utilized Latinx as the chosen term that has been coined by some members of a diverse community that seek to push back upon hegemonic forces that operate in binaries (Morales, 2018). Using the “x” in Latinx, is a rejection of the dominant gender binary that is “emblematic of the nature of Latinx identity construction” that is constantly being redefined (Morales, 2018, p. 306). In the United States, Latinx identity and accompanying categorizations are constantly in flux (e.g., Chicano/a, Hispanic, Latinx, or Nationality-American). Using Latinx acknowledges the intersectionality of individuals that are outside dominant binaries (Morales, 2018), thus “x” is presented to be gender inclusive.

Secondly, I use *Latinx* in this manuscript as a blanket term to engage in conversations with nationality as its primary focus but acknowledge the social constructions of race and its effects on the Latinx identity in the United States. Daniel Blackburn (1998), professor of biology, defines race as a social construction that has



limited basis in biological markers and one that is based on social determinants, as racial definitions have been defined and redefined for more than 250 years. Morales (2018) argues that Latinxs have been racialized as “non-White;” however, that racialization is complicated. Latinx could be considered its own race as racial mixing creates ambiguous categorizations of what and who could be considered Latinx. Discussions about Latinxs and race could create numerous dissertations, as it is a complex topic. In this study, *Latinx* is employed to understand the categorizations that are often bundled into one pan-ethnic understanding of Latinx in the United States and bundled categorizations include national identity (e.g., Cuban-American/Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican-American/Mexican, etc.), identities self-imposed (e.g., Chicanx, la Raza, Mestizo) and externally applied (e.g., Hispanic). Shifting categorizations are confusing and ever changing, hence why this study is open to any participant that identifies as Latinx or any of the bundled identities often consolidated under Latinx.

Third, this manuscript makes primary use of *Latinx* over Hispanic. The use of Hispanic as an externally applied category, by a 1970s congressional action, that served as government regulation of a population which ignored the diverse “history, nationality, social class, legal status, and generation” of Latinxs in the country (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006, p. 1). Additionally, Hispanic, as a category, ignores the vast racial composition of Latinxs and associates it as one with Spanish descent, thus erasing the experiences of Latinxs who are Black and/or Indigenous to the Americas (Morales, 2018).

*Cultural Citizenship* includes the expansive variety of activities Latinxs, and other groups perform to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, which can also include

opposition to current societal and political structures that are exclusionary. I do not rely on the dominant definition of citizenship as legal presence in the United States (Siham Fernández, 2015; Flores & Benmayor, 1997), but instead, a construction of the myriad of activities that serve to reclaim political participation and recognition for Latinxs. One method for recognition of communities' civic practices is the tendency of communities to form through "shared social and political commitments" (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 72) and groups will experience and "live their social realities in different ways" (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 86). The way in which communities experience their realities informs the ways in which communities interact with notions of citizenship.

*Mixed-status families* can include family members whose status can range from U.S. citizen, permanent residents, asylees and refugees (Rodríguez, 2001), *DACAmented* (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and undocumented individuals (Benuto et al., 2018).

*Respeto* directly translates to respect in English; however, its cultural significance within the Latinx community is more complex. Kiyama and colleagues (2016) describe *respeto* as behaviors that denote a level of civility offered in different situations based on another person's identity such as gender, class, and age. In their research, Kiyama and colleagues (2016), describe how *respeto* is utilized by Latinas as a form of resistance and to demand acknowledgement of the value of Latinas.

*Civic engagement* is complicated to define, as consensus of its meaning and what civic engagement in the higher education ecosystem should and currently looks like is continuously debated (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Civic engagement is composed of

separate but overlapping dimensions such as service-learning (Astin & Sax, 1998), volunteerism (Astin et al., 1999), political engagement (Colby et al., 2000; Walker, 2000) or political participation (Barnett, 2018), social justice (Randle Scott, 2000), and community involvement (Randle Scott, 2000) or community engagement (Public Purpose Institute, 2021). For the purposes of this study, civic engagement is defined as the acts and behaviors of individuals or groups of people, working collectively, to confront larger and complex societal problems by addressing their root causes through a variety of methods.

*Community engagement* is defined as the collaborative activities between postsecondary institutions and communities, whether local, regional, state-level, national or international, that mutually benefit knowledge exchanges and sharing of resources. Community engagement's main purpose is to ensure a college or universities resources and/or knowledge is shared with the public or the private sector to cultivate teaching and learning, increase civic participation and engagement, develop scholarship and research, address critical social issues, and increase pursuit for the public good (Public Purpose Institute, 2021).

*Service learning* is often construed and used interchangeably with civic engagement; however, service learning is a separate dimension of civic engagement (Prentice, 2007; Torrez, 2018). Service learning is a

pedagogy whereby course learning outcomes are linked with community service in a way that enhances comprehension of course content while leading to a transformative change in student awareness, critical thinking, personal values, and civic responsibility, as well as empowerment of and reciprocity with community partners (Barnett, 2018, p. 152).

Service-learning is one method by which students are taught civic values such as volunteerism, community engagement and participation.

*Critical service-learning*, unlike service-learning which primarily centers the student learning experience, focuses on developing reflection and action for students to develop meaningful relationships with communities, in which the service-learning activity takes place, to gather the “skills, knowledge, and experiences required of students to not only participate in communities, but to transform them as engaged and active citizens” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 52). Critical service-learning compels students to understand systemic oppression and to develop meaningful relationships with the communities in which the service-learning experience is taking place to address injustices (Wade, 2001; Mitchell, 2008).

*Hispanic-Serving Institutions* are IHEs that enroll 25% Hispanic student population (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) Gina Ann Garcia (2019a), in her book *Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions*, describes the work HSIs will need to do to move themselves from simply enrolling the required 25% Hispanic student body, as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education, to becoming institutions that support the Latinx student holistically. Garcia (2019b) characterizes this as “servingness” which she argues “is the multidimensional and conceptual way to understand what it means to move from simply enrolling Latinx students to actually serving them” (p. 1). The United States federal government constructed HSIs but did not outline how Latinx students were to be served by these institutions (Santiago, 2006).

*Interrelational engagement*, is the term I created to describe the civic behaviors and activities that are formed from Latinx students' intersectional identities and Latinx culture of collectivism that move forward a civic engagement identity and accompanying activities that benefit Latinx students' families and community networks.

*Intergenerational paving* is a term I created to describe Latinx postsecondary students' deep sense of duty to pave an easier way for family and community members that will come after them, just as their parents did by making and taking actions that broadened opportunities for their children.

*Intersectionality*, as a concept, was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, p. 141), scholar and civic rights activist, to describe the multiple experiences and combined effects of multiple identities on an individual. Identities can include gender, sex, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc. Identity is fluid and different environments such as social or political contexts can impact how individuals interact or develop understanding of their identity(ies).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the need to recognize that administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs must revisit their civic engagement efforts to be responsive to a new population of students. Latinx students, as a growing higher education population, must be supported in their civic engagement endeavors, and to do so higher education professionals at IHEs, specifically HSIs, must engage in conversations of identity. Identity plays an important role in how Latinxs develop their understanding of civic engagement. This chapter provided a description of the problem and why it is important

for HSIs to pay particular attention to Latinx student's civic engagement development if they are to stay true to their democratic purposes. LCC and decolonial theory, as the project's two theoretical frameworks, guide us toward a critical interrogation and understanding of the importance of identity to a Latinx student's civic engagement and the obligation of HSIs to be responsive to these students. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the project's research design and terminology used throughout the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I explored existing literature on the civic engagement practices of IHEs, how civic engagement is experienced by Latinx students, and literature on how Latinx identity is politicized in the United States. I organized the literature on student civic engagement at IHEs in four ways. The review of the literature on civic engagement began in the mid-1990s as discussions of diversity and multiculturalism in the field emerged during this time (Hartley, 2011); however, I first interacted with literature examining the ways in which civic engagement is defined. It is important to understand how civic engagement is defined for both context and composition of this literature review. The second area I explored is how administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs institutionally inscribe civic engagement on their campuses. Third, I explored literature focused on civic engagement at HSIs. Fourth, I engaged in a discussion of the major critiques of civic engagement literature. The literature review then shifts to an exploration of the historical disenfranchisement of Latinxs in the United States, how Latinx bodies are politicized, and how Latinxs respond to this politicization. Finally, I examined literature exploring how racial and ethnic identity drives the civic engagement behaviors of Latinxs. Due to the expansive amount of literature on the historical relationship of Latinxs in the United States, I selected relevant historical events that home in on this relationship and informed this study further. I present key historical events exploring

Latinxs' experiences with the United States chronologically starting in the 1900s, in approximately 20-year increments. But first, to contextualize the review of literature presented in this study, the civic engagement efforts of Latinx students, and higher education professionals at IHEs and HSIs, I presented the theoretical frameworks that I use to examine the vast body of literature. I also provide my conceptual framework that I developed to organize my thinking and organization of the literature on civic engagement, Latinx civic identity, and IHEs and HSIs contribution to the field of civic engagement.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Latinx identity is an amalgamation of Latinx culture and its historical relationship with the United States. Latinx students who enter IHEs with an identity molded by their experiences within the United States (Flores & Benmayor, 1997), a relationship that higher education professionals at IHEs may not recognize. To facilitate our knowledge of how a Latinx civic identity manifests within IHEs, and HSIs specifically, I employed two theoretical frameworks that guide our understanding. The first, Latino Cultural Citizenship (LCC) (Rosaldo, 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997) was developed in the late 1980s to discern how race and culture inform the civic identity of Latinxs. The second, decolonial theory has many iterations that are geographically unique dependent on the colonizing entity (Morales, 2018). My engagement with decolonial theory is based on the work of Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist whose decolonialization work focuses on Latin America's experiences with colonialization. I use LCC and decolonial theory to interrogate the ways in which Latinx students may develop a civic identity that is



informed by the interactions they have within the United States and how these manifest at IHEs, specifically at HSIIs.

### *Latino Cultural Citizenship*

LCC as a theoretical framework was expanded upon Renato Rosaldo's idea of cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Rosaldo, 1997) to include the cultural and political participation of Latinxs in the United States. To understand LCC, it is important to explore Rosaldo's original idea of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship legitimizes the ability of communities to be different while simultaneously having access to full democratic participation (Rosaldo, 1997; Rosaldo, 1994a; Rosaldo, 1994b). Culture and citizenship are interdependent within this framework, with each informing the other to construct the political identity of disenfranchised people who create their own forms of political and civic participation in societies that have sought to exclude their participation. Culture, in this context, presents a boundary from which citizenship can be understood more explicitly. Culture are the practices a community upholds that define membership of individuals in said community. One example presented by Flores and Benmayor (1997) is that of Latinxs as members of large community networks, a trait for which Latinxs have been criticized as a reason for their lack of assimilation into U.S. society (Lazear, 2007). The large community networks insulate Latinxs from U.S. acculturation. Coincidentally, it is the lack of community networks that has led scholars (Bellah et al., 1996; Perin, 1988) to critique the decline of civic identity and participation among White individuals and communities. The juxtaposition of traits valid for one

group of people, but not another, demarks culture as a boundary from which citizenship can be questioned.

Social classes are stratified based on the issues affecting them and that stratification can dictate the cultural membership of a group of people. Rosaldo (1994b) describes this stratification as “first-class citizenship” or “second-class citizenship” (p. 402). “First-class citizenship” includes individuals or social classes that have full access to democratic participation and whose language, synonymous with discourse, is recognized as legitimate in the political and democratic processes of a nation. “Second-class citizenship” includes those whose language is outside the norms of what has been constituted as legitimate by first-class citizens and a nation (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402). Rosaldo (1994a) provides a poignant example of how language can become exclusionary, as in the case of universities in the 1980s and 90s debating the inclusion of diverse literary works to the curriculum which was overrepresented by the works of White Europeans and White Americans. The works of White American or European writers were never within the sphere of debate as these works were deemed the standard and foundation to a good collegiate education while the value of literary works by people of color were questioned by university administrators (Rosaldo, 1994b).

LCC provides a framework to understand the relationship between culture and citizenship among Latinxs. Unlike LatCrit, which concerns itself with the development of a community of scholars interested in the advancement of scholarship that leads to the production of “legal knowledge” about Latinxs and the law (Valdés, 2012, p. 513; Valdés, n.d.), LCC interrogates the influence culture has on the civic formation of

Latinxs, which Rosaldo (1997) terms “citizenship” (p. 27). In this study, the LCC of Latinx students at an HSI was analyzed to understand how they defined and practiced civic engagement and developed their own understanding of citizenship as informed by their identity.

### ***Decolonial Theory***

The second theoretical framework, I used in this dissertation, is decolonial theory. Decolonial theory has many origins that are contextually bound by geography, time periods, and experiences (Mignolo, 2002). As such, I align discussions of coloniality and decoloniality to Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano and his Latin American perspectives. Quijano (1992) argues that modern understanding of colonialism as “dominación política formal de unas sociedades sobre otras, parece pues asunto del pasado” [political domination of one society over another, are often seen as part of the past] (p. 12) have led to a new present-day form of colonialism enacted through racial and ethnic discrimination. Colonialism was able to achieve the erasure of “creencias, ideas, imagines, símbolos o conocimientos” [beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, and ways of knowing] that did not serve global colonial domination and led to the repression of “modos de conocer, de producir conocimiento, de producir perspectivas, imágenes y sistemas de imágenes, símbolos, modos de significación, patrones e instrumentos de expresión formalizada y objetivada, intelectual o visual” [ways of knowing, knowledge production and perspectives, images and image systems, symbols, modes of meaning, patterns and instruments of expression in formal and objective ways both intellectually or visually] of non-European peoples (Quijano, 1992, p. 12). As such, a resistant response to

colonialism is decolonialism (Quijano, 1992; Magnolo, 2002). Decolonial theory directs our understanding of the ways in which colonized people engage in practices – such as civic engagement – that reject colonial frames of thinking by centering culturally relevant approaches, knowledge production and understanding as legitimate. I recognize the historical discrimination Latinxs have experienced on the topic of language within the United States. In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) confers vivid examples of the historically fraught relationship between a Chicana/Latina/Mexican identity and language within the United States. I agree with Anzaldúa’s claim that Chicanos are “a complex, heterogeneous people, we [who] speak many languages” (p. 77). I embrace a multilingual identity by presenting quotes by Anibal Quijano in its original Spanish form and my English translation.

Latinx experiences with colonization are different based on geographic location, historical point in time, and modern-day interactions with colonization (Morales, 2018). A Puerto Rican experience with colonization will be different from the experiences of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos in the southwest (Morales, 2018). In this study, decolonial theory and LCC serve to frame an exploration of the experiences of Latinxs in the mountain west and does not attempt nor does it recommend generalizations be applied to all Latinxs in the country. Latinxs are not a homogenous group in their experiences with colonization, as national contexts also play an important role in the relationship Latinxs have with colonization and decolonization (Morales, 2018). The purpose of this study is to illustrate the ways in which Latinx students at an HSI define and practice civic engagement and how identity may play an important role in Latinx

students' interactions with civic engagement. LCC, as a theory, postulates that Latinxs' relationship with ideas of citizenship are informed by a culture that has been enmeshed with colonialism. Colonialism as articulated by Quijano, as political domination of one society by another, is both a historical and present-day manifestation among Latinx communities. Civic engagement that Latinxs practice has been colonized and obscured by master narratives such as the "sleeping giant" (Jackson, 2011, p. 691) that present Latinxs as unengaged without recognizing culturally and historically relevant forms of engagement.

The racial and ethnic identities of Latinxs in the United States play an important and direct role in the civic engagement education and development of Latinxs (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; DeSipio, 2006; Moreno, 2008). In this study, I recognize and argue that the civic education of Latinx students starts well before they set foot on a college campus. LCC allows us to understand how a racial and ethnic identity in the United States can play an important role in developing the civic identity of Latinxs (Rosaldo, 1997). If HSIs are to support Latinx students holistically, HSIs will need to understand to what extent Latinx students are showing up with a civic identity and from there assess how best to serve their civic engagement needs. Garcia (2019b) asks HSIs to regard the non-academic outcomes, in addition to the academic, if they are to move from simply enrolling to serving Latinx students. Non-academic outcomes must include critical consciousness, racial identity, and civic engagement as important aspects of evolving from simply enrolling to serving Latinx students in holistic ways (Garcia, 2019b). This study fills a gap in our understanding of how identity plays a role in the ways in which Latinx

students define and practice civic engagement and whether they regard their HSI as supportive of their civic development.

### ***Latino Cultural Citizenship and Decolonial Theory in Synergy***

Decolonial theory compliments LCC as it addresses the actions that communities unknowingly or knowingly take to decolonize the ways they interact, understand beliefs, symbols, knowledge, and ways of knowing (Quijano, 1992, 2000). Decolonial theory directs our understanding of the ways in which people engage in practices that reject hegemonic forms of thinking by centering and legitimizing diverse practices and interactions with civic engagement. LCC, similarly to decolonial theory, ascribes the importance of understanding historical discrimination and disenfranchisement within the United States in forming both a cultural and political identity in response to discrimination (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). The responses of disenfranchised people thus become the political identity or *citizenship* practice of individuals and their communities, which are culturally informed and serve to decolonialize dominant civic engagement practices.

LCC and decolonial theory undergirded the selection of the research questions presented in this study. LCC contends that an individual's cultural background informs their civic identity and participation (Rosaldo, 1997). Understanding how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement will help inform higher education professionals at IHEs, particularly HSIs, on how best to support their Latinx students' civic engagement development. Additionally, LCC as a theory, pushes administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs to question their apolitical approach to civic engagement. Civic engagement

practices at IHEs have remained largely apolitical (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011); however, students of color, by virtue of their racial and ethnic identity, are political. Latinx bodies *are* politicized (Lima, 2007). Using LCC to examine civic engagement practices at IHEs moves us to understand and consider Latinx bodies as political (Rosaldo, 1997) and the responsibility of higher education professionals on college and university campuses to be responsive to this in their civic engagement efforts. Higher education professionals at IHEs, and specifically at HSIs, need to be prepared to develop civic engagement activities that understand the Latinx body as political, encouraging them to push past its current apolitical status. Decolonizing civic engagement at IHEs will require recognition that students of Color are not served well by an apolitical civic engagement approach. This study's research questions are only a starting point toward decolonizing civic engagement on college and university campuses. Administrators, faculty, and staff at IHE's cannot support Latinx students if they do not have a basic understanding of how these students define and interact with civic engagement.

Flores and Benmayor (1997) argue for the need to understand culture and its intersections with identity and nationality. The heterogeneity and fluidity of Latinx identity must be considered when exploring LCC. Latinx identity is intersectional in its relationship with race (e.g., Asian, African, European, Indigenous, etc.) and nationality (e.g., Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, Colombians, Venezuelans, etc.). As such, each Latinx community will have unique historical experiences within the United States that shape their interactions with culture and citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). The United States, regardless of these unique socio- and historical interactions, aggregates

these individual communities, their identities, and their experiences into one default understanding of Latinx. LCC recommends the use of methodological approaches that add nuance to the experiences of Latinxs using “life histories, ethnographic interviews, participant observations, and textual analysis” (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, p. 10). To organize my thinking on how LCC and decolonial theory interact with the robust body of civic engagement literature, I developed a conceptual framework. The following section visually describes how LCC and decolonial theory were used to examine and interrogate the current body of literature on civic engagement within higher education, Latinx identity and culture and its intersections with ideas of citizenship.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bensimon (2007) contends that higher education professionals at IHEs have experienced challenges in developing equitable outcomes for students because they fail to recognize the racialized experiences of Black and Latinx students. Within higher education, individuals of color who have contributed significantly to civic engagement have been omitted (Bocci, 2015) and, within HSIs, little research has been done on how this institutional type supports Latinx student’s civic engagement behaviors. Civic engagement, as a movement within higher education, has remained predominantly identity agnostic (Alcantar, 2014), often centering the civic engagement practices of White students as the norm upon which all other civic behaviors are compared (Putnam, 2005; Lin et al., 2009). The homogenization of civic engagement to describe behaviors of White students is problematic for Latinx students who may bring different perspectives and experiences to civic engagement onto their postsecondary campuses. Latinx students

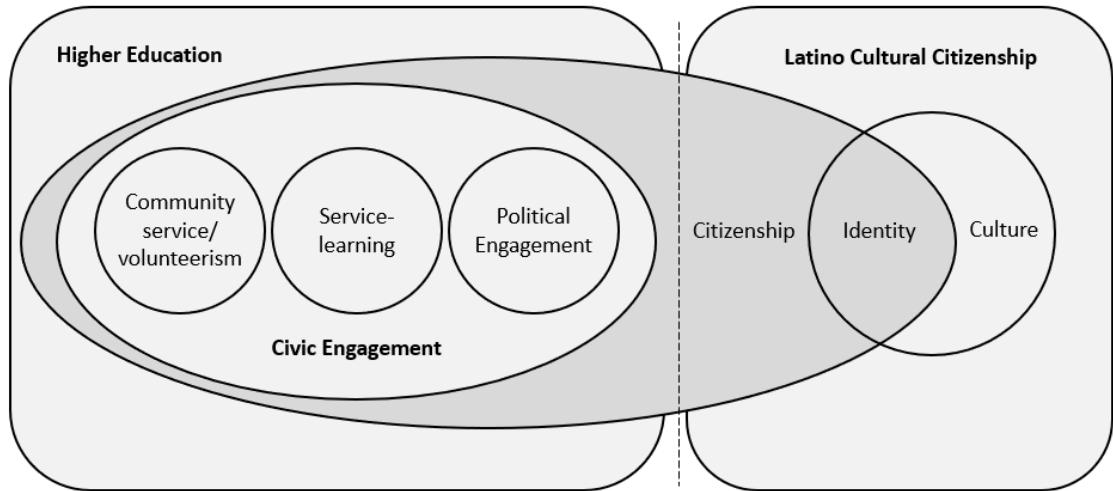


have developed identities that are shaped by moments of both invisibility and hyper visibility because of their racial and ethnic membership in U.S. society (Vaquera et al., 2014). I visually outline in Figure 1 how Rosaldo's (1997) LCC theory can be used to explore the robust civic engagement literature and examine how Latinx identity can help refine our understanding of the interaction between civic engagement, higher education, and racial and ethnic identity.

The conceptual framework I present in Figure 1 visually presents the current division that exists, represented by the dashed line, within the civic engagement literature in higher education and Latinx racial and ethnic identity, as understood through LCC. In this study, the dashed line also represents the decolonization of higher education's civic engagement literature by introducing two liberatory methods, photovoice and postcritical ethnography, used to bring in Latinx perspectives into the civic engagement conversation. I speak more in depth to the liberatory nature of this study's methods in chapter three and how these align to decolonization efforts in research and higher education.

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*



*Note.* This conceptual model visually presents the relationship between civic engagement’s body of literature and Latinx cultural and civic identity.

Civic engagement is expansive and has different facets; however, for the purposes of this study, I focused on three major areas: community service/volunteerism, service-learning, and political engagement. These facets are subsets of the larger study of civic engagement and serve to advance our understanding of how IHEs prepare students for participation in U.S. democracy (Colby et al., 2000). Flores and Benmayor (1997) emphasize a more expansive understanding of citizenship to include more than a legal status within a country but also the cultural and civic habits Latinxs form to enact their civic participation amid a history of exclusion and discrimination within the United States.

## **Review of the Literature**

### *Cultivating Civic Values for a Democratic Society*

One of the goals bestowed on IHEs, upon their founding, was the preparation of students for participation in society (Galston, 2001), a goal that was often achieved with experiential learning (Zieren & Stoddard, 2004). Originally, IHEs were meant to serve the sons of wealthy White individuals and excluded women and people of color; however, as women and people of color gained admission to the nation's IHEs, the role of preparing students for civic participation also evolved (Karabel, 2005; Anderson, 2002). The commitment of higher education professionals at IHEs to the preparation of students for civic participation and democratic life has come under scrutiny in recent times and been at the center of a call to renew and recommit IHEs to the civic and democratic preparation of students (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Among those scrutinizing and leading the call for the civic renewal of IHEs are organizations such as Campus Compact, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), and in some form the United States Department of Education through its Federal funds that commissioned and supported the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement's (2012) highly influential "A Crucible Moment" report. To prepare students for civic life in the modern age, AAC&U's College Learning for the New Global Century (2007) presented a set of recommendations meant to foster a clear understanding of the learning outcomes students should achieve through curricular and co-curricular programming at their IHE. In the report, AAC&U (2007) positioned civic knowledge and engagement of both local and global contexts important to a student's collegiate education and emphasized the

knowledge that can be obtained through experiential and service-learning activities in diverse communities. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) contends that the United States' democracy is predicated on developing "informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible people" that are committed to engaging in the nation's civic fabric and that these values be integrated into every aspect of a student's educational trajectory from elementary through postsecondary (p. v). Unlike AAC&U which provides recommendations for enhancing student outcomes, The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) presents a collection of recommendations for IHE leaders and administrators to implement that recommit their institutions to developing fully engaged students ready to contribute to the civic and democratic well-being of the nation. One of the methods presented by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) is the development of opportunities for students to engage in and practice civic engagement.

### ***Civic Engagement***

A primary challenge is the lack of definitional and terminological consensus for civic engagement which can lead to an incomplete understanding of civic engagement (Prentice, 2007; Cress, 2012). Civic engagement is defined differently based on who is using it. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) use "civic learning" and "democratic engagement" interchangeably to describe civic engagement and to emphasize the need for preparing students with civic knowledge ready to tackle larger social issues, which are important components of civic engagement

education (p. 3). Civic engagement has been defined, by some, as political engagement, or political involvement, which can include voting (Prentice, 2007; Mathews, 2000; Zimmer et al., 2016), volunteering for a political campaign, polling (Zimmer et al., 2016), paying taxes, following the law, and participating in jury duty (Dalton, 2016; Mathews, 2000). The American Psychological Association (APA) has a more expansive definition of civic engagement. The APA (2021) defines civic engagement as the actions taken by individuals or communities created to identify and respond to public issues and concerns. While eminent scholar Thomas Ehrlich (2000) defines civic engagement as serving community interests or engaging with organizations to address social issues by developing the skills and knowledge necessary to affect change whether through political or non-political action.

In addition to diverse definitional approaches, civic engagement has versatile usage and includes many dimensions, concepts, and practices that can be considered part of “civic learning,” “democratic engagement,” and civic identity (Prentice, 2007; Mathews, 2000; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012; p. 3; American Psychological Association, 2021) which need to be defined for both higher education professionals at IHEs and students. Mathews (2000) argues that students’ civic and democratic identity has evolved over time from one attuned to strong political participation, where today, concepts of civic identity are less associated with politics and more involved with individuals living morally private lives. For IHEs, their civic and democratic purpose has also evolved. IHEs were founded to prepare students for civic and political leadership (Bloom et al., 2007); however today, IHE’s governing boards

may not consider civic preparation a central mission of higher education (Mathews, 2000). The evolution of higher education has led it away from its central mission to prepare students for the civic and public good and positioned higher education as a product the public needs to purchase (Bloom et al., 2007). Regardless of the shift higher education may have taken, civic engagement is a practice that yields positive results for students.

Civic engagement has been shown to increase student learning of both academic and personal outcomes (Butin, 2010; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Boss, 2010). The Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric, developed by a group of faculty representing IHEs across the United States, collated existing learning outcomes from rubrics across the country assessing civic engagement outcomes. The VALUE rubrics provide institutional leaders with a framework for assessing student civic learning and growth. The rubric assesses six learning outcomes which include “diversity of communities and cultures, analysis of knowledge, civic identity and commitment, civic communication, civic action and reflection, and civic contexts/structures.” The rubric provides a wide breadth for assessing a student’s civic engagement outcomes since this type of learning can take many forms. Students can demonstrate civic engagement behaviors through activities that may include political and electoral participation, volunteerism, undergraduate research experience, or through community-based activities organized through service-learning, community engagement, or community-based research activities or programs (AAC&U, n.d.; Butin, 2006).

Administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs have used civic engagement preparation as a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008; Hoy, 2012). Kuh (2008) describes high-impact practices as strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective in increasing student success. To do so, higher education professionals at IHEs have institutionally inscribed civic engagement in multiple ways which include among the most prominent service-learning, community service and volunteerism, and political engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Butin, 2010; Boss, 1994; Walker, 2000; Panetta Institute, 2018). Gallini and Moely (2003) found that civic engagement experiences lead to increased learning and retention of academic content because it shifts students from passive receivers of knowledge to creators of ideas. Additionally, research by Diaz Solodukhin and Orphan (2022) found that faculty members who engage in reciprocal research relationships with students increase student's civic engagement development and leadership.

Research on student learning outcomes from civic engagement activities on campus are abundant (see Butin, 2010; Cram, 1998; Boss, 1994; Barnett, 2018); however, it would be remiss to ignore the impact of such activities on faculty; hence, I briefly cover some of the impacts faculty experience when engaged in activities such as service-learning. Pribbenow (2005) collected data over a year from an institution with a robust service-learning program in a single case study with 35 faculty. Pribbenow (2005) describes six major themes that describe the impact on faculty using service-learning. When using service-learning, faculty experienced an increase in their commitment to teaching, increased faculty-student connection, an increased understanding of different student learning styles, changes to pedagogical approaches to teaching, and a greater

connection to the faculty member's institution (Pribbenow, 2005). Service-learning is one high-impact practice by which civic engagement is enacted at IHEs.

### *Institutionally Inscribed Forms of Civic Engagement*

**Service-Learning.** Administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs interested in advancing civic engagement do so through a variety of approaches such as service-learning. Service-learning has become a prominent method of teaching civic engagement because of its demonstrated benefits for students and faculty (Pribbenow, 2005; Boss, 1994, Butin, 2010). Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service-learning as a credit bearing course where students participate in a structured activity that meets a community need and provides an opportunity for reflection as to the knowledge gained from the service-learning experience, which serves to enhance a student's appreciation and sense of civic duty. Butin (2010) asserts that service-learning resists the "banking" model of educating students where students receive information passively from instructor to student (p. 3). Freire (1970) describes the banking model of education as the passive learning that occurs when teachers or instructors, as the experts, transmit knowledge to students who are expected to learn and memorize that knowledge. Unlike banking models of education (Freire, 1970), service-learning is experiential learning (Vaccaro, 2009). Experiential learning is the process by which students learn by doing and reflecting on the learning occurring (Kolb et al., 2001). Service-learning traditionally has a formal evaluation that assesses the student's learning. It is through these formal evaluations and assessments that service-learning has been found to have positive learning outcomes for students (Butin, 2010). Service-learning increases students' interpersonal skills that are



gained by working collaboratively with diverse communities, organizations, and individuals (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008). Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) compared the moral development scores of 46 students in service-learning and non-service-learning courses, using the Defining Issues Test, the Service-Learning Outcome Scale, and the Moral Justification Scale to conduct a pre-course and post-course test. Although scores did not demonstrate a significant change in the student's moral development, students in the service-learning course reported increased sensitivity and compassion, an ability to identify, understand, and solve larger social issues, and a desire to create greater change in society.

Student learning outcomes include cognitive benefits (Butin, 2010) increased civic participation (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Butin, 2010), including increased collaboration among faculty, institutions, and local communities (Butin, 2010). Faculty are heavily, if not primarily, involved with developing service-learning experiences for students as these fall within the purview of curricular experiences. Faculty may find opportunities for the development of service-learning experiences through various methods which include faculty activism, community work, colleagues, students, journals, or through political engagement or may grow from an institution's volunteer programming (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

**Community service and volunteerism.** Community service and volunteerism can be confused for service-learning. Service-learning has specific assessment components to gauge student outcomes that may not be found as frequently in community service or volunteer experiences (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). The National

Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) asserts that community service cannot automatically be considered “democratic engagement” (p. 3) either, since not all community service experiences seek to collectively solve large social issues among diverse groups of people. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) describe “democratic engagement” as the civic learning and preparation students must receive, such as understanding and influencing political systems informed by national and global cultural contexts. A major critique of community service and volunteerism has been the ways it can promote self-servingness in the absence of reciprocal partnerships, or the disconnect of the service experience to larger social issues that gave rise to the issue being addressed through the community service activity (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). Mathews (2000) describes this critique as the decoupling of community service from political education. Mathews (2000) remarks on the self-serving nature of community service practices because they typically focus on helping others rather than addressing the root cause of an issue. Students through community service and volunteerism are meant to learn how to apply what they learn. Cress (2004) found that students that are civically engaged enhance their writing, technological, mathematical, communication, and critical thinking skills.

Critiques on community service’s self-servingness do not discount the impact community service can have on students. Boss (1994) designed a study exploring the effects of community service on college students. The study used Rest’s Defining Issues Test to measure the moral reasoning of 71 students in a pre-post-test control group design

using community service as the independent variable and moral reasoning as the dependent variable. Students in the study were required to complete 20 hours of community service and journal their experiences. Findings in Boss's (1994) study indicate that students who engaged in community service increase their moral reasoning compared to students who did not participate in community service. Students in the study reported increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and moral sensitivity (Boss, 1994).

**Political engagement.** Zimmer and colleagues (2016) present political engagement as an umbrella term that encompasses political behaviors such as voting, volunteering in a political campaign, joining a political party, attending political party meetings and differentiate it from what they term social movements, which include protesting, activism, and other forms of action-oriented engagement. However, differentiating social movements separate from political engagement and participation ignores racial groups' distinct histories with disenfranchisement and the ways these groups developed responses to exclusion (Anoll, 2018). Anoll (2018) in a mixed-data and mixed-methods design tested the political participation perspectives of Black, Latinx, and White individuals and found that minorities in the United States are more attuned to viewing others engaged in action-oriented political activity such as political rallies, positively. Black and Latinx participants viewed individuals engaged in activities such as protesting and rallying as demonstrating a higher commitment to democratic values and behaviors than White participants. Among Anoll's (2018) more important findings was that Black and Latinx respondents viewed grassroots political efforts such as protests, and rallies more favorably compared to White respondents in the study. Blacks and Latinxs

viewed rallies and protests as a method for promoting positive community health by improving and addressing people's needs (Anoll, 2018).

Political participation has been found to increase with educational attainment (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). Using an ordinary least squares and logistic regression model, Cohen and Kahne (2012), found that educational attainment is a consistent predictor for political activity among students and when controlling for several demographic variables found a positive association for Latinx, Black, and White respondents to participatory politics. Cohen and Kahne (2012) define participatory politics as the behaviors in which people and groups raise awareness and influence public issues or concerns. Unlike formal political engagement (e.g., voting, serving on a jury duty, paying taxes) (Dalton, 2016), participatory politics can include a broader range of activities such as blogging about politics, creating a politically oriented group online, sharing politically inclined social media posts such as videos, or participating in artistic forms of engagement such as poetry slams (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). Dalton (2016) moves our understanding of participatory politics further by introducing "engaged citizenship", which are emergent forms of civic participation that focus on social connectedness and concern for others (p. 6).

Since the 1980s, there have been discussions about the decline in political participation and engagement among the populace of democratic nations (Batool, 2018; Miller, 1980); however, research has found that among college students, political engagement has become more expansive than traditional political practices (Hollander & Longo, 2008; Walker, 2000). Walker (2000) cites multiple studies (see National

Association of Secretaries of States, 2000; Panetta Institute, 2018) indicating that postsecondary students report less political engagement in favor of more locally based community service activities and experiences. Walker (2000) contends these findings stem from a desire among students to see the immediate results of a service activity. Students do not view themselves as political actors but as organizers actively seeking change in their communities and society (Boyte, 2004). Van Benschoten (2000) and García Bedolla (2012) argue that relying on formal political engagement behaviors to understand civic engagement is narrow in scope because it does not capture diverse civic activities that are not captured through formal political activity.

### ***Critiques of IHE's Civic Engagement Work***

A critique of the ways in which administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs have historically facilitated students' civic engagement learning is the reliance of centering the relationship between citizenship and government through more formal methods of political engagement and less on the commonalities and interactions shared between people (Mathews, 2000). Mathews (2000) argues that students prefer citizenship and civic experiences that seek solutions to larger societal issues affecting people (Mathews, 2000). Data demonstrates a decline in the political participation of 18- to 24-age range adults (Prentice, 2007); however, findings from the *National Association of Secretaries of State* (NASS) survey found 64% of respondents in the 18- to 24- age range had reported joining non-political organizations, while 53% of these respondents' reported involvement in their communities through volunteering (Van Benschoten, 2000). Although the NASS survey was conducted over 20 years ago, it has been corroborated by

other scholars (Dalton, 2016; Bennett, 2008). Findings indicate that younger adults are not apathetic towards civic engagement but instead practice their civic responsibility in different ways that are not reliant on more formal political processes such as voting, political participation, or social organization membership (Barnett, 2018; Van Benschoten, 2000; Bennett et al., 2009). Bennett and colleagues (2009) describe formal political processes, such as voting and membership in social organizations and political parties, as activities conducted by “dutiful citizens” (p. 107) who share a sense of commitment to government and democracy. Bennett and colleagues (2009) compare “dutiful citizens” to what they term “self-actualizing styles of civic participation” (p. 105) which include more civic participation tied to technologically communicating through online communities and sharing of information through digital formats such as videos, social and digital media, including less trust in news media – activities that are influenced more by a person’s personal and peer networks – and less on a sense of duty toward formal political participation. Heinecke and colleagues (2016) conducted a study at the University of Virginia that found students whose form of civic engagement aligned to activism were expected, by the institution, to fit into prevailing molds of what it meant to be engaged. Student activists in the study noted that the institution expected students to fit a prescribed student identity that ignored and avoided engaging students on a mutually produced meaning of engagement.

It would be remiss to not briefly address a similar critique faculty have received about their disconnect to larger social issues. Starting in the 1980s, IHEs began to be critiqued for the perception of the “disengaged academic” – one that focused on the

disciplinary aspects of education and less so on addressing larger social issues (Butin, 2010). Critiques on higher education's focus on what Butin (2010) calls "academicize" is the focus on solely the teaching and learning of the academic discipline taught to students, which although part of what a collegiate education is about, does not contribute to the civic development of students (p. 128). By contrast, Stanley Fish (2008), professor of humanities and law, whose controversial book, "Save the World on Your Own Time" asserts that higher education, as an institution, should focus on its core function of expanding knowledge production and dissemination within its specialized fields and not deviate from this role to address larger social issues like declining civic and political participation, racism, and diversity. Fish (2008) argues that addressing social issues outside the core function of knowledge production could be destructive to the role and function of higher education, as addressing larger social issues moves faculty away from their academic role of teaching. Butin (2010) makes a case that the academic role of faculty and civic engagement such as the preparation of students to address larger social issues are not mutually exclusive.

Certainly, students cannot enter the college classroom fragmented from their identity. LCC guides our understanding that a Latinx identity is one constituted by lived experiences and culture to inform a civic identity that Flores and Benmayor (1997) refer to as citizenship. Adherence to Fish's (2008) approach to teaching that is removed of social and cultural contexts and focused on teaching knowledge already within the academy upholds Whiteness as the standard in higher education. U.S. higher education's foundation was built upon European and western values, while it ignored paradigms

originating outside of Europe, thus creating an educational system that permeates Whiteness (Peters, 2015) and advances “hegemonic Whiteness” (Cabrera, 2009, p. 13). The push and pull of faculty’s role on whether civic engagement and democratic preparation should be part of a collegiate education will continue to be contested (Butin, 2010; Fish, 2008), but a shifting student demographic whose bodies are politicized may demand administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs not stand ideally behind an identity agnostic approach to education and civic engagement.

A second critique within the civic engagement literature is its colonialism (Mitchell et al. 1994; Bocci, 2015; Morton, 1995). Civic engagement definitions that center political participation are often used to describe the practices of White middle-class individuals (Alcantar, 2014; Putnam, 2005; Lin et al., 2009), which may be narrow in scope and are inappropriately applied to assess the political participation of people and communities of color (García Bedolla, 2012). Higher education, as a field, has been critiqued for advancing civic engagement through colonialist frameworks that position IHEs as *saving* communities (Mitchell et al., 1994) and by centering administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs as experts in community matters and ignoring community knowledge and agency (Bocci, 2015), and include a disregard for the well-being of communities in which IHEs are located (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Mitchell and colleagues (2012) describe a savior complex, prominent within higher education’s civic engagement work. This savior complex is seen when universities work in communities, usually communities of color or under-resourced communities, to solve an issue without community input or community leaders guiding the work. The approach to solving



community identified issues often centers the expertise of higher education professionals at IHEs over that of the community without understanding or addressing the systemic issues that led to the issue the institution is now attempting to solve (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Enacting civic engagement experiences without community representation is a symptom of a larger issue - the invisibility of people of color in larger civic engagement and service-learning conversations (Bocci, 2015). Bocci (2015) conducted a historiography to explore how people of color were represented within the service-learning literature. Bocci (2015) found that people of color were referenced in two main ways within the historical writings about service-learning. The first was the practice of associating people of color indirectly with IHEs' civic engagement work, and secondly, attributing the contributions of people of color to larger social movements conducted by a collective group of people. Bocci (2015) found that White individuals who contributed to the field of service-learning were often referenced by name, while individuals of color who contributed to the same field were often referenced as part of a larger group's work. Bocci (2015) argues that this omission impairs our ability to acknowledge the important contributions of people of color to service-learning and instead contributes to a power imbalance that positions people of color as recipients of service-learning initiatives instead of leaders.

In the analysis of historical documents on service-learning, Bocci (2015) highlights the coded language used to refer to people of color such as "minorities" and "underserved" and the positioning of people of color as recipients of service-learning

programs or initiatives, instead of leaders in the development of service-learning programs (p. 8). This approach creates what Varlotta (1997) calls a “service-as-charity-paradigm” (p. 59). A “service-as-charity-paradigm” leads students to view their service-learning or volunteer experiences as helping people less fortunate, which is less likely to lead the student to understand or address the root causes of the issue faced by a community; this method leads to the institutionalization of power inequalities (Varlotta, 1997). Morton (1995) considers this power imbalance “a dangerous trap for colleges and universities” where higher education professionals at IHEs are centered as the experts and the recipients of service-learning programs and services as non-experts (p. 22). Mitchell (2016) contends that the power imbalance that can occur between higher education professionals at IHEs and the communities in which service-learning activities take place can become normalized when the benefits of service remain primarily with the individuals within the IHE instead of the community, which can epitomize “democratic work as charity” (p. 259).

Mitchell and colleagues (2012) characterize the centering of service-learning benefits to students, over those of the individuals or communities in which the service takes place, as advancing Whiteness. Butin (2006) describes Whiteness in service-learning as reinforcing an ideal for student engagement – a student that can volunteer and utilize their social capital and learns from individuals within the service-learning site. Institution driven approaches can advance colonialist practices when the expertise of higher education professionals at IHEs is centered and the focus on student learning occurs at the expense of the communities in which the service takes place (Saltmarsh &

Hartley, 2011; Eby, 1998). Several scholars (Eby, 1998; Orphan et al., 2018) have critiqued service-learning for the strains it places on community organizations that are burdened with expending, often limited, resources on training students only to have the student leave before or soon after the course concludes. Tryon and colleagues. (2008) conducted focus groups with 20 community organization staff that had hosted students as part of a service-learning program. In their findings, Tryon and colleagues (2008) found that community organizations were frustrated with short-term service-learning placements because of the investment they had put into training students that would leave once they had completed their required hours for their course. Organization staff spoke to the harm of short-term service-learning activities, which included transitional interactions with sensitive populations, staff's limited time and capacity to offer meaningful supervision and mentorship, limited development of impactful projects for both the organization and the student, and the difficulty of coordinating an organization's and IHE's calendar (Tryon et al., 2008).

Benson and colleagues (2011) argue that higher education professionals at IHEs, in the United States, contribute to hierarchies and elitism, which significantly impact their ability to develop democratic behaviors and civically committed communities. Benson and colleagues (2011) emphasize the importance of research universities to the advancement of civic engagement, both nationally and globally, by presenting the United States a model of democratization. Vaccaro (2009) describes how some service-learning projects reinforce discrimination by being viewed as charitable activities instead of analyzing conditions stemming from discrimination. Donahue and Mitchell (2010)

discuss the importance of increasing awareness of the privileged identities students may hold as a method for addressing inequitable systems that disenfranchise individuals and their communities. Reflexivity (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 21; Mitchell et al., 2010) is one method by which students with privileged identities can begin to understand how identity plays an important role in power dynamics within service-learning experiences (Donahue & Mitchell, 2010). Mitchell and colleagues (2012) recommend that reflection on the service-learning project and how Whiteness may be present be interrogated to help mitigate inequities in service-learning. Understanding how power dynamics are present in civic engagement is important to address as the student demographic of IHEs across the nation shifts in what Estrada (1988) calls “ethnic/racial restructuring” (p. 18).

### ***HSIs and Civic Engagement***

The “ethnic/racial restructuring” Estrada (1988, p. 18) refers to is the growing population of Latinx students pursuing higher education. It is estimated that more than 3.6 million Latinxs were enrolled in the 2019-20 academic year and that number is expected to rise to more than 4.4 million by 2025 (HACU, 2021). Despite this growing student demographic and the almost 600 HSIs across the United States, little research exists on HSIs and civic engagement. When searching for literature on civic engagement and HSIs, only two studies emerge, *Exploring Curricular and CoCurricular Effects on Civic Engagement at Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions*, by Garcia and Cuellar (2018) and *Service-Learning as a Tool for Increasing Political Efficacy and Civic Engagement at a Hispanic-Serving Institution* by Leda Barnett (2018). Garcia and Cuellar (2018) use a t-test and ordinary least squares regression to examine what

curricular and cocurricular experiences advance civic engagement behaviors among students at emerging HSIs. In their findings, Garcia and Cuellar (2018) find that Latinx students' civic engagement increases when curricular and cocurricular experiences are representative of their cultural backgrounds. Inclusive and validating curriculum and pedagogy were found to enhance Latinx student's civic engagement levels. Barnett (2018) utilized survey data employing 5-point Likert scale items administered at the end of a course employing service-learning and volunteering; the survey was administered to different courses over two semesters. Barnett's (2018) findings indicate that students experienced a positive effect in their concern for community issues and no significant shift in political efficacy among students. Important to note is that Barnett's (2018) study did not disaggregate survey results based on a student's racial/ethnic identity, which could inform more detailed relationships among Latinx students' political efficacy and civic engagement. Outside of Garcia and Cuellar's (2018) and Barnett's (2018) study, no studies have been conducted exploring the civic engagement practices of Latinx students at HSIs, how HSIs support the democratic preparation of Latinx students, or how racial and ethnic identity inform the civic engagement identity of Latinx students at HSIs. Although no research exists exploring the relationship between HSIs and the civic identity of Latinx students, HBCUs, as an institutional type that focuses on the preparation of Black and African American students, may elucidate how such relationships may develop.

HBCUs have an extensive history of civic engagement that is often not recognized among the large body of civic engagement scholarship (Gasman et al., 2015).

Randle Scott (2000) describes a rich history of civic engagement within HBCUs that developed in response to the racial exclusion and discrimination experienced by Blacks and African Americans within U.S. society. The missions of HBCUs are intimately intertwined with the racial identity of Black students and Black communities (Randle Scott, 2000; Gasman et al., 2015). Importantly, HBCUs functioned in a “tutorial” capacity by recognizing the history and contributions of Black and African American communities to U.S. society and the role of the HBCUs in advancing community well-being (Randle Scott, 2000; p. 270).

Gasman and colleagues (2015) analyzed historical data, which included an exploration of survey data administered by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) from 1944 to 1965, local newspapers, archives of select HBCUs, conducted site visits, and collected oral histories from presidents, faculty, and former students of several HBCUs and found HBCUs to be sites of civic preparation and activation for both Black students and Black communities. HBCUs are sites of civic activation by providing cultural enrichment, community education, access to health programs, and making available to students and the community the institution’s physical spaces and intellectual resources (Gasman et al., 2015). Randle Scott (2000) asserts that HBCUs, by extensively engaging with students and local communities to meet their needs, exercise their civic responsibility and successfully serve Black communities, and simultaneously create community. HBCUs were deliberate and intentional in the development of civic engagement programs that held at the center the racialized experiences of Black students and Black communities in the United States (Randle Scott, 2000). Researchers interested

in exploring how HSIs contribute to the civic engagement practices of Latinx students and the Latinx communities surrounding them should look to HBCUs to inform culturally relevant civic engagement programming.

### **Latinxs in the United States**

Latinxs have had a presence in the country since, and prior, to the founding of the United States and have been steadily growing in population since 1848 when parts of the southwest were annexed by the United States (Massey, 2012). Latinxs have not always been identified as Latinxs within the United States. Latinx identity within the United States has a complicated relationship of historical lineage, heritage, and categorization (Mora, 2014; Morales, 2018). The U.S. government routinely categorizes Latinxs together as Hispanic; a categorization that often causes confusion. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines “Hispanic or Latino as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish origin regardless of race” (United States Census, 2018). Starting in 2010, the United States Census Bureau used five categorizations for race: “White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (Humes et al., 2011, p. 2; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Latinx identity is complex, and categorizations used by entities such as the United States Census Bureau create confusion for Latinxs on what to mark when asked for their race (López, 2018). It is for this reason that Flores & Benmayor (1997) encourage researchers interested in working with Latinx communities to localize their work to understand clearly how different Latinx communities understand their communities and themselves in a larger social and national context. The following

sections explore further the experiences of Latinxs in the southwest, how Latinxs have been politicized, and how Latinxs have responded to such politicization.

### ***Historical Disenfranchisement of Latinx in the United States***

Rodolfo Acuña's eminent *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1988) describes a lengthy history of Latinx struggle with colonization, discrimination, political manipulations, and Latinx resistance. Acuña (1988) describes the disenfranchisement of Mexicans in the southwest before and after the area's annexation by the United States with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Discrimination positioned Mexicans and any Latinx, Hispanic, or Chicano identifying individual as a "second-class citizens" regardless of citizenship status or familial ancestry dating back to before the United States took control of the southwest (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 57; Acuña, 1988). Scholars (Rosaldo & Flores; 1997; Navarro & Mejia, 2004; Lima; 2007; Mora, 2014) have documented how Latinxs' experiences with discrimination often challenge their citizenship, both legally and conceptually, by presenting Latinxs as foreigners leading to a fight for rights and activism. The following section presents a chronological, in twenty-year increments, snapshot of some of the major challenges Mexicans in the southwest faced starting in the late 1800s, how these historical examples highlight the politicization of the Latinx body, and the resistance that developed and emerged in response.

**Before 1900.** Acuña (1988) describes in detail the legitimization of violence against Mexicans in the American southwest by White individuals who sought to claim land and resources for themselves. To do so, White individuals employed various methods of disenfranchising Mexicans in the southwest. One method of disenfranchisement was by



associating Mexicans as violent individuals that had to be curbed and controlled by law officials and the law (Acuña, 1988). In many cases, Mexicans were falsely accused of crimes against White individuals or arrested in cases of self-defense and were tried in courts of law. In many instances, Mexicans had witnesses that could have absolved them of the crime but were faced with laws that prohibited such testimony if the witness was Black, Chinese, or Native American. *Section 394 of the Civil Practices Act of 1850* prohibited any Native American or Black individual from testifying against a White individual, which was then expanded under *People v. Hall*, to include Chinese and anyone not White (Heizer & Almquist, 1977). Such laws disenfranchised Mexicans and other people of color who were attempting to prove their innocence in the courts. If such legal maneuvers were unsuccessful and the accused Mexican freed, White communities would sometimes mobilize and lynch the accused upon their release, often also lynching or killing the freed Mexican's family members in the process (Acuña, 1988). The extent of discrimination led to the prohibition of translating legal materials into Spanish in California which further disenfranchised Mexicans politically (Acuña, 1988).

**1900-1920s.** Educational disenfranchisement was another method of dispossessing Mexicans and those of Mexican ancestry of opportunity during the 1900-1920s. While *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* is widely known for desegregating schools across the United States, one of the earliest legal cases, if not the earliest according to Donato and colleagues (2017), occurred in 1914 in Alamosa, Colorado. Plaintiffs in *Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.* (1914) argued that race was the reason for the school's segregation; however, defendants in the case argued that

Mexicans were racially White, and therefore race was not a reason for segregating students in the area. The case was won by the plaintiffs and the *Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.* (1914) and would open the flood gates of legal action against school segregation that would follow in several southwestern states (see *Del Rio ISD v. Salvatierra*, 1930; *Roberto Alvarez v. Lemon Grove*, 1931) (Valencia, 2018; Vara, 2017).

**1920-1940s.** Mexican Americans, in 1929, founded the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to protect Mexican American's constitutional rights and to confront and fight segregation and discrimination (League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC], n.d.). LULAC was created at a time of heightened discrimination and xenophobia in the United States (United States House of Representatives, n.d.). The hardships of the great depression and World War I increased discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans leading to the Mexican Repatriation Program of the 1930s which deported an estimated one million Mexican and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent (SB-670 Mexican Repatriation Program of the 1930s). Location played an important factor on the extent of discrimination experienced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Texas employed strict segregation, while New Mexico protected New Mexican's civil rights as outlined by its constitution but still employed segregation in certain social situations, while California employed race-based legal enforcement (Steele, 2008). In response, Mexicans and Mexican Americans began to develop political and social societies aimed at challenging discrimination by White individuals and communities who dominated the political landscape (Gómez-Quíñones, 1994). Among these organizations was "El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española" established in 1939.

“El Congreso” was the first attempt at bringing Latinx workers from different nationalities together to address economic and racial discrimination (García, 1989, p. 146).

**1940-1960s.** Similarly, to its predecessors (see *Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al., 1914*), the 1946 case of *Mendez v. Westminster* has received little recognition; however, *Mendez v. Westminster* was an important antecedent that influenced the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. Mexican children in California were prohibited from attending public schools that served White students. Defendants for continuing school segregation argued that Mexican children were inferior in their ability to learn and master the English language, inferior in personal hygiene and prone to diseases that would lead to contagion, of both intellectual inferiority and disease of White students, if schools were desegregated (*Mendez v. Westminster School District, 1946*). The ruling in favor of *Mendez* meant that California was the first U.S. state to officially desegregate schools; a ruling that eight years later would be influential in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

The 1940s through the 1960s were filled with economic turmoil after the conclusion of World War II and Mexican men filled a large demand for labor after Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps across the United States (Acuña, 1988). The Bracero Program, established in 1942 and extend through 1964, accepting more than five million Mexican men to work in many of the U.S. economic sectors with desperate need for labor, primarily agriculture (UCLA Labor Center, n.d.; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020b; Acuña, 1988). Under conditions of the

Bracero Program was the Mexican government's requirement that Mexican laborers not be subject to racism or discrimination otherwise Mexico could refuse to issue Bracero permits (Vargas, 2001). The extent of discrimination experienced by Mexican Braceros, jeopardization Texas's participation in the program, leading Governor Coke Stevenson to pass the "Caucasian Race Resolution" which maintained the right of all White individuals to equal treatment in the state of Texas. Texans did not view Mexicans as White, and discrimination continued leading the Mexican government to reject permits for Braceros bound for Texas (Acuña, 1998).

**1960-1980s.** The 1960s were a time of great social and parallel movements, which included the civil rights movement among African Americans and the Chicano movement (Magana & Mejia, 2004). In the Chicano movement, IHEs were instrumental in the formalization and organizing of the era's fight for civil rights. In 1969, Chicano college students in California formed the "Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)" (Goose, 2005, p. 178) and the "United Mexican American Students (UMAS)" (Navarro, 2004, p. 98). MEChA celebrated Latinx's Indigenous heritage and emphasized the importance of Chicano traditions and language, cementing the importance of identity as a strength of the Latinx people (Goose, 2005). MEChA's focus on a Mexican American nationalism led to the development of "El Plan de Santa Barbara" which focused on the use of college programs as an avenue for empowering people of color and embraced "cultural nationalism [as] a means of Chicano liberation" (Goose, 2005, p. 142). The wider Chicano movement presented an ideology driven by a community identity informed by an ancestry predated by European colonization of the Americas and

emphasized the importance of higher education as a tool for the empowerment of the Chicano community. In *El Movimiento*'s manifestó, highlighted student's desire to uphold Chicano history as one intertwined with cultural identity and struggle for full-recognition as members of society (Muñoz Jr., 1989). Student leaders of *El Movimiento* defined full recognition as one free from discrimination and racism. The manifesto outlined how members of *El Movimiento* would organize under a network of student activism that would confront racism and oppression by engaging in political engagement, which members of *El Movimiento* further defined as liberation. Any action that would move Latinxs toward a life free of oppression and racism was seen as a political, social, and cultural movement. *El Movimiento* emphasized the importance of community and collectivism in advancing liberation of all Latinxs (Goose, 2005; Muñoz Jr., 1989).

In Denver, Colorado, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales would lead the development of liberation conferences that would attract hundreds of Latinx youth from across the United States to engage in discussions of ethnic identity. Corky and the movement's work led to the United States' only political party formed by, and to represent, Mexican Americans called "La Raza Unida Party" (Magana & Mejia, 2004, p. 72). "La Raza Unida Party" focused on upholding a Mexican American identity committed to celebrating its Indigenous roots and connection to "Aztlán", which some in the Chicax movement refer to the lands in the southwest annexed by the United States (Magana & Mejia, 2004, p. 73; Goose, 2005; Acuña, 1988, p. 366). Similarly, Latinxs created advocacy organizations during this time dedicated to the advancement of Latinx efforts. Such organizations included the "Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)" and

the “National Council of La Raza” which were both established with funding from the Ford Foundation (Navarro, 2004, p. 98).

**1980-2000s.** The 1980s saw conversations on immigration reform and amnesty heightened. In 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act granted millions of undocumented immigrants’ legalization, most from Latin America (Immigration Reform and Control Act, 1986; Cohn, 2015). The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 gave legal status to immigrants who had entered the United States prior to 1982 and had demonstrated continuous residency in the country (U.S. House of Representatives, n.d.). Immigration continued to be a contentious topic during this period and in 1994, California Proposition 187 brought renewed debate to the topic of immigration. The passage of Proposition 187 prohibited undocumented immigrants from receiving social services, access to public-health, and denied public education from kindergarten to postsecondary education to undocumented immigrants. The proposition granted teachers and healthcare providers the ability to report people suspected of being undocumented to the California Attorney General or then, Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) (Martin, 1995). The backlash against Proposition 187 was immediate and students across California banded together to mount large school walk-outs protesting the passage of the bill (Martin, 1995). In 1997, U.S. District Court Judge Mariana Pfaelzer ruled Proposition 187 unconstitutional (U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.).

**2000-2020s.** According to the Pew Research Center (Budiman, 2020) about 25% of all U.S. immigrants originate from Mexico; however, in recent years, immigration has increased from other Latin American countries, even exceeding Mexican immigration. A

long and complicated history of Latinx immigration to and from the United States has been a prevalent topic within U.S. discourse (see Proposition 187; Mexican Repatriation Program of the 1930s, Operation Wetback), hitting a fever pitch within recent history, especially after the terrorist's attacks of September 11, 2001 (U.S. House of Representatives, n.d.). Increased focus on immigration led Representative Luis Gutiérrez to create the Immigrant Children's Educational Advancement and Dropout Prevention Act (2001) and although it failed to pass, it set the stage for late iterations such as the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act of 2010 provided conditional status to individuals who could demonstrate they had lived in the United States for five years and were or had been 16 years of age or younger when they entered the United States. The DREAM Act also required individuals to graduate from a U.S. high school, or have obtained a GED, and demonstrate "good moral character" through a criminal background check (DREAM Act, 2010).

In 2005, U.S. House Resolution 4437 Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 attempted to criminalize any undocumented individual in the United States and although the bill passed the House it did not pass the Senate. H.R. 4437 would have made it a felony to immigrate illegally into the United States and would have militarized the border between the United States and Mexico (Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, 2005). The bill received fervent resistance, as protesters viewed it as an attempt to compare immigrants, regardless of citizenship status, to terrorists, thus leading to as many as five million people, mostly Latinxs, protesting the bill across U.S. cities such as New York, Denver,

Miami, Chicago, Phoenix, and Washington D.C. (DeSipio, 2020; Heiskanen, 2009). H.R. 4437 also mobilized student action throughout U.S. cities when students walked out of schools to march and protest H.R. 4437. The student marches were entirely student-led and organized through social media and contemporary forms of communication; one of the earliest and largest marches was attended by 2,800 students (Lazos Vargas, 2007). The primarily high school student led movement gained greater traction as university students joining the movement and “Students Stand Up” (p. 798) was created in Las Vegas, Nevada and comprised membership from middle and high school students, and postsecondary students (Lazos Vargas, 2007). “Students Stand Up” was organized and had developed a clear message for political leaders – to develop a clear path for citizenship, reunify families affected by the nation’s immigration sweeps, improve the living and working conditions of immigrants, demilitarization of the border with a rejection of a border fence, and a rejection of classifying undocumented immigrants as criminals – the organization also sent 2,000 letters to local offices and Congressional members (Lazos Vargas, 2007, p. 799).

On Wednesday, July 10, 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform heard testimony about the impact of the Trump Administration’s “Zero Tolerance Policy” or better known “Child Separation Policy” which sought to curb migration into the United States by Latin Americans seeking asylum and refuge by separating children from their parents/guardians (*Kids in Cages*, 2019). Among those who testified were the American Medical Association (AMA), the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP), and the Trauma Recovery EMDR



Humanitarian Assistance Programs which provided testimony on the inhumane treatment of children being held by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in which more than 2,000 children had been removed from the custody of their parents/guardians (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). The impact of this program has reverberated among Latinxs in the United States and although the program was touted as neutral and colorblind and meant to curb illegal immigration from anywhere in the world, based on Trump's rhetoric, it is surmised Latinxs were the primary target of the program (Johnson, 2019; Guevara, 2019).

The previous examples of discrimination faced by Latinxs since the onset of the United States are just a snapshot of some of the most salient examples of how Latinx bodies and identities are politicized. I make no attempt to capture a comprehensive timeline of events, as there are simply too many to cover. The goal is to present some of the most salient examples that can frame the following discussion on Latinx identity in the United States and its impact on a Latinx civic identity. Several of the examples provided above demonstrate students' relationship with democracy through their role in activism. Kezar (2010) argues that activism is one way in which students can learn about leadership, citizenship, and processes associated with democracy. Heinecke and colleagues (2016) contend that student activists engage in citizenship through their participation in dissent and these actions are typically not recognized because they do not conform to dominant forms of democratic engagement, as dissent and activism are part of larger collective and community movements and less on the role of the individual in democracy.

### ***Politicization of Latinx Bodies***

A vast history of discrimination based on race and ethnicity have led many scholars to write extensively on the ways in which Latinx bodies have been politicized (Lima, 2007; Mora, 2014; Morales, 2018; Navarro & Mejia, 2004). For example, Latinx racialization, self-identification, and self-determination is contentious because of the externally United States applied labels toward a heterogeneous group of people. Cahaus (2020) describes the blurred categorization Latinxs experience when Hispanic is applied to such a heterogeneous community because it ignores the “different experiences of colonization and homogenizes Latin Americans as all identifying with Spanish ancestry” (p. 218). Associating all Latinxs, as Hispanic, disregards Afro-Latinxs or Indigenous peoples of the Americas who also identify as Latinxs (Beltrán, 2003) and whose racial or ethnic identity is not rooted in the Spanish language but associated with a geographically Latin American ancestry (Cahaus, 2020). Cahaus (2020) describes how colonialism has pushed forward a prescribed mode of associating Latinxs more closely to a Spanish, and subsequently, a European identity. In doing so, Latinxs are ascribed a Spanish identity that develops a pan-ethnic identity that ignores both racial/ethnic differences and geographically unique experiences with colonization (Beltrán, 2003). Oboler (1992) explores this politicization more deeply by interrogating the various ways in which the term Hispanic has been used to classify Latinxs as other, or simply put, as foreign to the United States’ cultural fabric. During interviews with participants, Oboler (1992), similarly to Cahaus (2020), found that Latinxs viewed themselves, not as a pan-ethnic group but through the various constructions of self with nationality being the most salient. Latinxs viewed Hispanic both as a term utilized to mark them as different from

White American society and as a term used by White individuals to describe perceived deficiencies of the Hispanic community (Oboler, 1992; Cahaus, 2020; Calderón, 1992).

Lima (2007) takes our understanding of the politicization of Latinx bodies further by describing the rejection of Hispanic and the development and acceptance of Latinx by Latinxs as a political statement. Latinxs, by resisting the term Hispanic and uniting by recognizing unique cultural and national differences, engage in a form of political action. Oboler's (1992) findings indicate that "identifying oneself as Latino/a and participating in a Latino social movement is a political decision" (p. 32). Mora (2014) describes how the National Council of La Raza (NCLA) commissioned, with the financial support of the National Endowment of the Humanities, articles focused on a shared Hispanic identity, including articles that explored how Hispanic could be defined to describe Latinxs. The finished works ultimately emphasized the diversity of different Latinx groups who had diverse "cultures, accents, and phenotypes" (Mora, 2014, p. 65). The articles highlighted commonalities which included religion, migration experiences, family traditions, and most importantly, experiences with inequality and discrimination (Mora, 2014). The articles commissioned by the NCLA spoke to the determination of Latinxs' sense of social justice and that experiences with discrimination and inequality unified Latinxs toward "a communal striving for upward social mobility" (Mora, 2014, p. 66). Discrimination and inequality served to unify Latinxs to consider the political and social strength of unifying to address racially and ethnically motivated discrimination.

### ***Latinxs Fight for Rights***

Latinxs fighting for rights and equal recognition has been extensively documented and spans the entirety of the United States' existence (Acuña, 1988; Navarro & Mejia, 2004). Cohen and Kahne (2012) use U.S. Census Bureau data to suggest that citizenship status plays an important role in the lower rates of voting among Latinxs; however, this measure does not capture the varied forms in which Latinxs fight for rights and recognition (Alcantar, 2014; Bañales et al., 2020). Undocumented status does affect Latinx participation, in activities such as voting or jury duty; however, these activities are only a segment of the myriad types of civic activities and behaviors that demonstrate a commitment to civic life (Moreno, 2008). Popular narratives, such as that of Latinxs as the United States' "sleeping giant" (Jackson, 2011, p. 691; Gonzalez-Sobrino, 2020, p. 1019), erase a long history of activism, engagement, and political participation. U.S. history is full of examples of Latinx activism and resistance against policies and practices that place Latinxs as "second-class citizens" (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402). Silvestrini (1997) examines how Latinxs utilize cultural citizenship differently and separately than legal citizenship, in part due to the historical legacy of policies and laws that have disenfranchised Latinx communities. People, according to (Perin, 1998), choose civic engagement practices that are framed by their cultural citizenship and not necessarily by participation in dominant forms of engagement, which often include the nation's politic, where individuals may feel excluded and marginalized.

### ***Latinx Identity as a Driver for Civic Engagement Behaviors***

Civic engagement research has found generational differences in the ways individuals' practice and engage civically (Bennett et al., 2009; Lopez et al., 2006),

similarly, identity plays an important role in the ways in which Latinx identity informs civic behaviors (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Garcia & Sanchez, 2004). In essence, “citizens are made rather than born” (Galston, 2001, p. 2017). Bañales and colleagues’ (2020) empirical study utilizes measurement invariance and structural equation modeling to interrogate the critical consciousness of Latinx and Black young adults and that consciousness’s connection to civic and political engagement. Critical consciousness in their study is used to explain how reflecting on the marginalization of people spurs Latinx and Black young adults to civic and political engagement. In their findings Bañales and colleagues (2020) found that Latinx and Black young adults who reflect critically on structural and systemic racial marginalization and inequality were more apt to participate in civic and political engagement. However, findings from Cohen and Kahne’s (2012) report indicate that Latinxs have the lowest levels of participatory political activity compared to other demographic groups such as European Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Cohen and Kahne (2012) describe participatory politics as the diverse activities that people use to mobilize politically such as utilizing online organizing for a cause, sharing information on politics among other members, and efforts to shift or address political agendas. Cohen and Kahne (2012) attribute factors such as citizenship status, education, and income for the differences between the demographic groups, but their qualitative data indicates that Latinx youth may enact civic activities informally through the betterment of their communities and neighborhoods.

### ***Latinx Students and Civic Engagement***

Colby and colleagues (2000) argue that American individualism has led to civic disengagement, which has translated into decreases in tolerance and mutual respect, civility, and increased individual self-interest. Individualism has diminished concerns for society according to Colby and colleagues (2000); however, their analysis does not engage with discussion of collectivism among other student populations such as Latinx students. In a comparative study with 60 Latino and non-Latino participants, Arevalo and colleagues (2016) found that Latinx students are more likely, than their non-Latino peers, to help and support both familial and non-familial individuals. In their study, Arevalo and colleagues (2016) found that Latinx students helped non-familiar individuals and felt a social responsibility to help biologically and non-biologically related individuals. LCC provides a way for understanding Colby and colleagues' (2000) and Arevalo and his colleagues' (2016) divergent findings. According to Rosaldo (1997), LCC establishes a method for understanding how Latinxs engage in acts of citizenship that are informed by Latinx culture. Culturally, as a collectivist community, Latinxs are more likely to help others through both familial networks and those not related to them biologically (Arevalo et al., 2016). Colby and colleagues (2000) notion that higher education has lost its democratic mission by embracing an "instrumental individualistic" approach focused less on larger social questions, and more on research and economic development poses a legitimate issue (p. 21); however, the extent of the issue is still unknown as researchers have yet to consider Latinx student's contribution to IHEs civic purpose.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study adds to our understanding of civic engagement in an understudied institutional type, the HSI, and most importantly, it explores civic engagement by naming and recognizing that racial and ethnic identity plays an important part in the civic development and identity of Latinx students. The body of literature on civic engagement at IHEs is extensive (e.g., Hartley, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Putnam, 2005; Ehrlich, 2000; Mitchell, 2008); however, for HSIs, as an institutional type, there is no research exploring civic engagement in relation to their designation or Latinx students. Further, this study centers the lived experiences of Latinx students to voice, for themselves, how they characterize civic engagement using photovoice. Postcritical ethnography recognizes the importance of uplifting the voices of participants to disrupt power imbalances in research (Noblit et al., 2004). In this study, the voices of Latinx students are uplifted and provided with a platform where they share and engage their institution's administrators in conversations about their own civic engagement. Photovoice, as a method, provides an approach for decolonizing research by centering the knowledge of participants (Wang & Burris, 1997). In this study, Latinx students captured, visually through photographs, the ways they define and practice civic engagement, so it may inform HSIs on how best to support the civic development of Latinx students through culturally grounded ways.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of this research study was to understand how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement and the extent to which and how a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the United States' mountain west supported these types of activities. Metrics used to evaluate civic engagement often utilize White middle-class individuals and their practices to develop measures that are narrow in scope (Alcantar, 2014; Putnam, 2005) and are subsequently applied by scholars to assess the practices of other ethnic and racial communities. Current narratives position Latinx communities as being less politically active and showing less trust in political systems (Alcantar, 2014; Coley & Sum, 2012; Torney-Purta et al., 2007). Latinxs have historically been excluded from prevailing political (e.g., voting) processes leading Latinxs to create space for their own political participation informed by Latinx culture, history, and social contexts (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Latinxs are often not part of the development of measures used to evaluate their own community's engagement (García Bedolla, 2012). Excluding Latinxs from the development of civic engagement measures ignores the varied ways in which Latinx communities engage and practice their civic responsibilities.

In order to understand how Latinx students themselves define and practice civic engagement and how an HSI could support their development, three research questions guide this study. The three overarching questions guiding this study are:



1. How do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define and practice civic engagement?
2. How does identity inform the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students?
3. How do Hispanic-Serving Institutions contribute to Latinx civic engagement?

LCC, as a theoretical framework can move ethnographic research, as an observational methodology, into one that becomes “more than explanation” (Alvarez, 1998, p. 1058). This study’s use of postcritical ethnography is in tandem with LCC’s concern with critiquing and confronting ethnography’s colonialist origins (Noblit et al., 2004; Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Postcritical ethnography and LCC does so by positioning people within the “social, cultural, and political history and contexts in which they are constituted” (Murillo Jr., 2004, p. 155; Benmayor et al., 1997) and engaging in the activism needed to decolonize research by collaboratively theorizing, constructing, and negotiating knowledge production and ways of knowing with participants to uplift their voice (Noblit et al., 2004). Such an approach reframes how ethnography can be used as a tool for activism to address the social inequalities researchers capture through their observations thus moving ethnography into a postcritical stance that seeks to make a difference in the lives of participants by disrupting systems of oppression.

In this chapter I describe the rationale for the use of postcritical ethnography and photovoice as the project’s two methodological approaches and illustrate the research study’s setting and sample selection. The chapter includes a step-by-step blueprint on procedures I took within the study that included participant selection, data collection, data

analysis and instruments used in the project that ensured its trustworthiness. Finally, I conclude the chapter with limitations and ethical considerations that were factored into the study.

### **Qualitative Inquiry Rationale**

The use of quantitative methods to measure civic engagement and participation have tended to ignore the political and historical experiences of Latinx students whose histories demonstrate exclusion from prevailing forms of engagement. Metrics such as voter registration, voter turnout, and philanthropic giving to measure Latinx civic engagement practices (Rouse et al., 2015) overlook the importance of understanding the lived experiences behind statistical or numerical data (Garcia et al., 2018). Bensimon (2007) speaks to the abundance of quantitative studies on student success that view students as independent and in control of all decisions affecting their postsecondary experience. According to Bensimon (2007) this overreliance on quantitative work has left out important context that would facilitate our understanding behind what the numbers are describing in a quantitative study and allow practitioners as IHEs to develop appropriate responses to support student success.

Quantitative measures of Latinx civic engagement do not capture or provide space for understanding how the Latinx body has been politicized. Garcia and colleagues (2018) argue that data and numbers “cannot ‘speak for itself’” and researchers must therefore rely on critical analysis of the experiences and stories of communities and individuals that have been marginalized (p. 151). Garcia and colleagues (2018) argue that complex social issues such as racism are not quantifiable and require further analysis and

interrogation of the lived experiences of people. Additionally, some Latinx students may not be able to perform certain civic behaviors because of their citizenship status or limited financial resources. Thus, a qualitative approach provides much richer data and an opportunity to further understand, in more descriptive detail, the civic engagement practices of Latinx students. In addition, qualitative approaches “inform action, enhance decision-making, and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems” (Patton, 1990, p. 12) and can correct “(mis)applied, (mis)interpreted, and often (mis)characterized” narratives derived from quantitative approaches that reject reflexivity (Garcia et al., 2018, p. 150). Utilizing qualitative methods provides space for Latinx participants to, in their own words, define and describe civic engagement. As such, I merge two methodologies, photovoice and postcritical ethnography, to create richer data that will allow us to effectively understand the civic engagement practices of Latinx students.

### **Research Design**

I chose Photovoice (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997) and postcritical ethnography (Noblit et al., 2004) for their ability to decolonize research (Quijano, 2000) by encouraging active and continued collaboration with participants throughout the research process and provide opportunities for participants to highlight the transformative changes participants would like to see in their communities. I use both postcritical ethnography and photovoice in this study, because both methods focus on uplifting the voices of participants and present their lived experiences as legitimate. Additionally, postcritical ethnography and photovoice require researchers to employ reflexivity to

interrogate the researcher's motives for conducting their research projects to address biases, and requires researchers be transparent about these motives with participants to challenge power dynamics between researchers and participants.

My use of these methods also aligns closely to LCC's recognition of the varied ways in which Latinxs practice engagement considering historical marginalization and exclusion from long-established recognition systems of civic engagement such as voting, political representation, and citizenship status (Navarro, 2004; Flores & Benmayor, 1997). LCC argues that Latinxs civic development is informed by a Latinx cultural identity (Rosaldo, 1997). The collective action of Latinx communities in pursuit of full recognition as citizens (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997) is evocative of the call for researchers to work collaboratively with participants (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). Postcritical ethnography socializes researchers to work collaboratively with participants to co-construct knowledge and develop "alternative ways to think about our research and writing" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 25).

Photovoice, as both arts-based research and participatory action research, provides ample space to explore new ways of co-constructing knowledge that center and uplift the experiences of historically marginalized communities to bring about change (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice's capacity to produce knowledge from the perspective of participants is a strength of this method. Similarly, postcritical ethnography problematizes ethnography's colonialist practices by explicitly acknowledging power dynamics between the researcher and research participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Photovoice and postcritical ethnography fit together by treating the

experiences of participants as legitimate, centering, and uplifting the voices of marginalized communities, and asking the “now what?” (Gerstl-Pepin, 2004, p. 386) to move research observations and findings into something actionable that benefit participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Photovoice and postcritical ethnography are two methodologies that center the experiences, perspectives, and voice of participants, which align to my study’s purpose of elevating and centering Latinx student’s own views and relationship with civic engagement within the field and study of civic engagement.

### **Postcritical ethnography**

Postcritical ethnography problematizes previous research approaches that have perpetuated colonial practices and focuses explicitly on power dynamics between researchers and research participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Rosaldo (1989) argues that ethnography remains complicit to colonialist and imperialist practices. Rosaldo’s (1989) concept of cultural borderlands describes the subtle distinctions of cultural groups that are often overlooked in classical ethnography. Ethnography’s problematic history as a colonialist tool – one where a researcher enters as a “Lone Ethnographer” and *others* its research subjects (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30) necessitate decolonized research approaches. A particular criticism of ethnographic researchers is their interactions with “objectivism, monumentalism, timelessness” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 9). The long-established approach to research using objectivity and detachment of the researcher from research participants has been found to contribute to ethical issues within research studies (Davis & Dodd, 2002). Several of these ethical dilemmas include “giving scientists a privileged position over others” by favoring research topics that scientists deem ready for “objective” study,

and a dependency on quantitative research as a gold standard for objectivity (Yin, 2011, p. 286). Quantitative and qualitative approaches have coexisted and are defined by the methodological approach of a researcher and the questions they seek to answer (Yin, 2011). In this study, I mitigate these ethical dilemmas by utilizing methodologies that are reflexive and insist on researchers providing explicit rationale as to how and why these methods provide accurate and responsible representation of participant's views. I utilize postcritical ethnography because of its following four considerations for researchers to honor participant's role in the research process as active and not passive contributors (Noblit et al., 2004).

The first consideration, positionality, involves the researcher being explicit about their interests in the research setting and its participants. In postcritical ethnography, the researcher's identity (e.g., class, gender, race) and motivations are to be explored as part of the study (Noblit et al., 2004). In this study, my own lived experiences and identity as a Latina informed the study's topic, research questions, and motivation to further explore the civic engagement practices of Latinx students. Noblit and colleagues (2004) argue that a researcher's identity is defined by their interactions with their surroundings and the intersections of race, gender, and class.

The second area of consideration, reflexivity, is about "redesigning the observed" and about "redesigning the observer" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 21). Identity is not sedentary, it is constantly changing and evolving and participants and communities participating in a study, including the researcher, experience these changes (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 21). The Trump administration's hostility toward Latinxs during his time as president (FitzGerald

et al., 2019) meant that my identity as a Latina was hyper visible. Periods of heightened visibility and invisibility are common for Latinxs as it often depends on the nation's political and economic environment (Massey, 2012). Latinx identity is constantly responding to its environment, including me as a Latina researcher and possibly for Latinx students. As such, reflexivity offers me, the researcher, an opportunity to understand a community and myself within the temporal constraints of the project.

The third consideration is the rejection of objectivity. Noblit and colleagues (2004) argue that cultures are not objects and should not be approached as such in research settings. Noblit, and colleagues (2004) who has written extensively on ethnographic research and edited one of the only books on postcritical ethnography, argues that cultures change, thus, researcher interpretations must take this ephemeral stance into consideration. The Latinx community is not monolithic (Morales, 2018; Magaña, 2005). The purpose of this study was to invite Latinx students to define and share, for themselves, how they practice civic engagement, as informed by their cultural backgrounds and identities. Postcritical ethnography recognizes that no individual is truly objective. All researchers have biases, feelings, and interests (Noblit et al, 2004; Rosaldo, 1989). Understanding these biases and interests allow me to reflect on possible inferences on observations that may be erroneous and clouded by these biases.

Finally, postcritical ethnography is concerned with representation. Postcritical ethnographers are asked to critically reflect on their reason for engaging with the communities and cultures they seek to study. Researchers should problematize these reasons by engaging in conversations of representation and be cautious not to objectify

the communities they study or attempt to understand. It is for this reason that I selected photovoice as a secondary methodology; one that uplifts the voices of participants making them front and center to safeguard against edifying participants. Postcritical ethnographers must also ask questions about what is the best medium for presentation of the research. The appropriate method of presenting research should focus on upholding accurately the communities in a project, must be selected whether it is through literary devices, metaphors, or imagery that may include performance, montages, or videos (Noblit et al., 2004).

In this study, I selected photovoice as the most appropriate method because photography allows participants to collectively build the narrative they want to share to a wider audience (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). Rosaldo and Flores (1997) argue that Latinxs create a collective identity through shared activities that bring individuals together to build community. In this study, participants participated collectively in the single focus group interview where participants ascribed meaning to their photographs and at the culmination of the project, brought participants and the wider Latinx community together through the exhibition of participants' photographs and narratives. The exhibition celebrated participant's work during a public celebration open to the broader Latinx and Universidad de la Gente community.

### **Photovoice**

Photovoice is recognized for its ability to validate the lived experiences of participants from marginalized communities whose perspectives have historically been ignored by those in power (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice's ability to disrupt master



narratives through the presentation of counter narratives is a strength of this method (Latz, 2017). Master narratives are the stories and beliefs upheld within cultural groups as true and that uphold social and historical identity among a group (McLean & Syed, 2015; Syed et al., 2018). Underrepresented and marginalized communities disrupt these master narratives by sharing their own stories and experiences as a counterstatement (Yosso, 2006). Counterstatements, also known as counter stories, serve to push back upon "established belief systems" and bring forward and center the knowledge of marginalized communities by "showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live" and demonstrate that they are not alone in their experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 156). One dominant narrative this project aims to disrupt the portrayal of Latinxs as less civically engaged than White individuals. Grossman (2012) argued that this narrative often ignored the various challenges that contribute to Latinx's lower civic engagement and participation. Photovoice is an effective method because it provides participants the opportunity to disrupt master narratives told about them by centering their own voices within a study. Photovoice participants use photography to document their realities and lived experiences so they can best represent their communities as they see themselves (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Photovoice, as a method, can uplift the voices of participants through storytelling by presenting participants with opportunities to realize changes they would like to see.

Wang and Burris, (1997) developed photovoice, as a methodology, from the use of three different theoretical approaches (Wang & Burris, 1997). The first, Paulo Freire's (1970) problem-posing education provides people with the ability to identify issues

affecting their lives through the visual image thus “enabling people to think critically about their community” and discuss what is affecting their communities (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). LCC asserts that describing power structures is not enough; the voices and perspectives of Latinxs are important to highlighting the struggle for recognition (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Photovoice, particularly the medium of photography, can be utilized as evidence (Wany & Burris, 1997). The visual image is powerful because it sheds light on the experiences of Latinxs who have been historically marginalized and opens opportunities for discussion on issues that impact their communities. Second, photovoice is informed by feminist theory, which positions individuals as experts on their communities and makes visible what has been invisible to those outside of a community. LCC, similarly, attempts to reposition the invisible experiences of Latinxs with hegemony and bring them into visibility (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Lastly, photovoice uses documentary photography because it captures “an immense array of visual styles, genres, and commitments' ' (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 371).

Postcritical ethnography asks researchers to utilize the methods of representation that are most appropriate at conveying the message participants want to share (Noblit et al., 2004) and similarly, LCC argues for researchers be attentive to the role of agency of a study’s participants and the way in which they want to present themselves (Rosaldo, 1997). A central concern within photovoice is engagement with “an explicit political agenda” (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 170) to address the concerns of a community. The use of photovoice in this study fills a methodological gap that ethnographic research alone cannot fill and one that postcritical ethnography asks researchers to address. Photovoice’s

construction of knowledge through storytelling and its focus on presenting participants with opportunities to influence changes they would like to see, mitigates ethnography's colonial tensions, and aligns to postcritical ethnography's demand that research become actionable. The ability of this method to turn research into action to implement change makes this methodological approach transformative. Photovoice's social justice approach aligns to postcritical ethnography's call to move researchers from passive and objective observers to those proactively engaged with participants in using research findings to benefit the lives of participants. I selected these methodological approaches because they center Latinx students' voices on how they define and practice civic engagement and how their identities inform their civic behaviors and activities.

### **Data Collection**

Photovoice has eight steps that outline its methodological processes: "identification, invitation, education, documentation, narration, ideation, presentation, and confirmation" (Latz, 2017, p. 4). Each of these steps inform the data collection approach of a photovoice project. The following sections illustrate in detail the data collection processes for this study. Postcritical ethnography, in turn, invites the researcher to engage in the study's topic through reflection, invites participants to inform the research process, and importantly, asks researchers to select the most appropriate method of uplifting participant's stories and experiences in non-exploitative ways (Gunzenhauser, 2004). Storytelling, as an aspect of postcritical ethnography, informs this study. Together, photovoice and postcritical ethnography invite participants to inform the study. In this case, participants develop the images and narratives they want to present that accurately

communicate their realities and needs; all contributing to postcritical ethnography's commitment to storytelling without exploiting its participants (Gunzenhauser, 2004).

In the following sections, I describe the data collection process I undertook for this study through the use of photovoice and postcritical ethnography. Photovoice and postcritical ethnography are concerned with storytelling that accurately presents the experiences of participants (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997), similarly, LCC positions Latinxs to reclaim space, rights, and create a new America that recognizes our experiences legitimate (Rosaldo, 1997). Observations and interviews that tell stories on perseverance reveal how Latinxs resist, adapt, accommodate, and transform their lives to reclaim space and rights in the United States (Rocco, 1997).

### **Identification**

**Sample.** Participants were selected using “homogeneous sampling” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 135; Patton, 2002, p. 235). Homogeneous sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, seeks participants that share similar experiences or characteristics (Lodico et al., 2010). In this study, these characteristics were (1) participants who identify as Latinx, or any of the subcategories (e.g., Hispanic, Chicano, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuba, Panameño, etc.) that are included under the Latinx umbrella, and are (2) enrolled at Universidad de la Gente (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-b). Additionally, I used “snowball sampling” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 135; Patton, 2002, p. 237) as an approach for inviting additional participants to the study. I asked individuals that originally signed up to participate in the project for introductions to other individuals that might be interested in participating. Latinx's commitment to community lead them to develop safe spaces for

racial and ethnic expression (Silvestrini, 1997); communities that are represented on postsecondary campuses through student groups and organizations. These communities allow for the utilization of “snowball sampling” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 135; Patton, 2002, p. 237).

Attrition in photovoice research studies is a concern. Attrition rates can reach 50% or higher (Latz, 2017), thus a higher number of individuals were recruited and selected for participation in the project to mitigate attrition that may occur. A larger sample size of 12 participants was recruited in consideration of possible attrition within the sample. The sample size of a photovoice study depends on the scope and depth to which the researcher hopes to reach (Latz, 2017; Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997). The optimal number of participants for a photovoice project is 5-7 individuals (Wang, 2006). This study’s aim is to deeply understand the relationship between Latinx students and civic engagement, thus exploring this relationship in detail requires a smaller sample to allow for in depth exploration of the topic.

**Setting.** In 2020, Universidad de la Gente’s Board of Trustees issued an anti-racism resolution pledging “to dismantle institutional racism and bring together civic, industry, public and nonprofit leaders, activists, academics” and the community “to address the most pressing issues of racial justice” (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-a). The institution’s commitment to anti-racism and support for its diverse student body amidst a complicated and painful history with the city’s Latinx community make this an important site for study (Page & Ross, 2017). Universidad de la Gente was established in 1965 as state college, later receiving its four-year college status in 1966, and in 2012 Colegio de

la Gente started granting master's degree thus allowing it to change its name to Universidad de la Gente (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-b). Today, Universidad de la Gente is a HSI and Regional Comprehensive University (RCU) with a 17,678-student population, of which more than 95% are from the state (IPEDS, 2019; Universidad de la Gente, 2022). The university's enrollment represents a diverse student population: 36.5% students of Color (35.7% Latinx; 7.2% Black or African American; 44.3. % White; <1% American Indian or Alaska Native; 4.6% Asian; <1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 5.3% two or more races; 1.2% race unknown), 58.4% first-generation, 54% of undergraduates transferring to the institution, with nearly 80% of its student population work full or part-time (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-a; Universidad de la Gente, 2022). Universidad de la Gente's Latinx student enrollment is 32% according to the U.S. Department of Education (Universidad de la Gente, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

The Monte campus, on which Universidad de la Gente exists today, was mired by controversy during its founding. Monte was one of the oldest neighborhoods, even predating the founding of the state's capitol. Originally established by a group of miners in 1858, it later became a neighborhood with housing and commercial businesses for working-class families. The racial and ethnic composition of residents in Monte has been fluid since its beginning. The location of Monte was originally land stewarded by the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes. Immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe began to settle in the area in the late 1800s and by the 1920s migration from New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado increasing the community's Hispanic population (Page & Ross, 2017).

As the area's demographics changed over time, so did the city's leaders' response to Monte. A report released by the city's housing authority in 1949 described Monte as blighted. In the report "the term blight as applied to Monte signified a minority-filled urban space that was poor and deteriorating, yet capable of overrunning the rest of the city if left unchecked" (Page & Ross, 2017, p. 1299). Xenophobia and fear drove the city's urban renewal efforts of Monte (Page & Ross, 2017). In response, Monte community residents, led by one of the community's pastors, organized themselves under the Monte Residents Organization to fight the bond issue that would fund the creation of the campus and displace its primarily Latinx residents, yet in 1969, city residents voted to pass the bond measure. Its passage displaced the largely Latinx residents across the city and throughout the state. Several hundred businesses and households were displaced by the city's bond measure. As recognition of the displacement of Monte residents, descendants of those displaced are eligible for an institutional scholarship that can be used at any of the higher education institutions now located on the Monte campus (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-b). Universidad de la Gente's recent HSI designation and rich history with the Latinx community make this site an important setting for understanding how Latinx students interact with and define civic engagement.

### **Invitation**

**Recruitment.** Recruitment for participants occurred in four ways. First, I requested a meeting with key Universidad de la Gente administrators to discuss how this project could support and augment the institution's civic engagement objectives and its recently awarded HSI designation (Universidad de la Gente, 2020a). Key Universidad de

la Gente administrators included those that facilitate the Universidad de la Gente's civic engagement and service-learning activities, those engaged in the university's HIS initiatives, and those that worked closely with Latinx students. Secondly, I participated in on-campus and community events, specific to the Latinx community on the Monte campus, thus establishing relationships with community members. Latz (2017) recommends that researchers, whenever possible, engage with the population they seek participants from in-person. Engaging with prospective participants in-person creates rapport and builds trust between the researcher and prospective participants. Additionally, engaging with prospective participants in their own communities aligns with postcritical ethnographic inquiry that argues that it is "most appropriate when it places events and people in the social, cultural, and political history and contexts in which they are constituted" to combat objectification of research participant's lives (Murillo Jr., 2004, p. 155). Third, I conducted outreach directly to Latinx students, as identified by institutional staff, faculty, and administrators, and connected with students through on-campus organizations and student groups. I attended student gatherings and organization meetings on campus to introduce the study and solicit participants. I developed a flier that was distributed through administrative channels with faculty and staff. I also reached out to Universidad de la Gente's Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) which governs the university's multicultural Greeks such as Nu Alpha Kappa, Sigma Lambda Beta, two Latino-based fraternities and Lambda Theta Nu, Pi Lambda Chi, and Sigma Lambda Gamma, Universidad de la Gente's three Latina-based sororities. LCC argues that Latinxs, and similarly other minority groups, seek to "claim space" where members of



these communities can feel safe and create a sense of “belonging and membership” (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, p. 15). Latinx membership groups and communities are also formed out of a shared sense of “social and political commitments” (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 72). As such these on-campus organizations were identified for their shared sense of commitment to issues that affect the Latinx community and served as places to connect with Latinx students. Prospective participants were provided with a recruitment brochure, see Appendix A.

During my attendance to on-campus organizations and community events, I passed out a project brochure explaining the project and the call for participants. Additionally, I placed flyers on institution-sanctioned bulletin boards throughout campus in areas with high student traffic. I shared the flier via social media networks geared toward Universidad de la Gente Latinx students with my email address. I employed a recruitment email that was distributed widely through listservs, group message boards, and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Reaching out through social media has been found to be an effective method to connect with students (Davis III et al., 2014) and findings from the Pew Research Center (Krogstad, 2015) indicate a preference for Facebook and Instagram among Latinxs. I reached out to several Universidad de la Gente student groups via Facebook to recruit participants. As part of their participation, participants received a \$100 honorarium distributed in \$25 increments after each meeting. Offering an honorarium may have increased interest among prospective participants and encouraged persistence during the study.

Individuals interested in participating were asked to complete a survey that collected their contact information and included several questions that assisted me in determining their eligibility to participate in the study. Participants met the study's two criteria. Participants identified as 1) Latinx, Hispanic, Chicanx and 2) were enrolled at Universidad de la Gente. The fluidity of Latinx identity and categorization meant that any participant that identified as Latinx, Hispanic, Chicanx was invited to participate. In recent times, Latinx has become a blanket term to describe people of Latin American origin. Latinx has become valuable "in identifying political movements that go beyond Mexican American, but which are indigenous to the Americas" (Beltran, 2003, p. 169). Similarly, Hispanic, as developed by the Nixon administration in the 1970s describes those with Spanish surnames and of Iberian cultural origins (Beltran, 2003). As a reminder, Latinxs are not a monolithic group, as their national and historical identities are unique; however, identity markers such as phenotype (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) and language surfaces prejudices that are applied to Latinx members broadly (Rosaldo, 1997). Due to the diversity among Latinxs, I expanded recruitment criteria to anyone that identified as Latinx, Hispanic, Chicanx, or identified with any Central or South American and Caribbean nations.

Finally, participant criteria did not require that students be civically engaged, as it was important to understand why a student may not be participating civically. The purpose of this study is for Latinx students to guide our understanding of their relationship with civic engagement, whether they view themselves as active participants or not, and to illuminate the ways that may not be currently recognized in the large body

of student civic engagement literature. Understanding this perspective can inform the work HSIs conduct to support their students' civic development. Additionally, this study explored how Latinx students conceptualize their idea of civic engagement. Latinx students may be engaging civically but not defining it using this term; this study explored that further. Photovoice studies can vary widely in sample size; however, the optimal sample size for this project was five to seven participants. Patton (2002) suggested six to 10 individuals to be an optimal group interview size; however, this study had a total of 12 participants, two of which withdrew before the single focus group interview.

### **Education**

Participants that met recruitment criteria were invited to meet and a date/time was scheduled using a Doodle poll. I asked participants their preference for meeting in-person or via Zoom, a virtual meeting platform. Participants overwhelmingly shared they preferred to meet virtually using Zoom instead of in-person due to conflicts with other commitments such as work, school, childcare, and geographic location. Additionally, this study took place during the COVID pandemic and although participants did not communicate a desire to take increased precautions by meeting virtually, participants' vast commitment and geographic locations led nine of the 10 participants to request that we meet virtually. Participants attended three virtual meetings and five participants attended the final in-person exhibition. The first meeting was an orientation where I introduced myself to participants and shared my positionality with participants. I did this to remain reflexive of my own Latina identity and my intimate interest with this topic. I opened the first meeting with the reasoning for this study and how my own identity as a

Latinx informed my approach to this study. I also did this to honor participants as individuals from robust communities that should be engaged and invited to inform research studies about their communities (Noblit et al., 2004). In the first meeting, participants learned about the purpose of the study and received more detailed information about the study. During the orientation meeting, participants received a brochure describing the scope and aim of the study. Additionally, I gave and explained to each participant, in detail, the purpose of an informed consent form. Photovoice training with participants emphasizes the ethical concerns of using a camera (Wang, 2006) which include a focus on privacy and informed consent. I emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and that participants, at any time, could withdraw from the study. I explained the importance of obtaining written consent from participants and any individuals they photographed as part of the study. The informed consent form used for this project can be found in Appendix D.

I trained participants in basic photography guidelines. Training included photograph composition. Composition basics included the rule of thirds (Riaz et al., 2015, p. 16439), appropriate lighting, and how to request consent from subjects in participant's photographs. I provided participants with extra photo release forms and study brochures to be given to people that participants wanted to photograph as part of the photovoice study. The project brochure included details about the study, my contact information, and contact information for the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board where they could obtain additional information.

## **Documentation**

During the orientation, participants received a prompt with a series of questions outlining the topic of the study. The prompt is available in Appendix C and was both distributed and read to participants during the orientation meeting. The prompt served to remind participants about the scope of the project as they capture their images (Latz, 2017; Wang, 2006). The prompt included open-ended questions that participants were asked to respond to via photographs. The prompt explored three main areas. The first area explored participant's identity formation and awareness. These questions asked participants to capture, in photographs, what their Latinx identity meant to them and how they understood that identity. The second area asked participants to capture, through photography, what their relationship was with civic engagement, what civic engagement meant to them, and what practices they believed demonstrated Latinx's commitment to civic engagement. During the orientation, I presented various definitions used to describe what is meant by civic engagement with participants, as this may have been a new term for participants. I emphasized that definitions of civic engagement are contested, and this study's purpose was to hear from them directly how they define and practice civic engagement. Lastly, the third area asked participants to capture, via photographs, what their civic engagement experiences have been in relation to Universidad de la Gente. These prompt questions elucidated the ways in which Universidad de la Gente may or may not have been contributing to their Latinx student's civic engagement development and civic identity formation.

The prompt attempted to surface the interrelationship between Latinx culture and citizenship and how, if at all, it manifested on a university campus. LCC posits that

Latinx identity and civic identity are intertwined to create a new understanding of citizenship that is informed by the Latinx community's culture (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). Latinxs, by virtue of their racial and ethnic identity, have a nuanced relationship with citizenship. Latinx identity informs the ways in which Latinxs interact with ideas and practices of citizenship (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). The prompt questions explored this interrelated relationship and sought to understand how it manifests among Latinx students at an HSI.

Participants had full autonomy to capture, in photograph form, what they believed answered or illustrated a response to the prompt questions. Participants used their cellphones to capture all photographs. Latinx individuals are more likely to access the internet through their mobile device (Perrin & Turner, 2019; Brown et al., 2016; Cohen & Kahne, 2012) as such I selected cell phones as the medium on which participants captured their photos. Participants were asked to upload their images to a secure Microsoft OneDrive folder I created through my account provided by the University of Denver; this required internet connectivity, and participants felt more comfortable texting photographs to me. I then uploaded the images into each participant's OneDrive folder. Utilizing a cell phone with internet connectivity facilitated participant's participation. Files and photographs were stored in Microsoft OneDrive because of its security measures such as two-factor verification and encryption capabilities. Participants had a month, after the orientation meeting, to capture photographs that responded to the prompt. The month timeframe allowed for more flexibility, as participants had busy schedules. Universidad de la Gente is a commuter institution with no on-campus housing,

indicating that it takes time for students to reach campus (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-d). Additionally, the average age of Universidad de la Gente's undergraduate students is 25 years of age and nearly 80% work while attending Universidad de la Gente (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-a). For working students who participated in this study, commuting to campus to meet with me would have been prohibited due to their work schedules and family obligations. Meeting virtually with me increased the ability of participants to participate in this study. I understood that participants had limited time to participate, therefore, I solicited their thoughts on certain tasks, such as timeframe for data collection. I asked participants whether they wanted to reduce or extend the time frame for taking photographs, participants said a month timeframe was sufficient. I sent reminders weekly to the email and phone numbers participants provided during the recruitment stage to encourage continued dialogue with participants. Participants were more apt to respond via text message than they did via their emails.

### **Narration**

The second meeting served as a single focus group interview where participants assigned meaning to their photographs. A single focus group interview brings together one group of participants in one place to engage in discussion about a topic (Morgan, 1996). Strengths of single focus group interviews are the ability of participants to engage with each other and to ask clarifying questions of others in the interview (Patton, 2002; Latz, 2017). Additionally, a single focus group interview provides opportunities for participants to discuss disagreements and agreements that can be valuable data for the researcher (Morgan, 1996). Single focus group interviews create opportunities for the

researcher to ask participants to share “comparisons among their experiences and views, rather than aggregating individual data in order to speculate about whether or why the interviewees differ” (Morgan, 1996, p. 140). In this study, the single focus group interview was structured, as I manage the group’s dynamics to encourage active participation from all participants.

The single focus group interview was conducted, virtually via Zoom, at the request of participants. Several participants were online students, one living 1.5 hours away; others had childcare responsibilities and could not attend an in-person meeting. During the second meeting, I asked focus group participants questions exploring how their racial or ethnic identity informed their interactions with civic engagement; how their racial or ethnic identity led them to define and practice civic engagement; how Latinx communities may or may not practice civic engagement differently than other groups; and how Universidad de la Gente may or may not be supporting their civic engagement development (see appendix B for the interview protocol).

Due to scheduling challenges, I held three single focus group interviews (six participants in one session; three participants in another; and one participant who could not attend during the other two sessions). The smaller interview groups provide participants more time to share their views on the topic compared to larger group interviews. Morgan (1996) found that smaller single focus group interviews are more appropriate for topics that are emotionally charged as it allows higher participant involvement. The topic of the single focus group interview, Latinx civic engagement, at times, was emotionally charged for participants. Finally, this research was emancipatory,



meaning that during the single focus group interview, participants learned and engaged each other in ways that transformed their student experience. Postcritical ethnography argues for this level of engagement with participants throughout a study, specifically in the creation of data (Hytten, 2004). Hytten (2004), a researcher exploring the relationship between social theory and social justice with the democratic purpose of education, calls this the “ethnography of empowerment” (p. 103). Hytten (2004) argues “ethnography of empowerment” offers opportunities for a local community, in this case participants for this study, to engage in the research process so “they can be empowered to transform their environment in ways they see beneficial” (p. 103). Interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

I held a second meeting with participants where I reintroduced the purpose of the study and engaged participants in a discussion of how the process of responding to the prompt went. This process introduced the “meaning making” (Latz, 2017, p. 83) portion of the group interview. Meaning making, in photovoice, invites participants to ascribe meaning to their photography, in essence, what is the story the photography is trying to tell and what themes, issues, or theories emerge from them (Wang & Burris, 1997; Latz, 2017). Participants shared their photographs and any challenges, thoughts, or questions they had arisen during their capture. Importantly, group participants were engaged in an open discussion on the meaning of their photographs. Participants were prompted to discuss the images they produced and their meaning as they related to the prompt, and this elicited response from participants thus assigning meaning to their photographs. This helped the ideation process to happen.

## **Ideation**

During the ideation stage, participants took an active role in creating meaning for their photographs and this is where participants were deeply engaged in the data analysis portion of a project. Wang and Burris (1997) outline three steps for data analysis that participants should be engaged in, which include participants selecting photographs they believe accurately reflect their needs, participants contextualize those photographs to tell a story about its meaning, and participants codify the images by identifying “issues, themes, or theories that emerge” (p. 380). The single focus group interview creates opportunities for themes to emerge organically through discussion (Latz, 2017). Wang and Burris (1997) suggest the discussion process utilize “VOICE - voicing *our individual and collective experience*” (p. 381). Utilizing a structure like VOICE, organizes the discussion to identify micro (individual) and macro (collective) experiences among participants. In the single focus group interview, participants were able to observe and organize themes, issues, or theories they saw within their photographs and those of the group at-large. This process allowed participants to experience the research process in action. Together, participants initiated a preliminary analysis of their photographs as they assigned meaning to them and discussed them in the larger group, thus composing the “meaning making” process (Latz, 2017, p. 83). This process was important because it allowed us to “understand how people make meaning themselves or construct what matters to them” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 382).

We divided the discussion of the photographs into the three areas set out by the prompt shared at the onset of the project with participants (identity formation and

awareness; civic engagement and Latinxs; civic engagement and Universidad de la Gente). I asked each participant to take turns sharing the photographs that respond to a particular area of the prompt. During this exercise, I asked participants to describe how their photographs responded to the prompt questions in one of the three specific areas. Additionally, I asked what story participants were trying to share through each photograph. I also asked what other thoughts and ideas came to mind as they discussed their photographs and the prompt questions. I audio recorded the participant's share outs and at the conclusion of the share out for each prompt area, I asked participants to share if they had identified any themes among the responses of the group. The group interview served as the first place where meaning making took place and was developed with participants. I recorded the group interview and took field notes to catalog any themes that emerged. I asked participants to select an image for each area of the prompt they believed conveyed, most accurately, a response to the prompt given at the beginning of the project. I also asked participants to select one main photograph that they believed embodies their relationship with civic engagement. I then asked participants to develop captions for the selected photographs they believed communicated these themes.

### **Presentation**

The third group meeting served to plan the presentation of the participant's photographs and message to the wider Universidad de la Gente community. In this study, the exhibition was open to the public and served multiple functions. First, I requested that my dissertation defense be held during the opening of the exhibition on the Universidad de la Gente campus. I did this as both an ethical imperative to provide transparency,

adhere to postcritical ethnography's request that researchers remain reflexive, and to honor the "catalytic validity" (Lather, 1986, p. 67) of this study's attempt for social change and empowerment of its participants. Participants in this project were invited to view how the study was conceptualized, developed, and how their participation assisted in the understanding of Latinx student civic engagement practices at Universidad de la Gente. Additionally, publicly presenting my doctoral defense demystifies the process for participants or other Universidad de la Gente students interested in pursuing a doctoral degree. Only six percent of the U.S. Latinx population has been awarded a doctoral degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a). Opening my doctoral defense to the public in situ of the research site aligned to postcritical ethnography's push for connecting the researcher's identity to their research.

Universidad de la Gente institutional leaders, particularly those engaged in the university's civic engagement and service-learning efforts, were invited to the exhibition. Participants were invited, and if they desired, presented their own work. Participants had the opportunity to discuss their photographs with attendees during the exhibition. I opened the event with the purpose of the exhibition, an overview of the study, followed by a student panel with participants, I moderated, where students were able to share their experiences participating in the study and their experiences with civic engagement. Once this portion of the presentation was over, the audience was invited to walk through the exhibit to view the photographs and interact with the students that had chosen to present their work in the exhibition space. Participant engagement in the exhibition was completely voluntary. The overarching goal of the exhibition was to connect the

administration's decision-making power with these students, thus opening dialogue for discussions on how the institution can support and broaden their civic development initiatives in support of Latinx students.

Participant photographs and captions were printed onto large scale format foam core posters and displayed as part of the presentation of findings at the doctoral defense/exhibition., I selected to host the dissertation defense at Universidad de la Gente to honor the Latinx identity of the neighborhoods that surround the current campus and as a reminder of the campus' historical legacy of Latinx displacement and as an act of reciprocity and transparency with participants.

### **Confirmation**

The final step, in photovoice, is to gauge the impact of the exhibition on decision-makers to assess whether change occurred. Due to the temporal constraints of this study, confirmation was the sharing of this study's research findings with Universidad de la Gente's administration through the exhibition of the participant's work and student panel. Findings from this study informed Universidad de la Gente's administration what their Latinx students consider civic engagement and how they are practicing such civic engagement behaviors. Understanding how their Latinx students define, and practice civic engagement can assist the institution in its diversity and inclusion mission to establish "policies, practices, programs, and resources designed to embrace and support diversity" (Universidad de la Gente, n.d.-c) and further strengthen its commitment to Latinx students as a HSI.

### **Data Analysis**

Wang and Burris (1997) outline a three-step foundation for data analysis as: 1) photograph selection that “accurately reflect the community’s needs and assets,” 2) storytelling that contextualize the photos, and 3) coding for meaning by developing “issues, themes, and theories” that arise (p. 380-381). Photographs captured as part of the photovoice study are not the main data per se; rather, they provide an opportunity for the researcher to elicit reactions and responses from participants on how they engaged with the prompt and how they ascribed meaning (Latz, 2017). During the single focus group interview, only the student participants were invited to elucidate meaning from their images. Institutional leaders were invited to the exhibition to interact with participant’s images and the conclusions of the study after participants have already ascribed meaning to their images. Participants selected the photographs they found most meaningful and then applied meaning through “group discussion,” wrote captions for their photographs, or held storytelling with other members within the community (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 380). This process elicited multiple meanings from each photograph allowing participants to identify areas of concern or issues. In this study, photographs taken by participants focused attention to Latinx civic activation. Participants’ meaning making process served as the first level of data collection. The single focus group interview was recorded, and I conducted data analysis of those recordings after capturing ideas or thoughts that I missed during the meaning-making portion of the meeting.

Ethnographers rely on the observations of participants, “open-ended interviewing and textual analysis of human products” (Murillo Jr., 2004, p. 157) and include purposive sampling (Latz, 2017) of one-culture sharing group (Creswell, 2013). The use of

postcritical ethnography and photovoice, in this study served to critique ethnography's problematic history with colonization. Postcritical ethnography and photovoice focus on the engagement of participants in the data analysis process to decenter power from the researcher and redistribute it with participants. Co-construction of knowledge and inviting participants to engage in more facets of the study decolonizes traditional ethnography practices (Noblit et al., 2004). The meaning making process with participants is the first level of data analysis. Participants were asked how their photographs responded to the prompt. Recordings from the single focus group interview were taken and a secondary level of data analysis was conducted. The secondary level of analysis allowed me to dive deeper into the interview data.

In order to facilitate data analysis, I coded all the data collected for this study using Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is qualitative data analysis software that aids in the data analysis of qualitative data (Atlas.ti, n.d.). The single focus group interview recordings were transcribed. I then coded transcripts by organizing and bracketing segments of data with similar ideas and applying categorical labels to generate descriptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Descriptions that detailed "information about people, places, or events in a setting" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194) were coded and grouped together to develop concepts. Concepts that were identified from the data analysis served to answer the study's main research questions.

Concept coding served as the first round of analysis for the transcripts of the single focus group interview (Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed the interview transcripts generated through the single focus group interviews and institutional documents, such as

Universidad de la Gente's strategic plan and documents on their civic engagement initiatives using concept coding. Concept coding assigns "meso or macro levels of meaning to data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 119). Larger sections of data can be lumped together to construct a "bigger picture suggested by a concept" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 120). I utilized analytic memos when concept coding data to expand upon any generalizations or abstract codes that arose (Saldaña, 2016). In addition to analyzing analytic memos, I also analyzed memos that I wrote and utilized as a reflexive tool as suggested by postcritical ethnography (Noblit et al., 2004). I wrote memos about my thoughts on the study and on how my identity shaped my approaches and interactions with the study's participants, photographs, and the meaning participants ascribed to those photographs throughout the study.

During concept coding, I split data into macro levels of data that were then lumped together to construct a larger picture. Axial coding served as the second cycle coding analysis where codes were reassembled to identify prevailing and non-prevailing codes (Boeije, 2010; Saldaña, 2016). Axial coding "link categories with subcategories and asks how they are related" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 244). I took codes identified during concept coding and reassembled them together to allow an opportunity for categories to emerge from the rearranged codes. I then arranged the categories further into larger categories. Saldaña (2016) calls these "meta" categories (p. 278). Meta categories are more streamlined and allow for interrelationships to be built among the categories (Saldaña, 2016).



I provided an example of my approach to concept and axial coding for the following quote from Dailynn:

Can I just add something? I like to say, like, everybody's talking about community, I think that's super important because I think, that's honestly, where it stems from to be able to be civically engaged. Because I don't think you know, I don't see my grandma going out and protesting by herself, I mean a lot of people do, but I think once you build that community, then that's where it stems from to be able to be politically active, right? And so, I think that's something that we need to understand is that without community you can't have civic engagement within the scope of Latinos, that's what I'm getting towards.

I applied concept coding as a first level of analysis. The concept codes I identified for this excerpt were identity, community, and diversity of civic engagement activities. The concept codes were applied to other data, in the single focus group transcripts, that had similar concepts. I found 30 other pieces of data that featured identity as a concept, 15 excerpts that featured diversity of civic engagement as a concept, and 11 excerpts that featured community as a concept. I then conducted a second level of analysis, using axial coding, among the featured categories of identity, diversity of civic engagement, and community to create a larger subcategory or "meta" category (Saldaña, 2016, p. 278). The meta category was interrelational engagement. I created and defined interrelational engagement as the civic behaviors and activities that are formed from Latinx students' intersectional identities and the Latinx community's culture of collectivism, that move

forward a civic engagement identity and accompanying activities that benefit Latinx students' families and community networks.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of the data analysis process, I employed the following approaches. Once I identified meta categories; I shared these meta categories with participants. I asked, during the third meeting, prior to the exhibition, whether the meta categories accurately represented what they sought to convey through their photographs and in the single focus group interview. This process utilized “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236) and invited participants to co-construct knowledge, essentially decolonizing the research process by repositioning power away from the researcher and distributing it among both researcher and participants (Noblit et al., 2004). Brear (2019) in an ethnography study with 10 participants tested the trustworthiness of member checking and its effects on the study and participants. Brear (2019) found that member checking had profound effects on participants by uplifting their voices in the research process, increased critical development, and reciprocal researcher-participant relationship. It is this process that both postcritical ethnography and photovoice suggest for the decolonization of research practices (Latz, 2017; Noblit et al., 2004). I presented the “meta” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 278) categories found in the analysis of focus group interview data during the third meeting where we discussed the categories identified and revisited the meanings, themes, and theories participants identified during meeting two (ideation) and to confirmed whether this is what participants want to present during the exhibition to Universidad de la Gente administrators.

Lincoln (1995) argues that positionality is itself a form of data validity. Lincoln (1995) argues that objectivity is a barrier to the quality of a research study or project, as it does not engage in the larger cultural and social conversations that situate a research project. Further in this chapter, I describe my epistemological approach to this research study by providing my positionality. Providing my positionality gives participants a clear understanding as to my interest and motivation for selecting this topic and my intentions toward the study's participants. I also employed trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013) and fidelity (Latz, 2017), which in photovoice and ethnographic research employs "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236), "social significance" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 152) or "usefulness" (Leavy, 2015, p. 272), and "triangulation" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). The following paragraphs describe the trustworthiness of this project.

Denzin (1971) described triangulation as a form of validity and provided four types that can be utilized to strengthen a study. Triangulation can be accomplished by utilizing "data triangulation" where a researcher uses "a variety of data sources", "investigator triangulation" which denotes the use of various researchers, "theory triangulation" which includes various "perspectives to interpret a single set of data", and "methodological triangulation" which utilizes "multiple methods to study a single problem" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). In this photovoice study, validity is achieved by utilizing all four of Denzin's (2010) types of triangulation. "Data triangulation" is accomplished by participants providing data through their elicitations during the single focus group interview, analyzed documentation (e.g., strategic plans, reports, website, student communications) from Universidad de la Gente, and the photographs participant's

capture as part of the project (Patton, 2002, p. 247). Photovoice, as a method, invites participants to engage as researchers in the study. Participants provided their perspectives on the data through group discussion and assigned meaning to their photographs, as they responded to the prompt first described at the onset of the project; together these met Denzin's "investigator triangulation" and "theory triangulation" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). Finally, this study utilized multiple methods, photovoice and postcritical ethnography, as ascribed by Denzin's "methodological triangulation" (Patton, 2002, p. 247).

Participants in photovoice are actively engaged in the meaning-making process since they alone can ascribe meaning to their own photographs (Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). In this study, participants identified how their photographs visually defined their relationship with civic engagement and what in their photographs described that relationship. Wang and Burris (1997) articulated the importance of internal and external replication in photovoice and the ability of photovoice to inhibit distortions that arise from "fitting data into a predetermined paradigm" (p. 382). The direct interaction by participants in selecting their photographs, contextualizing them through storytelling, and identifying issues, themes or theories ensured both internal and external validity. In this study, participants decided what they photographed, which photographs they wanted to use that best defined and described how they practiced civic engagement, and how the pictures convey such a message to Universidad de la Gente administrators.

Additionally, photovoice, as a participatory action research method must serve a usefulness (Leavy, 2015) by having a positive impact (Barone & Eisner, 2012) in the lives of participants or achieving the goals the project set out to accomplish among policy

makers (Leavy, 2015). Photovoice “is designed to increase the individual’s and the community’s access to power” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 382). Lincoln (1995) described this as the “communitarian” role of research that addresses the needs of the community in which the study is taking place and pushes past the notion of research for the purpose of satisfying knowledge production (p. 280). In this study, an exhibition was arranged where Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees were invited to view large scale photographs with captions produced by participants. The photographs developed as part of the project “fuel critical consciousness and collective action by making a political statement about the reality of peoples’ lives,” in other words, these photographs can serve as a “community-based diagnostic tool” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 384), which serve to explicitly identify community-wide issues that require attention.

As such participants served in a communitarian role to evaluate the quality of this research by its impact to enact the change participants sought through their participation in the project (Wang & Burris, 1997; Lincoln, 1995). Postcritical ethnography takes this communitarian role further and asks for the development of informed action among participants and researchers to bring about change that benefits participants (Gerstl-Pepin, 2004). Similarly, photovoice redistributes power by enabling “grassroots constituents, representing their own community, to participate in framing the agenda and adding their voice to the policy-making process” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 384). Confirmation, the last step in photovoice, which explores the impact of the exhibition in enacting policy change, can then serve to include and engage the community in the

policy-making process (Latz, 2017). In this study, confirmation is recognized through institutional leadership's attendance and engagement with the exhibition and its subsequent response to support the democratic development of their Latinx students.

### **Positionality as a Researcher**

Ethnography's troubled history forced me to think critically of my decision to originally use this methodology, prior to my discovery of postcritical ethnography. Murillo Jr. (2004) engaged in this same discussion by critiquing ethnography's colonial underpinnings as "enabling the voyeuristic objectification of their research participants" (p. 156). For this specific reason, I reflected on both my identity and the design of this study. My research topic is not without an agenda. I am Latina and it is my lived experiences with activism and protesting that have led me to select this topic; this study sought to make space for Latinx students to define and share what they consider civic engagement. Researchers cannot bracket their own identities away; the two are inseparable (Murillo Jr., 2004). The choices a researcher makes from their selected theoretical frameworks to methods and scholars cited in a study are all informed by a researcher's identity. Latinx's level of civic engagement has been defined for this community through parameters never developed to assess Latinx civic contributions (Magaña, 2005). I consider myself part of the Latinx community. I recognize that engaging in this research as a Latina researcher presents both advantages and challenges. I enter this research through a frame of irritation at a master narrative that positions Latinxs as apathetic toward this country's political environment (Garcia & Sanchez, 2004) and recognize that this emotion is the reason this study is being conducted. I

believe it is my Latina identity that led me to select theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that interrogate and critique this master narrative about Latinxs. Master narratives such as America's "sleeping giant" (Jackson, 2011, p. 691) ignore the myriad of ways that Latinxs civically participate. America's "sleeping giant" refers to Latinx's unexercised voting power based on the number of Latinx individuals that are eligible to vote but refrain from voting (Vega, 2006, p. 39). I purposefully selected methodological approaches that lead to action.

As a researcher engaging in a postcritical ethnography study with Latinx participants, I remained reflexive, presented my positionality, and engaged in presenting findings that honored and accurately represented participants. I also questioned my subjective and objective lens and how these have been shaped by my own experiences and history when engaging in this research. Objectivity in research and an ahistorical approach to participant's experiences perpetuate colonialism by ignoring historical and present-day hegemonic practices (Quijano, 1992, p. 12). As a researcher, I understand the historical issues of the methods that I choose, the limitations of each method and the potential harm each method can pose to participants. Selecting a postcritical ethnographic (Noblit, et al., 2004) approach for this study was a way in which I was able to (1) remain aware of my own positionality as a Latina researcher, who was explicit in my research interest with this particular population, (2) remained reflexive to the fluidity of identity of both myself and participants, (3) understood that objectivity is not achievable because "cultures are not objects" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 22) and researchers enter with their own set of biases, feelings, and interests informed by their own culture and environments, and (4) remained

faithful to the best method of representation that honors the perspectives and views of participants. As such I utilized member checking and memos (Lodico et al., 2010). I provided participants with the transcribed interviews and summaries of my conclusions for review and ensured that any potential researcher bias was addressed within the study. Additionally, I engaged in reflective memos that I reviewed to monitor my perspectives with the study.

The choice of postcritical ethnography as one of my methodological choices was a layered one. It was not simply a method by which Latinx voices are uplifted to define civic engagement for themselves but also a critique of the positivism of the field. I entered this research with experiences that have shaped my understanding of the ways Latinx communities are civically engaged, some of which sit outside of predominant forms of measuring engagement.

### **Methodological Considerations**

As outlined in photovoice, the importance of the confirmation stage is enacted through the success of the study to elicit a response from policy makers to the participant's desire for change. In this study, policy makers are Universidad de la Gente's institutional leadership. I recognize that in this study the presentation stage is the last formally outlined interaction presented as part of a photovoice project; however, the scope of this study was a dissertation. The completion of this study was cemented by my ability to complete this dissertation. I was not able to include the reception of the exhibition by Universidad de la Gente's administration or analysis of the confirmation stage described by Latz (2017) in this study. I plan to continue the analysis of the



exhibition and its impact on Universidad de la Gente's approach to their Latinx student population's civic engagement in subsequent writings. I want to understand if and how the exhibition served its intended purpose. I plan to conduct further research on how Universidad de la Gente's administration engaged with the participant's visual messages and how it influenced the institution's leadership to support and/or expand the civic development and engagement of their Latinx students.

A second methodological consideration for this project is its interaction with race and ethnicity. Latinxs are not a monolithic group. Nationality, age, political inclination, and legal status are among just a few of the categories that add complexity to this ethnic group (Magaña, 2005). Participants bring with them individual experiences and identities that shape each person's relationship to civic engagement practices. This study does not attempt to make broad generalizations regarding an entire ethnic community. It only explores this relationship at one institution in this mountain west city and within the constraints of these students' communities.

A third methodological consideration is my "insider/outsider" (Coloma, 2008) status. I am Latinx and have this commonality with my participants; however, as previously mentioned, Latinx identity is fluid. My identification as Latinx may not be shared with or perceived by some participants. The area's Latinx/Hispanic/Chicanx identity means that tensions exist among definitions and categorizations on who and what defines a Latinx, Chicanx and/or Hispanic individual. The area in which Universidad de la Gente is located has a rich Latinx/Hispanic identity. The region's pan-Latino identity (Rodríguez, 1998), one that can include, Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and

European ancestry creates a complex racial and ethnic identity for many of the residents of the area. As a Latinx researcher, I must become knowledgeable about the region's history and remain open to understanding how this history may have influenced the racial and ethnic formation of participants. Universidad de la Gente was chosen for its historical relationship with the area's Latinx population. My decision for selecting this site is informed by my own Latina identity and the connection I feel to the area.

My role as researcher means that I am entering from an outsider perspective into a community, that although I am a part of through my ethnic membership, is not my own because of my different institutional enrollment. My "emic" and "etic" (Patton, 2002, p. 267-268) role as a Latina researcher provide both advantages and challenges. Patton (2002) defines emic and etic in two ways: 1) emic is used to define characteristics that are made from within the community that are unique and different from perspectives that are made by those outside a particular community and, 2) etic to define the distinctions made by those that are not part of said community and whose observations are in relation to differences and similarities to other cultures (p. 267-268). My emic role allowed me to understand nuances in the research and in participant's photographs and dialogue that may not be as easily understood by a non-Latinx researcher. However, my etic relationship to the location and this community may be limited by my deep emic relationship to the research participants.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Postcritical ethnography and photovoice are concerned with representational issues and "pursuits of justice" (Lester & Anders, 2018). Photovoice recognizes that

people are the experts of their own lived experiences and those of their communities that an outsider cannot achieve (Wang & Burris, 1997). As a researcher entering the lives and communities of participants, I remained reflexive and stayed true to what Murillo Jr. (2004) outlined as the “social, cultural, and political history and contexts in which [participants] are constituted” (p. 155). Mitigating representational issues that arose from my insider (Latina) and outsider (not from within this specific community) status required that I share my positionality with participants to clearly delineate my entrance into the study, my intentions, and departure from the study. I did this to resist reenacting ethnography’s colonial history in which researcher expertise and authority is exercised over participants thus objectifying, “othering,” (Rosaldo, 1989), reproducing and perpetuating narratives about research participants (Murillo Jr., 2004). To mitigate representational issues, I purposefully chose photovoice and postcritical ethnography as methodologies that center and uplift the voices of participants and invited them to engage as co-constructors of knowledge by participating as researchers themselves. I employed several levels of ethics to protect participants, which included procedural and relational ethics.

In order to align to procedural ethics that protect the privacy of participants and ensures their safety as human research subjects (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), an institutional review board (IRB) application was submitted to the University of Denver’s Office of Research & Sponsored Program for review and Universidad de la Gente’s institutional review board. I employed informed consent forms, and I explained the risks involved in participating in this study to participants during the orientation meeting.

Risks were minimal in this study; however, participants were still informed of any unintended consequences from their participation. Participants were able to self-select one of two options: to disclose their identity as part of the study or require that I, the researcher, maintain their confidentiality. Participants that sought to remain anonymous selected a pseudonym that was used during the exhibition of their photographs and within the writing of this manuscript. Second, a protected database of participant interviews was only accessible to me, the researcher. Participants only had access to their individual Microsoft OneDrive folder where their photographs and release forms were stored.

Photovoice research is visual by using photographs; as such consent forms (see Appendix E, Appendix F) were thoroughly explained and sought from participants. Participants who captured the image of others within their own photographs obtained a separate consent form for individuals who were identifiable in their photographs. I provided participants with training prior to the beginning of the photo collection portion of the study. Participants were trained on the “acceptable way[s] to approach someone to take their picture” and the ethics of taking someone’s picture without their knowledge (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 378). In addition to an IRB application, I employed self-reflexivity as an additional internal ethics criterion to mitigate what Denzin (2010) remarks as limitations to external ethics guidelines applied in qualitative research. Relational ethics “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Ellis (2007) considers the researcher/researched relationship as one that evolves over time and the response from

researchers on that evolution. Ellis (2007) presented one example in which she asked, what happens when a researcher becomes friends with research participants? IRB does not often account for such evolutionary relationships, as it assumes that research is being conducted on strangers in which the researcher has no plan on future interactions with participants (Ellis, 2007). Limited guidance from IRBs in such situations requires that researchers enact a process of self-ethical considerations. These ethical considerations are relational to LCC (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, which reminds researchers that participants in a study or project experience their lives and realities in different ways based on their identities. Researchers cannot enter as authoritative figures, especially in minoritized communities, as participants are the experts of their lived experiences and realities (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997). My identity as a Latina, from the community in which the setting of this study takes place, allowed me to engage in a base understanding of the practices and culture of participants; however, my identity as a researcher, per LCC (Flores & Benmayor, 1997), photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), and postcritical ethnography (Noblit et al., 2004) meant that the expertise of participants and their voices were front and center.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Latinx are not a monolithic group (Morales, 2018; Magaña, 2005; Beltran, 2003). Nationality, age, political inclination, and legal status are among just a few of the categories that add complexity to this ethnic group (Morales, 2018; Magaña, 2005; Navarro & Mejia, 2004). Participants brought with them individual experiences and identities that shaped each person's relationship to civic engagement practices. This study

did not attempt to make broad generalizations regarding an entire ethnic community. It only explored this relationship at one institution and within the constraints of these students' community and temporal bounds of the study; however, this project outlines how a researcher can replicate this with other student populations and in other special or temporal bounds.

A delimitation of this study is the focus on Latinxs of Mexican nationality or ancestry in our understanding of their relationship within the United States. Latinxs are not a pan-ethnic population (Gonzalez-Sobrinio, 2020). Latinxs "is a U.S. phenomenon that exists only within the boundaries of this nation" and consists of many groups with different Latin American origins (Gonzalez-Sobrinio, 2020, p. 1027) which include nations from Central and South America, Caribbean nations such as Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (Morales, 2018).

The reason this study focuses on Latinxs of Mexican nationality or ancestry but is open to Latinx participants of any national citizenship or ancestry in the study's design is because of the way in which the United States racializes Latinx individuals into one homogenous group. Secondly, I identify as Latina and my own lived experiences inform my relationship with civic engagement. Ed Morales (2018) shared the idea of hybridity among Latinxs; one in which national and racial identity provides one set of experiences informed by the United States when it racializes all Latinxs into one homogenous group and therefore creates new structures that Latinxs regardless of national origin or racial identity, can identify.

Geographically, this study is situated in an urban city in the mountain west, which has a regrettable but abundant history of Latinx discrimination, specifically for Latinxs of Mexican ancestry (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999). Until the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, much of the United States' southwest, including parts of the state, in which I conducted this study, were part of Mexico, which upon the signing of the treaty, absorbed many Mexicans living in the area into the United States (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2020). Mexicans absorbed into the new United States territory experienced discrimination, violence, and removal from their lands either by coercion or murder (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999). Additionally, ample literature (Navarro & Mejia, 2004; Magaña, 2005; Morales, 2018) exists exploring and interrogating unique Latinx identities based on their nationality and experiences with the United States, hence, tackling the experiences of Latinxs by nationality would prove too large in scope for this study. It is why this study is limited to the historical interactions of Latinxs with Mexican ancestry, but participation in this study is open to any Latinx identifying individual regardless of national origin or ancestry.

Additionally, photovoice as a method, assumes that participants will be able to enact the changes they want to see, yet photovoice is only able to inform policymakers about participant's desires, it cannot force them to enact the changes sought (Nykiforuk et al., 2011). Ultimately, policymakers, in this case Universidad de la Gente administrators, must be open and willing to engage with participants and address the civic engagement needs of their Latinx students. This study opens an opportunity for dialogue among

participants and Universidad de la Gente leadership; it cannot force Universidad de la Gente to respond with action.

Limitations in this study included challenges in recruitment during a global pandemic. COVID-19 mitigation efforts include social distancing and limited group interaction and although vaccinations were underway breakthrough cases meant that many individuals were refraining from participating in activities outside necessary life functions. Traditional efforts to adhere to ethnographic research such as observations and photovoice's focus on building relationships with participants prior to a study proved challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Methodological rigor comes into question when relying extensively on virtual interactions because of the challenge of exploring, in more detail and depth, certain concepts, or capturing nonverbal communication (Tremblay et al., 2021). I planned to conduct this study in-person; however, participants requested and felt more comfortable participating virtually. Additionally, Universidad de la Gente is a commuter campus, meaning that students must travel to and from the campus and 80% of students' work, which limits a student's desire or ability to participate in-person. Participants requested to participate virtually due to work schedules, childcare limitations, and geographic distance; one participant lived more than an hour away. Participants participated virtually in all three initial meetings. Only the final exhibition was held in person. To mitigate time constraints, I adhered strictly to the time commitment outlined as part of the study and compensated students for their time (see Appendix A) and provided one month for participants to respond to the prompt.

## **Chapter Summary**



This chapter provided a rationale for qualitative research methods and methodological approaches, specifically postcritical ethnography and photovoice, and their combined use in answering the research questions: how do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define civic engagement?; how do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution practice civic engagement?; and what practices should a Hispanic-Serving Institution establish to support their Latinx student's civic engagement development? The chapter articulated my vested interest in the study and how my identity influenced the design of this research study, the research questions being answered, the methodological choices I made, and ethical considerations I undertook. I describe the study's data collection and data analysis processes in detail for those interested in replicating this study. The chapter provided a guided methodological framework for understanding how Latinx students define and practice civic engagement at an HSI.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I provide findings in response to the study's three research questions. Specifically, I explored how Latinx students at a HSI defined and practiced civic engagement; how identity informed the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students; and what practices a HSI should establish to support their Latinx student's civic engagement development. Important findings include participants defining civic engagement as KRS; a definition that was intricately intertwined with identity. Additionally, participants in this study offered their own and expanded definition of civic engagement to include the civic behaviors they enact through, what I term, interrelational engagement. A second major finding about how Latinx students' practices and define civic engagement included intergenerational paving. I created the term intergenerational paving to describe the intergenerational sense of duty Latinx students feel to continue *paving the way* for family, friends, and community members yet to come after them, just as their parents did by opening opportunities for them through various actions. Participants spoke actively about their behaviors being informed by their first or second-generation status, which varied depending on the situation (e.g., first-generation college student, first as a U.S. citizen, etc.) and how their success, in and of itself, was a form of activism.

Participants' identities (e.g., first-generation student, immigration status, parent, gender, etc.) were fluid and often intersectional. The fluidity and intersectionality of participants' identities guided what resources and knowledge participants would seek and gather for the community in which their primary or most salient identity was prevalent at the time. For example, a Latinx student who also identified as undocumented, may seek resources to help other undocumented individuals in their community and then pivot to find resources to create a cultural event honoring Latinxs in the country. Participants' ability to pivot from one identity to another heightened their sense of empathy for the struggles of others and the importance of helping other people.

I identified three major themes for how identity informs the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students, these included: invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility. Each category informed the actions and behaviors of participants in this study, which led many participants to understand their presence on a college campus and other spaces as a political statement. Finally, I share findings that inform recommendations for practices that HSIs leadership should establish to support their Latinx students' civic engagement development. My findings indicate that HSIs administrators, faculty, and staff should include seeing students and their myriad identities, stand in solidarity, and work with Latinx students to address and develop solutions to the challenges they face both on-and-off the college campus, including providing opportunities for student to learn about, and to reclaim, their cultural and racial/ethnic history, as it presents itself in the United States. To arrive at these findings, I

recruited a total of 12 participants to participate in this study. In the next section, I share additional information about participants.

## **Participants**

The data collection process took a month from the first meeting with participants, of which there were initially 12: 11 women and one nonbinary individual. Two participants withdrew from the study, leaving a total of 10 participants who completed data collection and participated in the single focus group interview. Nine of the participants identified as first-generation, one as a second-generation college student whose parent(s) attended college within the United States. Participants had the option to divulge their names or select a pseudonym, one participant elected to use a pseudonym. Participants were Alexia, Alondra, Belen, Dailynn, Efraín, Elisa, Sofia, Lidia, Lupita, and Nallely. Nine of the 10 participants were undergraduates, one a graduate student, and several participants identified as undocumented and/or individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. I did not inquire into the status of participant's immigration status to be respectful of their privacy; however, several participants openly shared their immigration status during the single focus group interview. Participant's identity as an immigrant, *DACAmented* individual, or undocumented, and their status as first- or second-generation status, parenthood, in addition to their Latinx identity, were highly salient in this study and informed many of their civic behaviors.

Finally, participants requested the use of technology such as the use of cellphones and virtual meetings through Zoom. Participants spoke to the multiple commitments that placed a challenge in being able to meet in-person on campus. Several students were

online students, one living one and a half hours away in another city. Several others had childcare limitations, while others worked during the day and could only meet in the evening. All virtual meetings took place on weekday evenings between 5:30pm and 7:00 pm. Participants also requested text messaging over email, as text messaging was received more immediately than email. Several participants texted their images to me due to challenges with internet connectivity and reliability on a computer.

### **Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

The use of photovoice allows participants to document, visually through photography, a response to a prompt provided by the researcher. During the single focus group interview, I utilized Wang and Burris' (1997, p. 381) Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience (VOICE) concept to guide the discussion where many of the findings I present in this chapter were elucidated. The photographs allowed participants to reflect deeply and conceptualize how they would visually represent their thoughts in response to the prompt. The images also allowed participants to conceptualize their responses of how they defined and practiced civic engagement, how identity informed their civic engagement practices, and how their HSI does or could support their civic engagement development. The images led participants to extend dialogue further about the images they captured. In the following sections, I dive in deeper into the findings of this study and the data supporting these findings.

### **Defining Civic Engagement by Us for Us**

In this section, I present findings that broaden our understanding of civic engagement, specifically, how Latinx students at an HSI defined civic engagement and

how they practice civic engagement. Findings in this study indicate the importance of Latinx postsecondary students using the college campus as a place for gathering, collating, and sharing knowledge and resources with other members of the Latinx community that did not have access to the same resources. Secondly, participants viewed both their academic and personal success as activism and a form of civic engagement. Students viewed their success, and that of their communities, as civic engagement because success was a form of resistance against the marginalization of their Latinx identity, and other intersectional identities such as immigration status. In the following sections, I further engage these findings to describe how participants conceptualized and broadened our understanding of civic engagement.

### **Knowledge and Resource Sharing as a Civic Engagement Practice**

All participants, in this study, defined civic engagement as the ability to collect and share knowledge and resources with their family and community. Participants spoke about KRS as being a critical civic activity within the Latinx community. A theme that emerged during the single focus group interview was the importance of identity and how it informed participants' decisions about the type of resources and knowledge they collected and shared. Identity was an influential characteristic to participant's understanding of civic engagement. Participants emphasized how their identities, such as being a first- or second-generation immigrant, first- or second-generation college student, being a parent, being queer, working class, or identities developed through lived experiences, informed their behaviors and attitudes toward civic engagement.

Importantly, participants saw KRS as a differentiating factor between the Latinx community and other racial/ethnic communities. During the single focus group interview, Belen, an undergraduate Universidad de la Gente student, stated that KRS:

differentiates us [Latinxs] from others, like the way we share, because that's like community and minorities. We don't have the same access to resources than others, so might as well share what we have. For example, if you get the chance to access other things but other people don't, you make a trade, so you can access this, and I can [get] access to that. I think that's how we are different from others because we don't have the same opportunities and resources. Not everyone in our community have it, so that's why you share with others.

Belen's quote spoke to a mutually beneficial process that occurs during the knowledge and sharing resources process, yet there were no expectations of trading or reciprocity for sharing resources in my findings. In cases where reciprocity occurred, it took place as an act of gratitude, not as an expectation or transaction. What Belen's quote emphasized was how KRS are an invisible and minimized civic activity: "so we tend to, like, minimize other things that we do for like, example sharing with community or like finding resources for others to help them." Similarly, Sofia, a parent and participant who identified as an undocumented immigrant, reflected on how other communities are not apt to share resources so willingly. Sofia stated: "we're not a guero [White], we're not, they don't share it [with] us, they don't pass [knowledge and resources]. I was always thinking about, 'how can you bring awareness to make a change? How we can improve things?'"

Participants not only saw KRS as differentiating the Latinx community from other racial/ethnic communities, the activity of sharing resources and knowledge was seen as promoting community health and stability. Sofia spoke passionately about her advocacy work through the parent coalitions she volunteers for:

I see my civic engagement as a community resource. I'm part of a lot of parenting groups and a [parent] coalition at a children's hospital. I really wanted to take a picture but there were a lot of people in that place...it's just a hospital where we are trying to bring awareness of resources and there's only like for example, we're speaking on behalf of a lot of Latinos from the Hispanic community especially. I thought, 'No, this is how I'm trying to make a change in my community to bring a willingness and just change, you know.'

Sofia spoke about the importance of seeking knowledge and resources from individuals and organizations in a timely fashion to maintain family and community health. Sofia spoke on the impact that not receiving resources can have on people. Sofia reflected on a situation she encountered where a woman lost her children because she did not receive information and resources about the issue the woman was facing. Sofia stated: "a lady lost her kids because she couldn't get the resources. I wouldn't want to go through that. Like hearing about this case, like, my kids are little, 'why? Why lose more lives?'" This experience prompted Sofia to reflect on the importance of being aware of resources available to her, which she then passes onto the parent groups she works with: "I'm thinking, I have to be educated on resources, always on it, you know, because I can get angry if I don't do anything." Participants in this study were driven toward advocacy



because of their lived experiences and identities. Participants were driven to utilize their voices and skills to better their own lives, and those of members of their communities. Participants used their bilingualism, both English and Spanish, as an extension of the use of their voice. Belen and Sofia recognized their ability and skills, such as their bilingualism, being useful for their communities and thus became intermediaries for the knowledge and resources needed by their communities.

Participants' identity informed and drove many of the civic engagement behaviors they enacted. For example, participants' volunteer work was informed by their Latinx identity. In Figure 2, Nallely, an online Universidad de la Gente undergraduate, captured an image of the work she does volunteering at Voces Unidas for Justice (VOZ), a non-profit whose mission is:

“to provide an environment for Latin@ embracing the richness of our identities while building empowerment and leadership around issues of justice, equality, and safety; with the main objectives of access to safety services, creating community-based advocacy for accessing social networks and services, and building community leadership in order to end domestic and sexual violence, and stalking for all people” (Voces Unidas for Justice, n.d.).

Nallely described the work she does at VOZ as impactful to her and her community and the communities of color the non-profit supports.

Figure 2

*Voces Unidas for Justice*



*Note.* Nallely captioned this photograph: Voces Unidas is the nonprofit I work at, and we do food pantries every Friday. It's specifically for the community, like people of color, Indigenous people and I really appreciate that, especially because I do live in a very low-income community; they are just down the street and it's, it's just awesome. I love the work that they do there, and I just captured these two ladies that are always present.

KRS was pivotal to how participants viewed their role as civic agents within U.S. society. Participants were intermediaries between larger U.S. society and the Latinx communities they represented. Importantly, sharing knowledge and resources led many participants to feel like their contributions were leading their community and themselves toward success. Participants used skills and abilities such as their voices and bilingualism

to advocate for the resources needed by their communities and were able to bring knowledge and resources back to share with their communities. Participants spoke extensively about the use of their volunteer and advocacy efforts to increase success among family, friends, and their Latinx community. To participants, KRS was an effective strategy for supporting their communities because it broadened access to vital resources.

### **The Subversive Act of Perseverance and Success**

Participants their success in sharing knowledge and resources as a subversive civic activity. The marginalization of participant's Latinx identity and their communities led many participants to regard their success and those of their family and community as acts of perseverance. Nallely, in Figure 3 captured how her father, through hard work, was able to offer her and her family opportunities that could not have been afforded to them in their country of origin.

Figure 3

## *Working Hands*



*Note.* Nallely captioned this image as: I chose my dad's hands because you can't see them until you zoom in on them, but they are very rough and very like...I don't know, they're working hands; they're very much working hands. My dad's a construction worker and he works with his hands every day, literally every day, 12 hours a day, every day. I always just have this thing with people's hands because I feel like they speak about your life; they really do, like what type of work you do, and I know it's not a political change going out there to work construction, but I do feel like it speaks volumes about, you know, people coming out here to work for their dream; even if it's not an American dream. We didn't immigrate here for an American dream; it was more like escaping certain situations. So, I feel that for me [this image] is the best picture representing that...just working hands because I think that a lot of our community could relate to that. I feel

like a lot of our parents do that [hard work], like the majority of my immigrant friends' parents do this.

For Nallely, her father's hands represented a physical representation of perseverance and success. Nallely's father was able to provide her and her family with safety that was not available to them in their native country. In her caption, Nallely commented on how her family did not immigrate to the United States for the American dream but to offer them safety and opportunities. Thus, success for Nallely is a representation of her father's hard work sustaining her family amid transitions into the United States

In Figure 4 Alondra is standing in her graduation regalia having just graduated with her bachelor's degree from Universidad de la Gente. Alondra reflected on how her college experience helped her growth civically – here Alondra views her graduation as a form of civic engagement. Alondra, by succeeding and reaching her academic goals, as a first-generation student, was her way of participating civically. To better understand how success is a civic activity, I share a reflection shared by Belen on Alondra's graduation picture. Belen reflecting on Alondra's image during the focus group interview emphasized why Alondra's graduation was important: “it's possible for us, Latina and first-generation and all of that to graduate from a good school, and actually, like being part of a [Latinx] community and demonstrate [to] them that it's possible to do it, is like sharing [with] others, how we connect with the community by sharing things, even, if it's just information, resources, or just helping each other in the community.” Belen reinforced the importance of Alondra's photograph as documenting how success can be

used as a message to the Latinx community. The message Alondra's graduation image conveys is that with information, knowledge, and resources, success is achievable. Participants used success as a signal for the wider Latinx community on what could be accomplished with the right resource and information.

Figure 4

*Graduation as Civic Participation*



*Note.* Alondra captioned the photograph as: Being a Latinx Universidad de la Gente student has helped me grow tremendously in terms of civic engagement. I have learned of opportunities throughout campus over the years, and that ultimately led to me graduating with much more knowledge than before. These pictures of myself graduating are so important in the sphere of

civic participation because I am a first-generation student and that is a way of participating civically. Higher education has allowed me to learn more about civic engagement and encouraged me to finish my degree and I am grateful to have gone to an HSI like Universidad de la Gente.

Participants spoke about events like graduating from college were overt forms of civic engagement among Latinx communities. Several participants reflected on how such activities, like graduating from college, are not considered civic activities by those outside the Latinx community. Alondra spoke up to share:

I am a first-generation student, so being able to graduate, and then like, you know get a higher education, and just be successful and that is, you know, being successful in any community, getting a college degree, but this especially in my family because it's the first generation. I think in there, I said, that is a way of participating civically because I did also do many things in my college career that were me being civically engaged, so I feel like just the fact that I graduated as a Latinx student is part of being civically engaged.

Participants saw perseverance and success as a civic activity because Latinxs had to overcome marginalization and discrimination. Participants spoke about resilience and perseverance as traits to be celebrated and recognized as civic participation. Elisa talked about the importance of developing opportunities and relationships to improve the lives of marginalized communities and how creating visual representations, such as that found in her image, Figure 5, was an important civic activity. Empowerment through visual representation was a form of civic engagement and to Elisa, an art activist, art can demonstrate perseverance and resiliency and can communicate that Latinxs are actively resisting marginalization, succeeding, and thus civically engaged.



Figure 5

*Civic Engagement Means...*



*Note.* Elisa captioned this photo they took while in Mexico as: To me, civic engagement means creating relationships and opportunities for marginalized groups that help them live better lives. Whether it be volunteering, sharing resources, teaching, protesting, creating art, etc. What I do is create artwork that is inspiring to marginalized groups, along with positive representation of our communities. I may not volunteer a lot, but my goal as an artist is to create diverse and positive representation content so that others like me, can feel seen and included. Art is a powerful tool that can help create the change we need as Mexicanos, Latinos, and Chicanos. I found this wall painting in my recent trip to Mexico that creates a wonderful image of women who seem to be powerful. I felt this was related to civic engagement as art was used to create a message that



women can be whatever, whoever, they want; these are also women of Latin/Mexican culture which made me feel uplifted.

Participants saw success as a civic engagement activity, but an undercurrent to the conversation during the single focus group interview was the issue of invisibility and legitimacy. Several participants spoke to their civic engagement activities not being recognized as civic engagement both within the Latinx community and among those outside the Latinx community. Belen spoke to the invisibility of Latinx civic engagement activities within Latinx communities: “it was surprising, because not many of them [Latinxs] know that was actually civic engagement. They thought it was just a thing that was happening and that it didn’t have an impact in us.” Similarly, Nallely reiterated her inability to distinguish between what constituted civic engagement and what was a practice within Latinx communities: “it was hard, because at first, I wasn’t sure what I should photograph. I live a very traditional immigrant life, you know, like I clean houses and stuff. So, I was like, is this civic engagement or is this just life? You know?” Participants had to think about what in their opinion, and in their lives, should be considered civic engagement. Participants’ knowledge and resource gathering, and sharing was an everyday practice because it was the best method for ensuring the success of their communities. Latinx participants in this study did not see their civic behaviors of KRS and success recognized as civic engagement activities, thus obscuring Latinx forms of engagement. Several participants spoke to the lack of recognition for these (KRS and success) forms of engagement delegitimized their civic contributions. In the next section,

I present findings that help us understand how Latinx postsecondary students enact their own forms of civic engagement.

### **Practicing Civic Engagement in Our Own Way**

Participants practiced civic engagement through a series of activities I term interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving. In short, interrelational engagement are civic activities that are informed by Latinx postsecondary students' intersectional identities, which then propel them to engage in behaviors that support the health of family members, friends, and the larger Latinx community. Intergenerational paving is strongly associated with interrelational engagement, which is the way in which first- and second-generation Latinx postsecondary students view their responsibility to create and expand pathways for future generations of Latinxs. Latinx postsecondary students demystify processes and gather and share knowledge and resources making a path easier to navigate for future generations of Latinxs. Participants described intergenerational paving as a method of honoring the opportunities their parents had paved for them through hard work and sacrifice. I described these two concepts further in the following sections and provide data that illustrate these civic activities.

#### **Interrelational Engagement**

Interrelational engagement is a networked system of engagement, informed by Latinx collectivism, that provides knowledge, information, and resources to Latinx students' immediate family, friends, and community. Latinx postsecondary students develop interrelational engagement through a complex system of intersectional identities that heighten empathy and drive forward various forms of beneficence within Latinx

networks. This was exemplified by Alexia's example of how her family volunteers at local homeless shelters and food banks because they understood what it was like to be homeless and hungry:

I feel like them [family] being more engaged in helping people that are in need of a home and hungry, that they're willing to help, because they understand...they were there before; they were in their shoes before. You know, it is understandable. We were hungry at some point too, really hungry, you know? We were on the streets too, like they were at some point, you know? Whether they're Latin, whether they're White, whether they're Asian, whether they're Black, they're still, they're still humans, they're people.

Alexia's comment reflected how her family empathized with people experiencing homelessness they helped at the local shelter because they had experienced homelessness and hunger. Alexia's family helped because of their own lived experiences and the struggles they encountered earlier in their life.

In Dailynn's case, her interrelational engagement was familial. Dailynn recognized that her civic engagement practices did not have to be on a macro-level but could exist in the interrelationships found between family:

When I translate for my grandma, like when I'm doing right, because she was an immigrant, she emigrated from Mexico to here, she doesn't know anything about politics. And so, I'm kind of the first in my family to want to pursue a career in government. I have to sit her down and explain to her, you know, I'm going to [Washington] D.C. for this or this is what I'm doing because she doesn't

understand that. That's part of what I define as civic engagement because it doesn't mean that you have to be protesting and all of that stuff you see, like your White counterparts [are] doing, it's different, and you have to acknowledge that. Dailynn reflected on her role guiding her grandmother through the U.S. political system and how simple and intimate activities, such as translating and explaining U.S. government structures, should be considered acts of civic engagement. Dailynn stated:

I think for me civic engagement [is] just finding a way where you can express, quote/unquote, like a Latino voice and political outcomes, right. So, whether that's like community-based civic activities, or at home, I think that should be counted as civic engagement. My definition is pretty broad.

For Dailynn, using her Latina voice and helping others find ways to express their own advocacy -however small, are all methods to enact civic engagement. Dailynn's view of community-based activities to define civic engagement was reiterated by other participants. Alondra's comment highlighted how civic engagement among Latinxs incorporate much of the culture's focus on family and community:

Yes, I would say for myself and the way that I approached civic engagement is definitely community engagement, just because of our roots and our culture, how we're so family and community based. So, I feel like both in a non-political and political way, just being engaged in the community, whether that be like, just social events, or like, I'm lobbying, like Dailynn said, just that type of stuff. But I feel like for me personally the community is the biggest part of that definition...just participating in it.

Dailynn's emphasis on roots and culture, highlight the collectivism among Latinx communities. In her example, Dailynn emphasized the importance of supporting family, while Alexia's example focused on Latinxs' wider communities, regardless of familial or ethnic membership. Membership in a community mattered to participants because it was the experiences of the collective that were used to inform what types of civic activities participants practiced. Among participants, the community was localized to family and community members that are geographically close and members of identity-driven community networks.

Among participants, family and community facilitated a heightened sense of empathy. Efraín's focus on family increased their empathy for the challenges faced by their family and others and drove Efraín toward an activist identity. Efraín spoke of their solidarity with their mother, sisters, and niece when it comes to reproductive health and access services; services Efraín recognized they would not require. Efraín's empathy for the circumstances of their female relatives encouraged them to show up and support women's reproductive rights; activities that blanket members of other communities outside Efraín's immediate familial networks. Figure 6 and Figure 7, taken by Efraín, documents their activism; activism that was driven by their ability to empathize with the issues facing their female identifying relatives.

Figure 6

*Solidarity*



Figure 7

*A Reminder from my Window*



*Note.* Efraín wrote the following caption for this image: I live down the street from the capitol building. This image represents a lot of intersections meeting in one moment. I am identified by others as a man, and knowing that I, anatomically speaking, am not able to make the choice of going through a pregnancy or not, being present and showing up means I am representing my mom and my sisters and niece [top image]. I see this building from my window every day, now I'll see it and it will be a reminder of the impact I can make by showing up at the doorsteps of policy making spaces [bottom image].

Efraín's ability to empathize moved them toward an activist identity. Efraín recognized the importance of advocating for the rights of others, even if they personally were not impacted by those same issues. In this example, Latinx collectivism is central.

Central to participants' interrelational engagement was family and community. Alexia's photograph, Figure 8, shows her father's concrete work and exemplifies the impact Latinx collectivism has in driving the success of the Latinx networks. Alexia spoke about the challenges her father faced while working to create his own concrete business. Alexia shared:

My dad sold the only car we had. He didn't get much but my family got together, kind of gave him the money, that little bit of money that they had to give to my dad [and] lent [it] to my dad. So, my dad ended up opening a company, it was hard, very, very hard.

Alexia went onto share how her dad, in return, helped other family members open their own companies, once his was established: "he actually ended up helping one of my family members get his company done, kind of went around and I think if it wasn't for

my family and the people, he knew we wouldn't have made this happened." The benefits of Latinxs' cultural trait of collectivism shine in Alexia's example and demonstrate how collectivism extends further into the wider community. Alexia shared how her dad had begun advocating and protecting his houseless neighbors:

A lot of people don't understand, you know, we tend to get a lot of cops by and as you know, my dad, like, my dad, he came from nowhere, from nothing. Got his, you know, his company, those homeless men help him because they want to eat, you know, they need food, money, whatever is the case and it got to the point where my dad has told the cop, the policeman [to] stop coming by, they're not doing anything wrong...my dad is always helping them, always want[s] to help.

Alexia commented on how her father pays it forward by extending the help he received from his family toward the houseless people in his community. Due to Alexia's family's lived experiences facing houselessness, her father empathized and supported others experiencing houselessness in his community.



Figure 8

*Coming Together for Success*



*Note.* Alexia’s photograph of a stamped concrete walkway her father laid down captured her father’s perseverance and represents his family’s support in opening his own concrete company. Alexia during the focus group interview shared: We knew that in the back of it, he was scared. He was so scared. Obviously, I think he still had that in his mind, ‘I’m an immigrant.’ I go ‘dad, everything’s gonna be okay. We have a little bit of rights now’...we needed support, he needed help, he needed someone to kind of say, ‘yeah, you can do this.’

Alexia, in Figure 8, speaks about her father securing U.S. residency, after many years as an undocumented immigrant. Alexia shared that, for her father, gaining U.S. residency did not eliminate feelings of insecurity; however, Alexia and her family pushed her father to take the step toward his goal of opening his own concrete business. In Alexia's case, family was the unifying force that helped spur her father toward entrepreneurship, highlighting, again, the impact of a Latinx culture of collectivism and the role of interrelational engagement. Alexia went on to share how her Latinx culture's collectivist identity created a support system for her father that she does not see within friends of other cultures:

...we help each other grow, we might motivate each other as a family, and I feel like I see that a lot in Mexican culture or Latin culture. I say that because I have friends from different cultures and they're not as united as they don't work; they're not as together as my culture.

Lidia reaffirmed what other participants shared, family and community are at the center of their civic engagement activities. Lidia shared:

Like Sofia mentioned, she is out there, she's a volunteer. I think that's the way we try to be a part of the community; engage the community in different things. We try to be hands on learners or hands on activists. It's different from other communities because we try to get as much attention as we can, seeing as we're very loud in that sense.

Lidia spoke to Latinxs' collectivism, serving as a source of activation that uses family and community networks to seek out knowledge and resources that serve the community.

For Lidia, Latinx's loudness is the exemplification of Latinx individuals' willingness to seek out, through various community networks, resources necessary for individual and community success.

Efraín shared how the relationships within Latinx communities both set them apart from other communities' civic behaviors and informed how Latinxs approached and understood civic engagement. Efraín talked about the barrier members of the Latinx community face and how the relationships between people and Latinxs' commitment to each other help circumvent some of those challenges for the community:

Well, I think specifically here in this country, I think you know, doing it in more than one language definitely has a different kind of impact, because we're not only you know, having to deal with these things in this country, such as you know, oppression and all this but we also have to navigate it in a different language. Showing up to the spaces and sometimes intimidating areas of the world where you don't speak the language is hard. Sometimes that in itself is a barrier to not show up. So, just doing things like that in Spanish and I don't know if it's protecting or showing up for what you call the meetings at the capitol building and sharing your voice in Spanish.

Efraín's comment emphasized the strength of Latinxs when they show up civically, especially when language is a barrier to civic participation. For Latinxs to be present when language may be a barrier demonstrates a commitment to civic engagement. Efraín passionately goes onto share:

...the diaspora of what Latino is, the different experiences, the different voices, the different settings, the different cultures that kind of came together here in this country have different Spanish speakers or different communities that otherwise kind of would not be grouped together. We kind of, you know, get together, and unite and speak up for our values...we're very family oriented, which I think provides a bigger sense of justice for us.

Efraín's emphasis, in the previous excerpt and echoed among all participants, was the collectivist nature of Latinx communities, that although unique, diverse, and not a monolithic entity, come together under the umbrella of Latinx due to the diaspora of the community within the United States. Participants' focus on family and community was overwhelming and the idea of honoring the role Latinx parents played in providing opportunities in a new country drove many of their civic behaviors. Participants spoke about their responsibility and obligation to pay it forward for others, just like their parents had done for them by immigrating to a new country and creating easier paths for future generations to follow. Participants' sense of duty to give back helps Latinxs overcome structural barriers, such as English as the dominant language, and encourages Latinx individuals to civically engage in ways that support their families and communities.

Participants exemplified how Latinxs' culture of collectivism is operationalized through the act of interrelational engagement. Activities such as those by Alexia's family encouraging her father's entrepreneurship, which he later reciprocated among the houseless in his community, to Dailynn's civic activity of translating and explaining U.S. politics to her grandmother so she can be engaged in the country's politic, and Efraín,

using their ability to empathize, stand in solidarity, and advocate for women's reproductive rights are all examples of how a collectivist culture can lead to a strong civic identity.

### **Intergenerational Paving**

Participants described how their civic behaviors paved the way for future generations, just like their parents and family had done for them. Preparing the way, for participants, meant gathering knowledge and resources they would then share with others to make their journey easier than the one they had experienced. Participants recognized the sacrifices and hard work of their parents and felt it was their responsibility to pave the way for future generations to have expanded opportunities. I term this concept intergenerational paving and define it as the sense of responsibility and accompanying actions Latinx postsecondary students engage in to create, open, and expand opportunities for future generations, just as those before them did. In the single focus group interview, participants emphasized the importance of collectivism to their identity as Latinxs, and how it translated into a sense of responsibility or duty to engage in activities that support current and future family and community networks. I, therefore, intentionally present the word responsibility, not as something that has to be done, but to highlight participants' pride in being part of a culture with a strong commitment to family and community and whose actions serve to maintain strong community ties.

Several participants spoke to the sacrifices and hard work their parents and family endured to give them the opportunities they now enjoyed and how they were taking these opportunities and gathering knowledge and resources to make the journey, whether

navigating the U.S. political system, opening companies, or navigating higher education, easier for other family members, friends, and the wider Latinx community. Lupita talked about the future and why she was civically engaged. Lupita stated:

I think about what I thought about what defined civic engagement, I thought, ‘why are we doing it?’ I thought about the why and for me, it was just for future generations for, you know, for our children, or our nieces and nephews, or, you know, people like that who make who is going to make this world turn. What are we going to leave them, you know...these problems that if we don’t fix them now, then they’re going to have to fix them and deal with them and it would probably be much worse in the future? So, I think for me, the reason for civic engagement is for, you know, just for ourselves, and more importantly for the future generations.

Lupita’s image, Figure 9, which she shared with other participants, during the single focus group interview, is a picture of her and her niece. Lupita shared that the image captured how she viewed civic engagement as the action that would support and benefit future generations of Latinxs, such as her niece.

Figure 9

*Guiding and Preparing Future Generations*



*Note.* Lupita shared this image of herself with her niece. When sharing with participants, Lupita spoke about her role preparing a path for future generations, for her and her community's children, to succeed.

Participants felt responsible for expanding opportunities they enjoyed, such as a postsecondary education, to future generations of family, friends, their future children, and other Latinxs to come. Sofia's image, Figure 10, represented to her the importance of paving the way for future generations and the resiliency of her community. Sofia viewed

her civic engagement as the ability to work together to promote positive changes that would allow future generations of Latinxs to prosper.

Figure 10

*Heart*



*Note.* Sofia captioned the image as: This picture represents civic engagement to me because [it] is a collaborative work that emphasizes change for the next generation. In this picture you see a brown hand holding a heart and in the middle is a face of a kid. To me the hands represent working together to promote change and is done from the bottom of [the] heart. This work is voluntary because we know the biggest reward is to see the next generation prosper, like the kid represents hope and resilience.



A thread woven throughout the participants' discussion, during the single focus group interview, was the conflict between the collectivist, family-oriented behaviors of the Latinx community, and the individualism impressed upon them by U.S. society. Efraín succinctly shared why collectivism and family centeredness informed much of the intergenerational paving activities participants spoke to during the interview:

We live in such a society where we're so conditioned, especially in the American side of our culture, of our biculturalism, to be more individualistic. More about me, more about the individual, and that's where sometimes these mashups for people that our multicultural kind of, you know, kind of come into clashes, and kind of prioritizing that family orientation definitely feeds into how I show up and making it more about everyone, and me, not just because of my issues. Thinking about my little nephew, you know, he just turned nine, and he's biracial. He's Black and he's Mexican. He's a male and like thinking about him, in this political environment...thinking about our families, I think, putting that as the forefront definitely is a form, of kind of giving the middle finger to society and being like, 'Yo, we are family oriented, and no matter what this opposing culture says about being individuals and you know, a capitalistic society and consume, consume, consume, we're still like, together despite all of these things.

Efraín's comment encapsulated the family and community-focused approach participants took when sharing how they defined civic engagement and the civic behaviors they believed should be seen as civic engagement activities. Importantly, identity and culture

played a significant role in how participants in the study defined and enacted their civic engagement.

Intergenerational paving is both an act of commitment and responsibility to community and an act of resistance to the United States' dominant upholding of individualism. Efraín, Lupita, and Sofia's comments highlighted how Latinx's are engaging in a dual use of intergenerational paving. The first use of intergenerational paving is to facilitate an easier path for future Latinx generations, and the second, to resist the U.S.' individualist orientation. Latinx postsecondary students, by intergenerational paving, are enacting their right to be and develop different civic practices and behaviors.

### **The Role of Identity on Civic Engagement Behaviors and Practices**

Participants saw how interrelated the role identity played in their civic behaviors and practices. Participants used their intersectional identities to behave and engage in activities that served as acts of solidarity for both the communities they represented and other marginalized groups. Secondly, participants spoke about their identities being invisible, visible, and hyper visible depending on the situation and how experiences with these forms of visibility/invisibility informed many of their civic activities and behaviors. Embedded within these forms of visibility was the underlying act of participants using their bodies as political statements. Participants used their physical bodies as a form of civic engagement by utilizing their presence as activism and resistance amid the contentious sociopolitical environments placed upon them based on their identities by the U.S. government.

## **Intersectionality as an Act of Solidarity**

Participants recognized they were interweaving multiple and equally important identities, whether they were based on racial/ethnic membership, immigrant status, a queer/gay identity, parenthood, online student, working-class, or first- and second-generation college student. Participant identities were fluid, meaning that their identities could shift or be intersectional based on circumstance. For example, Sofia used her undocumented identity to educate eligible voters on matters that affected the undocumented community, then leveraged her identity as a parent to organize parent coalition groups to advocate for their children's education. For Sofia, her identity as an undocumented parent informed her civic activities and the types of information and resources, she collected to then share out widely with the communities (the undocumented community and parent coalitions) she supported through her volunteerism.

Participants inter wove different identities together to inform the types of knowledge and resources they collected and shared with the communities representing their most salient identity at the time. Participants' identities also informed the activities they engaged in and heightened empathy for the struggle of others, thus driving the importance of helping people. Sofia highlighted how helping others can also have a secondary effect of helping oneself. Sofia shared: "it's not just getting involved but it's because it was a benefit to helping others." Sofia shared that she often cannot get paid for some of the community work she does due to her undocumented status but that she found other benefits from volunteering. Sofia stated: "I have learned in the past that the volunteer[ing] that I have done has a greater price, which is learning, connecting, getting

resources, going to those protests...I register people to vote, and I can't even vote.”

Sofia's direct action, although not at the polls, exists in the information and resources she shares with her community. Sofia's identity as an undocumented immigrant informed the types of changes she wants to see in her community, and although she cannot vote directly for those changes she would like to see, she can help those that can vote understand the impact of their vote on undocumented, Latinx, and parent communities.

Sofia stated:

I was hoping to get to this act because the benefit is [to] speak about things that need to be changed in our country, a country that I'm part of, that was the way I was speaking for them to [understand] you're voting for both of us. I couldn't vote but they could vote for both of us.

Similarly, Nallely reflected on how her own experiences with marginalization and her socio-economic status allowed her to stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups:

I do remember when like, Black Lives Matter, and stuff like that was happening, I do remember getting close to or going to those events as well and seeing a lot of Hispanic people there as well. In a way, you know, we understood what it feels like to be targeted as well, even if it's different. I do think that even though it's different, we can all come together to an agreeable point of, 'okay, we understand what this feels like, let's try to work towards something better' because at the end of the day, the problems that I pointed out, for example, all of us, most of us [are] coming from poor families, you know, not just Hispanic people face that, like

everybody faces that...but in a way, we all do it differently within our own communities.

Nallely's solidarity with Black Lives Matter was informed by her ability to empathize with the struggle of other communities. Efraín succinctly articulated how identity played a key role in their civic and community work and the solidarity that emerged from being able to empathize with the struggle of others:

Everything that I do has definitely been driven by who I am as an individual with my many identities intersecting and overlapping. It definitely influences everything from how I live, and you know, the work that I do and how I share it with the community. One thing specifically that I have become more likely to be aware of and that I am more proud of sharing and kind of emphasizing within the communities that I'm in is that I am an immigrant. I'm undocumented and I am Mexican. I embrace my mestizness, that I am mestizo and that I'm a Spanish speaker but that I definitely am learning more of the identities that were kind of erased or that don't, that didn't make it to me being knowledgeable of my maybe Indigenous background. So those are things that I'm definitely using as fuel to keep influencing how I do the community work that I do.

Participants' ability to acknowledge their intersecting identities and recognize how those identities are marginalized informed their civic work and increased their ability to empathize to a greater extent with other communities.

### **Invisibility, Visibility, Hypervisibility, and the Issue of Legitimacy**

Participants spoke about the fluidity by which they were invisible, visible, and hyper visible in physical spaces and in civic engagement literature. Participant's Latinx identity was racialized and politicized in certain spaces drawing attention to Latinxs in certain situations, while offering Latinxs invisibility in others. In this section, I interrogate each theme and how invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility bring up issues of legitimacy, regarding whose civic engagement activities are seen as valid.

### **Invisibility and the Issue of Legitimacy**

When it came to the role identity played on the civic contributions of Latinxs, several participants spoke to the invisibility of Latinx's civic engagement practices and contributions and the process by which their contributions had been delegitimized. Participants spoke to the sacrifices that Latinx individuals must make to practice civic engagement and how sacrifices, such as long working hours in laborious jobs, are often invisible to those outside the Latinx community. Elisa spoke of those sacrifices and shared:

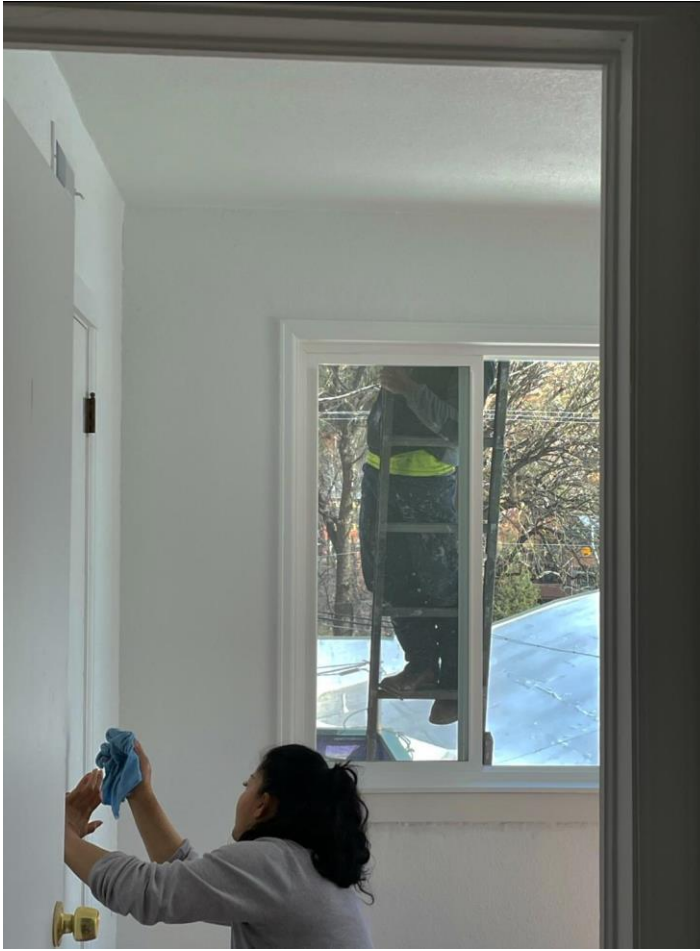
I think it's different from other groups because we're limited on what we could practice just because we're not wealthy like that. So, I feel like it really has to take a lot of sacrifice because you know, we had to take time off from work. And like me, I don't mean to miss so many things, because I'm always working, and I feel terrible, but like, I gotta get these bills paid, though. I wish I didn't, but I feel like what we do is like, a lot more impactful because of that, you know, restriction. When we're there, we're really there, we're helping each other out and we're providing resources as much as possible. I feel like that's really different from

what other people do. I guess, I don't know, I need to like, I guess, do more research on what others do.

Although Elisa could not describe how other groups practice civic engagement differently, she articulated the challenges that surround Latinx communities on their quest to practice their civic duty. For Elisa, civic engagement is easier to enact if you have resources available to participate, and she also emphasized that when Latinx's practice civic engagement, it is more meaningful and has greater impact. Similarly, Nallely's image, Figure 11, documents her working-class background and highlighted how individuals are working toward their goals, but similarly, work can place time and resource restrictions on their ability to engage. Resource scarcity means that Latinx individuals must be judicious in their civic activities but are therefore more invested in their civic activities.

Figure 11

*Working Together Toward Our Goals*



*Note.* Nallely, during the focus group interview, described her job cleaning houses and the importance of seeing how Latinxs are working toward their goals, even if they are often invisible within society, these individuals are working to sustain their families or towards something [a goal].

The invisibility of some of the work that Latinx communities do, such as political activism, leads Latinxs to not see their political engagement as a valid form of civic engagement. Additionally, for some, the inability to vote increased the invisibility of Latinxs in the political space. Belen highlighted this point below:



I think we, as Latinos, like, or immigrants, in my case, we tend to have this concept, but like, wrong or misconception, because when I first like, started reading for this project and stuff, I questioned myself if I really knew what civic engagement was, what it means to, like practice it in this country. I think for us, Latinos, we tend to not consider things we do enough to be civic engagement because we tend to consider other White folks in like, ‘oh, they think that it’s voting and stuff’ and some of us, we’re not able to do it, so we think that it’s not civic engagement enough. So, we tend to, like, minimize other things that we do for example sharing or finding resources for others to help them.

Participants expressed confusion about whose civic engagement activities were considered legitimate. Dailynn spoke to where this confusion and issue of legitimization emerged from and how Whiteness factored into that confusion:

I think it’s just; it was taught in a lens of just ‘these White people are doing it,’ right? It was never like, you would see a Latino going in, it was never that it was just like your White male counterparts, specifically, going out and being in the political sphere, like that’ what it was, and so anything behind closed doors, right, like the picket line, like all that stuff that my grandparents did [Chicano rights movement], it was because they didn’t fit within like that, like White scope of civic engagement. I never thought that it could be that [civic engagement] if that makes sense. I mean, it was taught through a lens of like, you know, only White people could do that. You couldn’t have like these marginalized, you know, impoverished communities doing the same thing and make it count as that.

Dailynn went onto describe how the centering of Whiteness within civic engagement puts into play issues of legitimacy and whose civic engagement activities count in the larger civic engagement field:

Well, I think a big part of it too, is just like, what we see and what's projected onto us as civic engagement. As a Latino community, we try to morph into that definition of what civic engagement means to everybody else, right? We can't just like, although we try and do it naturally, try to morph into that definition of civic engagement. That way, we feel like it counts as what other people see it as [civic engagement] ...I think, most definitely, one thing to point out is just, we tried to morph into that definition of civic engagement, where practically we don't even align with any of that if that makes sense.

Although issues of invisibility and legitimacy were interwoven with racial and ethnic identity, the same concepts of invisibility and legitimacy informed how Latinxs understood their civic behaviors. Alondra spoke about how Latinx civic engagement practices are informed by Latinxs' collectivist culture and highlighted the importance of community in the Latinx context:

Can I just add something? I like to say that, like everybody's talking about community. I think that's super important because I think that's honestly, where it stems from to be able to be civically engaged, because I don't think you know...I don't see my grandma going out and protesting by herself. I mean, a lot of people do that, but I think once you build that community, then that's where it stems from to be able to be politically active, right? So, I think that's something that we

need to understand is that without community, you can't have civic engagement within the scope of Latinos, that's what I'm getting towards.

In the quote above, Alondra legitimates the community driven civic engagement practices of Latinxs; a practice that Alondra articulated as missing within the larger civic engagement conversation.

Several participants reiterated the importance of community to the civic engagement behaviors of Latinxs and how small and incremental civic activities should also be counted as civic engagement. Nallely spoke about her work at a nonprofit whose motto "La Cultura Cura" highlights the importance of using culture to heal the needs of the community. Nallely shared that even small acts go a long way within the Latinx community. Nallely stated:

...in small things like the community coming together to try to make a change, even if it's a small one...nothing crazy, nothing too big, and maybe sometimes not even seen from other [people's] perspective [but] still big enough for us, or for someone, even if it's not like in the grand scheme of things.

Participants regarded the invisibility of the civic contributions made by Latinxs as a barrier facing the legitimization of the civic activities of Latinx individuals and the Latinx community.

Daylenn, Alondra, Elisa, and Nallely all spoke to how Latinxs' civic engagement practices are delegitimized and thus are rendered invisible against dominant forms of civic engagement. Participants had a difficult time articulating what dominant forms of civic engagement were, yet participants articulated not having their community-focused

civic engagement practices recognized in the larger civic discourse as a primary issue. For participants, omission of the impact of their community driven civic activities in the broader civic engagement discourse made participants feel invisible. Participants spoke to the importance of community as the guiding force behind their civic engagement behaviors and emphasized the importance of Latinx collectivism to their civic engagement practices and behaviors.

### **Visibility**

Participants felt that the invisibility of their civic contributions were applied externally by non-Latinx individuals. Several participants spoke about how they counteracted the invisibility applied to their civic engagement activities and behaviors. Dailynn resisted this invisibility by stating that “when everybody talks about civic engagement, and you know, you have this idea ingrained of like, you have to be out there advocating and protesting, no, you don’t have to.” Latinxs’ civic engagement activities were visible but harder to identify as civic engagement within the Latinx community because they were considered part of everyday life. Latinxs’ civic activities and their everyday life actions were indistinct. Nallely commented on how she “had a lot of those moments where I was like, I couldn’t distinguish, is this just our everyday, Hispanic life, or is this like engagement?” Dailynn described how there are other methods of engaging civically that are not as visible and they can come with challenges for Latinx communities but that it does not deter Latinxs from civic engagement. For participants, the discrimination and marginalization of their Latinx identity meant that combatting systems of oppression was an everyday civic engagement activity. Alondra spoke to the

challenges Latinxs face just for the right to vote and how they are punished for attempting to do what is upheld for White individuals:

When you think of civic engagement before, I'm learning more about it, it's just like voting and like, maybe protesting and again, it's like your White counterparts [doing it]. And as we've seen before, it's usually, BIPOC that are, I guess, um, what's the word? Castigados for it. They're [BIPOC] are the ones that have to pay the price, even though they're at the frontlines...they're the ones being punished.

Alondra reflected on how Latinxs' civic engagement activities are part of their everyday lives. For Alondra, Latinxs are constantly remediating the discrimination and marginalization they face, and part of that remediation includes making Latinxs visible in different spaces to meet their needs.

Latinxs are making themselves visible in different spaces in both political and non-political ways to reclaim their power and as remediation for their historical marginalization. For Dailynn, resisting Latinx marginalization meant bringing Latina women into spaces of power, specifically the political space. In Figure 12, Dailynn is standing on the steps of the state's capitol with a group of Latina students who were learning about the lobbying and advocacy process.

Figure 12

*Preparing the Next Generation*



Figure 13

*Communicating our Needs*



*Note.* Dailynn is photographed [top image] with Latina girls between the ages of 14 to 16 years of age, a majority of who did not speak English, attending *Latino Advocacy Day* at the state capitol. Dailynn stated that the [top image] image: was something that brought almost every Latino and the community together to be able to go and lobby for bills to get passed that would help the Latino community. In the second image, Dailynn shared how the same group of women traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby in their senator's office with a program called, *Latinas Increasing Political Strength*, and that although the interaction was intimidating, it was a great way to build: that confidence to be able to go and speak to, you know, the staff assistant of their senator. Dailynn stated: It was really hard to be able to talk in front of this staff assistant in D.C. where they're very busy and they make time to hear us, and this picture reminds me it wasn't an easy conversation. She was struggling to understand the majority of girls that were speaking but they were trying; they want to be politically involved but they just don't speak that very good English.

Dailynn's photographs and comments highlighted how Latinxs are both hyper visible and invisible in spaces of power by virtue of their historical underrepresentation. In her images, Dailynn captured how the Latina girls' physical presence in D.C. at their senator's government office heightened their visibility but also displayed the invisibility Latinxs experience. Latinxs experience invisibility and visibility as a duality. Dailynn's images highlighted how Latinxs are reclaiming power by entering and making their presence and needs known and demonstrating Latinx agency and resistance, thus moving Latinx from invisibility to visibility. In Figure 13, Dailynn shared how their senator's staffer struggled to communicate with the Latinas in the room due to language barriers. Language barriers did not stop the Latina women from enacting their agency and communicating their needs to their senator. Dailynn's photographs documented how

Latinxs visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility fluctuated based on the setting and context.

Elisa reflected on how her art resists and rebuffs the invisibility that surrounds the struggles of the queer Latinx community. Elisa used art activism to uplift the lived experiences and challenges of queer Latinxs by making visible what has been invisible.

Figure 14

*I Practice Civic Engagement by...*



*Note.* Elisa captioned this image as: I use art as a tool to create change and educate. This picture is of a recent project I did that was an installation and interaction piece. I took the tradition of eating pan dulce and drinking café around people close to you, as I did all my childhood and on. I took this opportunity to have my classmates join me in this tradition while conversing about difficult topics, as I laid out queer Latinx history, article all over the table for them to read. My classmates learned a lot from this interaction and led them to be open, vulnerable, and appreciate our cultures.



Elisa stated how the art installation in Figure 14 was perceived by her peers:

Everybody else was like, well, we didn't know this, you know, was going on within the community, or you know, with everything, they just, they had no idea until I brought it to their attention, and they were really surprised. It got them appreciating our parts of the culture and also our struggles too, that you know, I guess it wasn't visible to them, but I'm like, 'no, we're struggling here. We're trying to maintain our rights and maintain, you know, just a good way of living.

By using art, Elisa was able to open dialogue on issues of importance to her and make visible the challenges and struggles queer identifying Latinxs face. For Elisa, art is an instrument for activism because art can convey messages and stories that have been invisible and bring them to the forefront. Elisa and Dailynn underscored how Latinx individuals are, in different ways, actively elevating the Latinx community by making their identity visible in spaces where Latinxs have been historically excluded or invisible.

### **Hypervisibility**

Participants spoke to the interrelated relationship between visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility they experienced based on their Latinx identity. In Nallely's case, she spoke and described how her visibility was magnified within jobs because of her Latina and immigrant identity. Nallely stated: "I wouldn't be in those spaces if I wasn't Latina, especially being an immigrant myself. I really don't see myself having been like a housekeeper or working construction myself if I wasn't an immigrant." Nallely commented on an image taken and shared by Alondra showing the cultural spaces Latinxs are often both invisible and hyper visible in because they have not been strongly

represented in those spaces in the past. Alondra shared that museums are not representative of Latinxs because of the disparities and inequalities preventing Latinxs from visiting such spaces. Alondra's image, Figure 15, is of a museum hall where she volunteers. Alondra, in her volunteer work, is actively working to redress the underrepresentation of Latinxs in cultural spaces. In the single focus group interview, Nallely reflected on Alondra's image and shared with the group: "Honestly, you're being Latino in general, you don't find yourself in those spaces, unless your part of that, as well as like, the pictures that Alondra shared, I really wouldn't relate to those pictures." Nallely, through her own comments, confirmed Alondra's observations of the low representation of Latinxs in cultural spaces like museums.

Figure 15

*Hypervisibility in Cultural Spaces*



*Note.* Alondra captioned this image as: I really enjoy both visiting and volunteering at cultural institutions such as the art museum, nature, and science museum of, etc., to learn about certain aspects of culture and to teach others along the way. Historically, most visitors of those institutions are not BIPOC and that is because of the disparity of income, systemic racism, and other inequalities that create that barrier. Therefore, going to those places as a woman of color, in both guest and volunteer positions, have made an impact for myself and my family. Hopefully,

that impact will multiply and encourage other BIPOC families to visit those types of places more and to feel more comfortable in their visit.

When Latinxs enter physical spaces, such as the cultural spaces Alondra captured in her image, they become hyper visible. Latinxs stand out because they have been historically underrepresented in these spaces. Alondra's work attempts to normalize Latinx representation in cultural spaces. Nallely went on to share that the work of the Latinx community, such as that of Alondra's volunteerism to increase Latinx representation in cultural spaces, help guide Latinxs to specific opportunities. Nallely stated: "I will just say that being Latina, I find myself in special and specific opportunities and locations, just because of my background and because of the community that leads me to be there."

Latinxs are hyper visible in social and political spaces, such as museums, state legislative, and political settings, because of their historical underrepresentation, thus, when Latinxs enter certain spaces, their presence becomes hyper visible. Nallely recognized Alondra's work as important for developing and making paths available for Latinxs to enter spaces they have historically been excluded and underrepresented from in the past. Nallely's comment elevates how intergenerational paving can also apply to current challenges and that paving access does not necessarily apply to generations but current Latinx individuals. When Latinxs enter spaces where they have been historically excluded, Latinx individuals are using their bodies as a political statement and space of resistance. Latinx hypervisibility is a form of activism because it resists and combats Latinx invisibility.

## **Latinx Bodies as Political Statements and Places of Resistance**

Participants widely believed that culture is a political statement, and many spoke to their physical bodies and existence being a political act. The marginalization and underrepresentation that Latinxs experience through their invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility led participants to understand their Latinx culture and their bodies as spaces of resistance and perseverance. Elisa highlighted how Latinx history is often invisible and that reclaiming, sharing it, and being vocal about your identity is an act of resistance and a civic activity. Elisa shared a story about queer Latinx history through the story of the “Dance of the 41” where 41 men, in Mexico, were arrested and criminalized for participating in what was viewed as gay activity. Elisa shared:

...we’re still experiencing these hardships. We’re not great just yet because we’re still experiencing police brutality and still facing discrimination. We’re still facing racism and all that stuff and just me being loud and open about everything, I feel like that’s my way of practicing, it is, like, not hiding my culture, not hiding who I am in any way, shape, or form.

Elisa regarded being vocal, sharing her story and culture, and speaking about her queer Latina identity as a form of resistance. Elisa framed her physical presence as a political statement – that queer Latinxs are still here.

Symbols, such as that of the serape Dailynn is wearing in Figure 16, are representative of the resistance and perseverance of Latinxs and act as political statements. Dailynn spoke to the importance of this image by sharing the significance the serape had to her grandparents. Dailynn’s grandparents saw the serape as a metaphor of

their efforts to travel to the United States and the civic work they engaged in to provide their children opportunities.

Figure 16

*Embodiment of Perseverance*



*Note.* Dailynn shared that this picture of her with her grandparents was: where Universidad de la Gente kind of acknowledged their Latino [students], those who were graduating...I never knew the value of a serape. I didn't feel like I was able to, you know, I feel I didn't need to be there just because I'm not from Mexico, but it meant a lot to my grandparents. They wanted me to go, like this is important, you need to represent where you're coming from...I never understood the gravity of that...my grandma's like, 'make sure that you can see your serape' and I was like,

‘okay, okay, grandma, hear you.’ Yeah, it was just something that meant a lot to them, and I never understood why.

Dailynn shared how, for her family, her college graduation honored the sacrifices and challenging work her grandparents did by immigrating to the United States, as worth it.

The serape was representative of her Latinx family’s history. Dailynn stated:

So, my grandma was just telling me that although my mom graduated, so I’m not first-generation, I’m second-generation, but to see everything that they did, like kind of pay off and to see their granddaughter, their first granddaughter graduates and to be able to represent them, that’s a way of me showing them it was possible and that it was worth it. It was very emotional for them to be able to tell me, but I never knew that. I just thought it was like, ‘okay, yes, like I’m Hispanic, this is just a [serape] representation, but no, [not] to them. It was like all our effort that we did, you know, crossing the border and coming over here and then you know your mom had you at 19, like everything was worth it and to represent that, it means a lot to us.

The serape, in this context, has dual meaning. The first meaning is of the serape as a signal of pride associated with membership in a cultural group, and secondly, as a physical manifestation of success. Dailynn’s physical presence on a university campus, wearing the serape with her graduation regalia, embodied her own success, that of her grandparents, and of the wider Latinx community.

Similarly, Belen shared how Latinxs have had to reclaim their cultural heritage because of the United States’ attempt to make Latinx culture invisible. Belen, through her

photograph of Aztec dancers, Figure 17, taken at a cultural event in the largely Latinx neighborhood of the city in which this study was conducted, displayed the reclamation of cultural heritages. Belen shared how the lead dancer spoke to his experience with marginalization in the United States because of his culture. Belen stated:

I remember that when they started dancing, one of the people that was dancing...he was explaining to us that no human is illegal and stuff. He was telling us that when he was young, he wasn't allowed to dance because [it] was something that you wouldn't be proud of but when he grew up, he finds a group and it was new people and [they] start to teach you your culture and that you should be engaged with the community. I think it was because it was in those days when you weren't supposed to be proud of your Mexican [heritage] or if you're here [United States] because you're wanting to be better than that.

Belen described how Latinxs have historically been penalized for being proud of their culture and that efforts are now being taken by Latinxs to reclaim heritage lost due to assimilation.



Figure 17

*Celebrating Culture*



*Note.* Belen captioned this photo as: The photo reflects what it means to be Latina/o, Hispanic, Chicano/a, Mexicana/o, [it] means the fact that having immigrated to a new country but not forgetting the roots and the history that comes with us.

Latinxs are using their identity, histories, culture, stories, and bodies as spaces of resistance and as political statements. Latinx postsecondary students, by making visible the invisibility of Latinx culture and history, like in Elisa's story of the *Dance of the 41*, Dailynn's serape as a physical representation of success that honors the sacrifices and

demonstrate the perseverance of Latinx families, and the reclamation of Latinx culture and history are all ways in which Latinxs are resisting invisibility and making political statements.

### **Creating Spaces of Support for Latinx Students at HSIs**

Noticeable among participants' reflections on the practices his administrators should establish to support their Latinx student's civic engagement development was the importance of seeing these students for who they are and being accepting of the complex identities they own. Participants made clear that their identities and their relationship to U.S. society did not disappear once on the college campus; these identities and environments external to the college campus follow students into the classroom and onto campus. Participants emphasized the importance of HSIs administrators, faculty, and staff to stand in solidarity and engage in action to support their student populations, especially those that are marginalized within U.S. society. Additionally, participants spoke about the importance of college being the impetus for many of their civic behaviors and activities – behaviors and activities that were not nurtured during their K-12 education because of the lack of Latinx representation honoring their civic contributions to U.S. society. HSIs that educate and provide opportunities for their students to see their community's civic contributions and behaviors were a driving factor in awakening and expanding participants' civic development. In the following sections, I present data that led to the emergence of these findings.

### **See Us and Support Us**

Faculty and staff at Universidad de la Gente played a significant role in the success of many of the participants in this study, half of which graduated during the period of this study. Participants spoke to the ability of Universidad de la Gente faculty members and staff seeing them holistically, as complex individuals, whose lives are affected by the sociopolitical environment in which they exist. Elisa spoke to a dissimilar experience at a community college in Texas where she had to hide aspects of her identity:

Like you just had to hide who you are because it's a lot of racism down back home in Texas with racism and homophobia. I went to Tarrant Community College, to get my associates, I just didn't interact with anybody. I wasn't engaged. I just kind of went and left, you know, went to school, went home. I didn't bother looking at any events or anything because there weren't that many, it was not really a campus.

When asked how her experience at Universidad de la Gente was different from her experience in Texas, Elisa stated:

I feel safe, I will say for the emotional, emotionally, one, because every teacher I've had ha[ve] been really good teachers, they have been great instructors. The teachers I've had helped me push myself and to be expressive in an authentic way, where they're not judging you, you know. I could talk about my culture, they're not like scoffing or something about it, or rolling their eyes or anything; they're genuinely interested. There's so much like, opportunities, so many, like I said, so many events that I see happen on Universidad de la Gente that's like

really inclusive. So that's where I'm like, 'okay, I'm safe here. I don't have to watch my back or something.

Universidad de la Gente's administration, faculty, and staffs' ability to create a culturally welcoming campus and establishment of a community presence was important to students' physical and mental well-being. Sofia shared how Universidad de la Gente invited famous Latinx speakers that could connect with Latinx students. One example Sofia provided was Universidad de la Gente hosting actress Diane Guerrero from *Orange is the New Black*, who spoke on her experience as a Latinx woman whose parents were deported when she 14 years of age. Lidia shared how she saw Universidad de la Gente in her community through posters posted in Spanish in grocery stores, something she commented other postsecondary institutions were not doing. Lidia shared how she felt pride telling people she attends Universidad de la Gente. Lidia shared: "oh, I'm in college, that's the college that I go to, the one that's on the poster, that's where I go." Universidad de la Gente administration's acknowledgement of its diversity and willingness to reach out into diverse communities made participants feel seen.

Dailynn shared: "I think Universidad de la Gente does a really great job on saying, 'we're very diverse, we have a diverse student population,'" however, Dailynn also points out that Universidad de la Gente faculty members still has work to do to uplift the civic contributions of Latinxs. Dailynn shared a conversation she had with an Universidad de la Gente instructor on the Eurocentricity of the curriculum:

Because when you teach, you know a diverse population of students or whoever you're teaching, you need to acknowledge where your perspective [is] and what

you're teaching us. I learned that my communication's professor last semester was like, 'I'm teaching you through a western male, you know, type of lens, like I recognize that I'm, you know, I can't teach you through what you guys have learned.' And so, I think that just acknowledging that there's new forms of engagement in civil society and learning how your students can be involved in that, is a part that's missing from Universidad de la Gente, aside from all the great programs and events that they throw, because you can attend them, and you still wouldn't know what civic engagement means.

The previous quote highlighted an area of opportunity for Universidad de la Gente faculty members to build a curriculum that identifies and incorporates the contributions of its diverse student populations.

Student success was driven in part by Universidad de la Gente administration's ability to recognize and understand how students' identities impacted their college experience. Nallely shared:

Exactly, because even though we are Latino, you could be a citizen and that's a completely different situation from being undocumented, or you could have very good English skill, or you cannot, and it really affects your way that you get your education in school. It's hard to not really know those advanced vocabulary words when you get into college, like you're not going to have the same essays as the rest.

Participants spoke, at length, about the role of faculty members acknowledging students' identities and the challenges students faced in and out of the classroom. Faculty members

who saw and were able to get to know their students were able to guide their students toward institutional resources and support services. Belen shared how, although her classes were small and not culturally diverse, faculty members were prompt to offer her support in areas she was struggling in such as her English. Belen shared:

I haven't experimented a lot in [the] classroom because the majority of my classes are small or I'm the only Hispanic or Latino there but I think it has helped me a lot in the way that it's like...I remember in one class, I was struggling with my English and I remember that the teacher was like, 'hey, okay, you don't have to like worry about it because at the end of the day many of us have an accent.' I think that connected [with] me. And then he told me about our writing center that was like, especially for students that English is their second language. I think just the action of him giving that information to me was some sort of way of engagement because he saw me like kind of struggling but he was like, 'hey, you don't have to worry about it, instead you can like work on it.'

When asked what Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff could actively do to support their Latinx students' civic development, Nallely shared, "I would just say, keep an open mind, be understanding and that will really help us and encourage us to continue moving forward." When asked what Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff could do to actively support their Latinx students, Elisa shared that they feel "Universidad de la Gente helps a lot" and felt there were many opportunities. Elisa found the amount of opportunities overwhelming. Elisa shared:

...oh, my goodness, I'm missing out on everything because I don't even know where to start. You know, there's flyers for so many types of events. Plus, they're actually really, really good with also keeping our community safe. Like I said, I feel safe at Universidad de la Gente.

Elisa went on to share how a faculty member helped support her outside the classroom by connecting her to the Gender, Women, and Sexuality department so she could learn about and attend events supporting various student populations. Elisa appreciated the gesture but felt annoyed because although she wanted to participate, work had to take priority. Elisa shared: "as soon as I'm done with school, I have to go to work, but I really appreciate her giving me these, you know, chances to go to all these events."

Lupita reinforced Elisa's observations about Universidad de la Gente, as a campus, offering many opportunities to get engaged on campus. Lupita shared: "There were a lot of events happening on campus...it was basically clubs and organizations, like, 'hey, come join this club' or just trying to spread the work or awareness of their club." Lupita in her image, Figure 18 and Figure 19, captured a club and organization resource fair put on by Universidad de la Gente administrators and staff.

Figure 18

*Helping Students*





Figure 19

*Connecting with Resources, Student Groups, and Services*



*Note.* Lupita captioned this image by stating: ...a common problem for first-generation students is that there's really no guidance. Every student is on their own...this picture represents reaching out to students and... proposing a possible solution to uprising first gen students who may be confused, or stuck, and organizations that reach out to students are a big help.

Lupita shared that a challenge for first-generation students, like herself, is the limited help available for navigating postsecondary institutions. Lupita shared how she believes that institutions who offer support to students, informed by an understanding of their students' identities, are a valuable resource and service. Activities such as faculty

members connecting students to and sharing institutional resources, provided opportunities for students to join and engage in on- and off-campus organizations, and were seen as positive activities by Universidad de la Gente faculty members. Lupita exemplified the importance of faculty members providing a holistic approach to Latinx student's educational experience that would then be the foundation for a strong civically engaged student. Participants, in this study, viewed their success as a civic activity, hence for them academic success was a civic engagement practice. Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff supporting participant's academic success was regarded by participants as the institution civically supporting Latinx students.

Participants saw Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff supporting their civic engagement development by seeing them for who they were and supporting their myriad identities. Participants spoke of their civic engagement identity developing further at Universidad de la Gente because the institution was willing to welcome their Latinx and intersecting identities onto the campus. Additionally, participants saw Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff providing both the academic and non-academic support for them to be successful. Since participants defined civic engagement as KRS, and academic success, Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staffs' ability to provide access to resources and knowledge helped Latinx students enact their civic engagement activities. Participants also viewed Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staffs' ability to help them achieve

their academic goals as supporting their civic engagement activities because their success was part of how participants conceptualized a civically engaged identity.

### **Stand in Solidarity with Us**

A major theme that emerged during the focus group interview was Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staffs' solidarity with its undocumented and Latinx students. Many participants identified as undocumented or *DACAmented* individuals or had mixed-status families. Participants spoke extensively about Universidad de la Gente faculty members and staff seeing them and understanding the challenges they faced, as well as about the resources Universidad de la Gente administrators had made available to support them. Participants, in this study, spoke about programs like Universidad de la Gente's Immigrant Services Program (ISP), the Dreamer Emergency Fund, the Gender, Women, and Sexualities department, and the Latinx graduation ceremony as being impactful to participant's lives and those of their families and community.

Participants saw Universidad de la Gente leadership's advocacy, at both the policy-level and institutional-level, as important acts of solidarity. Several participants spoke about Universidad de la Gente's leadership in introducing and supporting Senate Bill 13-033 (2013) known through its short name as ASSET. The ASSET legislation granted undocumented, high school graduates in-state tuition at public postsecondary institutions within the state. Sofia voiced her own feelings of solidarity with Universidad de la Gente, as an institution, because of the university's willingness to take action to support undocumented students. Sofia shared:

I think it was the [Universidad de la Gente] president who said, ‘yeah, we’re making, we’re building [a] foundation for all the colleges [to] kind of get on board, you know.’ You can say, I’m supportive but [Universidad de la Gente] is taking action, you know, since like when they do that, it’s like we’re not saying it just because it looks good. No, we’re taking action, we’re getting involved. I just see Universidad de la Gente being super supportive.

Sofia and several participants went on to reflect how institutional programs such as ISP and their staff had supported them through programming focused on making their lives during their postsecondary education and transition post-Universidad de la Gente easier. Sofia shared how ISP staff made her feel like she deserved the same education as documented students and that ISP staff helped with various activities such as grants and testing and bringing in speakers that could speak to the undocumented experience. Sofia shared an example about how ISP staff were thinking about DACA and undocumented students’ success post-graduation from Universidad de la Gente by bringing in speakers to talk about entrepreneurship. Sofia stated that she viewed that activity as staff “thinking, how can this [help] DACA or undocumented people still get a job. Just bringing people in, resources and just sharing those experiences.” Sofia went on to share how these types of activities helped her feel like she could commit to Universidad de la Gente and encouraged her to “always recommend [Universidad de la Gente]” to others such as her sister and friends.

Participants also saw Universidad de la Gente’s affordability and their willingness to put financial resources to support marginalized student populations as an important act

of solidarity. Efraín spoke to the importance of having access to emergency funds as an undocumented student, especially during COVID, because they cannot receive support through traditional avenues such as federal or state financial aid. Efraín viewed Universidad de la Gente leadership's willingness to provide access to financial resources as the institution's way of investing in their students:

I think a good way that they have contributed, especially recently, within the last year or so, they started supporting DACA and undocumented students through funds, through grants that they were, you can use the money however you'd like, and I think that in itself, providing some source of relief, financial relief, allows us to pursue things that fulfill us in our life, you know, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. It's not about the money, it's more about having access to certain things, maybe you need to pay off your braces, maybe you needed to pay rent, you know, having a stable environment and being able to take on that challenge, such as [Universidad de la Gente] did with supporting and it was a good grant. I think the first one I got was \$1,000 and this last one was \$2,000, so that was tremendous support, you know, that showed that they're willing to invest in the communities that I represent.

Lidia reiterated Efraín's observations about Universidad de la Gente's leadership investing in the communities the institution's student populations represent. Lidia shared:

Universidad de la Gente has been one of the pioneers in the way of helping us and smaller communities. I know for a fact that a lot of my high school peers and even more after my generation, they've all started to attend Universidad de la Gente,

and I don't think I've seen anybody be in debt or anything like that just to try and afford a good college education. So, [Universidad de la Gente] is definitely doing a good job.

Lidia went on to share how her participation in ISP was critical to her personally and to her community by curating and providing access to information and resources in a centralized location. Lidia shared:

I get all the emails that they send out and any information that might benefit anybody in my community. I let them know, 'hey, like there's a certain program that is being held in this place and it's these days? Is anybody interested? They speak Spanish, so let you know what it's about. Would you like me to hand you the information? I can go over it, and I can talk to you about it if I know a little bit more.' And most of the times they have been very, very much attention grabbers for them, they don't have the resources or don't know anybody that can help them out with it; they're like, well, this totally helps our community, it helps me personally because I don't have to try and search for it because it's coming directly from someone within us.

Programs like ISP helped students collect and share valuable information. Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff developed trust among participants by curating and consolidating information, since the institution was seen by students as a trusted source of reliable information. Universidad de la Gente served as a vital space for participants to engage in KRS; a practice participants emphasized as a civic activity within the Latinx community. Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff,

by making available information and resources that support Latinx students' diverse identities, supported their Latinx student's civic engagement behaviors.

Efraín shared how their Latinx and immigrant identity and the sociopolitical environment they find themselves in does not disappear when they set foot on a college campus. Efraín shared how attending Universidad de la Gente shifted how they understood their identity and the power their lived experience had for how they can use their identities as a space for resistance and advocacy:

My identity kind of shifted once I started [at Universidad de la Gente]. My first year, I was in 2016 and one of my first classes that semester was public speaking, and like I said before, I'm very quiet and really shy, introverted, and on one of the assignments was persuading people to do something about civic engagement, actually...I decided to go for asking people to register to vote [and] as Sofia, I think, was one of the ones I mentioned earlier. I have been asked if I want to register to vote and usually, I said, "no," just like a plain thought. And while on campus, I was like, I decided to take it a step further and be like, "I am not able to vote" and tell them directly so that they know that people on campus are being impacted by these issues. So that was one way of me standing up in a class and then finally being comfortable. And feeling safe to say things like this. And I told the class I was like, 'Hey, this is a very big election year, a lot of my, like, things in my life are on the line. I am undocumented, I have DACA. If Trump wins all of these things are up in the air, a lot of instability, a lot of unsure futures.' And that was the first time I think I've come out of the undocu[mented] closet and that was

kind of the catalyst to all the work that I've done since. You're finally like standing up in front of people, and telling people like, 'hey, please go vote because I can't and from there, it's been great to identify as a, you know, an immigrant, undocumented, and being there as a student has kind of turned on this switch to allowing me to see things that I thought I wasn't able to achieve. So, being, as I said, before, physically present on campus, kind of like was like, 'yo, you're a student, like you're doing this thing that you thought you couldn't like, what else connected? What else? What's the next step? Like, what else? How else can I get involved?' And it was like 'el bicho que me pico for like, civic engagement.' It was... it was then.

Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff created an environment students felt safe in, even when the broader national conversation from the U.S. government toward and about Latinxs was perfidious. The safety participants felt on campus encouraged them to be their authentic selves and opened space for participants to speak about their marginalized identities. Efraín felt safe enough to move from invisibility into visibility; a move that was the catalyst for their activist and advocate identity to emerge. The ability of Universidad de la Gente leadership to stand in solidarity with students, by introducing and implementing policies to support undocumented students, encouraged participants to use their identity as a catalyst for mobilization. Participants continued their own advocacy and civic work to better their own lives and those of their community because they felt supported and safe to do so at Universidad de la Gente. Efraín emphasized how Universidad de la Gente leadership's solidarity with



undocumented students continues to help the institution produce a strong generation of undocumented leaders and advocates:

I think [Universidad de la Gente] was the one pioneering the movement to provide in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants; they were the ones pioneering the financial aid for the state, the CAFSA. I think they were the ones that kind of started it, they're producing amazing, amazing, amazing immigrant undocumented leaders. I've met so many from [Universidad de la Gente] that have been a great source of inspiration and guidance.

Efraín's comment was echoed by other participants who saw Universidad de la Gente as a campus with administrators, faculty, and staff with the ability to recognize the plight of its students and used it to inform its advocacy efforts. Universidad de la Gente leadership's advocacy efforts included acknowledging the identities of its students and responding to the sociopolitical environment Latinx students find themselves in.

Participants vocalized how Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff had created a campus environment that welcomed their identities and made them feel safe enough to be their full selves on campus. For participants like Elisa, Efraín, Lidia, and Sofia, Universidad de la Gente administrator's willingness to create programs, hire faculty who were culturally aware, and provided vital resources for students, both in the curricular and co-curricular environment, had a great impact on their civic identity. Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff, by acknowledging their Latinx student's identities and the challenges conscripted upon them because of their identities,

created space for Latinx students to establish a civic engagement identity informed by the identities they brought to campus and their new status as students.

### **Help Us Reclaim Our Heritage**

Participants spoke about their collegiate education at Universidad de la Gente as a place of Latinx cultural reclamation. Participants reiterated how it took them enrolling in college to learn about the history and contributions of Latinxs to U.S. society.

Participants felt their K-12 education undervalued and overlooked the civic contributions of Latinxs. Lupita spoke about how Universidad de la Gente offered her opportunities to engage in cultural activities honoring her Latinx identity. Lupita shared:

Yeah, so for me, it affected me tremendously. It is because I am Hispanic that I am who I am today. So, I in [Gente] joined the mariachi [program]. I grew up listening to similar music, so I wanted to know more about my culture. I love joining programs like Pathways. I love going to high schools and helping seniors and motivating them to reach their dreams just because I needed some motivation too. I've never actually felt like I belonged in a certain group in high school or in any you know, the swim club or anything like that. Just because no one really shared my experience but because of that I also wanted to reach out and just help others who are feeling similar in my situation or just are, you know, just reoccurring in the same problem.

Lupita regarded her participation in Universidad de la Gente's mariachi program as a way to reclaim part of her cultural heritage and to give back to the community. Lupita felt it

was important to support high school students who may not feel a sense of belonging in their current educational setting.

Dailynn described a similar experience in her high school education and shared how it was not until her postsecondary education that she learned and appreciated her family's civic activities and contributions. Dailynn shared:

I'd see on the TV people protesting and my grandma telling me about it but I was never really intrinsically, you know, in it to figure out how I could get involved until I stepped out of high school and I got involved in college, where I was exposed to the issues that Latinos face and like what are the policies that are being made to help them and their community? That's when I became, you know, civically engaged with my community.

Dailynn shared that this awakening to civic engagement did not happen in high school because she did not see herself reflected as part of the Latinx community until college, where her intersectional identity as Latina and as second-generation, was widely accepted. Dailynn shared:

So, when I was in high school, I really struggled with my biracial identity. I always say this because it was either, I was too White to be Mexican or I was too Mexican to be White. And so, there was that in between that I was like, I never really fit in. So, I went to high school, predominantly, you know, 70% of the student population was Hispanic and so I really struggled with my identity as a Latina. I kind of discounted anything that my family had experienced, or that, you know, I thought was, you know, relatively Latino community-based stuff and

because of my identity, the way that I identified. So, when I went to college, I realized that, you know, people don't discount [you] just because you're second generation, like you know, just because your parents were born here, but your grandparents were in Mexico, that doesn't make you any less Latino.

Dailynn spoke to the acceptance she experienced at Universidad de la Gente and how that openness to her biracial identity helped reshape her relationship with her Latina identity and the civic contributions of her family. Dailynn shared:

I was exposed to a variety of, you know, diversity within the student population that were like, 'no, like my biracial identity here, here, here, and like, I'm still part of that community that you know, were my family's from.' In high school, I had the mindset of like, 'no, everything that my family did, it doesn't count because you know, that's part of their story, that's not my story.' That's when I struggled. When I got to college, it was like, 'no' it was kind of accepted and I was okay, 'no, I am Latino, or Latina and those experiences are my experiences as well' because my family had to go through that to have me.

Dailynn, through the exposure and opportunities Universidad de la Gente faculty and staff provided, was able to learn about the issues faced by the Latinx community, thus allowing Dailynn to learn and celebrate her family's own historical legacy of civic engagement. Dailynn went on to share how her high school's education on what was considered civic engagement was limited and did not acknowledge culturally centered activities such as those her grandparents engaged in, which included protesting alongside Cesar Chavez, a civil rights activist and labor and union leader. Dailynn shared, "my

grandparents worked in California, they would pick strawberries and stuff. I remember them telling me, ‘we protested [with] Cesar Chavez, like, all that stuff.’ I was like, ‘oh, like, that’s cool’ but that was, at most, that was it.” Dailynn’s story highlighted, similarly, what other participants shared; their high school’s narrow focus on what counted as civic engagement and whose activities were counted affected how they viewed their Latinx community’s civic contributions. Dailynn viewed her own family’s rich civic activity as not belonging to her. Dailynn stated:

I don’t know, I think it’s in high school you are taught a very basic level of civic engagement...I would never count what my grandparents went through just because you know, they’re Mexican and I didn’t see that as civic engagement back in high school. It wasn’t something that people were like, ‘oh, yeah, that’s civic engagement right there.’ No, it wasn’t, you’re just taught like the basic level.

Alondra shared a similar experience. Alondra did not develop a comprehensive understanding of civic engagement until she attended college. Alondra stated, “I only had a basic knowledge of civic engagement in high school, and it wasn’t until [Universidad de la Gente] that I learned different ways of civic engagement.”

Dailynn, Alondra, and Lupita emphasized the importance of Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staffs’ commitment to elevating the historical and civic contributions of Latinx in the United States. Universidad de la Gente administrators, faculty, and staff, by elevating Latinx’s historical and current civic contributions, created a space for Latinx students to reclaim their community’s historical legacy of civic engagement and served as a catalyst for participants’ own civic development. Participants

felt the Kindergarten through 12th grade environment had marginalized the civic contributions of Latinx communities and it was Universidad de la Gente's culturally welcoming environment that provided the space for participants to explore their Latinx identity in relation to a civic identity.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented findings to the study's three main research questions. Findings included Latinx students defining civic engagement as KRS and using their success as a form of perseverance and resistance from the marginalization they experienced because of their identities. Participants practiced their civic engagement through interrelational engagement and by using intergenerational paving to prepare an easier path for future generations of Latinxs. Identity played a crucial role in informing the ways in which Latinx students practice civic engagement, which included using their intersectional identities to stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups, how they wove in and throughout instances of invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility, and how Latinx students used their bodies as political statements. Finally, participants shared how HSIs should see and support their Latinx students holistically, as being affected by the sociopolitical environments they find themselves in, how these experiences manifest onto the college campus, and how HSIs should and can stand in solidarity with their Latinx students and their intersecting identities by creating programs, providing resources, both financial and non-financial, to facilitate the Latinx student succeed. Finally, HSIs should provide opportunities for Latinx students to reclaim their histories and learn about the civic contributions of Latinx to U.S. society.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, INTERPRETATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to expand the civic engagement literature to include the student voice, specifically those of Latinx students, and highlight the importance of race conscious approaches within civic engagement activities in higher education, especially for HSIs. My findings indicate that Latinx students' civic engagement behaviors are attuned to their racial/ethnic identities and a strong collectivist culture. Collectivism (Arevalo et al., 2016) was an important theme throughout my findings. Collectivism (Arevalo et al., 2016) had an important function on how Latinx postsecondary students develop their civic identity and enact civic engagement activities and behaviors. Participants' strong ties to a collectivist Latinx identity led participants to focus on civic engagement activities and behaviors that focused on the health of their families and community. Participants' strong culture of collectivism informed how they developed behaviors such as interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving and helped them conceptualize success, and knowledge and resources sharing as civic engagement activities that served them, their families, and the wider Latinx community. The civic engagement practices of participants in this study, although informed to an extent by their postsecondary institution, were mainly direct manifestations of their Latinx identity and the community's historical, and political relationship with the United States. Participants used photovoice to visually document and elucidate how they

interacted and practiced civic and democratic participation. I use the findings from this study to expand our understanding of what civic engagement is and broaden it to include interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving; two concepts that explain how Latinx students come to enact civic engagement behaviors. I then provide an expanded definition of civic engagement that includes KRS and success as a symbol of successful civic participation. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define and practice civic engagement?
2. How does identity inform the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students?
3. How do Hispanic-Serving Institutions contribute to Latinx civic engagement?

I use Latino Cultural Citizenship (LCC) and decolonial theory to examine this study's findings and further interrogate how Latinx identity and culture play a part in the civic engagement behaviors and attitudes of Latinx postsecondary students. Importantly, I broaden how we view and understand Latinx student's civic and democratic participation and add a culturally relevant perspective to augment the civic engagement field and accompanying literature. Finally, I provide recommendations for research, theory, practice, and policy that serve to advance Latinx students' civic engagement development among higher education.

### **Findings and Current Literature**

In my findings, Latinx identity and intersectionality played a critical role in how participants conceptualized a definitional use of civic engagement. The civic behaviors of



participants in this study were informed by the racialization of their Latinx identity. The social issues participants were actively addressing were the result of the U.S.' socio- and political policies that negatively affect Latinx individuals and their communities. In response to U.S. policies and government approach toward Latinxs, participants had developed interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving as ways to circumvent the racialization of their Latinx identity and the limitations this racialization placed on their civic engagement opportunities. Participants recognized they did not participate in dominant forms of civic engagement due to a variety of challenges, which included undocumented status, which hindered participants' ability to vote, income disparities that meant there were limited opportunities to engage, language barriers, and the cascading effect of Latinx communities being portrayed, by U.S. media, as uninterested in civic engagement.

Participants such as Elisa, an Universidad de la Gente student who used art as activism and Nallely, an online and undocumented student, spoke about how Latinx individuals must be judicious with their civic activities due to financial constraints and work obligations. Elisa and Nallely were clear when saying that although there are constraints such as legal status and work obligations, these constraints did not stop Latinx students from engaging in their own ways. Participants underscored that Latinx engagement activities needed to have an immediate impact on their communities because of the sacrifices participants had to make to participate in civic engagement activities.

Scholar such as Butin (2010), Bringle and Hatcher (1995), Boss (2010), and Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) emphasized the importance of civic engagement as a tool for

increasing student academic success and personal growth; however, in this study, intergenerational paving was the main factor driving both Latinx student success and civic engagement. Participants' communities' need for immediate and high impact civic engagement activities meant that participants engaged in interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving activities that helped their communities directly in the immediate and positioned an easier path for future generations to have expanded opportunities. Van Benschoten (2000), Dalton (2016), and Bennett (2008) have reported on the rise of community-based civic activities for younger adults, while simultaneously the United States is experiencing a decline in political participation. Perin (1998) argued that people approached their civic engagement activities through a cultural citizenship lens, and less so by participation in dominant civic engagement activities, which individuals may find exclusionary. Specifically, Silvestrini (1997) highlighted how Latinxs have developed cultural citizenship separately from legal citizenship because of laws and policies that have disenfranchised Latinxs throughout history. My findings indicate that observations by these scholars (Van Benschoten, 2000; Dalton, 2016; Bennett, 2008; Perin, 1998; Silvestrini, 1997) are accurate. I found that Latinx postsecondary students use their racial/ethnic identities and their collectivist identity (Arevalo et al., 2016), which center family and community networks, to drive forward many of their civic behaviors. In the next section, I describe how Latinxs have developed a culture of engagement informed by their cultural and racialized identity within the United States.

## **A Subversive Culture of Engagement in the Shadow of Whiteness**

In this study, participants commented on the invisibility of their civic engagement activities and spoke on issues of legitimacy for their civic and democratic practices. Participants asserted that their methods of defining and enacting civic engagement were not widely recognized within larger U.S. society, which had a cascading effect on Latinx individuals and communities not being able to recognize their civic activities as civic engagement. Dailynn, an Universidad de la Gente political science student, commented on how Latinx communities have attempted to morph into and enact dominant forms of civic engagement, but these activities do not accurately represent Latinxs. For Dailynn, dominant forms of engagement were visible activities that lived in the political space and were practiced primarily by White individuals. Dailynn's comment focused on the disparities between White communities and communities of color, who may engage in similar civic activities and practices, but practices by Latinx are minimized and discounted. Dailynn had reflected on how Latinx communities have been portrayed as civically unengaged, even though from her personal experience, of having grandparents that had protested alongside Cesar Chavez during the Chicano Rights Movement of the 1960s and her own work broadening access for Latinx women to participate in politics, demonstrate the contrary. For Dailynn, Latinxs juntos luchan for causes that impact their communities.

Several participants spoke about how civic activities, such as protesting and other forms of direct action, were not taught to them in school as civic engagement.

Participants spoke about their K-12 education not educating them on what and how they

could enact civic and democratic practices, and many felt their K-12 education made invisible the civic contributions of Latinxs by not including that history as part of the curriculum. Jackson's (2011) concept of the "sleeping giant" (p. 691) reinforces a dominant view of Latinxs as apathetic or as unwilling to participate in U.S.' democratic processes, thus discounting and ignoring current Latinx civic engagement practices and behaviors. Nallely, an online Universidad de la Gente student, commented that Latinx communities are using their culture to address challenges through small actions that, although invisible to wider U.S. society, have significant impact on Latinx individuals, their families, and wider Latinx community.

Latinx students in this study defined civic engagement in ways that have not been explored within the civic engagement field; this is in part to the field's colonialist underpinnings. Mitchell and colleagues (2012), Bocci (2015), and Morton (1995) critique the civic engagement field because of its colonialist structure. Mitchell and Soria (2016) and Mitchell and colleagues (2012) described the colonialism of civic engagement as a framework that attempts to *save* communities, often of color, by bringing outside experts, often White faculty members and White students, to solve community issues in communities of color. My study corroborates García Bedolla (2012) argument that the Whiteness of the civic engagement movement does not serve Latinx students and neither do the apolitical and race-neutral approaches in which higher education professionals have delivered their civic engagement programming. Cabrera (2009) described "hegemonic Whiteness" as the normalization of structures that privilege White people because of their racial identity (p. 13). Civic engagement as it has been defined, whether

purposefully or inadvertently, has upheld Whiteness by not acknowledging and understanding how race/ethnicity inform civic behaviors and activate agency (Price et al., 2011). Scholars (Alcantar, 2014; Rubin, 2007; Garcia & Cuellar, 2018) have interrogated metrics assessing civic engagement among students of color; however, I argue that within higher education there has yet to be an interrogation of how racial/ethnic identity impacts the civic behaviors of Latinx students.

Participants in this study demonstrated a complex understanding of the role of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) on their race/ethnicity, on their Latinx culture, and on the socio and political relationship Latinxs have with U.S. society and the U.S. government. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), as one of the tenants of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), helps us understand how identity-based characteristics such as class, gender, and race overlap to develop how people interact and experience society differently. Participants, in this study, were acutely aware of the complex and tenuous relationship the United States has with Latinx communities and their intersecting identities. Participants were aware that U.S. government policies could affect them in multiple and different ways because of their intersectional identities. My findings indicate that participants are engaging in civic engagement activities and behaviors that redress the inimical relationship Latinxs and their communities have with the United States.

Based on my findings, participants are using their cultural citizenship (Rosaldo, 1989, 1994a, 1994b, 1997) to inform and participate in activities that have direct positive impacts on their families and communities and serve to redress discrimination and

marginalization. Participants spoke to the importance of community to the Latinx identity, asserting that it was their cultural identity, as collectivist (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015) that impacted how they defined and practiced civic engagement. For participants, Latinxs juntos luchan for the betterment of their communities. Alondra and Efraín, felt that for Latinxs, civic engagement was synonymous with community engagement. The collectivist nature of Latinx communities (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015) meant that issues affecting the community drove forward many of the participants' civic activities. Participants in this study were engaged civically because they had a commitment to the collective well-being of their familial and community networks. Well-being for Latinx postsecondary students, often meant rectifying the issues that stemmed from oppression and marginalization and serve as examples of how Latinx students have decolonized (Quijano, 1992) civic engagement to serve them and their communities in their own terms.

In this study, every participant exemplified how they operationalize collectivism. Arevalo and colleagues (2016) have argued that Latinxs' collectivist culture led Latinxs to help both familial and non-familial networks. For example, Efraín advocated for equitable access to women's reproductive rights, amid the fall of *Roe v. Wade* because of their concern for relatives; Elisa used art activism to open space and create dialogue about the challenges affecting queer Latinxs; Alexia volunteered her time at a hospital supporting Latinx families with navigating a complicated healthcare system; Alondra worked to broaden access for the Latinx community to have the same types of access White individuals enjoy to cultural centers such as museums; Belen engaged in Latinx

cultural and history reclaiming through community organized events; Lupita connected high school and first-generation Latinx students to valuable postsecondary resources; Dailynn expanded access for Latinx women to directly connect with their elected officials; Sofia coordinated Spanish speaking parent coalition groups to advocate for their children's education; Nallely volunteered with a non-profit engaged in the advocacy and empowerment of Latinxs in her community; and Lidia connected members of her Latinx community to vital resources. Most of these examples were community-based volunteer activities, which circumvented the political sphere, and supported Latinx individuals and their communities to address immediate issues directly.

### **Latinx Bodies, the Impetus for Engagement, and Identity**

Latinx students who participated in this study were keenly aware of their racial/ethnic identities and the precariousness it placed them within U.S. society. Lima (2007) described how Latinx individuals are politicized in the United States and how Latinxs have been centered as largely apathetic to the U.S.' civic and political affairs; a narrative Bonfil Batalla (1990) argues is a "colonial project" (p. II). The U.S. media and government, by framing Latinxs as apolitical and apathetic to the political and civic activities of the nation, advances a dominant narrative that makes invisible Latinx agency and delegitimize civic activities enacted by Latinx individuals and communities. The U.S. media and government, by making invisible Latinx agency and the role culture and identity has on Latinx civic engagement behaviors, ostracizes Latinxs as "second-class citizens" (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402). Rosaldo (1994b) described "second-class citizenship" as individuals or groups whose civic undertakings are invisible or disregarded by "first-

class citizenship” which are those of individuals whose civic and democratic processes and discourse are recognized as the norm (p. 402). My study disrupts assumptions about Latinxs as enacting “second-class citizenship” (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402) by framing Latinx civic behaviors and activities as legitimate and true to an identity of collectivism and advocacy amid their historical oppression. Additionally, my study increases our understanding of the impact of identity on civic engagement as the topic is currently understudied and rarely part of larger civic engagement discourse.

Participants’ civic behaviors and activities were a direct response to the “second-class citizenship” (Rosaldo, 1994b, p. 402) to which Latinxs are relegated to within U.S. society. Nallely, an online Universidad de la Gente undergraduate, spoke about her work volunteering with VOZ, a non-profit, whose mission is to support Latinx communities through empowerment to address injustices and inequality through advocacy and community development. Nallely’s volunteer work with VOZ was in direct response to the inequities and injustices faced by Latinxs in her community. Sofia and Efraín, two participants who identify as undocumented, registered people to vote, even though they themselves were not eligible to vote. Sofia and Efraín utilized their undocumented identity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by undocumented Latinxs among those with voting privileges. Efraín, who was also *DACAmented*, and spoke at length during the single focus group about the Trump administration’s negative rhetoric about Latinxs, regarded the rhetoric as the catalyst for their civic activation. Efraín became civically engaged in the political process even though they are not eligible to vote because of the negative discourse emerging from the Trump administration about



Latinxs. Efraín and Sofia were providing the vital service of advocacy and translating, from English to Spanish, for members of both the Latinx and undocumented community about political issues that would affect them and their communities. Efraín became active and vocal when their racial/ethnic identity became a topic of contention and impetus for discrimination. Additionally, Efraín recognized that this tug and pull, such as politicians pandering Latinxs for their vote, while also politicizing and racializing Latinxs is a continuous process – as previous generations of Latinxs have experienced similar cycles of discrimination and activation. It is important to emphasize that, although Sofia and Efraín had undocumented status, this identity did not discourage them from becoming politically active, instead the U.S. government’s negative discourse about Latinx immigrants propelled them forward to become civically active. Identity informed civic activities, such as those demonstrated by the participants in this study, are not often reflected within the countless civic engagement definitions provided by civic engagement scholars (e.g., Prentice, 2007; Mathews, 2000; Zimmer et al., 2016; Dalton, 2016) or within the larger civic engagement field.

Racial/ethnic identity remained at the core of how participants in this study came to develop a civic identity and enacted civic behaviors. “Intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141) and a Latinx culture of “collectivism” (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015), and “cultural nationalism” (Goose, 2005, p. 142) played a significant role in expanding empathy for the hardships of others. For example, Alexia’s father and her extended family modeled empathy for the hardships of others when they used their lived experiences with food and housing insecurity to later help houseless individuals in their

community. Alexia's example reflects how the collectivist nature of Latinx communities is an asset that moves forward community health by increasing empathy among both familial and non-familial networks and drives forward civic practices and behaviors that help others.

LCC (Rosaldo, 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997), as a theoretical framework, helps illuminate the civic engagement actions of participants that advance the betterment of their community. Rosaldo (1994a, 1994b) spoke about the cultural values that drive forward concepts of citizenship. The Latinx students who participated in this study, embodied physically, through their civic activities, what Rosaldo (1994a, 1994b) and Flores and Benmayor (1997) theorized as the civic actions that Latinx individuals enact, as informed by their cultural values. Unfortunately, the invisibility of Latinx civic behaviors is relegated as "second-class citizenship" (Rosaldo, 1994a, 1994b) because they are not recognized within the larger civic engagement movement or upheld as a norm within U.S. society. For these reasons, I engaged in a study that centered Latinx students, to voice for themselves how they defined and practiced civic engagement. In the next section, I elaborate on the findings related to the first research question of this study.

### **Latinx Students Define Civic Engagement**

In my findings, two definitions for civic engagement were widely recognized among participants. Participants, in this study, defined civic engagement as the collection and sharing of knowledge and resources with familial and community networks that led to their success. Participants spoke about the university as an ecosystem where knowledge and resources converged allowing them easier access to information they

could then bring back to their communities. For example, several participants identified as undocumented and several as *DACAmented* individuals. Participants' participation in Universidad de la Gente's Immigrant Services Program (ISP) meant they could access vital information that would support them and other undocumented members of their community who were not enrolled students and did not have similar access to Universidad de la Gente. For participants, defining civic engagement was informed by the need from their communities for vital information and resources that would support their success.

### **Knowledge and Resource Sharing**

Participants' Latinx identity, as a politicized and racialized identity within the United States (Lima, 2007), was a driving factor for why participants sought certain information and what knowledge and resources were collected and shared. During the single focus group interview, participants were highly attuned to the marginalization Latinxs experience in the United States because of their racial/ethnic identity and other intersectional identities such as gender and U.S. legal status. Participants spoke to their civic behaviors being a response to this marginalization. Participants also spoke to the importance of finding and sharing knowledge and resources with family and community networks as a method of circumventing historical systems of oppression within the United States.

The practice among participants to collect and share knowledge and resources is reminiscent of Funds of Knowledge (FoK), a concept that positions households as "repositories of knowledge" (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 26; Gonzalez et al., 2005) and where

families develop networks that connect them to other networks to create, exchange, and broker knowledge and resources that help families prosper (Moll et al., 1992). In this study, participants were using the college campus as a repository of information and resources they used to gather vital information for their communities. For example, Efraín, an Universidad de la Gente DACA student, spoke about their civic activities being informed by their intersecting identities. Efraín shared that their intersectional identities helped them figure out what information they needed to obtain and share with different communities of which they were a member.

Participants expanded access to KRS within their Latinx and other identity focused communities. KRS was localized to the needs of each participant's community. For example, Sofia, an Universidad de la Gente undocumented student with children at home, exemplified how her intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989) were instrumental in driving her civic activities. Sofia gathered knowledge and resources to share with parent groups she volunteered with and used her bilingualism to translate resources and information from English to Spanish. Sofia's intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a parent, an undocumented immigrant, and Latina informed what resources were needed for these various groups. Sofia was also able to use her bilingualism to support Spanish speaking Latinxs. Sofia, during the single focus group interview, highlighted cultural nuances and differences for how different racial and ethnic groups mobilize their civic engagement behaviors. Sofia reflected on the collectivist behaviors among Latinxs and their focus on sharing knowledge and resources; behaviors she emphasized were not shared by White individuals or communities, who have been hesitant or resistant about

sharing knowledge and resources with Latinx communities. For Sofia and other participants in this study, they had to seek out knowledge and resources that were not openly shared or easily accessible to them or their communities because of their racial or ethnic membership. Participants defined civic engagement as KRS because of the necessity to engage in these behaviors amid exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization.

### **Latinx Success**

Secondly, Latinx participants, in this study, also defined civic engagement as success. Participants spoke about the importance of success as a mechanism for refuting and upholding their Latinx values of perseverance and intergenerational paving. Varlotta (1997) has described higher education's civic engagement behaviors as "service-as-charity" (p. 59) when working in communities of color. IHE scholars and administrators have not made a concerted effort to address the historical origin of the systemic issues affecting Latinx communities; and for participants, the source of inequities is clear – systemic racism and discrimination.

Elisa, an art activist, and Universidad de la Gente student acknowledged that discrimination is very much still part of the Latinx experience. Elisa shared that Latinxs, and their communities are still experiencing discrimination and system racism through activities such as over-policing. Participants articulated clearly that they were not waiting for the *saving* Mitchell and colleagues (1994) describe as the civic engagement's field savior complex. Latinx students in this study activated their agency to both seek, collect,

and share knowledge and resources to drive forward the success of their community and themselves.

For participants, to achieve their goals and succeed, in whichever ways they categorized success, was a civic action, which meant overcoming barriers and challenges. Scholars (Rosaldo & Flores; 1997; Navarro & Mejia, 2004; Lima; 2007; Mora, 2014) have extensively documented Latinxs' activism and fight for rights thus challenging the dominant narrative of Latinx apathy toward U.S. politics (Gonzalez-Sobrinio, 2020). My findings indicate that the Latinx apathy narrative (Jackson, 2011) is false and such narratives only devalue the intense sense of duty Latinx postsecondary students feel to support their communities through, often, invisible indirect and direct civic activities.

To better understand why participants viewed success as a civic activity, it helps to use LCC (Rosaldo, 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997) as a lens. LCC helps us home in on reason and success was regarded by participants as a definition of civic engagement. In a society, such as the United States, that has marginalized the Latinx body and created challenges to upward mobility, using symbols of success, such as the serape, in Dailynn and Alondra's photographs, highlights Latinx perseverance and determination. Kiyama (2010) found that academic symbols help influence families' awareness of college. The serape, in Dailynn and Alondra's photographs, signify both an academic symbol for their academic success and a cultural representation of the success of their families and the wider Latinx community. The serape is a symbol for the challenges Latinx students had overcome to accomplish their academic goals – and a visual representation for what can be accomplished to Latinx communities.

## **Latinx Students Practice Civic Engagement**

In this section, I answer the second part of my first research question: how do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define and practice civic engagement? Participants, in this study, were aware of the inequities surrounding their multiple and intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989) that excluded their communities from vital knowledge and resources. The Latinx students in this study were aware of the importance of their role as emissaries and the magnitude and impact of their success as a symbol of perseverance for their communities. Cohen and Kahne (2012) reported findings indicating Latinxs had the lowest participatory political activity when compared to other racial groups; they attributed this finding to education, income, and citizenship and argued that Latinx youth practice civically through informal activities. In the next section, I interrogate what informal civic activities Latinx postsecondary students enacted and why they should be considered formal civic activities.

### **Interrelational Engagement**

Building on my findings, I am advancing a new concept related to Latinx civic behaviors and a culture of collectivism. I call this concept interrelational engagement. Interrelational engagement are the civic behaviors and activities, formed from Latinx students' intersectional identities, which move forward civic practices in support of Latinx familial and community networks. To best understand interrelational engagement, we must position the collectivist culture of Latinxs as an asset within the Latinxs community (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015). Rosaldo (1997) utilizes LCC to describe how identity and culture combine to inform the types of citizenship enacted by Latinxs.

The strength of participants' civic activities was their commitment to the betterment of their family and communities. Latinx participants in this study were highly attuned to the challenges of maintaining their collectivist culture and maintaining their interrelational engagement behaviors from being weakened by the United States' individualistic culture. Efraín commented on the importance of family and community-oriented behaviors and the protection these culturally based behaviors must be afforded within the U.S. context. Efraín commented on the messaging the United States espouses about the importance of individualism and the tension it causes among cultures whose approach is collectivist. For Efraín, the U.S.' individualism and Latinxs' collectivism is constantly in tension and maintaining a Latinx collectivist identity and accompanying behaviors, such as interrelational engagement, was their way of refuting the United States' attempt at assimilating them into an individualistic society.

The struggle between the U.S.' individualistic culture and Latinxs' collectivist culture can be seen within the civic engagement literature. On one side, findings such as those of Arevalo and colleagues (2016) found that due to their collectivist culture, Latinxs are more willing to help familial and non-familial people. While at the same time, Latinxs' collectivism, according to Lazear (2007) has been attacked for impeding Latinx's assimilation into U.S. society. Additionally, Colby and colleagues (2000) have theorized that it is an embrace of an "instrumental individualistic" identity that has weakened the higher education field's focus and commitment to its democratic ideals (p. 21). Bellah and colleagues (1996) and Perin (1988) describe how the focus on individualism and lack of connection to larger networks among White individuals has led



to their decline in civic participation. Higher education professionals, at IHEs, by upholding expectations for one racial/ethnic group (critiquing Latinxs for their collectivism) but different for another (critiquing White individuals for their lack of collectivism) accentuates the issue of legitimacy. Legitimacy issues arise when faculty and staff at IHEs develop civic engagement activities and programming for students that emphasize one cultural trait (e.g., collectivism, individualism) over another and expect the non-represented group to adopt behaviors not predominantly found in the non-represented culture. Participants in this study spoke on how their civic engagement activities are not recognized as civic engagement because their activities were focused on the immediate needs of their communities. The tension between Latinx collectivism and the United States' culture of individualism highlight Bocci's (2015) findings of how civic contributions by people of color are framed as collective movements and ignore individual agency.

Participants shared how activities, such as those enacted through interrelational engagement, are not recognized as civic engagement because they have not been part of the larger civic engagement discourse. Dominant forms of civic engagement overshadow and marginalize Latinx's interrelational activities. Dailynn, for example, spoke on how the Latinx community do not define or consider their civic activities civic engagement because their behaviors have not aligned to dominant forms of engagement. The interrelational engagement activities by which Latinxs exhibit, and practice civic engagement have not been recognized or explored within the broader civic engagement

field. The civic engagement field centers Whiteness when it ignores the role of racial/ethnic identity and culture on Latinx's civic development.

The interrelational engagement activities practiced by Latinx individuals are often invisible within larger civic engagement discourse. The Latinx voice has been missing from the field; however, this does not discount the engagement behaviors that Latinx postsecondary students have developed. For example, Alexia described how it was her family that supported her father's entrepreneurship in creating his concrete business by pooling funds and encouraging him to push on when insecurity surrounding his place in U.S. society, as a formerly undocumented individual, threatened to hinder his progress. Once established, Alexia's father then helped other members of their family start their own businesses. Alexia's example highlights how Latinxs operationalize their collectivism to uphold interrelational engagement activities that support Latinx individuals, the collective, and ameliorate the effects of discrimination. In addition to interrelational engagement, participants also utilized their collectivist culture, to inform their civic engagement practice of intergenerational paving.

### **Intergenerational Paving**

Participants felt a deep sense of duty to continue paving the way for family and community members that will come after them, just as parents and/or other community members paved the way for them to have expanded opportunities - I define this sense of duty as intergenerational paving. Latinxs utilize their culture of collectivism to develop and inform intergenerational paving and is another method from which Latinxs practice civic engagement. Scholars (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015) have described how

Latinxs' collectivist culture creates strong familial networks and connections that promote care and concern for issues that affect individuals and their familial and community networks. Pallares (2014) found that Latinxs' culture of collectivism creates a commitment to the well-being of the collective and found increased civic engagement activities among familial networks. My study corroborates scholars' (Pallares, 2014; Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015) findings. I found a strong commitment to familial and community health among the Latinxs postsecondary students who participated in this study.

The Latinx students in this study operationalized collectivism through their community-focused activities. Participants emphasized their commitment to succeed as both a personal goal to improve their own lives, and as a visual example to younger Latinxs in their networks that success is achievable. For example, Lupita shared how she viewed civic engagement as a method for preparing a path for future generations to have greater impact on the world. Lupita's civic activities were focused on paving an easier way for her future children, and younger relatives.

Lupita alluded to the duality that civic engagement plays in her life. For Lupita, civic engagement affords her the opportunity to resolve issues affecting her personally and allows her to focus on solving larger issues for future generations of Latinxs. Lidia's example highlights the collectivism among Latinx communities and the intergenerational paving at play within Latinx postsecondary student's civic engagement practices.

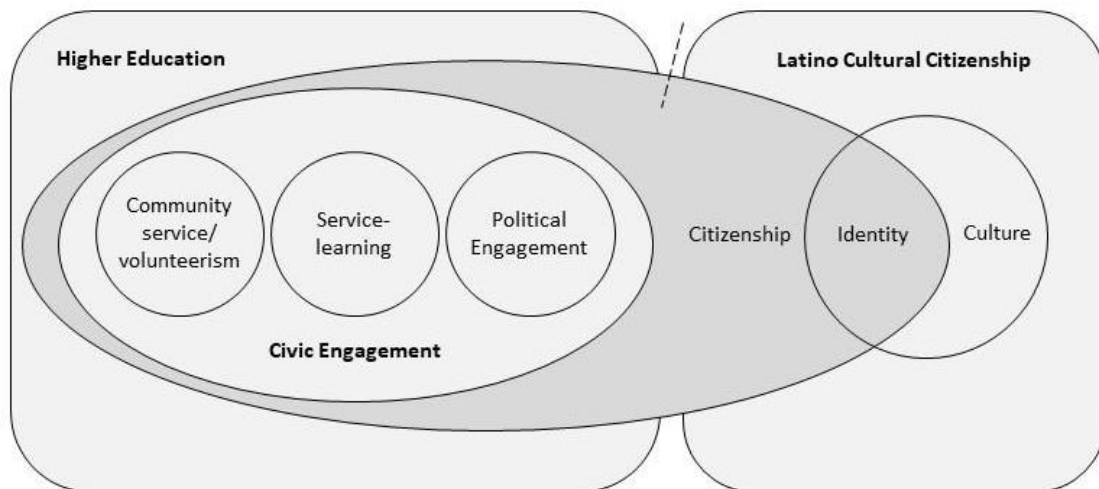
## **Decolonizing Civic Engagement**

An important implication of my study is the importance of decolonizing (Quijano, 1992) civic engagement by asking Latinx students and their communities how they define and practice civic engagement for themselves and then recognizing these behaviors as valid. The historical relationship between Latinx communities and the United States means there will be regional variation for how Latinx postsecondary students define civic engagement (Navarro, 2004). Latinxs are not monolithic and different Latinx communities have different civic needs and concerns (Morales, 2018; Magaña, 2005; Navarro, 2004). Participants in this study were explicit in their understanding of civic engagement as collecting, gathering, and sharing knowledge and resources with their familial and community networks. I want to emphasize these students primarily identified as Mexican or of Mexican descent. Latinxs are not a monolithic group; (Morales, 2018; Magaña, 2005) therefore, efforts to decolonize civic engagement at IHEs need to be localized to each institution's geographic region. The diversity among Latinx communities across the country means that higher education professionals need to understand the localized and national issues affecting Latinxs in situ. Issues affecting Latinxs in the southwest, who predominantly identify as Mexican or of Mexican descent or Hispanx, will be different than those affecting Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latinx groups. Susan Brickford (1995) explains this difference between people and communities by arguing that our identities are formed by our social identities, thus different United States relationships among Latinx communities create different identities and civic needs and practices.

The diversity of the Latinx communities and their experiences with colonization, is why I assert that to decolonize the civic engagement field, we must acknowledge and understand how identity plays a role in the civic development of Latinx postsecondary students. In Figure 20, I revisit my conceptual framework, from chapter two, to conceptually represent how administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs can decolonize their civic engagement efforts. The dash line represents colonization and the division that currently exists between the study of civic engagement and the role of racial/ethnic identity in developing a civically engaged identity. By eliminating the dashed line, through research and discourse that interrogates the role of racial/ethnic identity, my study decolonizes the civic engagement field. I encourage higher education professionals to reject an apolitical and race-neutral stance toward their civic engagement activities; this also decolonizes the civic engagement field.

Figure 20

*Conceptually Decolonizing Civic Engagement*



*Note.* This conceptual model presents how bringing identity into civic engagement discourse begins the decolonization process. The dashed line removed symbolizes the decolonization of civic engagement by recognizing and interrogating the role identity plays in an individual and communities' civic development.

Latinx postsecondary student's conceptualizations of civic engagement and accompanying behaviors are a direct result of their Latinx identity. For example, Dailynn, a second-generation college student and political science major, highlighted her grandparent's civic activation during the Chicana Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, as a response to the oppression Latinx agricultural workers faced because of their Latinx identity. Dailynn was now advancing her grandparents advocacy work by expanding opportunities and opening space for Latinas to share their own voice with policymakers. Dailynn recognized that language can be a barrier for Latinx civic engagement; however, language barriers did not stop the women from showing up in Washington D.C. and on the steps of the state legislature of the state in which this study was conducted. Dailynn used her skills and voice to serve as intermediary, thus providing access and parity for these women. Dailynn's example highlights how Latinx postsecondary students are engaged in carrying forward a historical legacy of advocacy and agency.

### **Establishing a Culture of Support for Latinx Civic Engagement**

To answer the third research question in this study, we must explore the relationship between Universidad de la Gente and participants in this study. When I asked participants what practices should a Hispanic-Serving Institution establish to support their Latinx students' civic engagement development, four themes emerged: the importance of

college administrators, faculty, and staff ensuring Latinx students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in co-curricular programming, the importance of faculty members and staff to serve as institutional agents, the impact higher education administrators have on Latinx students and their communities when they relinquishing apoliticization and race-neutrality, and the role of technology on Latinx students' civic engagement behaviors.

Participants in this study were keen to praise Universidad de la Gente for the role its leadership had played in supporting both their academic aspirations and the health of their communities through institutional advocacy in support of and recognition of their Latinx identity. In the following sections, I speak in more detail to how HSIs can create and develop a culture of acknowledgement that supports Latinx students' civic development and highlight areas of opportunity for HSI leaders, and leaders from other institutional types, to support Latinx students holistically in their civic engagement journey. Finally, I want to emphasize that this question is both a research and practice question. The purpose of this research question was to better understand how postsecondary institutions, specifically an HSI, support Latinx students' civic engagement. The question also illuminated what practices can be utilized and adopted to better support Latinxs students' civic engagement activities and behaviors. I provide a series of recommendations informed by my findings answering this question.

### **Representation**

Participants found the omission of Latinxs' individual and collective contributions to the United States' civic life within the K-12 educational setting problematic.

Participants described K-12 classroom environments void of Latinx figures or role models that had civically contributed to the United States. Vaquera and colleagues (2014) discussed how Latinx students develop identities that are influenced and informed by the hypervisibility and invisibility Latinx students find themselves within U.S. society. Participants, in this study, spoke about the invisibility of Latinxs' civic contributions in the K-12 curriculum. Dailynn spoke to this omission by articulating that in her K-12 education, Latinxs were not portrayed as civically engaged and that it was not until she entered college that her civic identity developed. Dailynn commented that it was not until college that her awareness of civic engagement developed because she was exposed to issues affecting Latinxs and a place where she learned of the policies affecting Latinx communities.

My findings indicate that Latinx postsecondary students are individually and collectively engaged, yet Latinx students have a challenging time identifying whether their civic activities can be considered civic engagement. To understand Dailynn's comment more thoroughly, we can engage Varlotta's (1997) concept of "service-as-charity-paradigm" (p. 59), which frames students as recipients of service or volunteer experiences helping those in need instead of framing students as engaged in civic action. Bocci's (2015) historiography found that people of color, within the service-learning literature, were stripped of their agency and that the individual contributions of people of color were ignored or reframed as collective movements. Culturally relevant practices that include Latinx representation within the curriculum impact Latinx students' self-conceptualization and academic success (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). It matters when



Latinx students see themselves and their communities' civic contributions reflected within the curriculum. Alondra shared that her K-12 experience did not engage with discussions or ideas of civic engagement or democratic participation from a culturally responsive approach. Alondra spoke about how her high school only taught a basic level of civic engagement and that it was her enrollment at Universidad de la Gente where she learned about different forms of civic engagement. The lack of racial or ethnic representation in the K-12 curriculum means that many Latinx students are entering college with a basic and incomplete understanding of civic engagement.

Participants lauded Universidad de la Gente for providing a more comprehensive understanding of civic engagement and creating on-campus opportunities to learn more about Latinx's civic contributions. Participants spoke about on-campus programs such as ISP, Pathways, and the Gender, Women, and Sexuality department, the English as a second language writing services, and the myriad of engaging and famous Latinx guest speakers that Universidad de la Gente has hosted. The participants in this study applauded Universidad de la Gente for being vocal about the diverse student population it serves and the intentional work it does to reach out to diverse communities.

### **Relinquishing Apoliticization and Race-Neutrality**

Participants in this study spoke about the impact Universidad de la Gente has had on their lives and those of their communities because of the institution's administration's willingness to step into the political arena in support of Latinx students. In turn, participants spoke about their commitment to Universidad de la Gente because institutional leadership have demonstrated a commitment to the state's Latinx

community. In 2012, Universidad de la Gente's Board of Trustees voted seven to one in support of developing an in-state tuition rate for undocumented students after the bill, failed in the state legislature for the sixth time. The controversial move by Universidad de la Gente, as the only institution to support the legislation, is credited with strengthening support for the bill, which later passed in 2013. Passage of the bill meant eligible undocumented students, in the state, could now receive in-state tuition at the state's public institutions and opened access to some of the state's state-based tuition stipend for eligible state undergraduates (Rice, 2013). Universidad de la Gente's president, at the time, spoke on the matter and acknowledged that the institution was created from the area's Latinx community and was committed to serving Latinx students. Participants in the study felt seen and supported by Universidad de la Gente because the institution was willing to put itself in the political spotlight to support Latinx students.

Sofia, a parent, and undocumented student, commented during the single focus group interview that she promotes Universidad de la Gente with friends, relatives, and her community because Universidad de la Gente has taken action to support Latinx and undocumented students. The ASSET legislation that provided undocumented students with in-state tuition was passed in 2013. Among Latinx Universidad de la Gente students and their communities, it is still regarded as a shining example of Universidad de la Gente's commitment and solidarity with these populations. Participants also saw Universidad de la Gente as committed to Latinx students by making available both financial resources and programs to support underrepresented student populations. Efraín spoke about Universidad de la Gente making a financial commitment to support their

students, especially during the COVID pandemic. Universidad de la Gente made available emergency grants to their students including *DACAmented* and undocumented students. Similarly, Lidia, who volunteers at local high schools, spoke about the importance of Universidad de la Gente within the state's higher education landscape as one of the most affordable four-year options in the state. Lidia viewed Universidad de la Gente's commitment to maintaining itself affordable as an important act of solidarity with the students it recruits and educates. Among participants, Universidad de la Gente's affordability was a political and race-conscious act because without Universidad de la Gente administration's focus on maintaining the institution affordable, it would no longer be a welcoming institution to Latinx students, many of whom identify as low-income.

Participants also spoke to Universidad de la Gente administration's willingness to enter Latinx communities and make itself known as a welcoming environment for Latinxs. Lidia emphasized the pride she feels when she sees Universidad de la Gente marketing in her local grocery store in Spanish. For Lidia, seeing her institution committed to her community gives her a sense of pride that she is then excited to share with other members of her community. Lidia shared that when she sees Universidad de la Gente posters in Spanish in her community, she shares with people in her community how proud she is to attend Universidad de la Gente. To participants in this study, Universidad de la Gente leadership's willingness to denounce apoliticization and race-neutrality and make itself visible in students' communities are what made participants feel the institution was committed to serving them holistically.

## **Faculty and Staff**

In addition to Universidad de la Gente administrator's willingness to enter the political arena in support of Latinx students, the institution also employed faculty and staff that understood the student populations they served. Several participants spoke about faculty members creating a classroom environment that felt safe for participants to be their authentic selves. Participants spoke about campus staff and administrators hosting events and creating spaces on campus that were welcoming of their identities and made them feel seen and supported. Examples participants provided were ISP, which supported undocumented and *DACAmented* students on campus, the writing center for English as a second language learners, the Gender and Women's Study Department, and the multitude of student clubs and organizations that catered to a diverse array of students on campus. Efraín spoke about feeling safe enough to share their undocumented status, in the classroom, and that that moment allowed them to move forward fully in their civic engagement work, rallying in support of issues affecting the Latinx undocumented community. Efraín recognized the impact Universidad de la Gente has had on the undocumented community and shared that Universidad de la Gente is producing immigrant, undocumented leaders that are an inspiration for students like themselves.

Universidad de la Gente faculty and staff created a campus environment of safety for participants and their multiple identities. Elisa spoke to her experience in Texas where the racism and homophobia found in the state, and on the community college campus she attended there had limited her engagement. Elisa spoke about how her institution in Texas did not foster a campus where she wanted to engage or participate in, as it felt like

a hostile environment. For Elisa, Universidad de la Gente was an altogether different experience. Elisa shared that at Universidad de la Gente she felt both physically and emotionally safe and that the institution, specifically the faculty, provided an inclusive and culturally welcoming campus. In research conducted by Diaz Solodukhin and Orphan (2022), we found that faculty members and students can engage in reciprocal relationships that encourage and increase student's civic leadership development when faculty members acknowledge students' lived experiences as valid. Like our 2022 findings, Universidad de la Gente faculty members were acknowledging Latinx student's identities and lived experiences to create culturally responsive classroom and campus environments. However, although Universidad de la Gente faculty members were lauded as creating welcoming campus environments for participants, Dailynn recognized that there remains work to be done. Dailynn, during the single focus group interview, commented on the Eurocentricity of the curriculum and that even though her instructor acknowledged they were teaching through a dominant western, male lens, he could not teach her diverse forms of engagement found in society or that students were bringing with them into the classroom.

Acknowledgement of Latinx students' identity and lived experiences from faculty and staff was critical to making the campus and classroom environment a welcoming space for Latinx students. Several participants spoke on the importance of faculty members seeing them and recognizing their identities and the challenges this created on campus. For Belen, a faculty member's prompt recognition of her struggle mastering English was an opportunity to connect her to vital campus support systems. Belen's

instructor encouraged her to continue working on her English language proficiency and connected her to the writing center, which had an English as a second language focus.

Universidad de la Gente faculty members, by acknowledging student's identities, were supporting their curricular and co-curricular success. Elisa commented how a faculty member connected her to the Gender, Women, and Sexuality department so she could learn about events they were hosting. Elisa, as a queer identifying Latina, felt her emotional and physical safety increase when a faculty member connected her to the department and their events. Faculty members were institutional agents connecting students to valuable, identity driven resources, and programs on campus that supported them holistically.

### **Recommendations for Research, Theory, Practice, and Policy**

Future directions for policy and practice include exploring further the concept of interrelational engagement more closely and how it manifests on postsecondary campuses, specifically, HSIs. I purposefully created my third research question to gather data and information that could inform a series of recommendations for practice, theory, research, and policy. The following recommendations draw from findings related to my third research question and inform these set of recommendations. Understanding interrelational engagement more intimately would support the development of culturally relevant civic engagement programming among postsecondary administrators, faculty, and staff in support of their Latinx students. Administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs could then develop civic engagement activities that utilize and support this type of civic behavior. Similarly, exploring and understanding more closely how intergenerational

engagement is enacted among Latinx students, can inform how college and university campuses can develop campus environments and climates that are welcoming of students' familial and community networks. Latinx students come from collectivist cultures (Arevalo et al., 2016; Chang, 2015), which means that Latinx students are not just pursuing a postsecondary education for themselves but for the betterment of their families and their communities. Supporting Latinx students and the multiple generations of individuals within their familial and community networks would support Latinx students in comprehensive ways and support Latinx community health. Additionally, I suggest this study be replicated in different geographic areas of the country and within different Latinx communities due to the diversity of experiences within different Latinx communities. The diversity among Latinx communities may lead to additional forms of civic engagement that have not been explored in civic engagement research and discourse.

Touched upon, but not deeply explored due to the scope of this study, was the role of first- and second-generation student status on the civic engagement development of Latinx students. Dailynn, as the only second-generation participant in this study, highlighted tensions that may exist within second-generation Latinx students and their civic identities. Exploring and understanding how first- and second-generation Latinx students differ and why this may be the case would better inform faculty members' and staffs' civic engagement activities. Finally, additional research needs to be done to understand the civic engagement activities and behaviors of non-traditional and commuter students. In this study, all participants were commuter students, and most were

non-traditional. The civic engagement field has not explored, at length, how non-traditional students and commuter students interact with campus-sponsored civic engagement programming. Additionally, it can be difficult to understand the civic engagement development and accompanying activities of commuter students; more research should be conducted in this space, especially, as Latinx students tend to stay close to home and commute to their campuses (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Santiago, 2007).

HSIs were not specifically created with the purpose to support Latinx students, unlike their counterparts HBCUs and TCUs, however, HSIs and their increasing presence in the higher education landscape means this institutional type is poised to support the largest ethnic minority group in the country (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Santiago, 2007). Higher education professionals at IHEs must recognize that Latinx students attend the college campus as racialized individuals by virtue of their racial/ethnic membership within the United States context (Lima, 2007). The following recommendations assist postsecondary institution administrators, faculty, staff, scholars, and policymakers with decolonizing their civic engagement activities. I begin with providing recommendations for research and how the civic engagement field can augment scholarship that is culturally relevant and refutes racial neutrality and centers Latinx student expertise. I provide recommendations for theory that advocate for the use of theoretical frameworks that explore the role of identity. I provide recommendations for practice that guide higher professionals at IHEs to develop culturally responsive approaches to the programs and services they develop to support and serve Latinx



students and civic engagement activities. Finally, I present recommendations for policymakers on how they can support IHEs to better serve Latinx students and their families, so Latinx students can further enact their civic activities.

### **Recommendations for Research**

Postsecondary institution faculty members and staff must provide resources for Latinx students to conduct research and advocacy work that supports their communities and build upon Latinx civic engagement practices such as interrelational engagement and intergenerational paving. I recommend administrators, faculty, and staff at IHEs provide support for Latinx students seeking to conduct research in their own communities by utilizing culturally relevant methods that uplift their experiences, center their perspectives, and those of their communities. Faculty members should utilize liberatory and emancipating research methods such as art-based research because these methods allow participants to approach research creatively, expanding who can participate in research. Photovoice, in this study, allowed online and commuter students to participate in research in, and about, their own communities. In this study, Latinx students were able to highlight how they practiced civic engagement, locally within their communities, something that would have been difficult for Universidad de la Gente to explore with methods that center the expertise of the institution over that of the participant. Research approaches should include both academic and non-academic outcomes that are race-aware and include what Garcia (2019b) describes as critical consciousness. Bañales and colleagues (2020) used critical consciousness to understand and explain how Latinx and Black youth enact civic engagement when they reflect on peoples' marginalization.

Studies and toolkits that researchers can reference further on the use of arts-based research are Wang and colleagues (2017), Pearson and colleagues (2018), and Barone and Eisner (2012).

Research activity with Latinx students will look different due to their historical relationship with the United States, colonization, and geographic specificity. Latinx are not homogenous, thus distinct cultural backgrounds will expose Latinx students to different lived experiences (Morales, 2018). Latinx students' relationship with the United States will inform what types of research activities they will seek and create unique approaches to research projects. Faculty members and staff need to tailor their research activities with specificity for the Latinx communities from which their students represent. Importantly, postsecondary institution faculty members and staff must center and allow Latinx students to lead and inform the research being conducted within the communities from which the students originate.

I am intrigued by the overrepresentation of undocumented/DACAmented participants in this study. A call for participants was widely distributed throughout the university, in both social media, direct messaging via email and conversations, attendance to on-campus events, and through snowball sampling, nonetheless, most participants in this study identified as undocumented or *DACAmented* students. I suggest further studies be conducted to better understand the impetus for Latinx undocumented students to participate in research studies on civic engagement, compared to students with legal status. In the next section, I provide recommendations for how we can move toward

formally recognizing and elevating Latinx student's civic engagement activities and behaviors from the fringe into visibility.

Researchers should utilize technological tools that allow for increased Latinx student participation in research studies. Participants requested to participate virtually, via Zoom, primarily in the evening to accommodate work schedules, and use of texting over email, which facilitated the participation of students with various obligations.

Universidad de la Gente is a commuter campus. All participants in this study were commuter or online students; a majority identified as non-traditional students with multiple jobs, children, family, and community obligations. One participant lived 1.5 hours away from campus, while several participants had children and limited access to daycare. Conducting this study in-person, on-campus would have limited participants' ability to participate. Although participant preference for technological tools is a finding not directly linked to a research question, I present it as both an implication and recommendation of conducting research with Latinx postsecondary students. Nine of the 10 participants utilized their cell phone for capturing their photographs. Participants sent pictures to me via text messaging or by uploading pictures directly to a secure Microsoft OneDrive drive folder through their phone.

My study corroborates scholars' findings on Latinx student preference for mobile devices in research participation. Scholars (Perrin & Turner, 2019; Brown et al., 2016; Cohen & Kahne, 2012) have found that Latinxs are more likely to utilize their mobile devices. Institutional staff should ensure their internet presence utilizes "responsive design" (Marcotte, 2011) to guarantee students can view information via their mobile

devices. Responsive design adjusts placement of web content to fit the available space of a device by adjusting the width of the content (Marcotte, 2011). Using tools such as virtual meeting environments and mobile devices can expand the ability of commuter, online, and non-traditional students to participate in research activities.

Finally, campus faculty members and staff need to provide civic engagement research opportunities for the diverse student populations they represent such as commuter, online, and non-traditional students. Participation, in this study, included online students located a few hours away from campus, non-traditional students with demanding work schedules, and student parents who had limited access to daycare. I recommend faculty and staff to utilize digital resources and technology to broaden participation among students who may not have opportunities to participate in civic engagement research.

### **Recommendations for Theory**

Higher education administrators, faculty, and staff, need to develop opportunities for Latinx students to learn about the civic, economic, scientific, and historical contributions of Latinxs to the United States and how racialization informed those contributions. Importantly, scholars need to decolonize (Quijano, 1992) their understanding of civic engagement to broaden and include Latinx civic practices and behaviors that reject hegemony and create a unique civic identity. Decolonizing civic engagement means recognizing and valuing Latinx agency and their historical and current contributions to U.S. society. It also means supporting the Latinx student holistically, which includes Latinx students as individuals and as members of a robust

community. Mitchell and colleagues (1994) and Bocci (2015) describe how the savior complex utilized by higher education professionals, at IHEs, ignore, make invisible, and further marginalize already marginalized Latinx communities. Civic engagement scholars and practitioners must renounce the savior complex that permeates the civic engagement field (Mitchell et al., 1994; Bocci, 2015). Civic engagement scholars and practitioners should develop culturally relevant civic engagement activities within research, and in their curricular and co-curricular programming that support Latinx students.

Scholars and faculty members should increase representation of Latinxs' civic engagement contributions within the curriculum and in their co-curricular programming. Findings from this study indicate that Latinx student's view their bodies as political statements and see their physical presence in spaces, from which Latinxs have been historically excluded and marginalized, as activism. Campus administrators, faculty, and staff should increase visibility of Latinxs' civic contributions to help students understand that using their physical bodies as activism is a strong and valid form of engagement used throughout history by Latinx individuals and communities. Latinx students see their presence on college and university campuses, and other social spaces such as cultural facilities, as a civic activity.

Finally, civic engagement scholars and researchers need to utilize theoretical frameworks that interrogate the role and impact of identity on the development of an individual's civic engagement behaviors and activities. Theoretical frameworks, such as LCC (Rosaldo, 1994a, 1994b), help us better understand how Latinxs develop and enact behaviors that are responsive to their culture and their socio- and political environment. It

is important for scholars and higher education professionals to understand that Latinx students do not build a civic engagement identity in a vacuum. Latinx individuals develop a civic identity as a direct response to the apolitization Latinxs experience in the U.S. politic (Flores & Benmayor, 1997). Students, on campus, will be affected by what is happening in the country and using theoretical frameworks that center identity, culture, and civic engagement experiences must be used.

I also suggest that researchers interrogate how theoretical frameworks may be incomplete or could become more robust if they explored the role of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141; Morales, 2018, p. 122). Participants in this study did not only adhere to a Latinx identity but spoke frequently about their other identities (e.g., undocumented/*DACAmented*, parent, first-or-second generation students, queer, etc.). Participants spoke about their intersectionality creating different lived experiences between participants. My study explores further how a Latinx identity is not binary but infused with intersectionality to develop the civic identities of Latinx postsecondary students. This study helps expand our theoretical use of intersectionality in the development of Latinx postsecondary students' civic engagement development.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Higher education professionals, at IHEs, must acknowledge and nurture Latinx students' familial and community networks as assets that drive forward student success and inform civic engagement activities and behaviors. Latinx student's families and communities should be invited onto campus and seen as collaborators in a student's educational success and personal growth. Latinx students use interrelational engagement

to collect and share vital knowledge, resources, and information that support the health and stability of their families and communities. Latinx students view the postsecondary campus, not just as a vehicle for educational and workforce readiness, but as a space that could help their family with resources and knowledge.

Administrators, at IHEs, should provide programming that welcomes Latinx students' families onto the college campus and makes resources available in various languages. Participants shared that providing many of the existing resources in Spanish would be seen as a welcoming aspect from their institution. One example participants shared was the need for their institution to provide orientation programs that are in Spanish and welcome both the student and the entire family to participate; this is vitally important for first-generation students. Secondly, participants spoke about the importance of providing orientation programs for undocumented students, who will have a vastly different experience than their documented peers. Latinx students view the college campus as a resource hub and Latinx students want to see the college campus extend to their communities as well. Sarubbi and colleagues (2019) conducted research on orientation programs among nine different institutions with families of color and found that when families of color feel invisible within orientation programming, these families can feel undervalued within the institution and may hurt the academic success of students. Sarubbi and colleagues (2019) argued that institutions should create orientation programming that acknowledges families' lived experiences, identities, and cultural assets to develop more welcoming campus environments.

Campus leaders must create professional development opportunities for faculty members to learn how to develop classrooms and curricula that are culturally responsive and inclusive of diverse student populations and that incorporate civic engagement scholarship; so, students are exposed to civic engagement as part of their studies. Faculty members play a significant role in ensuring Latinx students feel a sense of belonging on college and university campuses (Diaz Solodukhin & Orphan, 2022; Martinez, 2019; Garcia, 2017). Participants in this study saw faculty members not only as teachers, but as resource brokers that could navigate and connect students to vital resources and on-campus groups that could support student's well-being and that of their communities. Faculty members must create representation within course content that highlights the civic contributions of diverse populations – as the college/university classroom can be the first-place students learn about their communities' civic engagement activities and contributions to U.S. society. Adamo and colleagues (2022) provide strategies for how classroom environments can be modified and transformed to employ the “values, assets, and collective knowledge” of racially diverse student populations (p. 85). Some of the strategies Adamo and colleagues (2022) share for building a culturally and inclusive pedagogical approach in the classroom include inviting student feedback about the course and its content and inviting students to co-construct, co-teach, and co-learn in the classroom.

Faculty members can learn from my study how representation within the curriculum is critical to Latinx postsecondary student's conceptualization of a civically engaged identity. Participants were clear that they did not see themselves or the Latinx



community's civic contributions reflected in the curriculum in their primary and secondary educational experiences. Similarly, participants did not speak broadly about their university curriculum being reflective of the Latinx community's civic contributions, many of their experiences with civic engagement occurred primarily in the co-curricular space. Faculty members should increase and infuse the representation of and the civic contributions of Latinx individuals and communities into their curriculum.

Additionally, these recommendations are not exclusively for HSIs. Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) can utilize the findings from this study and these set of recommendations to inform their civic engagement activities. My study found that Latinx students bring their intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989) onto the college campus and what happens outside and inside the institution affects students and their academic trajectories. PWIs need to be ready to take a position and enact actionable steps to support Latinx students as Latinx students' social environment impacts them both inside and outside the classroom.

Finally, many RCUs were created to develop and train teachers for the workforce (Ogren, 2003; Orphan & McClure, 2019). Participants in this study felt their K-12 education and the curriculum did not do enough to educate and instill an understanding of civic engagement or the processes that support democratic participation or a civic identity. IHEs with teacher preparation programs are uniquely positioned to develop teacher training programs that adequately prepare teachers to teach about civic engagement, democracy, and civic participation. Importantly, teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers that can teach on the civic engagement activities of

different racial/ethnic communities and reinforce the United States' long history of civic participation and activation from communities of color.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

Postsecondary institution administrators, faculty, and staff need to be aware of the political and social climate in which Latinx students exist and be ready to take a position that supports their well-being. Students are acutely attuned to what is happening in society and how U.S. government policy affects them and their families.

Postsecondary institution administrators must be ready to take a position against or in support of policies that affect Latinx students negatively and hinder their civic engagement activation and participation. Campus administrators should develop policies to mitigate the negative effects of government policies on Latinx students.

Latinx students enter postsecondary education not only for their education but to seek out information and resources that can be used to support and advance the well-being of their community, family, and networks. Kiyama (2010) conducted research that found Latinx social networks function as “informational resources” (p. 342) which provide families with information on processes and help them advance toward goals to which they aspire. Latinx students use their postsecondary institutions as a resource for collecting vital information and resources for themselves and then share it with their own communities. Campus administrators should develop policies that enhance how information and resources are shared with students and their communities.

Administrators should be prepared to take policy positions that are informed through a

racial/ethnic lens and through culturally responsive approaches to best support Latinx students.

Higher education professionals must involve students in identifying the need, developing the policies, and participating in the advocating for policies that will support Latinx students. Higher education professionals who support and advocate for the needs of Latinx students play a large part in creating a sense of belonging, dismantling invisibility, and ensuring access is enshrined in policy. HSIs can be key players in pursuing public policy that supports Latinx students. Latinx students know the issues that are affecting their communities, they simply need the resources and skills to uplift their interrelational engagement into system-level engagement (e.g., political processes, policy, etc.).

A recommendation for federal-level policymakers is for the U.S. Department of Education to support and reward HSI institutions who demonstrate a commitment and plan for how to support Latinx student's civic engagement behaviors and activities. HSIs only need to enroll 25 percent Hispanic identifying students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) to receive a HSI designation, and the designation expands opportunities for grant dollars. Grants should be awarded to HSIs who support the civic engagement and democratic development of Latinx students through culturally appropriate programs and policies.

### **Conclusion**

Decolonizing (Stein & Andreotti, 2016) higher education is not an easy endeavor and seems even harder within the civic engagement field. The Whiteness that has

pervaded the civic engagement field does not disappear overnight with a few studies that use participatory and liberatory research methods and approaches; however, I do believe we achieve this goal by highlighting the civic practices of Latinx students and more broadly, by understanding and interrogating why students of color civic behaviors have developed in certain ways. Latinx students and their communities *juntos luchan* for the betterment of their communities. The civic engagement field does not have the luxury of remaining apolitical or race-neutral anymore. It is the racialized identities of Latinxs that drive many of the civic activities among Latinx postsecondary students. We need to expand the study of the civic engagement field with new and innovative research approaches, theoretical frameworks, and practices that center the lived experiences of people of color within the field.

I acknowledge that decolonization work requires vulnerability from both the researcher and participants; it requires reflexivity, honesty, and importantly - courage. It takes courage to look to history and see the myriad ways in which Latinxs have been disenfranchised, discriminated, disempowered, and our bodies politicized in ways that were and continue to be used to justify physical harm upon us. It also takes courage to do something about it and to develop ways of fighting for our rights to participate fully as members of society. Findings from this study demonstrate that Latinx students are doing just that – they are building their own ways to resist. Latinx students at this HSI developed interrelational engagement practices to learn about familial and community needs and then gathered the knowledge and resources needed to address those needs – all with a focus on the future. Latinx students then utilized the postsecondary institution as a

hub where they can access vital information and resources they can bring back to their communities.

The importance of this study and work lives in the civic mechanisms Latinx students have developed in response to a society and civic engagement movement that has omitted their rich historical legacy of activism, advocacy, and engagement. Intergenerational paving is only one example of how Latinx students are using their culture to honor the sacrifices and hard work of their families to provide expanded opportunities for success. Latinx students take the baton from those that have come before and honor their ancestors by crafting an easier path for future generations of Latinxs. If administrators, at IHEs, want to recruit and retain Latinx students to their campuses, they must do more to create culturally relevant civic engagement programming and meet students where they are - in their communities. The proliferation of HSIs means that the co-curricular space is equally important as the curricular, which needs to also evolve to be representative of diverse student populations. Only in this way will HSIs move from simply enrolling to serving Latinx students in holistic ways that support their success and reaffirm higher education's role as a place for democratic preparation. Finally, in essence, *juntos luchamos* for a better future.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix A: Recruitment Brochure**

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study: *Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution*

Dear [INSERT NAME],

My name is Liliana Diaz, and I am a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education. I am inviting you to participate in my dissertation project focused on exploring Latinx student's interactions with civic engagement. Participants will be asked to take photographs as part of this study. You are being invited to participate in this study because you may be able to provide insightful information on how Latinx students engage with notions of civic engagement.

*Civic engagement is defined as the acts and behaviors of individuals or groups of people, working collectively, to confront larger and complex societal problems by addressing their root causes through a variety of methods.*

This study focuses specifically on how Latinx students interact with ideas and practices surrounding civic engagement and how colleges and universities can support students in their civic endeavors. Your perspectives will help our understanding.

I seek participants for this project who meet the following requirements:

- Identify as Latina/o/x, Hispanic, Chicano
- Currently attending Universidad de la Gente
- Willing to take photographs as part of the project

Participation in this study will include three, one-hour sessions either in-person or via videoconference (e.g., Zoom). Participants will be asked to take photographs using a cell phone camera. The three hour-long sessions will be audio recorded. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. For your participation in the study, you will be provided a \$25 VISA gift card after completion of each one-hour session and a final gift card at the conclusion of the project for a total of \$100.

If you would like to participate in the project or have any questions, please contact me via email at [Liliana.diaz@du.edu](mailto:Liliana.diaz@du.edu). I will provide additional information on this project.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Liliana Diaz

Ph.D. Candidate | Morgridge College of Education | University of Denver



## Appendix B: Single Focus Group Interview Protocol

Research Questions	Single Focus Group Interview Protocol Guide to Elucidate Conversation on Participant Photographs
<p>Research Question #1: How do Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution define and practice civic engagement?</p>	<p><i>Civic Engagement &amp; Latinxs</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you define civic engagement? Civic participation? Why do you define it this way?</li> <li>2. Which photographs, that you captured, do you think best define Latinx civic engagement? Why?</li> <li>3. In what ways do your photographs demonstrate how you practice civic engagement?</li> </ol>
<p>Research Question #2: How does identity inform the civic engagement practices of Latinx postsecondary students?</p>	<p><i>Identity Formation &amp; Awareness</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. How does your racial and/or ethnic identity inform how you define and interact with civic engagement?</li> <li>5. In your opinion, how do Latinx communities practice civic engagement differently than other groups? Why, may this be the case?</li> </ol>
<p>Research Question #3: What practices should a Hispanic-Serving Institution establish to support their Latinx student's civic engagement development?</p>	<p><i>Civic Engagement &amp; Universidad de la Gente</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What civic engagement activities have you participated in through Universidad de la Gente, if any?</li> <li>7. How does Universidad de la Gente contribute to your understanding of civic engagement?</li> <li>8. What advice do you have for campus leaders about supporting Latinx students in their civic engagement development?</li> </ol>

## Appendix C: Participant Photography Instructions & Prompt

### Participant Photography Instructions & Prompt

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this project titled: *Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution*. As a part of this project, you are asked to respond to several prompt questions using photography. Participation in this project will include taking 24 photographs with a cellphone camera.

After each photography session, you will upload images to a Microsoft Office folder that is only accessible to you and to the researcher. You will then meet two times for approximately 60 minutes to discuss the photographs you have taken, alongside other participants.

During these group meetings, you will be asked to share your photographs with the group – your photographs will not be shared or distributed with anyone outside the group without your permission - you will be asked to sign a photo release form for the photographs you wish to share publicly. As part of this meeting, you will be asked how your photographs respond to the prompt questions (see below).

Participant Photograph Prompts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Take a picture of what it means to you to be Latinx, Hispanic, and/or Chicax.</li><li>2. To me, civic engagement means...[complete the statement with photographs].</li><li>3. Now put prompt #1 (your identity) and #2 (civic engagement) together [take a picture].</li></ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. My relationship with civic engagement is...[complete the statement with photographs.]</li><li>5. I practice civic engagement by...[complete the statement with photographs].</li><li>6. My community practices civic engagement by...[complete the statement with photographs].</li></ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. A typical day at Universidad de la Gente looks like [fill in the blank by taking some photographs].</li><li>8. Capture how your ethnic and/or racial identity informs your relationship with Universidad de la Gente [use photography to capture this relationship].</li><li>9. Universidad de la Gente helps me grow civically by...[fill in the blank by taking some photographs].</li></ol>

10. Take a photograph of something that Universidad de la Gente is doing to cultivate or grow your civic identity.

*Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time.*

### Photograph Consent

A consent and photo release form must be obtained from anyone who is recognizable (i.e., you can see their face clearly) in your photographs. If you photograph anyone under 18 years of age, you must obtain a consent and photo release form from the minor's legal guardian. The consent and photo release form has a place for a guardian's signature. You have 30 consent forms provided to you as part of your packet. If you require additional consent and photo release forms, these have been provided to you electronically to the email you provided when you registered as a participant. Please share the project brochure, included as part of your packet, to those you have photographed that have questions about the project.

### Photography Pointers

- You can take photographs vertically or horizontally.
- When taking pictures outdoors, keep the sun to your back to avoid sun glares or washing your subject out.
- Be as creative as you would like as long as your photo attempts to respond to the prompt.
- Be safe. Do not put yourself or those you photograph in danger.
- Do not take photographs of illegal activity or pornographic material.
- Make sure to have consent and photo release forms with you as you take your pictures.
- Feel free to handout a project brochure if you are questioned about taking photographs.

If you have questions during the project, please contact me. You can reach me via email, text, or phone. My email address is [Liliana.diaz@du.edu](mailto:Liliana.diaz@du.edu).

Thank you so much for participating!

Liliana Diaz  
[Liliana.Diaz@du.edu](mailto:Liliana.Diaz@du.edu)

## **Appendix D: University of Denver Consent Form: Participation in Research**

### **Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research**

**Title of Research Study:** Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

**Researcher(s):**

Student Investigator: Liliana Diaz, Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver

Faculty Sponsor: Cecilia Orphan, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver.

**Study Site:** Universidad de la Gente

**Purpose**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to understand the civic engagement behaviors of Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

**Procedures**

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to document, through photography, how you engage with notions of civic engagement. You will attend three 60 minute in-person meetings. The first is an orientation where you will learn more details about the study and receive project materials such as consent and photo release forms and a prompt you will use to take pictures. The second meeting is a single focus group interview where the researcher will ask you questions about the photographs you took as part of the project. The third meeting is to discuss how your photographs and messages will be presented to the wider Universidad de la Gente community as part of an exhibition. The photograph collection phase will last one-month, and the exhibition will be conducted during one day at a later, collectively selected date.

**Photographs**

You will receive access to all your photographs electronically from Liliana Diaz, principal investigator. Any photographs you take as part of this project, may not appear on social media sites (e.g., Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) or otherwise be published online or in any other format.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to take pictures, share your pictures, participate in the single focus group interview, or the exhibition, etc. for any reason without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.

**Risks or Discomforts**

Potential risks and/or discomforts of participation associated with this study are minimal and do not exceed risks encountered in daily life. The researcher will brief you on photovoice methods and appropriate use of cell phone cameras. A photo consent form must be obtained for individuals that are identifiable in participant photographs.

**Benefits**

No direct benefits derive from participating in this study. Benefits to society include broadened understanding of civic behaviors of Latinx students on college/university campuses.

**Incentives to Participate**

You will receive one-\$25 visa gift card after participating in each meeting as described below for a total of \$100 for completing the entire study:

1. Orientation
2. Single focus group interview
3. Exhibition planning meeting
4. Exhibition

Participants that withdraw from the project will be able to retain the gift card(s) received prior to the point of withdrawal. Participants will not receive gift cards for future meetings after withdrawing from the study.

**Confidentiality**

The researcher will utilize Microsoft 365, as provided by the University of Denver to maintain participant's photographs/videos secure. Only the participant and the researcher will have access to the Microsoft 365 folder where participant photographs/videos will be stored. Photographs captured as part of this project will only be publicly exhibited with participant consent through a signed photo release form. Photographs/videos will be destroyed 7 years after completion of the study; however, participants will have the option to retain their photographs. Audio/video recordings, and any associated transcripts collected as part of the study, will be destroyed 7 years after completion of the study.

**Privacy**

Photovoice offers the opportunity for participants to directly inform policymakers (in this study, Universidad de la Gente administrators) of changes they would like to see to support their needs. You have the option to present yourself in the study or maintain privacy by choosing a pseudonym. If you choose to maintain your privacy, you will be asked to select a pseudonym and your information will be kept private when presented or published about this study.

However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with

the order or subpoena. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants, including individuals on behalf of Cecilia Orphan, Associate Director, Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education.

### **Participant Privacy**

Please check mark your choice for the options below:

Participant gives the researcher consent to divulge their identity as part of the study.

Participant requests that their identity remain private as part of their participation.

Participant selects the following pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Recordings**

Please check mark your choice for the options below:

The researchers may audio/video record or photograph me during this study.

The researchers may NOT audio/video record or photograph me during this study.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Liliana Diaz at [Liliana.diaz@du.edu](mailto:Liliana.diaz@du.edu) at any time. You can contact faculty sponsor Cecilia Orphan, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education at [Cecilia.orphan@du.edu](mailto:Cecilia.orphan@du.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu) or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

### **Appendix E: Participant Photo Release Form**

#### **Participant Photo Release Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_, grant permission to Liliana Diaz/Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution to use my image(s) (photographs and/or video) for use in:

(Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Publications and articles	<input type="checkbox"/> Exhibitions
<input type="checkbox"/> Videos	<input type="checkbox"/> Photography
<input type="checkbox"/> Social media posts	<input type="checkbox"/> Newsletters/magazines
<input type="checkbox"/> Websites and/or affiliates	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:

I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished photographs or electronic matter that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the image.

Please **initial** the paragraph below that applies to your present situation:

\_\_\_\_\_ - I am 18 years of age or older and I am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

\_\_\_\_\_ - I am the parent or legal guardian of the below named child. I have read this release before signing below, and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release by submitting those questions in writing prior to signing, and I agree that

my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

Signature:		Date:
Signature of parent/guardian if under 18 years or age:		
Name (please print):		
Address:	City:	Zip:
Email:		Phone:

**Appendix F: General Photo Release Form**

**General Photo Release Form**

**Study Title:** Juntos Luchamos: A Postcritical Ethnographic and Photovoice Study on Latinx Student Civic Engagement Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

**Study Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this research is to understand the civic engagement behaviors of Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

**Photographs**

Participants involved, as part of this study, have been asked to respond to prompts using photography. You are receiving this form because one of the study’s participants would like to photograph you as a part of their response to the prompt. Photographs of you will not be presented, published, or exhibited without your consent.

**Statement of Release**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant, Liliana Diaz, the principal investigator of this study, the right to use the photographs taken of me for any purpose in perpetuity and waive any right to inspect or approve the finished photographs or electronic matter that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the image.

Signature:		Date:
Signature of parent/guardian if under 18 years or age:		
Name (please print):		



Address:	City:	Zip:
Email:		Phone:

**Contact Information for Researcher**

If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to:

Principal Investigator  
Liliana Diaz  
Liliana.diaz@du.edu