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THE LATINA/O STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL STUDIES: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research investigation was to explore the experiences of eighth-grade Latina/o students in a large, urban school in the Southeastern United States. Overall, the study uncovered the essence of the Latino/a student experience in social studies and furthermore revealed that social studies is not meeting the needs of Latino students.

Using phenomenology as a method of research, two interviews were conducted with twelve research participants who were selected through purposive sampling. In addition to the interviews, students wrote narratives and drew images as a form of data triangulation. The goal was to give students various methods for relaying their experiences. Data were analyzed using suggested methods of analysis by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007).

Using Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory as a framework, results revealed that students experienced middle school social studies through the lens of race. Students felt oppressed by the curriculum and textbook due to the fact that culturally responsive teaching practices were primarily absent, diversity was presented only through a Black-White dichotomy, and the social studies curriculum was dominated by notions of White supremacy. Latina/o students experienced a curriculum that was boring as a result of teachers who were boring. Students validated the use of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory as a framework for educational research at the middle school level.

In all, this research investigation fills a void in social studies research. The voices and experiences of Latino learners in social studies have been absent in social studies research.

Educators can use this research study to alter the approaches to the social studies curriculum for the betterment of our culturally diverse learners.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

The racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of America is why the country is often referred to as extremely diverse, and one of the main contributors to American diversity is the Latino American. Contributing largely to the diversity and ongoing diversifying of our nation, Latinos constitute 50.5 million or 16% percent of the United States population as reported by the United States Census Bureau (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). According to a United States Census Brief authored by Ennis et al. (2011), Latinos account for half of the population growth in the United States of America from 2000 to 2010, and over half of the total Latino population reside in California, Texas, and Florida combined, although statistics show that this ethnic group is starting to branch out into other states.

As the Latino population continues to grow in the United States, the number of students surpasses the overall population growth with about one out of every five public school students being Latino (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). While diversity should be welcomed within America's communities as well as our schools, it can be difficult to make changes to accommodate the growing number of racial, ethnic, and culturally diverse students in our classrooms. However, this is not a new problem, as the institution of education has historically been slow to respond to growing populations that do not fit into the "one size fits all" approach of the American public school system (Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1974). This description is also historically accurate when specifically describing our school systems' failures to meet the needs of students of color, who

have occupied desks in mainstream classrooms due to desegregation and population migration (Anderson, 1988; Neckerman, 2007). It is common knowledge that America has for hundreds of years struggled with how to formally educate children of color. Due to segregation, unequal resources, and various forms of institutional discrimination, students of color have lagged behind their White peers in many educational subjects. Social studies has also been culpable regarding the education of students of color. In fact, one of the very founders of the field of social studies education, Thomas Jesse Jones, was a known racist and educated Blacks as well as Native Americans for second-class citizenship at the Hampton Institute during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Anderson (1988, p. 51) stated that:

These subjects [social studies] were aimed primarily at teaching Hampton's students the "right" ideas of citizenship, the duties of laborers, and the history of race development. History, for instance, was designed as a study of the "evolution of races" and was aimed at giving the pupils "a new notion of race development." Jones contended that Black students arrived at Hampton with common sense notions of the problems of racial subordination. "Their acquaintance with the race problem has made them precautious in their knowledge of social forces controlling and limiting the development of races. The White youth grows to manhood without feeling any of the limitations which the colored youth feels all his life." But, Jones continued, "while the colored youth is more conscious of social forces than the White, his views are not natural." From Jones' vantage point, Black students' views of "race development" were unnatural because Blacks tended to interpret the social limitations imposed on them as arbitrary and unjust. The Hampton faculty taught Black students that the position of their race in the South was not the result of oppression but of the natural process of cultural evolution. In other words, Blacks had evolved to a cultural stage that was 2,000 years behind that of Whites and, therefore, they were naturally the subordinate race. (p. 51)

Due to the failure of American public school systems to adapt to racial, ethnic, and culturally disadvantaged populations, Black and Latino students have struggled and continue to struggle in areas of academic achievement (MacDonald, 2004). Most Black and Latino students lag behind their White peers in the areas of math and English, which are the primary subject areas of focus in what the school system eventually constitutes as leading to literacy (Hemphill, Vanneman, & Rahman, 2011; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2011). Research

shows that for Latinos especially, it is important to examine the entire range of educational issues affecting Latinos, ranging from public policy, language, curriculum, and teacher education, for a solution to closing the achievement gap between Latinos and Whites (Murrilo et al., 2010).

Statement of Problem

While educators are aware of the problem pertaining to the education of Latinos and other students of color, over-generalized efforts are being made by focusing entirely on reading, English, and math in our nation's public schools in an effort to reduce the severity of the achievement gap (Au, 2009). However, the achievement gap between Latino and White students does not exist only in the areas of math and English but extends into the content areas where high-stakes testing also exists (Grant, 2006, 2007). This gap is especially present for social studies, in which Latino students report much lower scores on standardized tests in the areas of United States history, civics, and geography, as reported by the National Council for Educational Statistics (2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

In the area of civics, there is a 23-point gap between Latino and White students in the eighth grade and a 19-point gap in scores for each respective group in the twelfth grade (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011a). The gap in geography scores is larger with a 28-point gap between eighth-grade Latinos and Whites and a 20-point gap for twelfth graders (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011b). United States history scores reflect poorly as well with both eighth- and twelfth-grade Latino students, who on average score 21 points below Whites. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011c).

Not only are Latino students underperforming on high-stakes social studies exams, but the social studies as a field has done little to address the needs of the Latino learner. Of all fields equipped to accommodate Latinos as well as other students from ethnically diverse backgrounds,

social studies provides the ideal curriculum for the teaching and understanding of diverse cultures present within the K-12 classroom (Sanchez, 1997). Nevertheless, there is a lack of dialogue and discussion dedicated to matters concerning race and ethnicity in the social studies (Howard, 2003), which may explain why Latino students are not performing well on social studies high-stakes exams. As the nation becomes browner, which the population statistics previously mentioned indicate is happening, it is imperative that curriculums across all fields reflect cultural relevance and address the growing needs of a diverse student body (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). Apparently, social studies is failing the Latino student, as shown by a lack of research pertaining to social studies and the Latino learner as well as low achievement scores. The disconnect is obvious, so it is imperative that the experiences of Latino students in social studies and what this means for their performance are uncovered through research.

Perhaps the most prevalent issue concerning the relationship between social studies and Latinos is the concept of culture. There is a large disconnect between the curriculum and Latino culture, mainly because of the westernization of social studies content, especially history and government curriculum. Concepts such as manifest destiny, free enterprise, loyalty to one's nation, democratic citizenship, and basic rights are often foreign to the lived experiences of minority students (Gay, 2005). Not only are these concepts foreign, but to teach them in such a westernized, Euro-male-dominated manner only contributes to the practice of exploiting and ignoring contributions to United States history and culture by Latinos as well as other minority groups.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is the main acting body over social studies education, and in its position statement (2001) stated that "social studies should move to develop an understanding of various ethnic and cultural groups as well as their contributions to

American society.” Unfortunately, social studies curriculum is not culturally responsive, and therefore perpetuates the racialized stigma that Latinos (and other ethnic minorities for that matter) have made contributions to society, but only within the realms of the European male’s standards (Howard, 2003). According to Gay (2005), teaching students European-dominated concepts such as manifest destiny and having them embrace American traditions such as the Star Spangled Banner, the Pledge of Allegiance, the American flag, and mottos such as “we are all equal,” are not just new to certain Latino students, but may also evoke the memories of racism, prejudice, hate, or oppression that many ethnic minorities, including Latinos, may have faced as citizens (or noncitizens) of the United States. The same ideas and concepts that are considered to be natural and positive for a majority of Americans may not carry the same significance in regard to Latinos, particularly because of their lived cultural experiences.

Performance on social studies standardized exams remains low for Latino students, and the issue of cultural disconnection with the social studies curriculum is a common problem. I, as well as many other educational researchers, can easily acknowledge that the social studies curriculum has been unkind to Latino learners and other students of color. The aforementioned achievement gap in the areas of civics and history are not shocking, nor is the fact that the curriculum tends to favor White-Male-dominated concepts and ideas. However, we need to know more about what it means to be a Latino American in the social studies. The common experiences of Latino American students in the social studies can provide us with better insight than could ivory-tower assumptions and deceptive test scores.

Rationale for the Study

Barritt (1986) stated that the rationale for a study should not be the “discover[y] of new elements” but should be built upon heightening awareness, creating dialogue, improving

practice, and providing a better understanding of the way things appear to someone else. Van Manen (1990) further stated that the purpose of phenomenological research is not to solve a problem but get to the essence of an experience. Social studies theory and assumption pointed to a phenomenon of being students of color in the social studies. Their experiences are different from those of their White American peers. Therefore, the rationale of this study was to challenge these theoretical assumptions and get to the essence of being a student of color, particularly a Latino, in middle school social studies. This disparity of experience is a problem that has existed since the integration of American schools, and researchers have exhausted numerous avenues such as textbook analyses, curriculum reviews, and research efforts. The problem, however, is that the focal point of these efforts has been placed too much on assigning blame rather than getting at the essence of the experience. Hence, in acknowledging that social studies has typically marginalized the Latino student, I also believe that the findings from this study are significant enough to challenge the status quo. Students' interview data, narratives, and images supported theoretical assumptions but more importantly provided a broader claim for space in social studies research concerning Latino learners.

Additionally, research showed that an education, specifically in the social studies, that is both culturally relevant and inclusive of one's culture is effective in increasing both interest and performance (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). Students did not speak of their experiences in social studies as an influence on their performance on assessments or their overall grades. In fact, most students mentioned that they were academically motivated enough on their own and did not need engagement to improve their scores. Students did say, however, that being more interested helped them perform better in social studies classes.

Of course, student attitudes have been measured before to determine not only how students perceive the social studies but also to examine implications for how to best meet students' needs as based upon their responses (Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Corbin, 1994; Curry & Hughes, 1965; Fernandez, Massey, & Dornbush, 1976; Haladyna, 1982; Karuiki & Wilson, 2003; McTeer, 1986; McTeer, Blanton, & Lee, 1975; Schug, Todd, & Berry, 1984). However, previous research has yielded only assumptions have been previously made as to how Latino students experience and perceive social studies, because there has been little to no peer-reviewed research dedicated specifically to quantitatively or qualitatively measuring Latino students' attitudes or perceptions towards social studies. As a result of studies of the experiences of eighth-grade Latino students in social studies, we know that their perceptions of social studies were not as favorable as those of their White peers (Chiodo & Byford, 2004). The strongest argument for this study is that it can fill a gap in existing social studies literature while simultaneously providing a voice for those who have gone unheard in social studies education.

Research Questions

Phenomenological research questions should be "meaning questions," asking for the meaning and significance of a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990, p. 23). The purpose of this study was to determine the essence of the phenomenon of being a Latina/o student in social studies. I wanted to determine what it was like to be a Latina/o student and experience the social studies curriculum, and consequently to determine the impact that these experiences have on students' perceptions. Thus, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do Latino students in a middle school in the Southeastern United States experience social studies?

2. What factors impact how eighth-grade Latino students in the Southeastern United States describe their experiences in social studies?
3. How do experiences in social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States impact Latina/o students' perceptions of social studies?

To answer these research questions, I conducted phenomenological interviews. In addition to the interviews, I had students provide written narratives as well as images that described their experiences in social studies. The narratives and images served as a form of data triangulation to corroborate the data given in the interviews.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

The purpose of this investigation was to determine how Latino students experience social studies at a middle school in the Southeastern region of the United States. The basis and design of this research study was based on Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which is an extension of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that has often been used for qualitative educational research involving people of color. The purpose of using CRT and LatCrit as a theoretical framework for the study was to acknowledge that Latinos as well as other students of color have traditionally been ignored in social studies research. The students' experiences substantiated CRT and LatCrit with regard to these claims of discrimination and privilege and provided a different narrative of their experiences. As a result, I used CRT and LatCrit in my method of analysis as well as data representation. I wanted the experiences of the students to stand alone, thus providing them with a significant voice.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a body of scholarly work with origins in the field of law and humanities that was meant to challenge liberal critiques by acknowledging advantages that Whites have held over people of color throughout history in social, political, and economic aspects of American society (Bell, 1995; Guiner, 1991). Fay (1987) and Tierney (1993) offered CRT as an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in an effort to initiate societal and individual transformation and change. Delgado and Stefancic (2001), however, provided what I believe to be the most comprehensive definition of CRT:

The Critical Race Theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. (p. 2)

Also in their definition of CRT, Delgado and Stefancic explained what CRT does or hopes to do, stating as follows:

Unlike some academic disciplines, Critical Race Theory contains an activist dimension. It not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better. (p. 3)

The origins of CRT are rooted in the tensions between individual and institutional forms of discrimination and privilege. The decrease in individual forms of micro aggression of the Jim Crow era led to the prevalent use of institutional racism to maintain racial status quo in America. This decrease in individual forms of discrimination and increase in institutional racism gave birth to CRT. The mid 1970s to early 1980s saw the emergence of Critical Race Theory, as a group of legal scholars, lawyers, and activists began to recognize that racial progress made in the 1960s had begun to plateau (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). What these groups of people associated with

the legal field began to realize is that racism had simply shifted from beatings and lynching to manifest itself in other ways: for example, denying students the opportunity to enter a university or obtain a high-level position due to their race. Expressions of racism metaphorically mutated from violence and threats to a set of policies that would ensure the same goals: that Whites maintain their societal advantage over Blacks and other people of color.

Critical Race Theory and Education

Although its origins lie in the field of law, CRT is applicable to education (Lynn, 1999). Over time, Critical Race Theory evolved from the legal field and was used extensively by educational researchers who sought to reform the institutional racist policies that were and still are prevalent in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lintner, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Principally, CRT looks at race as a primary source of inequality, which has especially reared its head in America's educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lintner, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). However, using CRT as a basis for educational scholarship goes beyond simply recognizing race as a primary means for inequality. CRT seeks to eliminate racial inequality by promoting the ideas, voices, and feelings of historically disenfranchised peoples (Lintner, 2004).

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) proposed five themes that serve as the foundation for perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy concerning CRT and education in which I offer a brief description of each of the five themes to further understanding:

1. The centrality of race and racism and their intersection with other forms of subordination. Race is not an outside factor in how people are perceived but finds itself at the very core of explaining individual experiences. Also, race as a factor does not preclude other factors, as it is

intertwined with other societal concepts such as gender and social class, which are critical aspects that can lead to subordination of a person or group of people.

2. The challenge to dominant ideology.

The dominant forces in education, especially teacher education, are White. Faculty of color in various fields of teacher education continue to be vastly outnumbered (Ladson-Billings, 2001). However, utilizing CRT in educational perspectives is a means for challenging the majority White ideologies that permeate the walls of the ivory tower and eventually trickle down to the public school classroom through articles, curriculum, and textbooks.

3. The commitment to social justice.

CRT offers a voice to underrepresented as well as racial, economic, and culturally disadvantaged groups of people.

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge.

Faculty of color can often struggle with the notion of research, as scholarly restrictions generally act as a form of oppression by de-legitimizing our voices and experiences (Delpit, 2006). CRT prioritizes the experiential knowledge that students and researchers of color often call upon, and sees it as legitimate for scholarly contribution to educational research.

5. The trans-disciplinary perspective.

CRT in educational research draws upon other fields such as women's studies, race studies, history, law, sociology, psychology, etc. to help us better understand oppression.

This research study relied upon these themes in order to promote the ideas, voices, and feelings of Latino students as a means for reducing the marginalization of their histories and perspectives within social studies.

Latino Critical Race Theory

Not only has Critical Race Theory branched into other academic fields of study such as education, social sciences, and the humanities, but there have spawned various forms of CRT that are specific to ethnic and racial groups. Latino Critical Race Theory or LatCrit, is an extension of CRT that emerged to provide a voice for Latinos who have experienced oppression due to White privilege and institutional discrimination. For years, CRT had been used in educational research only to give salience to the issues that African Americans faced (and still face) with regard to prejudice and other forms of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT and LatCrit are by no means competitive theories, as comparisons would do nothing but harm in promoting the voice of various disadvantaged groups of people. However, what differentiates LatCrit from CRT is its focus on the linguistic implications of being Latino as well as the complex identities involved with the term “Latino” (Haney-Lopez, 1997; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Numerous aspects of CRT are interwoven into LatCrit, as evidenced by Solorzano and Yosso’s (2001) definition of LatCrit:

A LatCrit theory in education is a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which *race and racism* explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically. Utilizing the *experiences* of Latinas/os, a LatCrit theory in education also theorizes and examines that place where racism *intersects* with other forms of subordination such as sexism and classism. LatCrit scholars in education acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower. LatCrit theory in education is conceived as a *social justice* project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. LatCrit theory in education is *transdisciplinary* and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship.

Often the term “Latino” is divorced of its racial connotations as discussions of race have been primarily limited to a Black-White dichotomy (Haney-Lopez, 1997; Iglesias, 1997). I have personally been exposed to this divorce numerous times throughout my life. For example, when

filling out an application for a teaching position within a school district located in the Southeastern United States, I was directed to indicate my race from the given selections: White, Hispanic not Black, African American or Black, Asian American, Native American, and other. Asking a Latino to select “Hispanic not Black” is a true and utter disregard for the racial diversity that contributes to the mestizo (mixed-race) and Afro-Latino populations that are statistically dominant throughout much of Latin America and the Caribbean. This example is what makes the need for LatCrit as a lens for conducting educational research even more of a necessity: there is a student population that has been ignored and missed in educational research, theory, practice, and policy. In fact, there appears to be an entire subgroup of people who are ostracized beyond their linguistic differences due to the color of their skin. As Haney-Lopez (1997) stated:

Nevertheless, it is clear that in the United States there exists no widespread consensus that Latinos/as share a separate identity that can be specified in terms of race, as opposed to, say, ethnicity, national origin, or culture. Indeed, if anything, the consensus seems to run the other way, rejecting any notion of racial distinctiveness and positing that while Latinos/as may constitute an ethnic group, individuals of this heritage are of every race.

Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Methodology

The use of CRT and LatCrit are synonymous with qualitative methodologies, as the purpose is to counter forms of institutionalized privilege and discrimination through storytelling. Anzaldua (1990) suggested that more theorized methods are needed that will help us gain a better understanding of those who have traditionally been on the margins of society. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) responded to Anzaldua’s (1990) suggestion by developing what is considered critical race methodology. Using CRT and LatCrit as a foundation, critical race methodology considers matters of race, racism, and prejudice as a means for conducting research grounded in

the experiences of people of color. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) further define critical race methodology as:

a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color.

Due to the nature of critical race methodology, studies utilizing components of CRT and LatCrit as a framework are qualitative in nature. Beyond simply recognizing bias that exists, CRT and LatCrit hope to validate the knowledge and experiences of people of color in educational research (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lintner, 2004; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Backed by peer-reviewed research, I argue that using CRT, LatCrit, and consequently critical race methodology for qualitative analysis in education has the following implications:

1. Parker and Lynn (2002) stated the need for more qualitative research built on CRT. As CRT and LatCrit are used more often to conduct qualitative research, increased value will be placed on *consejos* (cultural narratives), *testimonios* (testimonies), and counter-storytelling as valid, powerful research (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Gaitan, 1994; Pulido, 2009; Stovall, 2006; Villalpando, 2009).
2. Educators have a propensity to view the classroom in a separate context than society (Dewey, 1915; Freire, 1970), thereby producing a K-12 public school as well as higher education curriculum that is culturally irrelevant. Hence, Latino students (and other RECLD students) tend to be disconnected in school settings. However, as a direct

consequence of the increased value given to consejos, testimonios, and counter-storytelling as transformative, valid research, it will become clearer that the family and community practices of Latino students are not wholly separate from the school setting.

3. The use of CRT and LatCrit as a framework for a qualitative methodology will help educators better understand race as a relationship of power (Duncan, 2002). Consejos, testimonios, and counter-storytelling reveal how students respond to oppressive power inherently pushed upon them by educational institutions, as well as reveal how students project power drawn from their lived experiences and knowledge as a Latina/o (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Gaitan, 1994; Pulido, 2009; Stovall, 2006; Villalpando, 2009).
4. Lastly, not only does a critical race qualitative methodology offer insight into the school community and familial experiences and knowledge of Latino students, but it is vital in challenging stereotypes that can be projected when viewing Latinos through a framework of dominance in educational research (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

Summary of the Framework

Research shows that CRT and LatCrit are valid frameworks for conducting qualitative studies. The possible implications of this qualitative study, when discussed with research participants and disseminated through publication, are vital to improving the role of Latinos in social studies education. Chapter II of this study consists of a review of literature, and I have further substantiated the use of LatCrit as a theoretical framework for analyzing literature by providing a synthesis of research related to LatCrit and the K-12 classroom as well as the higher education setting.

Significance of the Study

By exploring Latino students' experiences in and perceptions of social studies, teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers can gain better insight as to how to best address the cultural and linguistic needs of Latino students. As mentioned previously, Latino students perform significantly lower on high-stakes social studies exams. Determining their experiences and perceptions will provide educational decision-makers with a basis for necessary changes to make to the social studies curriculum that will best accommodate the Latino student in middle school or high school.

This study will also help fill a hole in the literature pertaining to students' attitudes and perceptions of social studies. Chiodo and Byford (2004) conducted a similar study using a phenomenological approach; however, they made no references as to how students from racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistically diverse backgrounds perceived social studies. In fact, the Latina/o students interviewed in this study revealed varying perceptions of social studies as a result of their experiences. As Howard (2003) stated, there is more research, discussion, and dialogue needed on race in social studies education, and this investigation, when disseminated via publication, will also ensure Latino students are addressed in social studies teacher education.

Limitations of the Study

Every method of research has its threats to validity. I begin explaining the limitations of my study on this very notion. I used a qualitative, phenomenological method to determine Latino students' perceptions of social studies. In qualitative studies the researcher is responsible for the collecting, analysis, and interpretation of data (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011). As a result, this places the researcher in the role of a participator, which threatens the validity of qualitative research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Furthermore, a phenomenological analysis through the lens

of LatCrit required that I acknowledge my native perspective and cultural investment in the study, thus making my bias even more prevalent (Hammersly, 2000). While this is a legitimate limitation of the study, I decreased the threat to the validity of my findings by triangulating the data with written narratives and images.

Another limitation to the research is the exaggeration of implications for the entire student population. This is especially true for students from racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistically disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds. For example, research is often conducted pertaining to Black students, and many assume that the findings of the research translate to Latino students due to their shared historical experiences with discrimination. This is what makes LatCrit even more of a necessity in exploring students' perceptions: to ensure that the findings of this research are not exaggerated across diverse populations, but are appropriately situated within the contexts of the Latino student population. Furthermore, this study was conducted in a metropolitan city in the Southeastern region of the United States, which has a fairly large Latino population. Findings from this research study may not be indicative of the lived experiences of Latino students in cities, states, or regions where the population of Latinos is not as significant.

Perhaps Contreras' (2010) reference to Penna's (1995) study in her chapter on multiculturalism in the social studies best helps us understand how research can be exaggerated.

She wrote:

Penna (1995) conveyed a sense of the poverty that engulfed student participants. He revealed how arbitrarily a learning deficit label could be superimposed on conditions like malnourishment, poor health care, and sleep deprivation. Student participants were drawn from single-parent households or homes with unemployed adult males. Penna admitted, "How we came to believe that meeting with these adolescents one hour each day, five days a week, could influence their lives in any substantial way remains a mystery to me." (p. 387)

Meeting with twelve Latino students and conducting in-depth interviews should help to fill a void in social studies research, but to suggest that my research study has implications for every Latino would be denying Latinohood of its complex diversities.

Another limitation was my familiarity with the school setting. I am a teacher at San Marcos Middle School. I have an ongoing professional relationship with many of the faculty, staff, and students at the school. However, student participants selected for the study were not students I teach or have taught. Other school variables that can be described as limitations to my study are prior “good” or “bad” social studies teachers a student may have had, the quality of school life, and student performance in school.

My Experience With the Phenomenon

Like the twelve students interviewed for this research study, I, too, was a student of color in a social studies classroom. I grew up in an era where we as kids were extremely aware of our race. I knew I was Black because my aunt told me, my mother told me, and my grandparents told me. I knew I was different from my White peers in school. When we had school functions I didn't call dress clothes by such a moniker, but I referred to them as “church clothes.”

Middle school social studies I cannot recall in detail, but it was in my high school social studies classes when I begin to project the meaning of my blackness into what we were learning. I remember taking a U.S. history class in which the teacher was White. There was a Black U.S. history teacher in the school whom I wanted to be my teacher badly. I felt as if she would have understood me more or be more adept in teaching Black history. Nevertheless, I had a great U.S. history teacher. Nonetheless, I remember asking her aloud in class why we were not learning about Blacks from a more powerful perspective. I knew about Malcolm X, DuBois, and Marcus Garvey growing up, so the “Black as submissive” narrative did not always sit well with me. That

is not to say that I was unaware of segregation and Black treatment, but I knew that wasn't the only narrative pertaining to Blacks. I still performed well in class and was interested in the material just because I have always liked social studies.

My view of race and social studies changed once I became a teacher and again as a graduate student. I couldn't understand while teaching at a school in Orlando why my Black students did not like the positive Black narrative I was portraying in their U.S. history class. They did not do their homework, it was tough to get them to participate, and I spent a majority of my time on class management. I thought teaching about people who looked like us would cure all academic and behavioral ills, which is how research and theory present it. As a result of these experiences as a teacher, I no longer felt as if Blacks and other students of color for that matter needed a culturally relevant curriculum, but a military style teacher.

This feeling changed once again when I became a full-time graduate assistant. Reading Carter G. Woodson while taking doctoral courses at Columbia University really made me understand that perhaps I was "mis-educated." I had gone to college, excelled academically, gained accolades, and thus perpetuated my experiences upon the students I taught in Orlando. I immersed myself in more readings: DuBois and Cornell West to be exact. I felt as if I reconnected with my Blackness. The "chip on my shoulder" was back in place, but from an academic standpoint. As I travel to social studies conferences, I look at every presentation and what is said from a critical race standpoint.

I was brought to this research largely because of my wife. She has been my cultural broker into the Latin world. I have become pretty much fluent in Spanish and have interacted with more Latinos now than ever. Teaching at a dominantly Latino school has also made me aware of the obstacles that Latino students face. Not all of their teachers are open-minded and

welcoming of Latino culture. I have seen students feel rejected because of the beliefs of certain teachers. My experiences as a student of color, a teacher of color, and now a social studies teacher of color to students of color have led me to want to explore the experience of students of color in social studies.

Definition of Terms

Chicana/Chicano: Commonly used to refer to Mexican Americans. Chicano/Chicana and Mexican American will be used interchangeably throughout the study.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): Uses a race conscious framework to highlight “oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (Fay, 1987). CRT consists of five threads: admits that racism is normal in American society, confronts hegemonic practices and challenges dominant principles, is dedicated to changing the conditions of oppression, relies on and validates the experiential knowledge of its participants, and incorporates historical and interdisciplinary studies.

Culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching: A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit): Latino/a Critical Theory, or LatCrit, builds on the five themes of CRT while adding perspectives unique to the Latino experience in the United States, such as language acquisition, cultural background, gender, ethnicity, immigration status, and colonial experience (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Latino: Relying upon LatCrit as my basis, the term *Latino* will be used in this research study instead of *Hispanic*. Although certain publications and statistical data I will reference in this study use the term *Hispanic*, it is important that one recognizes the imperialistic perspectives that

are associated with the term. Whether or not to use Hispanic rather than Latino or vice-versa is a debated topic within the field of anthropology (Hayes-Baustista & Chapa, 1987; Trevino, 1987).

As Haney-Lopez (1997) noted, in the United States the Spanish speaking population is viewed as having no racial identity. Hence, the term Hispanic is often referenced in government documents such as the United States Census. However, as Pinal and Singer (1997) described it, the term Hispanic “has no firm historical link to the people it describes.” The term Hispanic historically refers those who have their roots in Spain. Therefore, any ethnic group with its origins coming from Central America, South America, and Spanish speaking countries in the Caribbean will be referred to as Latino. When necessary, however, I will be more specific in describing ethnicity (e.g., Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban American) as mentioned in literature or when referring to student participants in the study.

Latina/Latino: Sometimes the term Latina or Latino can take on the form of an adjective or a noun. For example, when using Latina as an adjective, I would state “she is a Latina student” meaning she is a student of Latino ancestry who is a female. When using Latina as a noun, I would state, “a Latina responded with a blank stare.” Latina is now referred to as a person rather than a description of a person. Whenever referring to a group consisting of mixed gender or all males (e.g., 6 males and 7 females) I will use the term Latinos. Referring to a group of all females, I will employ the term Latinas.

RECLD: RECLD is an initialism I will use when referring to students from racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistically disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds.

Secondary Students: Secondary students are those who are enrolled in either middle school or high school.

Social Studies: For the purpose of this paper, social studies will be defined as the K-12 curriculum that includes subjects such as anthropology, archeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, and other humanities-based courses.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to the Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is two-fold: examine what the literature has already mentioned about the Latino students and their experience with social studies and examine the perceptions students generally have of social studies. The review of literature will also further substantiate the basis for using LatCrit as a lens for exploring Latino students' perceptions of the social studies. This chapter begins with a summary of research pertaining to the theoretical framework guiding this dissertation study, LatCrit, which will help to conceptualize the two constructs of this literature review. By reviewing the literature, this chapter will develop the basis for answering the major research question for this study of how Latino students perceived the social studies.

It has been assumed that Latinos as well as other students from racial, economic, cultural, and linguistically disadvantaged (RECLD) backgrounds dislike the social studies because of its irrelevance to their experiences (Gay, 2005). While Gay's suggestion is not backed by research, it is the common school of thought within the field of social studies education concerning Latino students' relationship with the social studies. Therefore, the first construct of the review of literature seeks to examine the relationship between Latinos and the social studies, which may or may not validate the aforementioned assumption that Latino students do not like the social studies. I will analyze the relationship by looking at three research-specific aspects: Latino

inclusion within the social studies curriculum, Latino portrayal in social studies textbooks, and how Latino students perceive historical significance.

This research study attempted to explain what it means to be Latina/o in the social studies with regard to students' perceptions. Thus the second construct of the literature review examines prior research conducted to determine students' perceptions and attitudes towards the social studies. It is known that while students often enjoy the possible topics that can be covered in various social studies courses, they generally dislike the social studies (Thornton, 2004), and there are various research studies that both support and dispute this claim. Although there are numerous studies regarding elementary students' attitudes and perceptions towards the social studies (Downey & Levstik, 1991; Haladyna & Thomas, 1979; Herman, 1965), the second construct of this literature review will focus only on those research studies dedicated to measuring secondary students' attitudes and perceptions towards social studies, as my population sample will draw upon secondary students.

LatCrit as a Basis for Classroom Research

LatCrit in Public Schools: Documenting Success and Failures

The use of LatCrit framework in educational research has been vital to giving the Latino student a voice as well as enhancing understanding amongst educators of the numerous social, cultural, economic, and political issues that have often led to the marginalization of Latino students and their communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As Rierson (2006) stated,

LatCrit “cuts to the chase” by beginning from a place unique to most educational research. Instead of investigating if a bias exists against Latino students, LatCrit seeks to know more about the problems Latino students face when they enter the schoolhouse doors.

There have been few K-12 classroom-based research studies utilizing the LatCrit framework, but those that do support Rierson's statement by focusing their rationale beyond the argument of bias and seeking to understand how the problems Latino students face affect their perceptions of education.

Using LatCrit as a methodological and theoretical framework, Fernandez (2002) documented the narrative of one Latino student, Pablo, who attended a Midwestern university in Chicago, Illinois. Fernandez's qualitative study was part of a larger study in which she interviewed a total of five high school Latino students in Chicago (3 males and 2 females) and three Latino college students, all from low-income neighborhoods in Chicago. Pablo's personal narrative of his experiences in high school and college gave insight into the struggles that Latino students, especially immigrant Latinos, encounter when the curriculum is irrelevant to their lives and the teachers (who were majority White in his case) cannot relate to the students. Although not all teachers were "bad," Pablo also discussed the fact that the expectations held of him and Latino classmates by the majority White faculty were extremely low, thus resulting in a large number of Latino students' being educated for vocational skills rather than college preparation. With many obstacles placed in front of Pablo and his Latino classmates, many of them failed courses or dropped out of school altogether, while others decided to resist the educational restraints placed upon them by excelling academically. Pablo's story was just one of the many similar stories that Latino students across the country have, and this qualitative study emphasizes the importance of using LatCrit to document the failures of our educational system in meeting the needs of Latino students as well as the stories of resistance by Latino students.

Also using a critical race pedagogy framework, Stovall (2006) documented the importance of using hip-hop as a means for engaging high school students in the curriculum.

Upon informally interviewing students and discovering their intense dislike for his course curriculum, Stovall employed aspects of CRT and LatCrit to enhance his pedagogical and curricular selections. Using 19 African American and Latina/o American students in an urban school setting, Stovall conducted six workshops that utilized hip-hop as a means for exploring the historical and social contexts of particular situations discussed in his high school humanities course. Conducting interviews and using evaluation forms as a measure of success for the workshops, Stovall found that while the inclusion of hip-hop enhanced students' understanding of certain historical concepts such as slavery and Civil Rights, they would much rather have been the ones to select the songs/lyrics rather than the teacher. This qualitative study shows that when CRT and LatCrit influence pedagogy, it can lead to success in regard to students' understanding of and engagement in the curriculum. However, it is equally as important that students have a say in the selection of curricular materials, as often the intentions of the teachers may be positive, yet misplaced.

Similar to Stovall's (2006) study, Pulido (2009) also sought to examine the impacts of hip-hop on how Latino youth learn. It is important to note that like LatCrit, hip-hop's roots are embedded in the fight against oppression through storytelling, which can explain why Stovall (2006) and Pulido (2009) decided to use hip-hop as a construct for exploring Latino students' feelings and attitudes. Citing LatCrit as a lens, Pulido conducted 20 in-depth interviews with Mexican American and Puerto Rican students from Chicago and its surrounding areas, in which students provided narratives and stories of their experiences. While interviews served as the foundation for Pulido's study, she triangulated the data with observations and document analysis. Pulido found that students used hip-hop as a means for negotiating and challenging the radicalization of Latinos in their schools as well as their local communities. Students were also

able to pinpoint inequalities in how they were being educated by grasping the underlying concepts in certain hip-hop songs that pertained to stereotyping, racism, and other forms of prejudice. This qualitative analysis shows why it is important that Latino students' voices are heard in order to create an educational experience for them that is fair and de-racialized and that accurately represents the Latino culture.

LatCrit and the Post-Secondary Learner

Although the purpose of this study is to determine the phenomena related to middle school Latino students' experiences in social studies, I have chosen to examine research based upon LatCrit and the post-secondary school learner because so little research exists on LatCrit and the public 6-12 classroom. The implications of research at the post-secondary level have numerous ramifications for the secondary classroom as the students are close in age.

Additionally, post-secondary research centered on LatCrit can also assist in furthering the research on Latino learners in 6-12 settings. It is also important to note that much of the research conducted with college-aged students through a LatCrit lens utilizes a storytelling, or "counter-storytelling" methodology that can be inclusive of students' secondary schooling experiences.

In a qualitative study with 50 Chicana/o (Mexican American) university students, Delgado Bernal (2002) attempted to add value to the oft-forgotten and misinterpreted histories, culture, and experiences of Latinos. Analyzing life-history interviews and focus group data, Delgado Bernal argued that through the Eurocentric perspective that is dominant in research, Latino students have many obstacles blocking their path to educational success, such as limited English proficiency, cultural practices, and responsibilities outside of the educational setting. However, when we examine the life histories and focus group data through a LatCrit lens, those

very same deficits are perceived as assets to the formal educational setting or resources contributing to the diversity of experiences in the classroom. Thus, Latino students become holders of power and knowledge rather than being viewed as “lacking” in certain areas deemed necessary for educational success.

Another study of Chicana/o university students conducted through the LatCrit lens also countered the typical Eurocentric context through which the Latino is often viewed in educational research. In a longitudinal study of two Chicano college students, a male and a female, Villalpando (2009) also used the counter-story method. In this qualitative study, Villalpando sought to determine the impacts of peer groups on Latino educational success and career selection in higher education. Five themes emerged that supported Delgado Bernal’s (2002) conclusion that the perceived deficits from a Eurocentric viewpoint are actually assets and resources. The five themes that emerged were

1. the need to maintain a strong Chicana/o consciousness;
2. students’ dependence on spirituality;
3. students’ strong commitment to their communities;
4. influence of language on their lives; and,
5. the influence of family.

Summary of the Framework Literature

The purpose of this section of the review of literature was to further validate LatCrit as a framework for analyzing Latino students’ perceptions of social studies. Examining the literature pertaining to secondary and post-secondary students through a LatCrit framework helped me devise questions for exploring how Latino students perceive social studies. It also helped me

approach Latino learners from a non-Eurocentric perspective, placing more value on what they contribute to the educational process than on what they lack. In regard to the other two constructs of this review of literature, LatCrit stresses the importance of the voice of the student, which I will address by measuring perceptions, as well as emphasizes the importance of Latino inclusion in the educational process. Therefore, I (1) used this lens to examine Latino inclusion in the social studies curriculum, as well as (2) analyzed the literature on students' perceptions and attitudes towards the social studies.

Latinos and the Social Studies

Introduction to the Construct

Promoting Critical Race Theory in the classroom is especially imperative in order to reduce stereotypes and bring disenfranchised groups of people such as Latinos to the forefront of social studies instruction (Lintner, 2004). Of all the school subjects which students undertake in their K-12 schooling such as English, mathematics, language arts, foreign language, and science, social studies should be the most ideal subject for addressing the issue of diversity in the classroom and beyond (Sanchez, 1997). However, it has not necessarily happened that way, which is a big reason why Latinos tend to remain disconnected from social studies content. As the national scores indicate for social studies subject areas such as history and economics, Latinos do not fare as well as their White counterparts due in large part to a failure in the classrooms, where culturally relevant pedagogy for the social studies is not taking place.

Barely There: Latinos and the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum

Although the social studies has largely ignored the Latina/o student with its Euro-based curriculum, this does not mean that efforts have been lacking to ensure that Latino representation in the social studies curriculum improves. Even more important than an increase in representation is the effort to ensure that Latinos are represented in a positive manner, and not represented from a deficit perspective when being discussed in the social studies. The following research is an example of how teachers and teacher educators have attempted and still are attempting to ensure that Latinos are better represented in the social studies curriculum.

Escamilla (1987) conducted a quantitative study of 10th-grade students in a large urban district in southern Arizona. This school district was located only 65 miles from the United States–Mexico border, and over a third of the population was Latino. Therefore, one would expect a large knowledge base of Latino history, more specifically Mexican history, amongst every ethnic group in the district. Attempting to discover what 10th-grade students knew of Mexican contributions to United States history, she posed two questions:

1. Name two contributions that the United States has given to the world.
2. Name two contributions that Mexican Americans have given to the United States or the world.

Sadly, only 20% of the 3,000 respondents were able to correctly identify two contributions that Mexican Americans had given to the United States or the world. Despite the district's close proximity to Mexico and its large Latino population, Escamilla concluded that no cultural group in America, including Latinos, have a good understanding of Latino culture or history. She also concluded that educators must explore methods and outside content for the inclusion of Latino history and culture into the social studies curriculum. The results of this study offer an

explanation as to why Latino students may dislike social studies, and that is because they are absent in the curriculum.

Epstein (2000) conducted a qualitative study to determine the perspectives that 10 high school students had toward diversity within the United States history curriculum.¹ The research took place in 1995 in an urban Midwestern school with a population mixture of 43% African American and 55% White. School statistics indicated less than 1% of the school population was either Latino or Asian American, while the remaining 2% were classified as “other.” Epstein and her doctoral students conducted interviews and observations of a selected classroom that she described as “teacher centered.” During the interviews students were shown 52 captioned picture cards that represented traditionally recognized historical actors and events, people and events that the teacher emphasized in class (as determined by observations), and people as well as events related to the development of African American history. Students selected what they considered to be the 10 cards that best represented the most important historical events and actors beginning with 16th-century Native Americans and ending with 19th-century Reconstruction. The results of the interviews were termed “national narratives,” in which each of the 10 students responded to prompts pertaining to each respective picture they selected.

Although less than 1% of the student population in Epstein’s (2000) study was Latino, there are two aspects that stand out pertaining to the methodology and results of the investigation. First, there was no mention in the study of events pertaining to Latin American history, nor was there any mention of important Latino actors in regard to the cards that students were showed. While Epstein wanted to stay consistent with the events and figures that the

¹ Although the article was published in 2000, the study was carried out in 1995, submitted for publication in 1997, and approved for publication in 1998. Although there appears to be a large 13-year gap between Escamilla’s (1987) study and Epstein’s (2000), it is important to note that the original research was carried out in 1995, thus truly resulting in only an 8-year gap presented in this review of literature.

teacher deemed important, this study supports Escamilla's (1987) results in that Latino actors and Latin American history are significantly absent in the social studies. Also, in examining the results provided from the national narratives, it is clear that students' perspective of diversity in the U.S. history curriculum pertained largely to Native Americans, Blacks, and women. More specifically, students noted settlement and removal regarding Native Americans, slavery and the Civil Rights Movement regarding Blacks, and the Women's Suffrage Movement regarding women. There was no mention amongst students about Latinos in the U.S. history curriculum, and the mentions of RECLD groups were all from deficit perspectives.

A similar study conducted by Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson (2011) sought to measure the effects of culturally responsive teaching on students' perceptions of race in a U.S. history class. Fifty-four percent of the student population at this small high school in New York City was Latino, 33% Black, 8% White, and the remaining 5% were designated as Native American, Asian, Hawaiian, Pacific-Islander, or other. The 11th-grade humanities/history teacher, Ms. Vega (alias), sought to implement a curriculum that was culturally diverse, in which people of color were represented not only as disadvantaged but also as great contributors to the development of the United States of America.

Employing a similar methodology to Epstein's (2000) study, the Epstein et al. (2011) study asked students to select and explain the 8 most important historical events and figures from a given 25 selections towards the beginning of the school year,. The authors later randomly selected 8 students to further explain their narratives of the events and persons they had chosen. Perpetuating the White-male dominance stereotype yielded in other studies (Epstein, 2000; Escamilla, 1987), students' pre-instructional selections and responses at the beginning of the school year placed significance upon slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and the removal of

Native Americans. However, due to Ms. Vega's approach to cultural diversity in U.S. history, students' post-instructional responses differed significantly as more credence was given to Latino movements and an overall positive perspective of people of color in U.S. history. Thus we can see the impacts of a culturally responsive curriculum, where Latino students are empowered not only by being exposed to Latino contributions to history but more importantly being exposed to Latinos in a manner that gives salience to the population rather than designating them as inferior in matters of nation building.

Taking on the Responsibility: Latino Educators and the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum

While the aforementioned studies emphasized the effects of Latino inclusion, or lack thereof, in social studies curriculums, one underlying factor in each of the studies was the teacher's racial identification. It has been suggested that for students of color, simply having a teacher of similar ethnic or cultural background may help improve student performance, thus acting as a catalyst for motivation or improving interest in the course material (Collins, 2011; Gay, 2005; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001). As was the case with Ms. Vega in Epstein and colleagues' (2011) study, her experiences as a Latina dealing with racism and government played a significant role in her introducing like-minded concepts to her majority Latino student population. It is not an absolute surety that teachers of color are more suitable for teaching issues of diversity, but research pertaining to Latina/o social studies educators suggest as much.

In a qualitative case study of an exemplary high school social studies teacher, Salinas, Franquiz, and Reidel (2008), provided an example of how Latina/o teachers often take on the responsibility for ensuring a culturally responsive curriculum for Latino students. Ms. Davila (alias) was a Latina, bilingual, who taught geography at Santa Ana High School, which was

located in Central Texas. Santa Ana was situated in a large, urban, diverse area that had recently experienced a large influx of immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Central America. Due to the fact that students were late-arrival immigrants with limited English proficiency (LEP), Davila relied upon the use of graphic organizers, hands-on activities, critical thinking questions, and language and content objectives to help students grasp the concepts in her world geography course. However, what contributed more to the students' success was Davila's ability as a Latina teacher to draw upon students' experiences from home, prior learning in school, as well as the commitment to their community in order to build a strong foundation for understanding world geography content.

Another qualitative case study by Salinas and Castro (2010) examined how two male, Latino, pre-service teachers relied upon their cultural backgrounds in the selection of the social studies curriculum during their internship experiences at two high schools in Texas. After conducting interviews, observations, and analyzing journal entries from Jose and Clemente (both aliases), Salinas and Castro concluded that throughout the semester, both Latino pre-service teachers drew upon their experiences, one as a migrant farmworker and the other who experienced racism and oppression, to "disrupt" the official, standard-based curriculum. Both Jose and Clemente focused their pedagogy and curriculum on issues of social justice, which they believed were extremely lacking in social studies content. Reiterating the theme of this sub-construct, this investigation shows the significance of the cultural background of Latino teachers and its effects on curriculum selection.

Latinos and Social Studies Textbooks

Latin American history and important Latina/o people are largely absent within the social studies curriculum despite its emphasis on diversity. This very notion also applies to Latin American history and Latino peoples in regard to social studies textbooks. Social studies textbooks have historically lagged in accurately portraying Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans, and because of the textbook's influence on curricular decisions made by teachers, these very same ethnic groups have been underrepresented and inaccurately portrayed within the curriculum (Garcia, 1978, 1993; Garcia & Goebel, 1985). There is a dearth of textbook analyses that support Garcia's claim.

Garcia (1980) examined ten United States history textbooks that were published between 1978 and 1979 in order to determine how Latinos were portrayed. He selected ten textbooks on the basis of their advertisement in the social studies field's two most renowned publications in terms of national distribution and recognition, *The Social Studies* and *Social Education*. Without a clear consensus as to how one should evaluate criteria by the year in which the study was conducted, Garcia relied upon a wealth of criteria accumulated from various educational organizations in the evaluation of the U.S. history textbooks. He arrived at the following series of questions he would use in evaluating the textbooks:

1. Describe why each group immigrated to the U.S.
2. Describe when each ethnic group immigrated to the U.S. and where initial contacts with Americans began.
3. Give a historical perspective to the problems and accomplishments commonly associated with each group.

4. Describe key events and issues which are crucial in gaining an understanding of the group.
5. Provide content that notes each group's shared and unique characteristics and experiences.
6. Include descriptions of leaders and their contributions to the American scene.
7. Include content describing other experiences of the group.

He also used the following procedures to ensure that he was not blindly reviewing the textbooks but following a reliable methodology for arriving at his conclusions:

1. Information describing the general-group Hispanics and each subgroup was gathered by turning to the index of the text, noting the pages listed under each heading, reviewing these pages, and identifying the content.
2. The text was skimmed and non-indexed pages describing each targeted group were noted and classified.
3. Once the data were identified, they were matched with the appropriate question.
4. Sentences describing more than one group were classified with the general group Hispanics.

Garcia concluded that the textbooks provided a shallow, distorted, and problematic portrayal of Latinos as an overall cultural group. Much of the discussion of Latinos was centered on topics of drugs, violence, economic poverty, and prejudice. Rarely recognized for their contributions to United States nation building throughout history, very little attention was directed towards Latino leaders. The two most discussed groups of Latinos were Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans, thus rendering Colombians, Dominicans, Cubans, and other Latino groups invisible within textbooks and consequently the curriculum.

Unfortunately, further textbook analysis on the portrayal of Latinos in social studies textbooks replicated results similar to Garcia's (1980). In another study, Garcia and Florez-Tighe (1986) analyzed content from a basal reading series for its portrayal of Native Americans, Blacks, and Latinos. Basal readers are a highly organized series or collection of short stories meant to teach reading, vocabulary, and other associated skills to students (Penn State University, 2011).

Analyzing nine basal readers for accurate portrayal and balance of each respective ethnic group, Garcia and Florez-Tighe (1986) found results consistent with prior textbook analyses. First, most of the poems attributed to Latina/o authors were written primarily by Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans. In regard to geographical setting and Latino groups within the reading series, Latinos were confined either to rural or inner-city settings. Over 8% of the poems and stories about Latinos placed them in low-income situations, while an overwhelming 70% of the stories related to Latinos dealt with problem-solving. The misrepresentation of Latinos was consistent with Blacks and Native Americans in this study.

“When can you remember being taught about Latinos in U.S. history class?” This was a question that Dr. Barbara Cruz, a Latina social studies professor, posed to undergraduate students enrolled in her secondary social studies methods course. The results of this informal questionnaire were alarming in that students could not recall being taught about Latinos but remembered certain concepts they were taught about Latin America. According to Cruz (1994), it was and still is important to distinguish between teaching Latin America and teaching about Latinos, as not every concept applicable to Latin America can be assumed for Latinos living in the United States. For example, simply because Cuba and Venezuela are communist countries

does not mean that Cuban Americans or Venezuelans living in the United States identify themselves as communists too.

With this informal survey of undergraduate students serving as motivation, Cruz (1994) reviewed six U.S. history textbooks that were widely used throughout the country. Analyzing the textbooks, Cruz used a story-line analysis which looked for three things:

1. Which group receives the most attention?
2. Which group(s) resolves problems?
3. Who or which group(s) does the author intend the reader to sympathize more with or learn the most about?

Cruz found that the six textbooks perpetuated common stereotypes of Latinos. Not only did she provide the results in her study, but she cited specific examples from textbooks to further substantiate her claims. For that same purpose, I will provide some of the quotes she used as a means for validity. Her analysis found that Latinos were considered lazy and passive. Cruz also found that Latinos were often referred to as animals, violent, lawless, and corrupt. In regard to sexuality, Latinos were cast as lustful, promiscuous, and lascivious. She used the following excerpts from the six textbooks as an example of how Latinos were stereotyped²:

In reference to laziness and passiveness:

American operations in the Southwest and in California were completely successful. In 1846, General Stephen W. Kearney led a detachment of seventeen hundred troops over the famous Santa Fe trail from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe. *This sunbanked outpost, with its drowsy plazas, was easily captured.*

In reference to laziness and passiveness:

An outraged public demanded action. Congress in 1896 overwhelmingly passed a resolution that called upon President Cleveland to recognize the *belligerency of the*

² The excerpts provided from Cruz's (1994) study are only examples from what was given in the manuscript as there are more excerpts from the textbooks that were used to further her claim. The purpose of providing the excerpts is to give an accurate and consistent analysis of the nature of Cruz's study in this review of literature.

revolted Cubans. But as the government of the insurgents consisted of hardly more than a few fugitive leaders under palm trees, Cleveland, an antijingoist and anti-imperialist, refused to budge.

The Americans had little difficulty in securing the remote Pacific island of Guam, which they had captured early in the conflict from astonished Spaniards who, lacking a cable, had not known that a war was on. They also picked up *Puerto Rico, the last crumb of Spain's once magnificent American empire. It was to prove a difficult morsel for Uncle Sam to digest.*

Latinos as animals, lawless, and violent:

Learning that Santa Anna was on his way, Taylor pulled his troops into the little town of Buena Vista in February 1847, and prepared to face an attack. In the first part of the battle that followed, *the Americans were badly mauled.*

Latinos as corrupt:

In the meantime, a small group of Americans...went from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to Santa Fe, New Mexico. They captured Santa Fe without firing a single shot, probably because the Mexican governor there had been bribed to disappear.

Latinos as lustful, promiscuous, and lascivious:

Puerto Rico was a poverty-stricken island, *the fertility of whose million inhabitants, including many Blacks, outran that of their soil...* Although the American regime worked wonders in education, sanitation, goods roads, and other physical improvements, many of the inhabitants continued to clamor for their independence.

Cuban males still make passes at virtually every passing female on the streets of Havana.

The results of Cruz's (1994) study of six United States history textbooks used throughout the country were once again replicated in another one of her studies, although there were more positive outcomes. Cruz (2002) conducted a content analysis of the most popular elementary, middle, and high school history textbooks used in the State of Florida. She used textbooks specific to grades 5, 8, and 11, as these are the grade levels for which students are required to take United States history. Cruz used a quantitative procedure to determine the number of times Latinos and Latin Americans were used in pictures throughout the textbook and employed a qualitative analysis to examine how Latinos and Latin Americans were mentioned or portrayed

in the content and the pictorials. Cruz noted that in 5th-grade history textbooks, Latinos accounted for less than 1% of the pictorials, which was also consistent with other ethnic groups such as Native Americans and Asian Americans. People of White-European decent accounted for over 75% of the pictures in 5th-grade textbooks. Overall, Latinos were absent in the text; however, one 5th-grade textbook entitled *America and its Neighbors* fared better in its depictions of Latinos and Latin America. There were photos of Latin American leaders and Caribbean school children present throughout the book, although it still lacked accurate historical text related to Latinos and their contributions to United States history.

The 8th-grade textbook also had less than 1% of Latinos in pictures, and they were significantly underrepresented as well as inaccurately portrayed in the text, although the appendix included a Spanish translation of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. A review of the 11th-grade U.S. history text revealed results concurring with that of Cruz's (1994) previous textbook analysis. Latinos were portrayed in 3% of the pictorials, but in regard to content there seemed to be over-exaggerated, inaccurate conclusions about Latinos as a whole.

Much of the literature dedicated to Latino portrayal in social studies' textbooks is specific to history. However, there is more to the social studies than history, as students are required to take courses such as government and economics as well. Monforti and McGlynn (2010) examined 29 introductory United States government and politics textbooks to determine how Latinos were portrayed. They reported that information related to Latinos was brief and non-descriptive and was often found in sections pertaining to Civil Rights. More discussion on Latinos was also found in chapters discussing immigration, although overall, Latinos were ignored in regard to their contributions to politics and the governing of our country.

The literature on textbook portrayal of Latinos and Latin America reveals results that rival that of literature on Latinos and Latin America in the social studies curriculum. The absence of the Latino in social studies textbooks is of particular importance in a multicultural society, due to teachers' reliance upon them for content dissemination, curriculum selection, and historical accuracy (Wood, 1981). Although there are critiques of social studies textbook analyses due to their inconsistency in methodology, sampling, and researcher bias (Wade, 1993), the results are undeniable in regard to the ignorance about Latinos and their culture's contributions to American society.

Latinos and Historical Significance

Much of the social studies curriculum is centered on history. While it is a major debate among teacher educators and researchers whether social studies and history should be viewed as separate (Neumann, 2008), history does remain an important aspect of the secondary social studies curriculum. Particularly in middle and high schools, there is a major focus on both world and American history, with students often taking two years of American history in middle school (one school year is often centered around America before the Civil War and the second school year on America after the Civil War) and an additional year in high school.

It is difficult for Latinos as well as other culturally diverse groups of American students to understand the necessity and significance of undertaking historical study (Wheeler, 2007). Significant events have taken place in Latin American, Asian, and African countries that have had major political, social, and economic implications. There were also important Latino American, Asian American, African American, and Native American people who have contributed to the shaping of our very nation. However, reviewing the literature on the portrayal

of Latinos in the social studies curriculum and textbook, it is easy to conclude why Latinos find the study of history unnecessary, at least in American schools.³ Much of the absence has to do with what mainstream Americans find as historically significant. What students find to be historically significant can often depend on the cultural background and prior knowledge a student brings into the classroom (Barton & Levstik, 1998). Furthermore, family experiences and sources of information beyond the classroom play a large role in determining how students arrive at historical understanding (Seixas, 1993).

Perhaps one of the most relevant studies regarding Latinos and historical significance complicates the assumptions posed by Seixas (1993) and Barton and Levstik (1998). In a study of majority high-achieving students in a large, urban high school, Terzian and Yeager (2007) wanted to investigate how Latino students determine historical significance. Employing a qualitative method of research design, the researchers posed three questions for guidance in their research:

1. What events, people, and documents from the nation's history do three cohorts of ethnic-minority AP American history students at a large urban high school judge to be significant?
2. What reasoning and criteria do these students employ to assign historical significance and why?
3. To what extent do these students' conceptions of historical significance conform to those of their classroom teacher, the official AP curriculum, and so-called grand narratives of American history?

³ It is also important to note that when reviewing and searching for literature on Latin American history and the high school curriculum with a database specialist, no literature was revealed on the teaching of Latin American history at the K-12 level.

A total of 70 students from three AP American History courses participated in the study. All of the students represented an ethnic minority group with a large majority of them being Cuban Americans who spoke primarily Spanish at home.

Terzian and Yeager (2007) had students answer questionnaires and conducted interviews as well as focus groups. When expressing why they should study history, students indicated that they should study history to become more aware of the freedoms and liberties granted to them, which they must continue to protect. In identifying historical significance, “freedom” and “unity” were at the root of their explanation for selecting certain historical events and people.

The responses that these Latino students provided in the questionnaire and in interviews allowed Terzian and Yeager to conclude that this specific cohort of AP American History students determined historical significance in a manner consistent with their White peers, which is the opposite of what literature suggests. Latino students are expected to challenge the typical historical narrative that has underwritten ethnic minorities for years. However, much of this can be attributed to the complexity of the Latin diaspora that describes the diversity within the Latino community. Cubans are one of the few ethnic minority groups in the United States to have experienced economic and social success (Olson & Olson, 1995). Therefore, it is typical for Cubans to think of themselves as part of the majority, which is a disassociation from other Latino ethnic groups. This phenomenon can provide an explanation as to why this group of Latino, Cuban American students provided a counter-narrative explanation as to what they consider historically significant.

Summary of the Construct

This construct of the literature review explored the relationship between Latinos and social studies by examining three concepts: how and how much Latinos are represented in the curriculum, how and how much Latinos are represented in social studies textbooks, and how Latinos determine historical significance. We can draw a conclusion based on research that Latino students do not see much of themselves in social studies courses, be it through the textbook or through curriculum. When Latino students are exposed to Latin culture in the social studies, much of that is due to the presence of a Latina/o instructor. Just the very literature cited in this construct of this review of literature underlines the importance of having Latinos in educational positions of power, with a majority of the power's being provided by Latina/o faculty (Antonio Castro, Barbara Cruz, Jesus Garcia, and Cinthia Salinas).

There is much work left to do regarding Latinos and the social studies. More specific research is needed to determine how Latinos determine historical significance, as well as their perspectives of social studies education and whether or not it is meeting their needs. We are left with more questions than responses as ascertained from the literature. Will Latina/o educators be largely responsible for ensuring that Latino students obtain an education inclusive of their backgrounds? How can the social studies curriculum and textbooks better portray Latinos? How can we give more attention to the subcultures of the Latino community such as Afro Latinos, Dominicans, Colombians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, Brazilians, and other subgroups that are underrepresented in the social studies?

Answering these questions is where LatCrit becomes significant. LatCrit goes beyond recognizing the bias and prejudice that already exist, which the research on Latinos and social studies has so thoroughly illuminated. Applying LatCrit to this construct of the literature allows

research to move forward and offer solutions through the voice of the Latino and/or Latina student.

Students' Attitudes and Perceptions of Social Studies

In this construct, we move away from focusing entirely on Latino students to see what students in general think and perceive of social studies. Using LatCrit to conceptualize this construct, focus is given to the students' voice, thoughts, and feelings regarding social studies.

General Perceptions and Attitudes

Historically, students have not always held the most positive perceptions or attitudes towards social studies. Curry and Hughes (1965) began to establish a basis for literature on students' attitudes towards the social studies. Using a quantitative analysis of over 900 students from four large high schools in Waco, Texas, Curry and Hughes ranked social studies fourth out of five core subjects. Although social studies was considered of little interest to a majority of students, "Negro" (as referred to by Curry and Hughes in their manuscript) students tended to hold high regard for the social studies, ranking it among their favorite subjects next to English.

In a quantitative study, Fernandez et al. (1976) concluded that students did not deem social studies to be an important topic at all. Using students from both suburban and urban high schools, Fernandez et al. emphasized that this sentiment towards social studies was not just held by students but also by parents, administrators, and counselors as well. Also relevant to this study was the large number of minority students who participated. Out of 772 students, 133 were Hispanic, 209 Black, and 183 Asian American. Although minority participation in the study is not a prominent statistic mentioned throughout the research study, it definitely has implications

for how secondary ethnic minority students may view social studies. Overall, students perceived the social studies as irrelevant, and less significant than mathematics, science, and English, indicating that the social studies had less influence regarding their futures outside of school.

While not mentioned in the research study, a plausible reason for students' negative attitude towards social studies during that time ironically can be attributed to the Cold War. Due to the nuclear arms race, as well as the "space race," more emphasis was placed upon science and mathematics in order to produce students who would advance the United States' space program or arms program beyond that of Russia, or any other communist country for that matter (Evans, 2004; Slater-Stern, 2010).

Consistent with prior research, Haladyna (1982), in a quantitative analysis, also found that students' attitudes towards social studies remained low. Surveying students from grades 7 and 9, Haladyna tested not only students' attitudes but also factors that may influence those attitudes. He was able to conclude that teacher enthusiasm and effectiveness strongly influenced students' attitudes towards the subject matter. Other factors attributed to influencing students' attitudes towards social studies the most were instruction, peer influence, demographics, and self-motivation.

Schug et al. (1984) also conducted a quantitative analysis that sought to measure both elementary and high school students' attitudes towards social studies. The researchers found that social studies ranked only above science in what students considered to be the most important topics. Results show that students based their responses overwhelmingly upon career preparation and life skills. More than reporting results, however, Schug et al. hypothesized that students do not like social studies because educators, including social studies educators, do not do a good job of emphasizing how valuable social studies skills are in the real world.

Concluding with students' attitudes towards social studies, Chiodo and Byford (2004), reported a more positive attitude towards social studies. While they could not conclude that the attitudes towards social studies were entirely positive, contrary to past research the results of this qualitative phenomenological study yielded responses that could signal a changing trend in the way social studies is viewed. Indicating some of the same factors as mentioned in previous research, such as teacher enthusiasm, peer influence, and self-motivation, Chiodo and Byford's work shows us that over time, despite the numerous changes, the key factor influencing students' attitudes is teacher effectiveness. Perhaps the most telling concept from this study was that students indicated that social studies was important and of great value, which is an opposite viewpoint to that expressed in prior studies. Chiodo and Byford attributed the change in attitudes towards social studies to the changing socio-cultural conditions of the United States at the time, because of events such as the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

Gender and Social Studies

Similar to Latinos and other ethnic minorities today, there is a correlation between a culturally inclusive curriculum and students' attitudes towards the subject matter as it relates to gender. McTeer et al. (1975) selected 300 students from a high school in Cedartown, GA, to participate in their attitudinal survey. One-hundred students from the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades were selected. They found that high school boys preferred social studies above English, but they still liked science rather than social studies. Results were quite opposite for girls: they preferred English over social studies. Due to the nature of the quantitative analysis, no explanation was offered as to why males and females preferred one particular subject matter over another.

McTeer (1986) later surveyed 1,820 high school seniors from over 14 geographically dispersed high schools in northwestern Georgia. Students were asked to select which subject area they liked best and which one they liked the least, having to choose from English, math, science, and social studies. McTeer found that boys liked social studies more than girls, and girls selected social studies as their least-liked subject. Similar to McTeer et al. (1975), girls preferred English rather than social studies.

Surveying seniors from two large schools in New York City, Corbin (1994) wanted to examine the relationship of male and female high school students' attitudes towards social studies to their achievement in social studies. Three-hundred-seventeen high school seniors from an urban school as well as 167 high school seniors from a suburban school participated in the survey. Both males and females who obtained higher grades in social studies held better attitudes towards the subject matter. Females who expressed more positive attitudes towards social studies achieved higher grades than females who held a lower perspective of social studies. Females also preferred social studies subjects such as geography, sociology, and psychology as opposed to government and history, which are more male dominated.

Karuiki and Wilson (2003) were able to determine how gender affects students' attitudes towards social studies in a qualitative study. Using a small sample size of only 15 boys and 15 girls randomly selected from grades 6-8, Karuiki and Wilson were able to conclude that females held a less positive perspective of social studies. Although the questionnaire results were not statistically significant, it was clear through student interviews that the absence of female figures in the social studies curriculum led to a less positive attitude towards social studies by females than males.

Summary of the Construct

Multiple quantitative analyses have been conducted to determine students' attitudes and perceptions towards social studies. Chiodo and Byford (2004) decided to use a phenomenological analysis in their research in which they were able to arrive at results vastly different from what prior research has suggested. This construct of the review of literature reveals that there is a need for more qualitative analyses on students' attitudes and perceptions towards social studies. Through my research study, I hope to fill a much needed gap in the research by using a qualitative methodology to not only explore students' perceptions but also draw conclusions as to why.

Conclusion to the Review of Literature

Reviewing classroom-based literature that used LatCrit as a theoretical framework further validates the use of this theory as a means for conducting this study. Through an analysis of LatCrit classroom literature, I was able to see its effectiveness in ensuring that Latino stories are recognized as a means of scholarly research and its importance in ensuring that the voice of the Latino student is heard in teacher education. Furthermore, conducting this investigation through a LatCrit perspective is even more necessary as research pertaining to the Latino and social studies reveals that there are inaccurate portrayals of Latinos in the curriculum and textbooks. This construct also reveals that exposition of Latino and Latin American contributions to the United States are largely missing, and their mention often relies upon Latina/o social studies educators.

Latino students' attitudes and perceptions towards social studies is absent as well in existing social studies literature. A CRT and LatCrit analysis of prior research measuring

students' attitudes calls for us to look for what is present in these studies but also to ask questions as to what is missing (Ladson-Billings, 2003b). Therefore, this study hopes to fill the gaps of what is missing in social studies education research, the Latino voice.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to determine the essence of the phenomenon of being a middle school Latino student in the social studies. Furthermore, this study determined the meaning of this phenomenon as it pertains to Latino students' perceptions of social studies. The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. How do Latino students in a middle school in the Southeastern United States experience social studies?
2. What factors impact how eighth-grade Latino students in the Southeastern United States describe their experiences in social studies?
3. How do experiences in social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States impact Latina/o students' perceptions of social studies?

To answer these research questions, I conducted twelve phenomenological interviews. In addition to the interviews, data were triangulated through written narratives and images provided by the research participants pertaining to their experiences in social studies. Data were collected at San Marcos Middle School, a school located in an urban city in the Southeastern United States. Data were collected over the course of three months in the Spring of 2013 at which time the eighth-grade research participants had completed two-and-a-half years of social studies coursework.

Qualitative Research

The essence of the experience of Latino students in social studies was the focal point of this research study, and I relied upon LatCrit as a theoretical framework for carrying out the specifics of the investigation. As mentioned in the theoretical framework section of this study, LatCrit relies upon qualitative investigation, as the purpose is to tell the stories of those who have traditionally been underrepresented or ignored in scholarly research. Beyond LatCrit and other Critical Race Theories, there is validation in the use of qualitative methodologies for the purpose of research. Glesne (2011) stated that “qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (p. 39). Creswell (2007) also supported Glesne’s use of qualitative research when she stated the following:

We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study... We conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue... We use qualitative research to follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in casual theories or models. (p. 40)

I used qualitative research for four reasons, relying upon the suggestions of Glesne (2011) and Creswell (2007):

1. To empower Latino students.
2. To understand the context behind Latino students’ experiences in social studies.
3. To build on a significant body of quantitative research on students’ attitudes and perceptions (Corbin, 1994; Curry & Hughes, 1965; Fernandez et al., 1976; Haladyna, 1982; McTeer et al., 1976; McTeer, 1986; Schug et al., 1984). My goal was to gather data that could be considered richer in detail as opposed to these prior studies.
4. To remain consistent with the theoretical framework of CRT and LatCrit by providing a qualitative analysis.

Phenomenological Research

The type of qualitative research I used is phenomenology. Phenomenological research helps to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen specifically defined phenomenology as the “systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p. 10).

Phenomenological research goes deeper than narrative, as it attempts to uncover meaning not just for one person, but rather for an entire group of people who share the lived experience of a particular concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Moustakas (1994), researchers find the “essence” of what they are attempting to study via firsthand accounts of experiences told through formal and informal interviews. The experiences are then bracketed, analyzed, and compared to find the common underlying theme, or phenomenon. In short, phenomenology attempts to uncover three concepts:

1. What has a group of people experienced as a result of particular phenomenon?
2. How did the group of people experience the phenomenon?
3. What is the meaning of their experiences?

Using phenomenology, I uncovered the meaning of being a Latina/o student in the social studies as it pertains to students’ perceptions, but first, my goal was to get to the essence of the experience by determining what it was like to be Latino and experience the social studies curriculum. My research questions are consistent with the tenets of phenomenology.

Research Setting

School District

The school district where the research was conducted is a large, metropolitan school district located in the Southeastern United States. It is one of the largest public school districts within the state as well as in all of America. There are a total of 180 schools P-12 that serve a large student base of over 175,000 students. Middle schools and high schools make up a combined 53 of the 180 schools. The student population of the school district is racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, reporting a student population representative of 212 countries and speaking 162 languages. Thirty-three percent of the student population is considered Latino.⁴ The school district also serves urban, suburban, and rural geographic regions, which is unique in comparison to other large school districts in the country.

San Marcos Middle School

San Marcos Middle School is located in a central area of the city that is home to many Latinos. This situation is reflected in the school population, as over 70% of the 1,379 students are identified as Latino American. About 14% percent of students are White, 11% are Black or African American, 3% are Asian American, 1% are multiracial, and the remaining 1% is classified as other. Approximately 86% of the students at San Marcos Middle School receive free and reduced-price lunch, thus classifying it as a Title I school. Twenty-five percent of the students receive ESE services while about 30% of the student population is classified as English

⁴ The school district uses new federal guidelines to report race and ethnicity. The racial data are inclusive of various ethnicities. For example, an Afro Latino student would fall under the racial category of “Black,” which would be an accurate description.

Language Learners (ELL). There are 425 sixth graders, 394 seventh graders, and 428 eighth graders currently enrolled in the school.

Community Factors

Although there are not any housing projects that serve as residences for students of San Marcos Middle School, the community could be classified as middle- to lower-middle class, as is evidenced by the school's free and reduced-price lunch percentage. The surrounding area is truly representative of Latino culture: there are Latin American supermarkets, *bodegas* (corner stores), Spanish-speaking church congregations, privately owned Latin American restaurants and businesses, and signage written in Spanish. Some criminal activity takes place in this area of the city; however, serious felonies such as murder, armed robbery, and rape are not representative of the community.

School wide, San Marcos Middle School has experienced a recent dip in performance as judged by the state's department of education grading scale. The school was classified as a "B" school for the 2009-2010 school year, but poor performance on state standardized exams in writing, reading, and math have caused the school to be graded a "C." The school accountability report states that improvement is needed in the areas of reading and math for African American, Latino, economically disadvantaged, special needs (ESE), and ELL students.

Although the school may have dropped a letter grade, morale remains high among the faculty and staff. The principal encourages a college-readiness environment as teachers must incorporate some sort of college memorabilia into their classroom decorations. Each hallway is also representative of a particular university in its decoration and coloration. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program and International Baccalaureate Middle Years

Program (IB MYP) are major programs of focus within the school as much time, resources, and dedication are put in by faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members to ensure their success.

Research Participants

Sampling

The purpose of this study is to get at the essence of the Latino experience in social studies. Due to the nature of phenomenological research, I relied upon a narrow range of sampling strategies to find Latino students who have experienced social studies. Different from a quantitative analysis, which relies upon probability to determine statistical inferences, I used a purposeful sample, which allowed me to intentionally sample a group of people who best informed the study. Even more importantly, all participants must have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the type of sampling I used was considered a criterion-based sample. According to Creswell (2007), criterion sampling is the most effective method of sampling for phenomenological research as it is narrow and ensures that all individuals have experienced the phenomenon. The criteria I used are as follows:

1. Student must have been in the eighth grade. Age was not of importance, since the phenomenon explored was based upon eighth-grade students' experiences with social studies, not teenage experiences with social studies.
2. Student must be of Latin American heritage. The educational background of parents was not important. I looked for students who self-identified as being Latina/o.

3. Participants must have been non-English Language Learners, but students can be native Spanish speakers. The participants spoke Spanish but were native English speakers as well.

In addressing whom I wanted to study, it is important that I address who was not studied. Much of the literature pertaining to Latino students within the field of social studies education typically revolves around English Language Learners (ELL). While their stories are important, left out of the narrative of Latino students are those who are non-English Language Learners whose educational and life experiences are vastly different from those who have newly arrived to the United States. To include English Language Learners in the sample would have changed the entire nature of the study. In addition, I could not have been sure that all eighth-grade English Language Learners had taken social studies in their native countries. I know this from personal experience as I have taught newcomers ESOL social studies as well as mainstreamed ESOL social studies classes. There were students in middle school level classes who had never had a formal schooling experience in their countries. In addition, not all students took social studies in their native countries either. So if the purpose was to get to the essence of the Latina/o student's experiences in social studies, I had to be sure that they had experienced it.

Furthermore, I required that students be in the eighth grade. Although sixth and seventh grade are considered to be middle school, the purpose of this study was to measure eighth-grade students' experiences with social studies. Eighth graders at the time of the study had a full experience of middle school social studies. Sixth-grade students would be entering their first year of secondary school studies, having spent the prior seven years (P-5) receiving elementary instruction. Research shows that the teaching of social studies is continually on the decline in elementary schools (Guisbond & Neill, 2005; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; Pascopella, 2005;

VanFossen, 2005). The reason for the decline in importance of social studies in elementary schools is due in large part to the focus placed on reading and math as a result of the increased importance of standardized testing (Chiodo & Byford, 2004; Furin, 2003; Manzo, 2005). Due to what research has revealed, by measuring sixth-grade students' experiences in social studies, I would have obtained responses directly attributed to elementary social studies, which is not the purpose of this study. Similarly, studying seventh-graders was ruled out, since students would have had only one year of formal social studies education. By the time of data collection, eighth graders were near the completion of their middle school social studies course requirements and were able to provide richer data with regard to their experiences with the social studies curriculum. Creswell (2007) anticipated and justified my sampling strategy when he stated the following: "The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding" (p. 62). Therefore, using English Language Learners as well as additional grade levels for the purpose of this study would have clouded the understanding of the phenomenon I attempted to capture.

Sample Size

Creswell (2007), Glesne (2011), and Moustakas (1994) suggested that 5-10 research participants are substantial enough to get at the essence of a phenomenon, although some studies suggested even fewer. Prior social studies phenomenological research has relied upon a larger number of participants. In a phenomenological study of students' attitudes towards social studies, Chiodo and Byford (2004) initially selected forty-eight students but interviewed twenty-four

students. In another phenomenological social studies study, Labrana (2007) interviewed twenty-seven Chilean social studies teachers to determine their perceptions of the teaching profession.

Although these prior phenomenological research studies would suggest that I interview a significant number of participants, I interviewed twelve students. Twelve participants may not be comprehensive, but I was not looking for sheer size, but rather data that are rich in nature.

Twelve research participants for the study was somewhat of a middle ground between what phenomenological researchers have considered a substantial size and what phenomenological social studies research has suggested. To ensure richness of data, student participants were also interviewed twice. In addition, I did not rely only upon phenomenological interviews as a method of data collection but also on written narratives for each participant to obtain testimonios, remaining consistent with the use of LatCrit as my theoretical framework.

Table 1 provides a list of the research participants and their backgrounds. Pseudonyms are used in place of their names so as to protect their identity.

Table 1

List of Research Participants and Their Backgrounds

Names	Background	Gender
Vickie	Puerto Rican	Female
Oscar	El Salvadorian-Egyptian	Male
Mary	Puerto Rican	Female
Analiz	Panamanian	Female
Kristina	Puerto Rican	Female
Javier	Dominican-Puerto Rican	Male
Sara	Dominican-Puerto Rican	Female
Lena	Puerto Rican	Female
Isabella	Colombian	Female
Sofia	Colombian	Female
Genesis	Puerto Rican	Female
Frankie	Puerto Rican	Female

Sampling Procedures

As a teacher at San Marcos Middle School, I already had site access. However, to limit the threats to validity, I did not interview students I teach or have previously taught. The eighth-grade teachers at the school were aware of the study and agreed to allow me access to their students. Ideally, I would be able to interview students from another middle school, but as to not interfere with the educational environment nor disrupt any of my scheduled classes to leave and conduct research elsewhere, San Marcos Middle School provided me with research convenience.

Eighth-grade social studies students received a letter (Appendix A) soliciting Latino students' participation in the study. If students agreed to participate in the study, they then

received the parental consent form as provided by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida as well as an informational letter for parents (Appendix B). The twelve students who returned their parental consent form (Appendix C) and met the criteria outlined for the study were selected for interviews.

Data Collection

To collect data pertaining to the lived experiences of eighth-grade Latino students in social studies, IRB approval for human subjects was required from the local school district and the University of Central Florida. Once approval was obtained and students returned their informed consent forms, I began with data collection. Student participants were given the option to have their interviews conducted either before school or after school. If students did not have transportation before or after school, they were given the option to have their interviews conducted during lunch. However, all students were able to participate in the interviews either before or after school. Interviews were conducted in a quiet room in the media center to minimize distractions. Before the second interview, students were given the opportunity to draw their images. They received the prompt along with colored pencils. Not one student opted to use the colored pencils. Four students asked to take the drawing home but never submitted, thus I was left with eight drawings. I asked the students to turn in the drawings but did not want to pressure the research participants.

The first set of interviews lasted about 25-45 minutes. Using the semi-structured interview protocol, I also probed for meaning. The second set of interviews were shorter in length, lasting about 12-20 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by me. I listened to the audio recording again after transcribing to ensure accuracy. My goal was to be intimate with the data, which is why I transcribed the interviews myself (Glesne, 2011). Some

interviews were transcribed immediately after, but due to time constraints, this method was not possible for every interview. After transcription, I checked with the research participants to ensure accuracy of what was said. I would have preferred to keep field notes during the interview, but in order to ensure accuracy, I attempted to write down everything that was said. Video cameras could have been used, but due to the fact that research participants were students, this could have complicated the IRB approval process. In addition, I wanted the participants to feel comfortable and it was my judgment that the use of cameras would have interfered with their comfort levels (Van Manen, 1990).

Data Triangulation

A major criticism of qualitative studies involves its validity due to the researcher's role in collection and eventually determining how the data will be perceived (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). As a validation strategy, data were triangulated through the use of multiple data sources. Data triangulation can be seen as a way to "validate" your claims, as a means for eliciting the truth, or describing things the way they really are (Glesne, 2011). First, participants took part in two phenomenological interviews (see Appendix D for interview protocol). Second, students provided me with written narratives of their experiences in social studies, which were transcribed and coded using the same methods as the interviews. The use of narratives or testimonios is consistent with the LatCrit framework. The third form of data was a student drawing, which was executed before the second interview (Appendix E). Creswell (2007) recommended that when using phenomenological research, the research gathers depictions of the experience or the "phenomenon" outside of the research context. Thus, students were asked to creatively respond to a prompt asking them to draw what they perceive to be social studies. Also, to capture the

entire phenomenon, I found the use of multiple data collection strategies as very in-depth. Students had the opportunity to express themselves verbally, in writing, and aesthetically with drawings.

Interviewing

Van Manen (1990) stated that one of the primary purposes of interviewing in phenomenological research is to explore and gather experiential narrative material that will help in furthering one's understanding of a particular phenomenon. In developing interview questions that would capture the phenomenon and its meaning, Glesne (2011) recommended that interviews start with experience questions, which are helpful in making the interviewee feel comfortable. Additionally, Glesne recommended that interview questions be based in the past or present as that approach provides richer stories and descriptions and allows the opportunity for the interviewer to probe. Glesne (p. 109) also recommends that the interviewer avoid futuristic questions, as they can become a wish list.

Although it is common for phenomenological research to rely upon unstructured, informal interviews (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Moustakas, 1994), I wanted to arrive at as accurate a derivation as possible of the experiences of eighth-grade Latino students. Therefore, I used a semi-structured interview protocol that remained consistent with the significant tenets of this dissertation study. The interview protocol was developed with regard to both phenomenological research as well as Latino Critical Race Theory. The first two sections of the interview protocol were based upon phenomenological research as they are meant to capture the essence of the experience and determine the meaning of the experience. The second interview protocol was consistent with Latino Critical Race Theory and its use of testimonios as students

were prompted to tell a story. Although it is naturally impossible in a conversational interview to offer ready-made questions and adhere to them chronologically, these set questions allowed me to be concrete in exploring the entire experience to its fullest potential (Van Manen, 1990). In addition to the interview protocol, art was used as a source of measuring the lived experiences of eighth-grade Latino students in social studies. Van Manen suggested that the “products of art are in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations” (p. 74).

Narratives

In order to triangulate the data and provide for a richer study, I also collected written narratives from the students regarding their experiences with social studies. As previously mentioned, Latino Critical Race Theory is the framework that informed the study. In order to remain consistent with the framework, I did not rely only upon interviews, but I also asked for a specific story or narrative from the research participants’ perspectives. Although this process may seem redundant, the narratives that participants were asked to provide were specific in nature, asking the participants to recall a specific experience with social studies.

The use of narratives as a form of data has been questioned, yet Critical Race Theory scholars have addressed these questions or “threats.” However, narratives have been key in telling individual stories of micro-aggression to highlight notions of institutional racism. Notable Critical Race Theory scholar and original contributor to CRT, Richard Delgado, and his colleague Jean Stefancic (2000) best justified the use of storytelling and narrative analysis as a form of opposition to institutional racism. They stated:

Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place. These matters are rarely focused on. They are like eyeglasses we have worn a long time. (p. 61)

They further stated that:

The cure is storytelling (or, as I shall sometimes call it, counterstorytelling). As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others shows, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo... Along with the tradition of storytelling in black culture there exists the Spanish tradition of the picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bring them down to more human levels... Stories build a consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a deeper, more vital ethics. (p. 61)

Cynthia Tyson (2003) summarized and further supported the validity of storytelling and narrative analysis as used in critical race scholarship by stating:

It [referencing CRT's effectiveness in examining institutional racist practices] accomplished this through a series of counterstories that kept race as the center unit of analysis. In this regard, counterstories and storytelling functioned as a type of counterdiscourse, as a means of analysis to examine the epistemologies of racially oppressed peoples. Under this framework, the metanarrative shifts to identify and account for the continuing anguish of racism in the face of legal and social fixes.

Imagery

In addition to the narratives, I used imagery as a form of data collection and, consequently, a method of data triangulation. Students were given a prompt (see Appendix E) and were provided with paper, pencil, and colored pencils. This form of data was used to corroborate the interview data as well as their narratives. Imagery along with narratives provided the participants with an opportunity to verbally and creatively express their experiences with social studies.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, I relied upon the suggestions of phenomenological expert Moustakas (1994) and the alterations made to Moustakas' suggestions for data analysis by Creswell (2007). All data were transcribed and analyzed by me, and I did not rely upon software

to interpret the interview data for me. My goal was to become intimate with the data and know it; thus I depended upon non-technological strategies for manipulating data. After collecting interview data, I followed these steps, which are a combination of Creswell's and Moustakas' approach to data analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 159):

1. First, I described my personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. My personal experience was bracketed in Chapter I of this research study.
2. Develop a list of significant statements about how individuals experienced the topic and list these significant statements. In all, there were 216 significant statements.
3. Take the significant statements and group them into larger units of information as referred to as "meaning units" or themes. The significant statements were ascribed themes, and a code was developed for each theme. I coded the significant statements by hand rather than electronically.
4. Write a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. These are called textural descriptions and can include verbatim examples.
5. Write a description of "how" the experience happened. This is referred to as the "structural description," and the researcher reflects upon the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
6. Finally, write a composite description of the phenomenon that incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions. This is the "essence" of the phenomenon, which explains "what" students experienced and "how" they experienced it.

Figure 1 is a replication of Creswell's (2007, p. 170) template for coding phenomenological research, which provides a graphic representation of the above-mentioned steps.

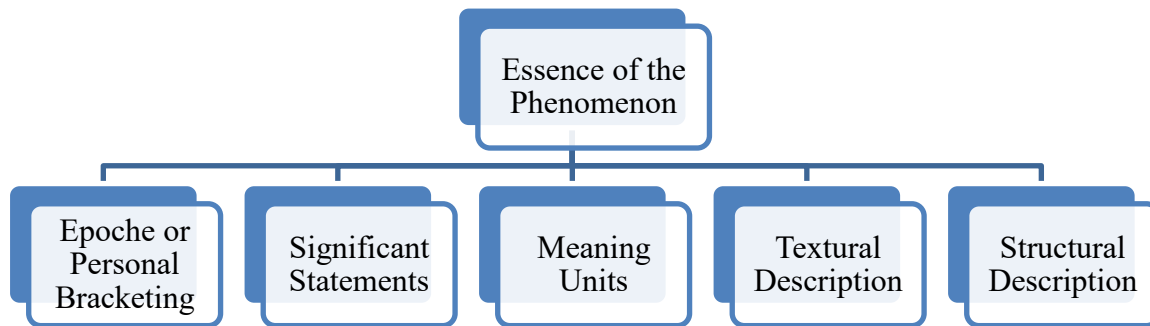


Figure 1: Template for Coding a Phenomenological Study

All student drawings were analyzed using a phenomenological approach as well. Drawings were reviewed, analyzed, and placed into categories pertaining to their experiences. In some cases, drawings were placed into multiple themes. I then used these sub-themes to formulate larger themes that supported the assertions and themes established from the phenomenological interviews and narratives.

Role of the Researcher

It is important that when discussing my role as the researcher in this dissertation study, that I delve into my subjectivity and personal investment with the phenomenon. Glesne (2011) substantiated this approach when she stated the following:

When researchers do not make explicit their interests and concerns, but rather work to appear neutral and to monitor all subjectivity in the sake of objectivity then this continues a colonizing discourse of the other... The research participant continues to be viewed as an object to be studied rather than as a person with whom to engage in conversation. (p. 140)

Subjectivity can be often viewed as negative, but with regard to the researcher's personal history and passions, subjectivity can be a vital contribution to research (Glesne, 2011). In this section, I provide my statement of reflexivity which helps to address concerns of subjectivity.

Before partaking upon this research study, my hesitations regarding this study were based upon my bias as one who is heavily vested in the Latino community because of familial roots and social experiences. Also, by the completion of this study, I will have completed six years of teaching in public K-12 schools with significant Latino enrollments. My familial roots and social and professional experiences involving Latinos are legitimate biases that served as limitations to the study. As a result of my background, I questioned how my research would be received with regard to validity by others in the social studies education scholarly community? This is a legitimate concern for many doctoral students and faculty members of color that is supported by research. Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, and Parker (2002) stated the following in regard to being a researcher of color investigating matters of race:

As faculty of color seeking to do transformative work that addresses issues of race and racism in education, we sometimes struggle with the limited ways in which our work and the work of other scholars concerned with race is interpreted and viewed by our colleagues.

Alluding to scholarly contributions, (Banks, 1992; Narayan, 1993; Padilla, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989) Ladson-Billings (1995) acknowledged that the "native" perspective can be seen as biased.

I, too, acknowledge that my socio-cultural background complicates my role as a researcher. However I ask, "If I choose not to carry out the study, then who will?" As referenced in my review of literature in Chapter II, Latinos and other educators of color in the field of social studies are bearing the responsibility for discussing and researching issues pertaining to students of color (Contreras, 2010; Cruz, 1994, 2002; Garcia, 1978, 1980, 1993; Garcia & Florez-Tighe, 1986; Garcia & Goebel, 1985; Gay, 2005; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2003a;

Salinas & Castro, 2010; Salinas et al., 2008). More importantly, my theoretical framework's being based upon CRT and LatCrit also validates my role as a researcher of color investigating issues pertaining to race with students of color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Gaitan, 1994; Duncan, 2002; Lynn et al., 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Pulido, 2009; Stovall, 2006; Villalpando, 2009; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Silencing myself by disregarding my experiences and knowledge would completely contradict the study itself.

Validity

Threats to Validity

There were two primary threats to the validity of this research study. The first threat to validity that other researchers may propose is my subjectivity and personal role in the research. Although I have acknowledged my subjectivity and personal investment in this study, I also rely upon Glesne's quote (2011) in validating my role in the study. Glesne stated that "scientific communities' emphases on validity, reliability, and objectivity have dismissed, marginalized, or maintained control over the voice of others" (p. 140). If the primary critiques of research related to race are based upon the researcher's personal involvement with race, then educational research would be rendered incapable and unprogressive pertaining to the improvement of racial issues within education.

Another threat to validity was my involvement in the location where the research took place. I am a current teacher at San Marcos Middle School and have been for the past two years. Although I did not interview my current students nor students whom I have previously taught, I am conscious of how questions of power and risk to the participants may be raised. Creswell (2007) stated the following concerns with conducting research in one's workplace:

To study one's own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may introduce a power imbalance between the researcher and the individuals being studied. Although studying one's own backyard is convenient and eliminates many obstacles to collecting data, researchers can jeopardize their jobs if they report unfavorable data or if participants disclose private information that might negatively influence the organization or workplace. (p. 122)

To address this threat to validity, I had an open discussion with my principal regarding the study. He was aware that students may reveal unfavorable information about the school, a specific teacher, or the subject matter in general. Although this was a possibility, it is important to remember that all information in the study would be kept confidential. Aliases and pseudonyms were to be used in the data representation so as not to reveal the identity of any teachers or students. Additionally, both I and my principal, who is also Latino, understood the value of this research in providing Latino students with a voice in social studies educational research. Additionally, he understood that the possibility of this research's influencing the field of social studies teacher education is likely once it is made into a publishable manuscript and perhaps published in a highly regarded, peer-reviewed journal.

The threats to validity are also addressed in the use of multiple data validation strategies which are discussed in the next section.

Validation Strategies

To counter the limitations of the study as well as the threats to validity, I used multiple validation strategies. The first validation strategy was the use of researcher reflexivity. Clarity regarding researcher bias from the very root of the study is important so that readers of the study understand my position and any biased assumptions that impact the data (Creswell, 2007). Another validation strategy was the use of data triangulation, in which I made use of multiple strategies for collecting data. Information from different sources helped shed light upon the

phenomenon and further my understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Typically with phenomenological research, interviews are the only source of data collection (Moustakas, 1994); however, within the interview, I was collecting a specific narrative as well as having participants complete a written narrative and a drawing. The narratives or testimonios in addition to the drawing helped corroborate the interview data. A final validation strategy was the use of peer review and debriefing as a means of an external check to the research process (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011). Throughout the data collection and data analysis process, I was in constant communication with the chair of my dissertation committee. We spoke about how many interviews were conducted, the themes that were revealed, and how to represent the data. The peer reviewer asks “tough” questions pertaining to my framework, methodology, data collection, and data analysis. Creswell (p. 215) recommended the following questions, which were used in my debriefs with my dissertation chair as well as my peers:

1. Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology?
2. Does the author have a clear phenomenon to study that is articulated in a concise way?
3. Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology, such as the procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994)?
4. Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does this essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred?
5. Is the author reflexive throughout the study?

Summary of the Methodology

The purpose of this study was to uncover the essence of the eighth-grade Latina/o student’s experiences in social studies at San Marcos Middle School in the Southeastern United States. Furthermore, the goal was to determine what their experiences meant. A

phenomenological approach to research was used to uncover the “essence” and determine meaning. Additionally, to remain consistent with Latino Critical Race Theory, students were asked in the interview to provide narratives or testimonios. Along with these testimonios, I used student drawings and written narratives to corroborate the interview data. Interview data were analyzed using Creswell’s and Moustakas approach to coding and interpreting interview data to uncover a phenomenon.

CHAPTER IV: THE TEACHER AND THE TEACHING

The purpose of this study was to get to the essence of the Latina/o experience in eighth-grade social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States. Twelve participants who identified themselves as Latino/a participated in the study and were interviewed over the course of three months. Each participant was interviewed twice using a semi-structured interview protocol. The first interview pertained to students' experiences in middle school social studies. The second interview was based on the influence of culture on Latina/o students' learning. In addition to the interviews, written narratives and images were used to get to the essence of the Latina/o student experience with social studies.

The interviews were transcribed using a natural transcription, being sure to capture the thoughts, hesitations, and verbal cues students displayed during interviews. The audio was double-checked for transcription accuracy. Each transcription was read over twice, in order to extract significant statements. What made a statement significant was anything related to "how" a student experienced social studies, "what" they experienced, and the meaning of these experiences. This focus was consistent with the use of phenomenological data analysis as the "how" describes the structural and the "what" describes the textural (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The written narratives were transcribed, and the same method of data analysis was used to extract themes from the narratives. Images were coded by their descriptions.

From twenty-four transcripts totaling 161, 216 significant statements were drawn. In all, three major themes emerged. The first theme that emerged was *the teacher and the teaching*. The

second theme that emerged from the data is *the curriculum: me, you, them, and it*. The third and final theme that emerged was the *power of pictures*. These themes were extracted using a phenomenological method of analyzing data. The phenomenological method was applied to the interviews, written narratives, and the images to get to the essence of the Latina/o student's experience in social studies.

The Essence

The three themes that emerged point to the very essence of being a Latina/o student in middle school social studies. The teacher and the content are at the very essence of the eighth-grade Latina/o student's experience in social studies. These themes emerged in the interviews and were corroborated by the narratives and images. The teacher and the content have shaped how the students experience social studies, what they experience, and the overall meaning of these experiences. Although the themes and may be seen as separate, it is important to note that in the field of education, and specific to this study, they are not mutually exclusive.

In middle school social studies, eighth-grade Latina and Latino students experienced a social studies that was isolated, monotonous, and culturally irrelevant. What influenced these experiences were the teacher and the curriculum. Overall, Latina/o students had a negative experience, but certain teachers stood out to the students for making social studies enjoyable. The enthusiasm of the mentioned teachers, their ability to engage students in the content with active pedagogical strategies, and their ability to be culturally responsive provided some students with a hint of excitement and relevance regarding social studies. This thread was consistently brought up in the students' written narratives, which showed that when they think of social studies, some positive experiences come to mind. However, I found that when analyzing the interviews, narratives, and pictures from a LatCrit perspective, which centers race and culture at

the center of the students' experiences, the boring teacher and oppressive, culturally irrelevant curriculum influenced how students perceived the social studies. As a result of these experiences, eighth-grade Latina/o students saw social studies as history dominated, lacking cultural diversity, and not helpful towards their future. In all, social studies had and still has the potential to really engage students, but it is dependent upon the teacher's being able to bring the curriculum alive.

The first quote that sums up the essence of the experiences of eighth-grade Latina/o students concerning the teacher came from Kristina:

I think it is interesting, depending on the way the teacher teaches the class. It is not straight from the book, do this or do that. Make it entertaining, like you would share a story that ain't exactly from the curriculum, but it has something to do with what we are learning.

Montana directly stated the impact of the curriculum on students' experiences when she said the following:

What's the word for it...I think the curriculum. Like just things that we learn it doesn't make a lot of sense. And a lot of the things we can learn about is not a part of the curriculum. And those are important things that we can't even hear about because it is not what we are supposed to be learning.

These two quotes show the significance of the responsibility of the social studies teacher due to the fact that the curriculum was culturally irrelevant and sometimes oppressing to these eighth-grade Latina/o students.

The Teacher: Fun and Enthusiastic

Eighth-grade Latino/a students experienced social studies in an individual, boring, and redundant manner. They found the topics to be uninteresting and their methods of learning to be the same. One of the contributing factors to these experiences was the lack of teacher enthusiasm. Javier mentioned how the lack of teacher enthusiasm affected his learning in his sixth-grade social studies course:

Naw I think it would be the teacher. Because in 6th grade I learned about most of the stuff from the textbook. I didn't understand it because it was boring because all they did was put it on the tape recorder and let us listen to it. We didn't learn anything about it. Then when they gave us a test about it and before you had to look at the dates in the text and that was it.

Clearly Javier's learning was impacted. Javier also had a similar experience in his seventh-grade social studies course as well:

My least favorite had to be 7th because it was not that much that we are actually paying attention, like that we actually learned stuff. It was maybe like once or twice a week or something. The other days we copied out the textbook, copy a fake answer, turn it in and get a good grade. We knew the answer didn't have to be right to get a good grade.

Isabella and Vickie clearly had negative experiences in social studies due to a lack of teacher enthusiasm. When the teacher was not engaged or enthusiastic about what he/she was doing, their learning suffered as a result. Vickie, who actually liked the topics, felt that her potential for learning and engaging in the topics were limited because of the teacher. Vickie in her first interview said, *"No, it was interesting but it was boring because of the teacher. It was interesting the topics but the teacher was like...ugh."* The teacher took all of the fun out of learning for Vickie. Isabella had a similar experience in seventh-grade social studies.

All he did was talk. We never did any projects or notes. When we did projects he never talked about what the projects could teach us... [He was]unorganized. I really didn't learn that many things. We did a lot of talking but didn't understand what the teacher was trying to tell us. We got off topic a lot. It just wasn't a good class and stuff.

Genesis supports the claims of Vickie, Isabella, and Javier about a boring teacher:

My least was 6th grade because we had to learn about Egypt and all that stuff. It is not that important. At least to me it wasn't that important. And the teacher didn't do anything fun which made it more boring.

Despite the lack of teacher enthusiasm, students like Javier and Sara recognized the value of teacher enthusiasm and its potential in getting students engaged in social studies. Javier wishfully went on to later state this about the role of teacher enthusiasm in social studies:

Yeah, I mean it is one thing that when the teachers are getting your attention. Because his enthusiasm or her enthusiasm can get you enthusiastic and you want to participate also. You can actually have fun with it. It is one thing to have a teacher to tell you to look at a page out of the textbook and one to get you excited about something. It is better than read this or read that. It is one thing when the teacher goes crazy and acts like the students.

Sara echoed Javier's sentiment when she stated in her first interview the following:

I think it is interesting depending on the way the teacher teaches the class. It is not straight from the book, do this or do that. Make it entertaining, like you would share a story that ain't exactly from the curriculum, but it has something to do with what we are learning.

Isabella, who had negative experiences regarding teacher enthusiasm, noted the potential for learning when a teacher is engaged. Isabella in her first interview stated "*The teacher he makes it fun to learn...I think it is the teacher and how he gives information to the kids. It is how he teaches us. It is how the teacher gives it to the kids.*"

Students felt more likely to get engaged in social studies content when their teacher was enthusiastic and engaged too. Students felt that because the topics were boring and monotonous, that it would be up to the teacher to engage them in the content. Unfortunately, throughout their middle school social studies experiences. Latina/o students did not experience teachers who were enthusiastic about teaching. Once again, the potential for a powerful social studies experience was there, but it was not harnessed due to the decisions of the teacher.

The pedagogical choices of teachers also contributed to whether or not the students viewed their teachers as fun or boring. In social studies classes in middle school, Latino/a students were most likely to learn in a passive manner. Note taking, worksheets, and textbook readings were the most common assignments. There were rare occasions in which students became engaged in social studies curriculum through discussions or debates. Students also mentioned wanting to be engaged in more projects. They expressed a desire to do more hands on

activities in which they would use what they learned rather than regurgitate what they had learned.

Analiz's narrative about how she learned in her eighth-grade social studies class was typical of teachers' passive, pedagogical methods:

First when we are learning something we do vocabulary and copy down the word off of a PowerPoint. The next day we will do like a little activity with the word or something with the word. Then we will usually have a vocabulary test the next day. When we are learning about something different, we read it. Then we would do something like, what is it called...when a bunch of people are reading it... I mean the notes, the only thing I think we should take notes on is if we are getting a test or if it is something we need to know for the end of semester exam. Other than that I feel like it's just a waste of paper because I don't need to know about it or I don't need it.

Javier also discussed the impact of passive learning such as note taking and textbook work. Like a lack of teacher enthusiasm and redundant topics, the teachers' pedagogical strategies affected students' learning as well. It can be hard on the students' learning experiences when the methods are passive, meaning the students are rather learning in a manner that does not require engagement. Here is what Javier had to say about the impact of passive teaching on his learning:

We barely used textbooks in my 7th- and 8th-grade classes. 7th grade he gave us workbooks to work out of. And he would put some stuff on the board for us to learn about. But when it's just textbooks, read it, there you go, here are the answers, it is hard because there are so many pages in that book and you don't know exactly what information unless the teacher guides you through it and teach you so that you can actually learn. I mean it is hard.

Analiz and Javier demonstrate that passive learning has no value and makes learning difficult. Sofia, at the end of her written narrative brought light to this very point when she wrote, "Learning about social studies is important and necessary, but just talking and writing notes won't help. There has to be activities that follow up." Oscar is a high achieving student who maintains straight A's regardless of whether a class is engaging or boring. Even though he was

critical of the teacher's pedagogical choices in 8th-grade history, he also felt that the pedagogical methods were limited due to the content area. He said:

History I would say is one class that I definitely have taken a lot of PowerPoint notes in...history is I guess I can say difficult subject to bring in interactive play unless you're going to do a reenactment. But besides a reenactment it is hard to get something to do in history.

It is important that teachers find ways for students to use the information and be active learners, not relying upon the banking method of education. Engagement is key. Students knew this as referenced by their comments on the potential impacts that active engagement could have on their learning in social studies. Analiz stressed active, engaged learning when she said:

More projects and stuff would help. I like doing projects a lot because I learn more. I find out more stuff. I have to look for the information and I find out more that way...So I mean like some project or PowerPoint we can make. Because with that we can come home and look on the internet for information or look in the book for stuff.

Genesis offered a suggestion for active engagement in her first interview:

Well in 6th grade she could've like pretended we were in Egypt and we could've like...I don't know...you know what I mean right. Pretend we were in Egypt and try to do things like they did but we were learning at the same time...We could've taken less notes and done more activities and stuff. I think it depends on the teacher because you can make it more interesting with your lesson plans and different things instead of doing the same thing all the time.

Kristina too offered suggestions similar to Genesis in her first interview when she said, "Simulations I guess and further explaining and different activities that are hands on to help you remember." Javier also noted the potential for active engagement in social studies. Javier mentioned, "Time flies when you're actually engaged in what you're learning; when you're participating and actually learning something." Oscar became excited when I inquired about the potential for active engagement in social studies: "Right, the opportunity to engage. Let's dive in and let's think some more. I really like that."

It was rare for Latino students to be engaged in active learning in their middle school social studies experiences. However, a few teachers chose active pedagogical strategies to engage students in social studies content. Kristina really enjoyed the slave journal that her eighth-grade social studies teacher had students complete. She described the purpose of this slave journal assignment as a way for students to adopt the perspective of a slave so that they could internalize the experience. She described it as such:

We did the slave journals and basically you had to um...we had to put yourself in the perspective of a slave. And you had like different period of times like you could be a slave. Like you could be on a ship going to the Americas or already be on a plantation working. I thought it was pretty awesome and he gave us a week and a half to do them. So it gave us enough time to actually think and research a little more.

Sara also had an engaging experience in her eighth-grade course:

Like we learned about Abraham Lincoln in 6th grade; that he was the 16th president, he ran for president in 18-something, but we didn't learn about him like we do now. Like his inaugural speech and what parts of it meant. If we did stuff like that it would have been more entertaining. The notes, they are not just copy it down and review it tonight.

Ironically, she mentioned learning the same thing that she learned in her sixth- and seventh-grade course, which typically leads to boredom, but the eighth-grade teacher's choice to use active pedagogy when teaching about Abraham Lincoln set this learning experience apart from others.

Genesis enjoyed learning in her eighth-grade history course, describing the activities and academic games she participated in:

My favorite was eighth grade because I like how the teacher explained it and give us little activities like Jeopardy. Oh I love Jeopardy. It is fun and so competitive. And I just like how it makes us learn, like you make it fun at the same time.

Lena enjoyed active learning too and it showed when she recalled an activity from her seventh-grade social studies course that required her to make a presentation about the propaganda prevalent within commercials. She said, "Like in seventh grade we were learning

something about propaganda and we had to make a PowerPoint about the propaganda commercials and stuff on the internet.”

The following narratives however do a better job of highlighting what active learning has meant to the students across all grade levels. Their experiences with social studies have generally been overwhelmingly negative, but the teacher’s choice to use engaging and active pedagogical methods really influenced the way that students viewed social studies. It provided students with a glimmer of hope and insight into the potential that social studies can have in their lives. A majority of their narratives pointed towards active learning.

Sofia’s narrative was based on active learning in her sixth- and eighth-grade social studies courses. She describes these experiences of active engagement as such:

When they say the word social studies a clock pops in my mind. As it is ticking I flashback of everything I learned is showing. Everything that allowed me to be where I am. A specific experience was in Mr. Jones [pseudonym] class where we talked about slavery. In order to understand how they felt he made us sit back to back in a small space. We sat there a long time. I felt claustrophobic. It helped me know more about it instead of just writing Cornell notes. It stands out because it was a hands-on activity. For me that helps me remember.

Another time was in Mrs. Saravia [pseudonym] class where we re-enacted the Olympics in Greece. We got to see what games they did at that time. She changed the room to make it seem like an arena. She even dressed up. She would make teams and they would pick one student to play. This stands out because it was entertaining. By this it helped me remember and actually know what happened.

Sofia’s narrative demonstrates how much fun active learning can be, but more importantly, it demonstrates the impact on her learning. She not only knows about Greek games, but she was able to apply her knowledge in a fun and meaningful way.

Isabella also talked about those very same classes. She mentioned a different activity for eighth grade, but the same Greek Olympics activity for her sixth-grade experience:

When I reflect on my social studies classes, I find that I have had mostly positive experiences. Among all of these, a few stand out. It takes me back to 6th-grade humanities taught by Mrs. Saravia [pseudonym] at San Marcos Middle School. For example, one of

her many interactive lessons involved a Greek class Olympic games. Mrs. Saravia recreated ancient Greek sports and games, in a safer environment. She got the whole class excited, and even offered prizes as we learned about ancient Greek history.

As for more of a recent experience, my 8th-grade U.S. history teacher Mr. Jones [pseudonym] has the gold. His lessons stand out to me. While we learned about the Revolutionary War, he was able to simulate how the aid of the French led to a patriot victory. He took us outside in order to demonstrate with a game of tug-a-war. He split our class up and selected teams to represent the British and the patriots according to students' size and strength. After the British had won a few matches, he brought the French in to show us that the patriots would inevitably win. The rest is history!

Mrs. Saravia clearly used engaging pedagogical strategies in her unit on Greece because

Kristina, too, talked about another activity in her written narrative.

6th-grade experience: When I was in the 6th grade, the way we would learn new material was by a textbook or by doing hands on activities like making foldables. We were learning about early civilizations so this learning technique was effective.

Specific experience: We were learning about Greek gods so Mrs. Saravia assigned everyone a god and we had to research it at home and draw a "Fakebook" profile of our specific god. I had the god named "Nike." I still remember because the activity was a good hands-on activity that makes me memorize most of the things.

Oscar's experience in another class really stood out enough for him to write about it in

his narrative:

When I think about social studies the first experience that comes to mind is a debate in my 7th-grade civics class. The reason this experience comes to mind is not because of the material we were learning about, but because of the level of thinking I had to think at. Since it was a debate the material wasn't constant and I constantly had to formulate a different response. The debate topic was whether a direct democracy or representative democracy was better for a country.

Oscar wrote about this experience in his written narrative, but he and Kristina mentioned this very same class in their first interviews. The class stood out to them because the teacher used pedagogical strategies such as debates and discussions. When Kristina talked about her favorite class in her first interview, she mentioned the following about the course:

I think my favorite has to be 7th grade with Mr. Pirlo [pseudonym], because even though I don't like the idea of civics because I'm not really educated on it. Like the three branches of government, who is who, and congress. I think it was really cool because he

put it in a fun way like debates and discussions and stuff like that. Rather than powerpoints, notes, here are the facts and study that.

Oscar went on to say more about the class and the teacher's use of debates and discussions:

This wasn't a stand-still game. We had to think more and challenge one another. Someone would bring up one point and now someone would play devil's advocate. You had to think on your toes because the argument you were preparing might've just changed with the discussion.

Overall, students enjoyed being engaged in social studies topics. It brought the content to life for them. The impacts of these experiences were key because these were their only positive experiences in all of middle school social studies.

The debates and discussions had an impact on the way that Kayla thought of herself and her ability to think on a higher level as evidenced when she said, *"Yea because when I walked out of class I would be like 'whoa' did I just think that."*

The impact that active learning had on Oscar cannot be understated. His experiences point to the reasons why teacher educators push pre-service teachers to use engaging pedagogical strategies such as projects, debates, and discussions:

Yes I did a lot. The debates and philosophical chairs, I had a way to express my own opinions on what we were learning. My classmates and peers were able to express their perspectives and it was nice to have them listen to what I had to say and listen to what they had to say as well.

Then when describing his favorite social studies class in middle school, he further mentioned seventh-grade civics stating:

I would go for 7th-grade civics because of my experiences. In that class because we talked so much I wasn't getting the teacher nor the powerpoints perspective but my classmates' perspectives. Like a PowerPoint might've said blah blah blah. And a classmate might've said what if this happened? So it broadened my thinking. I like the fact that we were made to think outside of our notes. We were talking in class and contributing. It was a diverse mix of minds thinking on one topic so you are going to have a lot of different perspectives. It wasn't just "we went to war; that happened" you know. It was more like

they went to war and this happened, but how it would've turned out differently if this happened.

Because of these experiences, Oscar not only saw value in himself but saw value in the ideas, opinions, and thoughts of his peers. Thus teachers' pedagogical choices coupled with their enthusiasm are vital in helping students to realize self-value and build cultural capital.

The Teaching: Social Studies Is Isolated and Redundant

Students experienced social studies in an isolated, boring, and monotonous manner.

When describing what they thought of social studies, there was never any excitement, a raised voice, nor even a smile. For the student participants, middle school social studies had been repetitive and disengaging. The assignments are the same, the methods of learning are the same, and more importantly, there was no real added value to what the students learned because of how they learned it. Frankie, a female Puerto Rican student, described this very experience in her first interview:

That has been part of my whole life since I have been in middle school. We do Power Points, and we do all these mini assessments and everything. So we come into class and they just try and make us memorize all these things. Like I come into my class and they're like here you go. They start with the branches of government and start talking about what the president does and what this other guy does and I'm like "I don't understand this, I'm not in the government." And then they try to teach us about all these countries and all of these things.... We are never going to understand it because it's just hard to come into a class and they tell you "here write this down, or write this other thing down" and try to memorize it and try to take it in a test. So my whole three years has been Cornell notes, Power Points and states and capitals and all of these things where people come from, but you still don't know who they really are.

In fact, Frankie felt that social studies was just a reflection of school as a whole. She mentioned that social studies was just a part of a school environment, which was redundant, isolated, and disengaging in general. After stating how she felt about social studies, Frankie then had this to say about school:

School is a place where they put a whole bunch of people in a room, they say this is what they are going to learn, they don't care whether they like it or not, they just say here it is, you are going to do this and do that, they don't do it for the better or for the worse. They do it by what they feel is right... That is not how a kid should be thought of. They should be taught [taught] everyday life things that makes them think better about the world to make this a better place.

Kristina shared similar thoughts as Frankie. Kristina mentioned learning in social studies classes in a very similar manner: *“Umm powerpoints, books, but like the powerpoints I kind of like it when they're actually kind of interesting. But mainly it is just boring facts all into one PowerPoint. I'm not really interested.”*

Frankie and Kristina's experiences show that when social studies classes are repetitive and disengaging learning can be difficult. These types of experiences are critical in the sense that they can affect a students' performance in class, and consequently their future. This was the case with Mary, who said, *“I think that social studies is pretty boring which is why I get a bad grade; because it is hard to pay attention. It is all about the past and doesn't really relate to how life is now.”* Even when the students did enjoy social studies, they still found it monotonous, as evidenced in Oscar's first interview when he said in reference to his sixth-grade global civilizations course, *“It was fun and all but the course at times I believe wasn't challenging enough. Some of the things we learned in 5th grade. We would spend too long on one topic. I thought it got too easy.”*

This theme was prevalent in Analiz's interview. She saw no value in social studies because she experienced it in such a boring and isolated manner. Analiz mentioned immediately in her first interview the following:

Umm. I like school it's just like. I just feel like I just go through things the same every year. Like in science and social studies and reading. I just don't like social studies... It's just boring. It is just boring period. I don't like it. It just talks about presidents this and when I get older I have to do this. I mean it's just the fact that I learned about the same thing in like 4th or 5th grade. It's just the same thing.

After Analiz finished stating this, I then asked her if there were things that she wanted to learn about since she found her experiences so boring and she replied, “Yeah but I just don’t know what because I feel like we have already been over it. I feel like it will probably be the same thing.” Analiz also wrote about this in her narrative.

My first experience, I think that it is going to be boring. My 6th-grade social studies class was boring. My 7th grade was boring but a little bit better. My 8th grade was less boring and more fun. If it is fun I will learn more and remember stuff much better.

Genesis had similar experiences to Analiz, especially early in middle school social studies. Both Genesis and Lena mentioned sixth- and seventh-grade social studies as boring, too. Genesis in her first interview stated:

7th grade we just took notes like the review guides he gave us. We copied the questions and answers before a test. In 6th grade...it was like kind of boring because we learned about Egypt and stuff and I don’t think it is very important. It was just boring.

Genesis also repeated this notion at the beginning of her written narrative. She wrote, “My experience in social studies are different. I remember in 6th grade when we had to learn about Egypt. It was the most boring thing I ever learned. My teacher just talked. She didn’t do any activities.” Lena said, “In 6th grade we had to like learn about the ancient China. I didn’t like it because it was boring.” Perhaps Kristina sums up this boring and redundant way of learning when she stated in her first interview, “Other [social studies] classes would be just facts, facts, and facts you would have to learn.” In addition to the monotonous experiences, students felt isolated in their learning, as evidenced when Kristina stated the following:

I don’t know if it is because we have an intern but we do all individual stuff. But history is about people so we should be working with people, like in groups with history.... We barely get into groups. We hardly get into groups and that annoys me.

The students clearly stated that their experiences with social studies have been boring and repetitive. The redundancy of topics and isolated manner of learning have resulted in students’ perceiving a lack of value in the overall goal of social studies, which is citizenship. Because their

learning has been so isolated, repetitive, and full of facts, it has been difficult for students to see the citizenship and human-interaction aspect of social studies.

The Teaching: Cultural Responsiveness and the Minority Teacher

Latina/o eighth-grade students experienced social studies that was dull and redundant. There were a few exceptions, however, as some students had teachers who engaged them in active, meaningful learning. This engagement was not the norm, as most of the instruction students received in their social studies classes was not culturally responsive. Since they were not engaged, most students could not relate to the content. In contrast, some teachers were able to be culturally responsive in their teaching practices. They helped students relate to the content and put it in a way that they could understand.

Most of the Latina/o students who participated in the interviews did not experience a curriculum in middle school that was culturally responsive. They could not relate nor see themselves in the curriculum. Frankie wrote in her narrative about this lack of cultural capital:

Yet, I haven't had the best experiences in history. I just haven't learned what I need to. I need to learn how people developed. I need to learn how life works. My past experiences have been learning about America, learning about the government, and how America is terribly tearing apart. My teachers from sixth and seventh think that the curriculum was the right thing to teach. They thought that we were nourishing over their teachings. I didn't think so. I was lost half of the time. I don't believe in all the curriculum.

In her interview, I asked her what culturally responsive teaching would look like and she replied:

When the teachers actually take their time [to] put it in their words, they explain, they teach it, they interact with us. And they actually try; they just don't throw a book up at us or a paper, and say here do this.

Although a majority of students' experiences have been passive, boring, and irrelevant in social studies, some students mentioned that they had social studies teachers who were of color

who were able to relate the content to them. There is a debate as to whether or not teachers of color are best suited to teach students of color (Collins, 2011; Howard, 1999). Students' responses supported the confirmation of this claim. When asked whether they felt their minority social studies teachers were able to relate the content to them, students answered with surety.

Genesis claimed:

Yes I think he is because he is able to put things in our own words and is able to show things how it is. He is able to think like us so when we say something...we are like "what?" and he will say "let me explain it this way" so we can understand it better.

Genesis then added, *"I would say yes because they are able to understand us better and they can relate to us because they've been through that. They can relate to us."*

Javier echoed Genesis' sentiments of having a teacher of color and its meaning. Javier stated:

I think it is true because if you have a like not to be racist or anything, but if you have a White teacher and you are learning about something like slavery, they will probably be like yeah they got beaten and probably be nervous. If you have a teacher who can actually relate they can say "yeah this is what happened to my culture, this is actually what happened." I mean, like same thing, if you just be like "yeah that is what happened," it is different from the teacher who is from that culture. When you learn about a certain thing and you are like this is what happened to us, this is how we came about. I get a little excited because I am learning more about our history. So yea.

It is important to note that those students who mentioned the race of their social studies teacher as important all had the same teacher in eighth grade who has a Latin background. Although that teacher did not teach about Latinos in particular, he was able to explain things to them by using examples from the students' backgrounds. Because of this form of culturally responsive teaching, students were able to understand concepts better. Genesis stated about the teacher, *"Like when the teacher acts it out and breaks it down it helps."* She later went on to state in reference to the Latino teacher, *"Because I like the teacher, I like it better when the teacher explains it to me. I cannot like read from the textbook and learn from it. I need the teacher to*

give me examples and things like that.” The impact of this teacher on Genesis was insurmountable as she feels that the cultural responsiveness of the teacher led to her obtaining better grades in her social studies class. She talked about her grade improvement, mentioning, *“I used to have a really low B but now that I am in 8th grade and my teacher explains it more and gives us more examples, I have really high B or A.”* Genesis substantiated her claims with her written narrative in which she described culturally responsive teaching. She wrote, *“I like how he explains things to us in our own words. He gives us examples that we can understand and he makes it funny for us.”* I asked Genesis to provide me with an example of how he made something culturally relevant and she told me a story that made her laugh. Students were learning about the concept of Manifest Destiny and how God was used to justify America’s westward expansion. She said the students did not understand the concept of Manifest Destiny outright.

This one day we were learning about how we use God’s name like when we watch the awards shows. And he was in the front rapping. That was funny. I will always remember that... To show how some of the people back then might have been misusing God to explain why they wanted to move out west. Yea I did because it was funny and I could understand it more.

Javier had sixth- and eighth-grade teachers who were of color. He described their culturally responsive teaching practices stating, *“I have teachers that keep it interesting and keep it straight up and put it in a way that kids can understand and make it easy.”* When I asked Javier if he could give me a specific example of how his teachers were culturally responsive, he spoke specifically about his sixth-grade teacher. He summed up her culturally responsive teaching practices as such:

I think and so she got off topic and was like “we are learning about Hispanic heritage month.” She did it and it was fun because it was different. I liked it...Not only that but because my teacher named Ms. Rivera, the way she taught it, she starts off with now you heard of...and my 8th-grade teacher does it too. They start off with something that is happening today to compare it to something that we are learning. Like they will start off

with something like “Have you ever felt discriminated against?” And then they will say this how they felt back in the day. This is what happened. If you went into a restaurant and you were African American you were most likely to get spit in your food. It takes you there from now into then so you knew how they felt. It goes back to their experiences. So it was pretty cool.

Lena shares the same eighth-grade teacher as Javier. She said the following about his ability to be culturally responsive:

And I like this 8th-grade history class because we all get to debate and put our own minds into what we are learning. And um the notes are not really that boring, they are fun. The way the teacher explains it and how everybody in the classroom takes the notes and the questions that they ask.

I asked Lena what a teacher does to make something relevant to the students and what would that look like? She replied, *“They are funny and they explain stuff so that we can understand. They do like visuals and they use the students in the class for examples.”* When asked to provide an example of how a teacher made something relevant to the students, Lena gave me this brief narrative:

Oh, when we were doing like the slavery compromise. The 3/5 compromise and how they only thought of Blacks as 3 out of 5. In class we were talking about how back then how half the class wouldn't be alive or wouldn't count. Because he was like using the class as an example instead of thinking like way to complicated. He used visuals. And that made it more fun and I learned it better.

Sara, and Vickie also described the impact of a culturally responsive teacher on their learning in their written narratives. Sara in her narrative stated:

The first thing that comes to my mind is all of the funny stories that Mr. Smith told us during class. Also how he teaches is amazing. He teaches us really in depth in our topics. This stands out because all of my previous teachers taught really boring. But Mr. Smith doesn't. He entertains us. We learn better when we have fun learning.

Mr. Smith is not a teacher of color but one who works hard to relate content to the students. This shows that although a majority of the teachers who were able to relate the content to students were of similar background, White American teachers are also capable of relating to students of color if they simply try hard enough.

Vickie's narrative spoke at length about culturally responsive teaching as well. Vickie wrote:

When I think of social studies in school I definitely think of this 8th-grade year. It was the funnest year I had because it was the most involving. Unlike my other teachers, he got all the students involved. Whether it was essays or acting it out in front of the class. And he compares and contrasts them to events happening today. But my favorite part is that no matter what he is teaching us, he is always truthful and teaches facts unlike my other social studies teachers who teach us by what they want us to believe about history.

The impact of culturally responsive teaching cannot be understated. It is unfortunate that not all social studies classes at San Marcos Middle School reflected culturally responsive teaching practices. It is worthy of note, however, that despite the overall negative experiences, some students of color are experiencing teachers who are capable of making a social studies curriculum that is “White” in nature somewhat relevant and understandable for the students.

CHAPTER V: THE CURRICULUM: ME, YOU, THEM, AND IT

The second theme that emerged from the data was the curriculum: me, you, and it. Besides the teacher, the curriculum was at the very essence of eighth-grade Latina/o students' experiences in social studies. Student participants saw the social studies curriculum from various perspectives. The students did not see themselves in the social studies curriculum, yet they longed to. They wanted to see others in the social studies curriculum as well. However, what they were experiencing with the social studies curriculum was White and Eurocentric in nature. This experience reflected in their perceptions of the textbook and the democracy-based content.

The Curriculum and Me: Where Am I?

Students consistently and overwhelmingly expressed a desire to learn about Latino culture in social studies. In addition, students were curious to learn about other diverse cultures that make up America as well. One would think that due to the narcissism that exists at their age they would want to learn solely about their own culture. However, because our classrooms are more multicultural, students wanted to know more about their peers who were from other culturally diverse groups.

In his first interview Javier spoke about his desire to learn more about Latino culture and others as well:

I feel like not only me but everybody else feels like they don't teach us about stuff that we want to learn. We want to learn about our culture and other people. And kids like me, I want to learn about where I came from, how I started, and not only from the United States, but from our culture and every person's culture. I think that would be really

cool... it is cool knowing about...it is one thing knowing about your culture and it is another thing knowing about where it started.

Frankie spoke about the lack of a culturally diverse curriculum too:

Well in social studies we don't talk about Latinas or culture a lot. It mainly focuses on the people who founded and made history in America. So it does because I would like to learn more about every culture not just one. I kind of get off topic learning about American culture because I cannot compare it to mine. I feel like it isn't fair because I know that there are a lot of cultures that have done good things in America...We are just looking at one point of view and not everybody's point of view.

Mary also wanted to learn about her culture and others, but felt as if the teachers did not focus on it enough when she said, *"We have culture days but we don't learn much about them. Like we will get a little information."* Thus Mary saw the social studies curriculum as surface level, not going into depth concerning her culture.

This lack of culturally relevant material was not lost on the students as they yearned to know more about themselves and others. Kristina thought that it would be beneficial for her peers to learn about Latin culture when she said, *"But that would be cool 'cause then like more people would be like 'Puerto Ricans are pretty inspiring.' It would be cool to see other cultures too and learn about different people."*

Analiz thought it would be beneficial to her, but to others as well, to know about where she came from, Panama:

Yes, but more different cultures. Not just America though but about other places too. We should find out how they were made, how they happened. Kind of like the Panama Canal. Like when we went over there and I came back and told people about it, and my friends here didn't know anything about it because we never talk about other countries. We just don't go over that stuff and we don't know it.

Lena echoed the sentiments of Javier in wanting to learn about herself as well as others:

But like Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage month. Like the cultures we should learn about. But we should spend more time learning about cultures and stuff like that... not just my life but the other students too because we all are from different cultures. Because everyone should know about their past before we were here.

Sofia and Javier also spoke about the significance of learning about their culture. Sofia simply stated that, *“Yea I would like to learn how Colombia got independent like other nations. Instead of U.S.A, learn what we were like.”* Javier wanted more dialogue dedicated to Latin culture because he felt as if Latinas/os have contributed to American society, but it does not seem so due to the limited perspectives presented in their middle school social studies classes.

Javier put it bluntly:

Yea because they are multi-race and they actually went with different people. I think the Spanish people did something in history. They make it seem like the Spanish did not start migrating till later I guess because most of our social studies classes talked about early times.

He felt that the diversity amongst Latinos was alone worth mentioning in social studies. Frankie offered this suggestion for the inclusion of diverse cultures in the social studies curriculum:

What they should do throughout the year is make each of the lessons about something different. Like Mexicans, Cubans, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics and like all those things because we don't know what people across the world are doing. We want to learn, we want to explore, we can't just take a plane and fly everywhere. They should teach us a little bit about everything throughout the whole year.

Through these statements, it is clear that there is a lack of cultural capital for Latina/o students in social studies classes. As a result of their experiences, students internalized these forms of curricular oppression. They didn't see their culture as important and it showed. When I asked students how they felt about not seeing their culture in social studies curriculum, their responses indicated they have internalized the oppression, which is covert within social studies. Vickie replied, *“No, I don't really mind because I am really in America so I can't expect something like that. I guess if I want to learn about my culture I could always just go back to Puerto Rico.”* The fact that Vickie made such a statement is oppressive in nature. Despite the fact that millions of Latinos live in America, making it the largest minority group in the United States, they still could not see space for them within the curriculum. Genesis stated, *“I mean, it*

doesn't matter. I don't care. If it's not important then it's fine. I would like to but if they didn't do anything then I understand."

Students couldn't see themselves in the textbook nor the social studies curriculum. In their drawings (discussed in Chapter VI), students did not include themselves. As a result of their experiences in middle school social studies, they saw their lives completely exclusive from the curriculum. Sofia felt as if this inhibited the way in which her peers viewed her when she said, "*I feel like I can't communicate with other people because they don't know my past.*" Kristina revealed how she felt about a lack of cultural representation in social studies curriculum and textbooks:

Like it doesn't hurt me but after you think about it, it is like did we not play a role at all in history or are we not talking about them for a certain reason. I know we have at least done one thing... There is nothing really. If they do mention us it would be like a little box, like we are a side note.

Sara shared similar feelings as Kristina:

I don't think that much about it but if I did I would not be as happy about it. I would like to learn more about my culture because I really don't learn about it at home. Like I would want to learn about famous people and my roots and Latinos who helped shape our history.

The feelings of oppression that students shared are discouraging and disheartening for a social studies educator to hear. Lena desperately said in her second interview, "*Like I know we are in history somewhere and I want to know about us.*" Mary's explanation in her second interview as to how cultural oppression occurs in social studies explains why students may feel this way:

Like, Caucasian kids can be inside of social studies class and be happy about what they are learning because it is their history. On the other hand, a Spanish kid or a Black kid can be like umm...what exactly does this relate to me. So it is different. If I learn something about my culture in social studies it has to do with the White people taking over. That is the only time.

Mary's powerful statement shows how students have internalized these experiences of cultural dismissal, limited perspectives, and White dominance of the middle school social studies curriculum.

Although the curriculum was the source of the cultural oppression students experienced in middle school social studies, the teacher contributed to these feelings of oppression too. Students mentioned incidents in which the teacher made them feel insignificant because of their opinions. Mary in her first interview brought up a horrible experience she had in sixth-grade social studies. This one really stood out to her as she mentioned it in her narrative as well. Students were given a writing assignment in which they were asked to explain why the founding fathers were heroes. Mary wrote in her paper that she did not think they were heroes and consequently received an F on the paper. In the interview I asked Mary why she received an F on the paper and she replied:

I asked her why and she told me I wasn't allowed to bash quote unquote the um, the heroes quote unquote in history. And I said that I wasn't supposed to be judged on my opinion and she told me that it was rude to say that these people weren't heroes and that what they were doing wasn't right.

Mary also spoke about another student who felt oppressed by a social studies teacher because of his culture:

Like you may talk a certain way or have an accent and the teachers may criticize you for that. Like last year my friend has scoliosis and he has an accent, and he tried to say it. The teacher laughed at him when he tried to say it. He got really offended over that.

Isabella had a similar experience in her seventh-grade social studies course. She felt that the teacher was disorganized and did not provide a lot of clarity with his grading. She is a high achieving IB student who wanted to do well in class, but had difficulty understanding the concepts and grading. She enjoyed the debates and discussions in class but felt that there was not a lot of clear direction outside of that. I asked her if she spoke with the teacher about it, and she

replied “*Yea sometimes. He wouldn’t do anything.*” I then asked her how that made her feel and she answered sadly, “*I stopped caring, like I became disengaged. If he wasn’t going to listen then why try.*”

Frankie in her second interview also spoke about teacher oppression, but from the perspective of culture. She said, “*Sometimes because when we have teachers who are from over here and they try to talk about other cultures, sometimes they get stuff wrong. I think that sometimes the lesson plans teaches things that are not correct.*” I asked her to give me an example of this type of oppressive experience and she provided this narrative:

Well when I lived in Ocala I had a teacher who was from New Jersey and she had come down to teach. And I think that she was talking about Spain or something like that. And then she started randomly talking about Cuba and how they were trading something. Then she said that Cubans were a mixture of Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Then she started talking about dictators or something like that and I told her “Miss I think you got this wrong,” and she said no it is in the book.

In her first interview, Kristina detailed an experience with her eighth-grade social studies teacher and how he had upset her. Kristina enjoys collaboration in social studies class. When given a particular individual assignment, Kristina asked the teacher if they could work with a partner instead. She described his reply and her feelings as such:

And he said...like he said something sarcastic. I wanted to die. All he had to say was I wanted you to do this individually. But he said something sarcastic like... “oh that’s cool.” And I said to myself, let me calm down so I don’t go off.

That was just the culminating experience in a multitude of negative experiences she had with her social studies teacher.

The Curriculum and You: White and Black, but Mainly White

Discussions and mentions of race are often limited to a Black-White dichotomy in the United States of America. This is true as well for social studies classrooms. When students were

exposed to concepts of race and culture, it was from a Black-White dichotomy, often depicting the Black as helpless or submissive. The notion of slavery and racism from a Black-White dichotomy came up often during the interviews. This topic “hit-home” for some students, causing students to reflect on their beliefs about race and about themselves. Sara, who is an Afro Latina (she is of Puerto Rican and Dominican background) really got personal about what learning about slavery has meant to her:

Well since I am Black, I have a better understanding of how Black people were treated way back then. I mean now I understand their pain. Before I made a lot of jokes about Black people. Now I see how my ancestors, what they went through. And now I have a greater respect for them.

The topic of slavery also evoked emotions from Kristina. When I asked her which topics she learned about in middle school social studies that she found the most interesting, she replied:

I guess you can say slavery. I know it sounds bad but I like sad history because it has feeling and with the wars and stuff it is just dates. The other stuff is real and you can actually feel it.

Genesis, too, is an Afro Latina, and she enjoyed learning about slavery as well. When I asked Genesis which topics she enjoyed learning about, she replied, “*But the ones I liked were like slavery and the middle passage. I love slavery; I like that topic a lot.*” It is obvious through the images (see Chapter VI) and the quotes that students are drawn to slavery: a dominant topic throughout U.S. history, and, more importantly, one that deserves the attention of students. It is hard to learn about slavery and other forms of racial discrimination without having certain emotions evoked, regardless of a teacher’s pedagogical strategy.

Beyond slavery, students could not understand racism from beyond the Black-White dichotomy. All mentions of cultural diversity in the social studies curriculum was centered upon this very idea. Frankie, when asked about diverse cultures she learned about in social studies, immediately spoke of Blacks, “*But like I said in history we learned about the people who are*

never recognized like the Blacks including Harriet Tubman and all of these other people on a list who I've never seen or words I never heard." When I asked Genesis in her second interview about cultures she learned about in social studies class, she replied, *"I feel like all races but mainly American Whites. I meant Whites and Blacks. I guess because they were the ones who most changed America."*

Javier was a bit more brash in his sentiments regarding culturally diversity from a Black-White dichotomy when he stated, *"It kind of kills the learning. Because in history we learn about the same races, either African Americans or White. I would like to learn more about our race, like Latinos."*

Vickie spoke more about learning about race and how it is limited to a particular month:

Normally we go with the curriculum. But if it is like a special month, we will try to learn a little bit about that. But when it's Black and White in the curriculum we learn about them both. But when it's like Hispanic Heritage Month we go to Hispanics but once it is over with we go back to the regular curriculum.

Unlike Javier and Vickie, Frankie was a bit more accepting of learning about Black history:

I generally enjoyed when it came to Black History Month. That was my favorite time of the year. We were actually learning about all these people that stood up for themselves, for their people, for their family, and tried to make a change and tried to get what they wanted. They were the bravest people I have seen in my life and I think they deserve more recognition and the people should actually hear about them. Not just throw them into history and say "oh whatever they did what they did, now let's just forget about it," because without them they wouldn't be here right now. So learning about the people that actually changed the world is something I've enjoyed learning about in my social studies classes.

Howard (2003) called for social studies educators to have more race-based discussion in our classrooms. It is important that we talk about race. Using LatCrit as a framework for this study, I acknowledged that race is central to the lived experience of people of color in our

society, including our students. Students acknowledged this through their experiences with race and the social studies curriculum.

Besides seeing social studies from a Black-White dichotomy, students also saw a curriculum that was dominated with notions of White heroism. The pictures they saw in textbooks and the people that they learned about in the curriculum were primarily White. When they did learn about people of color, more specifically Blacks, it was from a deficit perspective.

Javier, in his second interview spoke about this deficit perspective:

I see war pictures, pictures of White guys or dead guys like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln. Maybe some Native Americans but not all the time. Sometimes, if they are African American most of the time they portray them in a bad way. But like George Washington and upper class White people, they you know, say things that make them look like a hero because of this or that. I think that Latinos and stuff like that actually are heroes in their way. They did things that helped America and nobody knows about it because of racism I guess.

Sara also referred to the deficit perspective when referring to Haitians and how they receive little recognition in textbooks despite the fact that they defeated Napoleon's army and won freedom from slavery on their own. Sara in her second interview brought light to the deficit approach towards Haitian Americans: *"I can really relate because I can see my ancestors and how they were treated. Especially with the Haitian Revolution and how we don't give them much credit even though the Haitians ended slavery on their own."*

The social studies curriculum is dominated with notions of White dominance. Vickie saw this as unfair in her first interview: *"I think it is unfair because it is always like about White people. And they don't ever teach us about the other person's perspective. Like learn about other people's perspectives. Like their side along with the White side."*

Vickie also spoke about this more in her second interview: *"Yea because it only focus on White people. It barely focuses on like African Americans, Puerto Ricans and other people. Like the way they say things. They make White people out to be the good people."*

Frankie, too, felt as if the social studies curriculum portrayed Whites in only a positive manner:

Well I would say we learn about all the people who tried to change America. Like the government and the president. And the people who tried to stand up against slavery. We concentrate on White America. We see mostly like Whites to be honest. We see lots of people who they say are good but really weren't. We really don't learn about the people who truly tried to change America and stand up for things that they believed in.

It is clear that students are being exposed to a social studies curriculum that is not representative of the diversity within our nation's classrooms.

The Curriculum and Them: Global and Current Events

In the aforementioned theme, *the curriculum and me*, there was a hint of globalism. Students are naturally curious about the world. Due to technology, social media, and advancements in communication, the students have immediate access to information about the world around them. Just as students expressed a strong desire to learn about their cultures and others, too, they also expressed a strong desire to learn about events and people from an international perspective. In addition, they mentioned the opportunity to learn about international events from a modern-day perspective. The Boston Bombings, the Syrian Civil War, and North Korean threats of attack were all major events happening during the time in which the interviews were conducted. Perhaps these major events sparked more curiosity in learning about the world as they were brought up in the interviews.

Analiz mentioned that she wanted to learn more about her country of Panama and wanted her peers to know more about her background too. She expressed an innocent curiosity to learn about the world around her as well. She said in her second interview, *"I just like want to know about the other side of the world. How they became a country? If they fought and stuff like that... it would be better to learn about the world since we are in it."* Similar to Analiz, Vickie was

growing tired of the American perspective. She seemed jaded with indoctrination when she said, “*Because it is like, it’s like, just more interesting. Like, the history, like the Great Wall of China and all of that stuff. It is more interesting than the history of America.*”

Lena and Oscar tied value to the idea of learning about the world around them. Both saw knowledge and awareness as helpful in gaining future employment or communicating with peers at work. Lena saw the value in being able to communicate with others:

Because we run into all different kinds of people around the world so we know like if we are at a job, and you know what they like...if they ask us “how is this?” then we know their culture and know something they like and something they don’t like.

Oscar saw a lot of value regarding competition on the job market. Of all the students interviewed, he was the most passionate about the incorporation of an international perspective into the curriculum. I was also impressed with his recognition that we live in a shrinking world in which our competition for jobs is no longer just domestic but global as well. He eloquently stated:

I would say, I mean I understand the importance of learning a country’s history. But when we get out in the real world you are not competing with just your countryman, but we live in a global world. For example, Greece’s economy goes down and that affects the European Union, and that affects the whole world. One country fails and we have a bunch of bank bailouts; that affects the whole world. We are not dealing with one small specific area now, but we have to think globally now. I mean yes we have to spend some time with local history but I think we should definitely see the global influences a little more when we talk about U.S. History. For example, a lot of the things we are learning about now in U.S. History had global significance but we don’t know its significance. Like for example when we learned about the Louisiana Purchase, the question wasn’t focused on why did France want to sell us that land in the first place? There was no talk about the Haitian Revolution and how they had their slave rebellion. Napoleon all of a sudden goes I have no naval port so let’s toss the territory.

Oscar has a unique background. His mother is from El Salvador and his father is from Egypt. He identifies with both cultures and does not see one as more significant than the other. His viewpoints were very balanced, but also well informed. He attributed his perspective of the world to his father. He mentioned that his father read the newspaper or watched the news with

him and engaged him in discussion on what they were learning together. Because O was so passionate in his first interview about a global curriculum, I asked him in the second interview how it can be incorporated in social studies. He responded at length:

Maybe what we can do is because at our school we have such a diverse population and so many demographics and everything...what we can maybe do is learn about everybody's country. Like I said in my last interview I saw history as a worldly thing and I don't think we should focus on a certain country for a whole year like how we are taking U.S. history for a whole year. I think I have to see all the you know...worldly connections and maybe going off that topic...you know we can have you know a couple of days or so for every student where they can learn about other people's backgrounds. I have a rich background so what we could do is maybe I can teach people a small brief history on El Salvador or Egypt. Or other people can teach about their own heritage, history or country. I think that would be a better world outlook because let's say my country may not have been as detrimental to the U.S. But let's say you are from Cuba; they have huge role with U.S. history. I mean that ties to my unit of history right now while also showing somebody else's view on it.

Javier had a teacher who engaged the class in discussion on current events, although not in full detail. He talked about current events in relation to the world. He was excited to learn about global and current events. He became enthusiastic in his interview when he mentioned the learning experience:

Like when we learn about current stuff also, I think it is great. Like about the Boston bombing for example and it was cool because we learned about it. We learned about North Korea. It felt good actually not saying something that is not a broken record. It is interesting because you know, now we need to learn about what is happening now. Let's take for example the Boston bombing. If we learned about that now, we can prevent that in the future. It is better than learning about it once it becomes old history in the past. North Korea, I was so interested in that and how their life was. How their life is kind of tough. It is cool because they are not as different as us but at the same time they are different.

Various other students found significance in learning about current events. While Mary did not mention global events, she did speak about the significance of curriculum inclusive of current events, stating, “We would be learning more about what is happening today rather than the past. I mean it is good to know what happened in your past but there are a lot of things

happening today that we don't know." When I asked her what we could do to teach current events, she mentioned global events in her suggestion:

I think you can because I think that we should work backwards instead of forwards. Instead of from the beginning of time til now. We should work from here to there so that kids could actually get the lessons from the past. Like if you were talking about Korea and what is going on and you related that to World War 2 or World War 1, we would actually understand what is going on.

This theme is discussed at further length in Chapter VI, where global and current events were indicated in students' drawings.

The Curriculum and It: Democracy, History, and the Textbook

A lot of students' experiences with social studies curriculum was influenced by what they were exposed to in classes. The curriculum was historical in nature, democracy based, and learned through the textbook. Students mentioned these very three concepts as playing a major role in how they perceived social studies and its purposes.

Gay (2005) stated that students of color cannot relate to democratic and civic-based concepts such as the Pledge of Allegiance, voting, patriotism, and active citizenship. Her assumption proved true concerning the Latina/o students interviewed for this study, albeit for different reasons. Students found it difficult to engage with topics related to voting, politics, and other citizenship-based ideas. This difficulty was not a result of cultural disconnect but rather due to course sequencing.

The dislike for democratic and citizenship-based ideals was unanimous and one of the most prevalent themes of this research study. Analiz immediately begin her interview stating, "*I just don't like that part. I just can care less about government.*" Mary echoed the strong distaste towards democratic and citizenship-based ideals as well. Students learned about the Declaration of Independence in both their seventh-grade civics course and their eighth-grade U.S. history

course. Mary said about the Declaration of Independence, one of the most critical documents to the foundation of our democracy:

I don't like learning about the Declaration of Independence or slavery. It is sad to learn about that [referring to slavery]. The people who wrote it, I think were hypocrites because they said that men were created equally but they had slaves. They were saying it and using the phrase like we are supposed to be the land of the free but we are not.

Mary did not reference her dislike for the Declaration of Independence because she is a Latina, but she felt that the document was a contradiction. Possibly the root of her ability to see it as contradiction comes from her cultural background. Oscar, too, was not too keen to learn about politics, democracy, or citizenship. I found this striking because Oscar spoke so highly of his seventh-grade civics course. This seeming contradiction shows that despite the content, when a teacher uses engaging methods for learning, students can change their stance toward the content. Nevertheless, when I asked Oscar to tell me about the topics he liked least in his social studies experiences, he replied:

Hmmm, I would have to say, hmmm, probably the typical topic of political strife in history. Parties struggling for power. It is important if you are going to have one party with power over the other. But this is a bunch of guys just going at it about power.

Isabella, when asked about politics, civics, and citizenship-based ideals, responded:

Oh the bill process. I find that really boring. How a law is made from a bill. And all the government stuff with the branches. I don't care about that. I think I am still too young to be learning about this.

The dislike for democratic and citizenship-based ideals was rooted primarily in the age of the students and not their culture. Frankie described in detail why she disliked civics and the opportunity to learn about citizenship when she stated, “*My least favorite class, I think that was last year because we didn't really learn anything about history. It was just a whole bunch of government stuff and I don't think we should be learning about government yet.*” She then stated that she wanted to learn about civics but rather, “*In high school when we are closer to voting and*

stuff like that. That's when they should be teaching us that so we can make our decisions wisely."

Sara also mentioned age when referring to why she did not prefer civics:

More like a little later on. Like more college or high school. I could use it then... Well because say, that is when you get more into politics because that is when you get the right to vote. So it would be better to learn about it then so that...because if you learn it now you probably forget about it by then.

So it is not as if students felt alienated by democratic processes, but found more value in classes related to citizenship as they became older in age.

One final reason why students seemed opposed to democratic ideals was due to the sequencing of their courses. It was difficult for students to draw logical connections between their social studies courses. In the sixth grade students took a global civilizations course that focused primarily on ancient Egypt, ancient China, and ancient Greece. In the seventh grade students took a civics class that was heavy on democratic and citizenship-based concepts. Students were exposed to a curriculum that included the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, the Pledge of Allegiance, voting, and other American democratic ideals. They learned about these concepts with no historical context. In the eighth grade students took a United States history class in which they were exposed again to democratic concepts, but with the historical context. The connections were hard to draw.

Oscar spoke about this very notion stating:

I think the way we are doing it is a little wrong. I think because what happened is I had 6th grade with ancient world history. 7th grade with American government and 8th grade with U.S. History. I think the order would be better to change up.

Sara, too, spoke at length about the course sequencing:

I didn't like last year because it was civics and I didn't really like political stuff. If we were taking history before civics it would be better because we would know who wrote the Constitution, what their background was like. And like you said how everybody should be free but they owned slaves. If we would have known that back then we would have a different understanding of the constitution and we could go more in-depth with it. Yea and we didn't know how the declaration, I forgot which one they had to rewrite into

the new constitution. If I would've known that I could've had a better understanding in 7th grade.

Sometimes the students contradicted themselves regarding this theme. They expressed concern towards learning about democratic concepts at such an early age, yet democratic ideals reflected heavily in their drawings (Chapter VI). Perhaps they have been so inundated with the concepts that they have come to accept them and internalize. Nevertheless, their thoughts about democratic concepts are concerning. They are citizens, and although they are not yet able to vote, they can be active participants in society. Some of the classes students mentioned with regard to active learning were civics classes. While discussion and debates may have engaged the students in democratic concepts, it is also important that students be given the opportunity to apply the content and ideas they are learning about.

Besides the overwhelming presence of citizenship-based ideals in social studies, students also spoke about the persistent presence of history too. Social studies is not just supposed to be history, it is inclusive of history. Social studies is supposed to teach students how to participate and be active, participatory members of society. Students saw social studies with a limited purpose and only from a history perspective. As students discussed what they perceived the purpose of social studies to be, it was not citizenship related but all tied to history.

Isabella described the purpose of learning social studies as follows:

History you need to know all about our background of our country and it is important to know what decisions were made in the past and to not be able to repeat them in the future. It is important to know what leaders took action and made our country what it is today. And I was told that umm, that if you don't, those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. So it is important to know the history of our country so that we don't repeat the mistakes they made... That everyone should learn about history because it is important to know background and how we came to be today. And how all the people made us how we are today. And not to do any silly mistakes that we did back then like the wars, we don't want to have that anymore.

She was not alone in describing the purpose of history as being “so that we do not repeat past mistakes.” Sara mentioned in her second interview that we learn social studies “because if you don’t know about your history you are doomed to repeat it.” Sofia stated the same:

Yea because you have to know the past to know the present and you don’t want to make the same mistakes that they made in the past. It helps us understand today and use knowledge to not repeat the same things.

Oscar’s stated purpose of learning social studies was:

I think is a great thing we have developed because we can build upon our past mistakes, and make sure history does not repeat itself as some people may say... You cannot complete a set of instructions without having previous instructions for help. So you don’t want to repeat mistakes. So to repeat mistakes is a necessary problem to avoid. Using previous knowledge we can create a better future.

Kristina’s purpose was as follows:

You should learn about America and how it started and when people first came here and stuff like that. And you learn from, say it talks about a war. I guess it is kind of important but kind of boring. Let’s say a general makes a mistake and sends a general to the wrong place. It gives us something to think about their mistakes.

As a result of social studies curriculum, students should see themselves as active participants in society. Their stated purpose for studying social studies, however, plays more into the history-versus-social-studies debate, and, perhaps, the middle school social studies curriculum is too history dominated.

Another concept students brought up in their experiences in social studies was their textbook, and the role it played in their perceptions. Students mentioned the textbook as limited in two ways: in depth and in perspective. The social studies textbook typically gets a lot of negative attention because of multiple textbook analyses done over the course of 30 years, which have shown negative or absent portrayals of culturally diverse groups. Students’ experiences with textbooks were not as negative as I would have thought going into the research study. In fact, some students found it helpful. Analiz spoke highly of the textbook:

It is tough but it has pictures I have never seen like that one guy. He was a slave and he didn't do what he was supposed to do and he had these big marks and whips on his back. I mean we didn't know that stuff before. And like other guys or like the Sacajawea person. We didn't know how they looked because if you searched it up you wouldn't really find that picture on the internet. So the book is better.

Although I do not agree entirely with Analiz's assessment of the social studies textbook, the textbook is helpful for providing students with immediate access to information in a school setting. Other students found the textbook to be equally as helpful yet limited with regard to depth. Sofia spoke on the depth of the textbook when she said in her second interview, *"I find it interesting, but it doesn't include a lot of deep knowledge. But it gives you pictures and that helps. So the textbooks in my opinion they actually work, it is just not that in-depth."* Isabella added to the sentiments of the textbook as helpful when she said, *"But I think the teacher makes the textbook better when the teacher can go more into depth. Other than that they are good, they help. We don't really use them that much but they help."* Oscar's statement regarding the social studies textbook summarizes students' general experience with them:

So sometimes when I look in the textbook I can see bias. Other than that, I think that textbooks are a good tool even though it is limited in the information that is out there. I don't like doing textbook assignments, but I like it better when the teacher explains things. I think that the textbooks have so much information but they can be somewhat limited. We should use them but not for everything. Have limited use because they have limited knowledge.

Building upon the aforementioned theme on race, some students saw the textbook as limited in the perspectives that it provides students. Students felt that the social studies textbooks that they used in middle school did not accurately portray culturally diverse groups, or left them out altogether. In Javier's first interview, he had this to say about learning from the textbook:

Less textbook and more stuff like learning from the internet or something like that. Or knowing it from primary sources. Not textbooks, but learning from the actual experience. One thing about textbooks that they will take some stuff and leave out some other important stuff that was there. It is like okay. I want to know more but it seems like they don't want you to know more.

In his second interview, I asked Javier what he would recommend that we do to make improve social studies textbooks in which he replied, *“I am not saying take out all Whites, but talk about Black people, Latinos, and more Native Americans. They had culture too that the White people just didn’t take land and freedom from them.”* Frankie had similar feelings as Javier. When discussing the social studies textbook in her first interview she said:

I hate it. They just put one person’s point of view. Maybe if you take more like more open minded people and you actually explain things from a student’s point of view or from a real person’s point of view.

Frankie expanded upon her view of the textbook as limited in perspectives in the second interview:

Well that too, it just focuses on one story, it doesn’t try to tell everybody’s story. Like how, what we did right or wrong. It tries to make America look innocent and that is why other countries don’t like us. We did start stuff that is not right. And maybe yeah, we have a lot of trouble because of what America and what the people did. And it is all about the people. And the textbook only focuses on the rich people. I think that we need to change the textbooks to focus more on culture, not just mine but from around the world.

Towards the end of her quote, Frankie said that we should incorporate perspectives from around the world in social studies textbooks to further our understanding of events and people which is consistent with the students’ overall desire for a global curriculum.

Vickie too thought that the textbook was limited in scope:

Boring but I think it would be interesting because like I said before, if they like shared both sides of the story. They will have you thinking that the Americans are the good guys when in reality they can be like the worst thing that ever happened.

Sofia simply stated that she would like to see different perspectives incorporated:

“Because for example if I want to go live somewhere I would like to know what happened, the history over there. That would help me.”

CHAPTER VI: THE POWER OF PICTURES

This theme corroborates the findings from the first two themes: The Teacher and the Teaching, and The Curriculum: Me, You, Them, and It. As method of data triangulation, students were asked to draw images pertaining to their experiences with middle school social studies. Van Manen (1990) recognized this practice as a valuable method in phenomenological research for having participants aesthetically express their experiences with a particular phenomenon. In this case, students' drawings substantiated the findings from the interviews and the written narratives.

The Teacher and the Teaching

There was only one drawing that pertained to a classroom setting or a specific learning experience in general. One student, Sofia enjoyed her active learning experiences so much in her sixth and eighth-grade courses that she drew about them (see Figure 2.

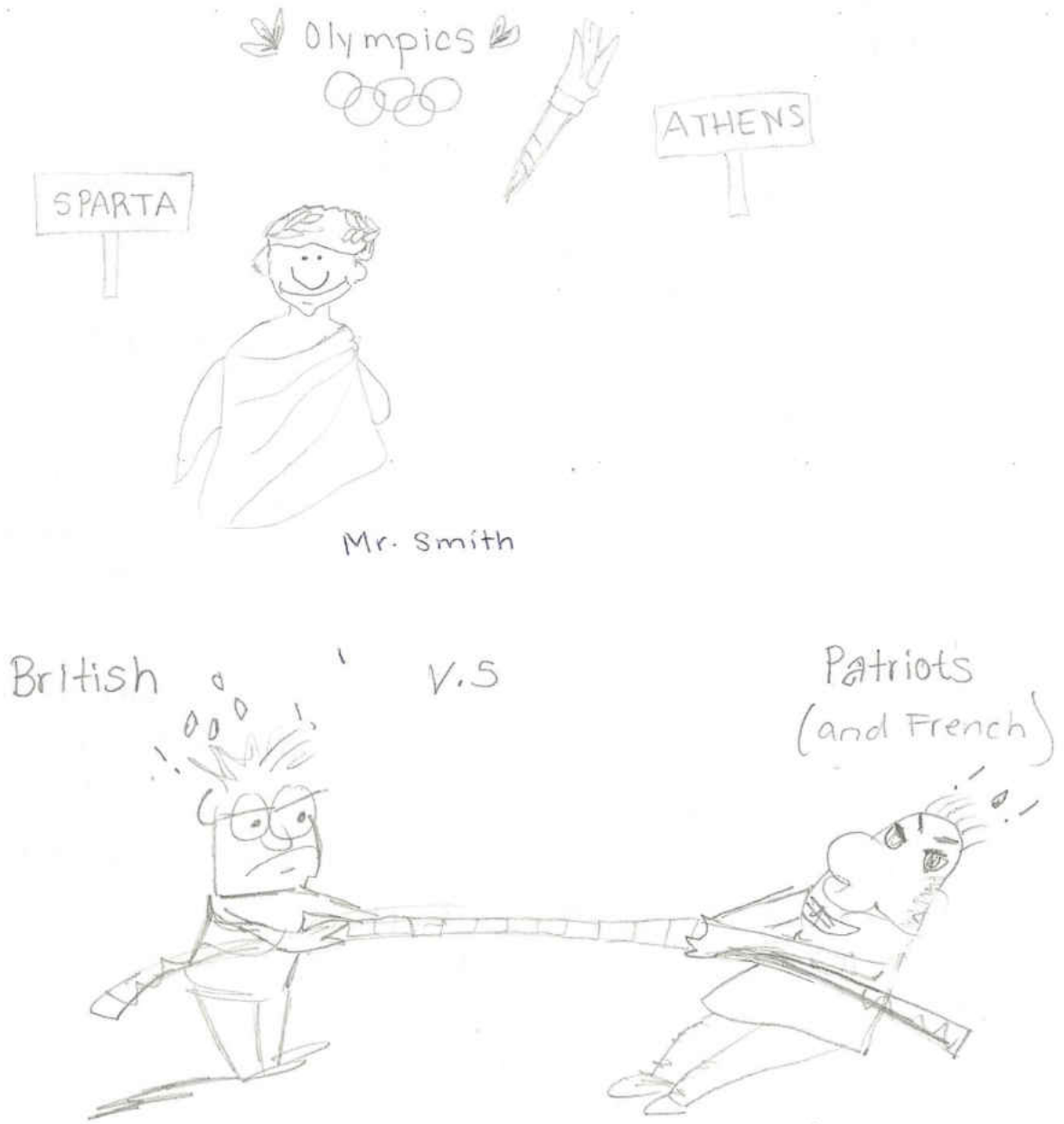


Figure 2: Drawing 1: Sofia

She spoke about these experiences in her interviews and wrote about them in her narrative as well. Although students had overtly negative experiences with social studies

teachers, Sofia's narratives and drawings show the significance of the teacher in determining how a student experiences the social studies curriculum.

The Curriculum and You: Drawing About Race

As mentioned in Chapter V, the students did not draw themselves in their images. However, students did hint at several topics that emerged in this theme. The Black-White dichotomy also showed itself in student images. Sara, Genesis, Vickie, and Kristina all showed pictures of issues related to race, primarily slavery. Vickie drew a strong image regarding slavery (see Figure 3). When drawing about slavery, this was the only time that students decided to use color, depicting the pigmentation of African Americans.

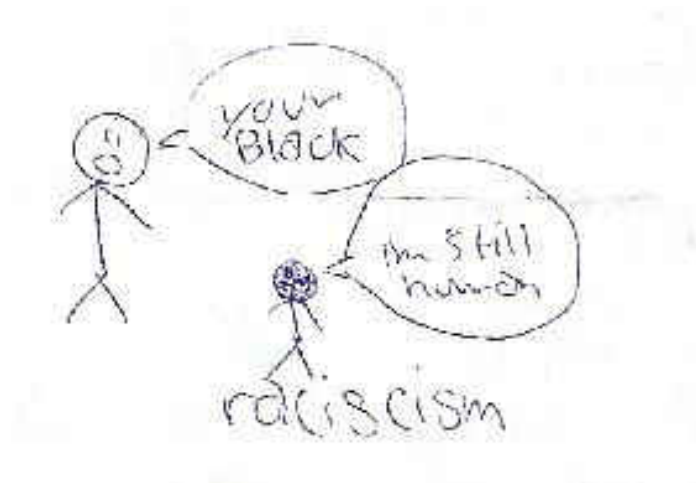


Figure 3: Drawing 2: Vickie

Sara's image was related to the civil war and its root cause: slavery (see Figure 4). She showed a person from the North shouting an insult at the South, referring to them as "slave

owners” and the Southern person shouting at the person from the North as a “broke American.”
There do not appear to be any slaves in this image.

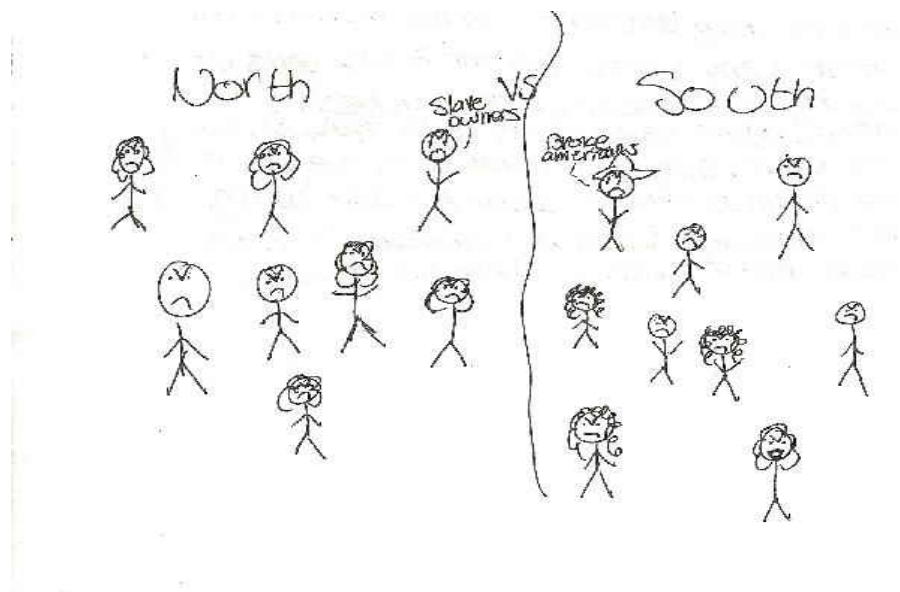


Figure 4: Drawing 3: Sara

Kristina depicted slavery in one of her drawings as well (see Figure 5). She, too, used color to refer to the skin of African Americans.

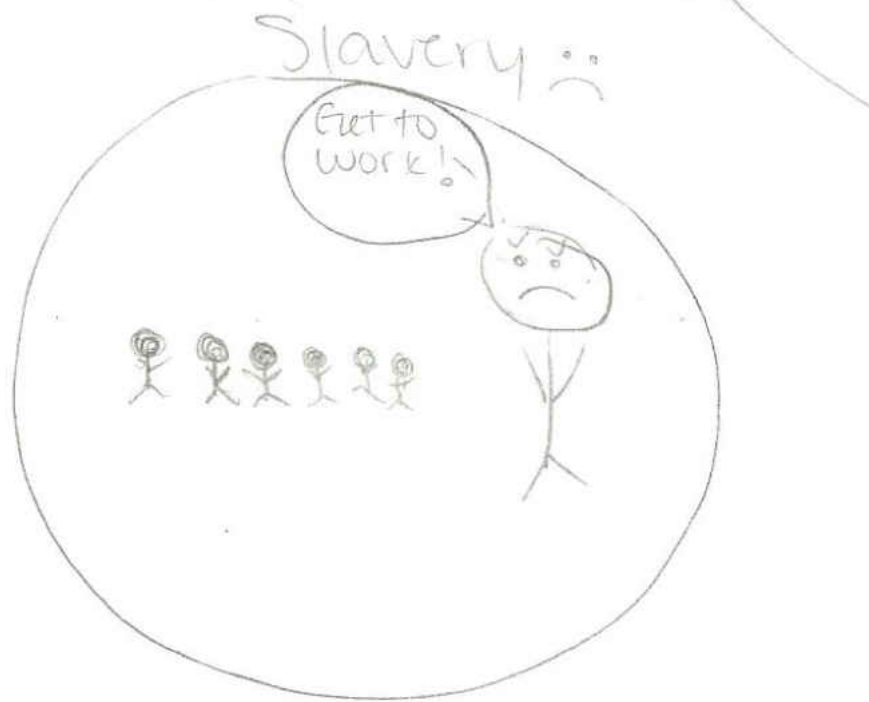


Figure 5: Drawing 4: Kristina

Genesis' drawings were rife with notions of racism, from a Black-White dichotomy (see Figure 6). She used color to refer to the skin of African Americans, but her drawings included slavery, the Underground Railroad, Abraham Lincoln as emancipator, segregated schools and water fountains.

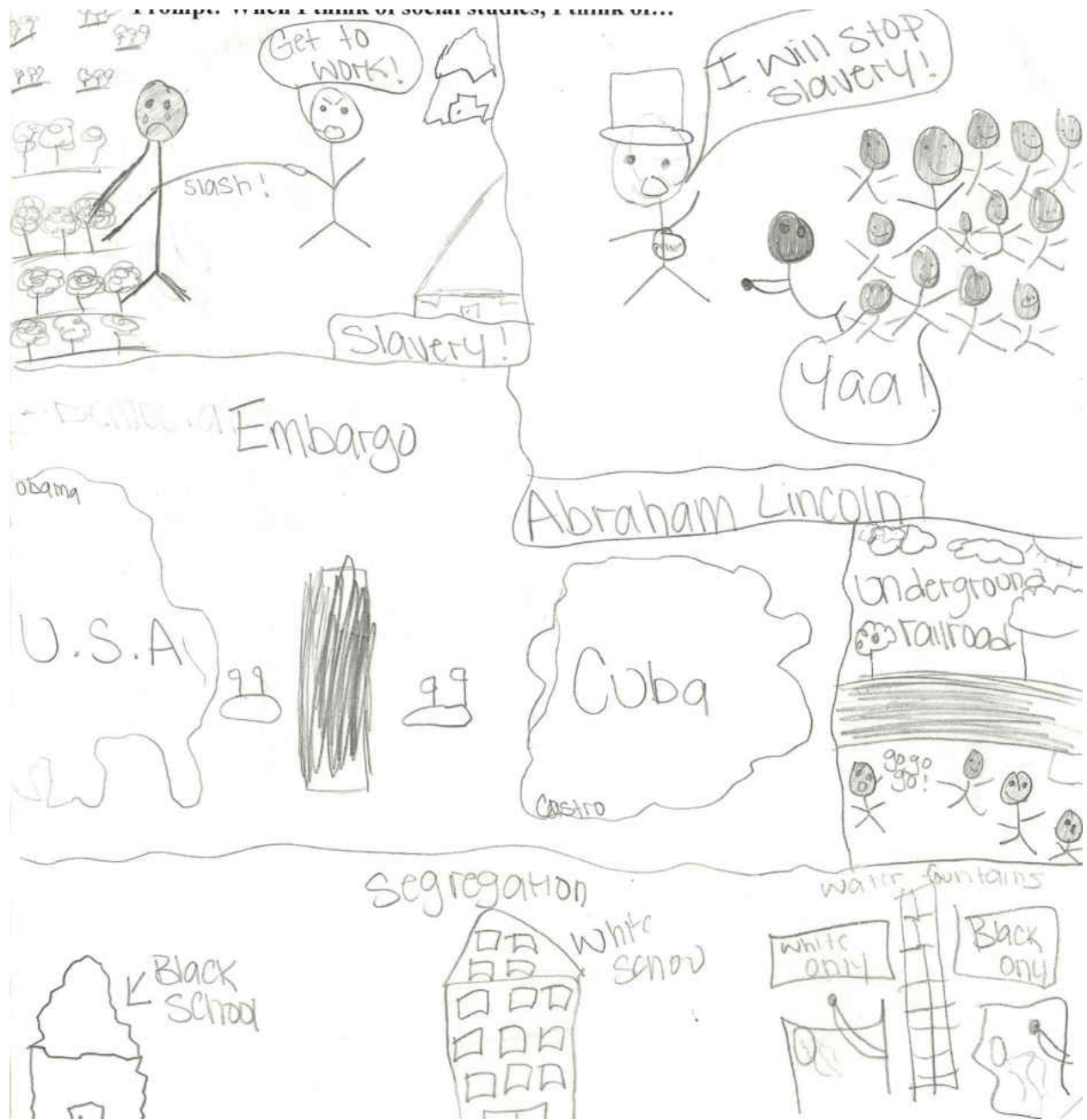


Figure 6: Drawing 5: Genesis

Using a phenomenological, LatCrit analysis of these images, I conclude that race is central to the way that students experienced middle school social studies. It was prevalent in their interviews, written narratives, and as evidenced their drawings.

The Curriculum and Them: Drawing About the World

Students in their interviews and narratives expressed a desire to learn about global and current events. They corroborated these sentiments in their drawings too. Oscar was the most adamant participant regarding the incorporation of a global perspective in social studies curriculum. Oscar's world perspective was also evident in his drawing (see Figure 7). He interpreted history and human interaction throughout history from a global perspective.



Human Action. during their existence.
Earth.

Figure 7: Drawing 6: Oscar

Genesis too had a global relationship in her image (see Figure 8). It stood out because the focus of her other drawings were race and slavery. Yet she still drew an image of America's embargo with Cuba. It is important to note that Genesis is not Cuban either, which would possibly explain this drawing. Rather she is Puerto Rican. I interpreted this inclusion into the drawing as a stated interest in current and global relations.



Figure 8: Drawing 7: Genesis

Kristina also had a drawing that showed international relationships (see Figure 9). Surrounded by drawings of war and slavery was an image of America signing a peace treaty with Japan, an absent concept in middle school social studies curriculum.

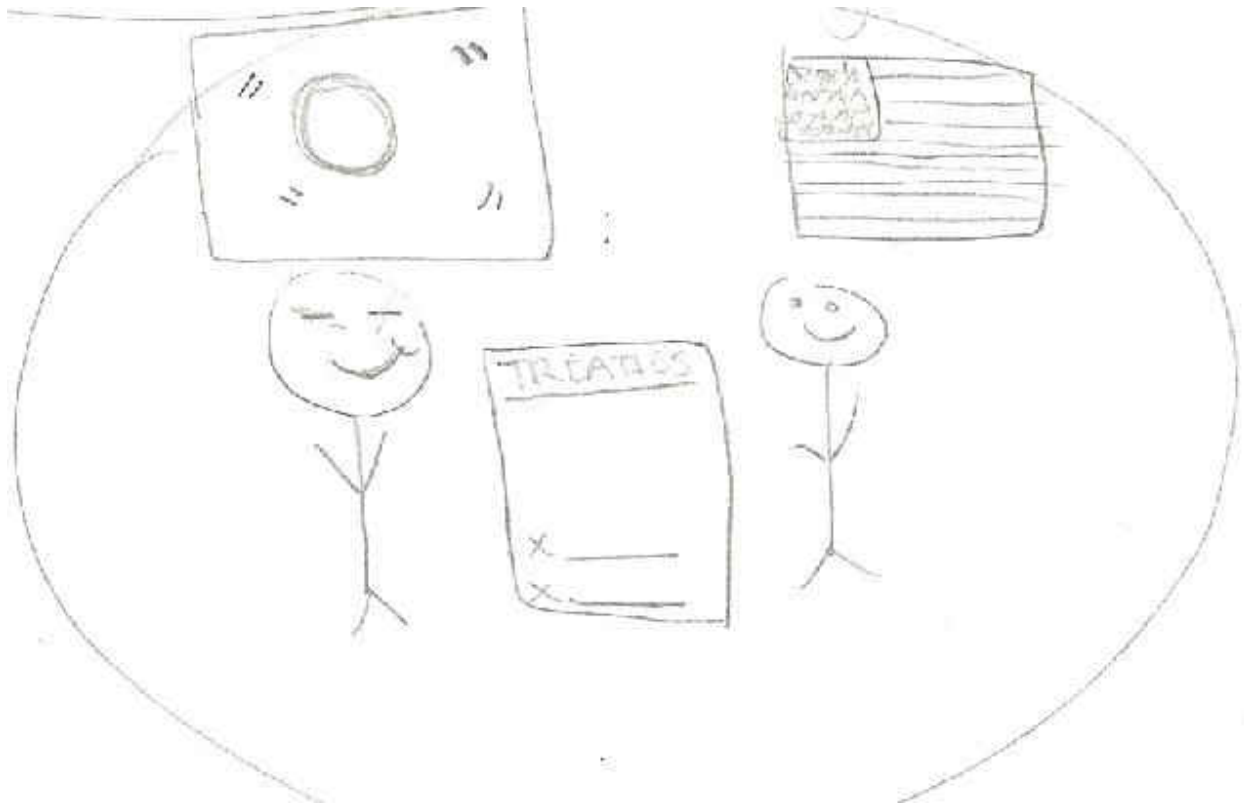


Figure 9: Drawing 8: Kristina

The Curriculum and It: Drawing About Democracy

Students did not like learning about democratic and citizenship ideals in middle school. Most students felt as if it were too early in their lives and academic careers to be inundated with ideas such as voting, politics, and government. Despite the dislike of citizenship and democracy-based ideals, Vicki, Analiz, and Sofia drew pictures related to citizenship. One of the classes Sofia hated most was her seventh-grade civics class, and she drew a picture of the United States Constitution (see Figure 10).

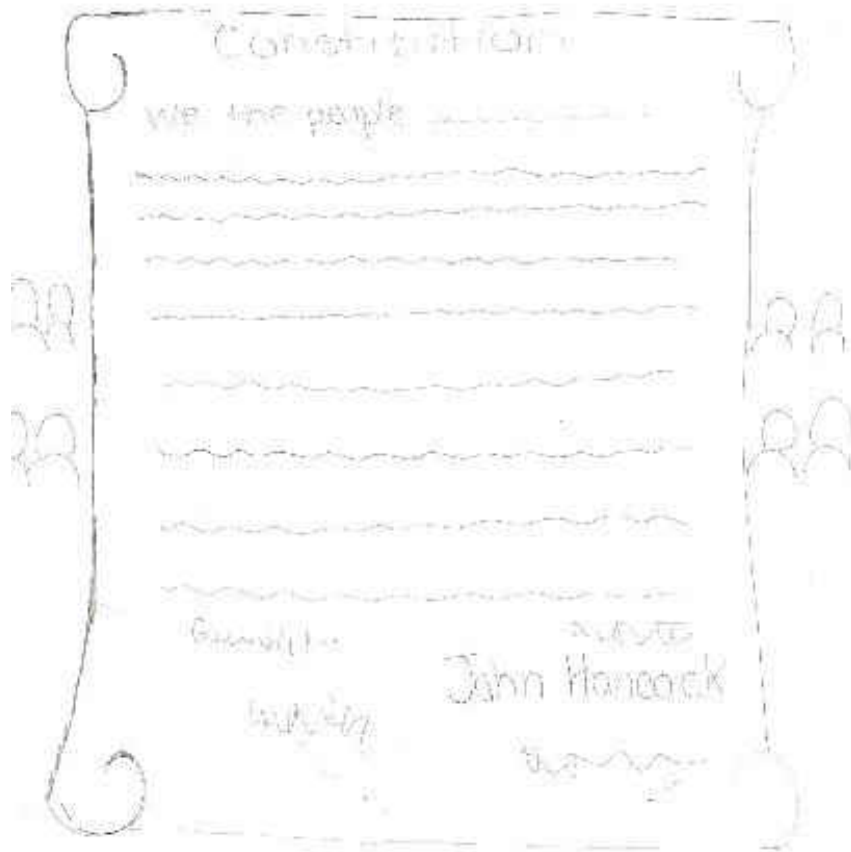


Figure 10: Drawing 9: Sofia

Analiz who spoke openly and quickly about her dislike for civics also drew a lot of citizenship-based drawings. She ranked civics first in her class rankings but this was not due to the content nor the teacher, but as Analiz described it, *“I would put civics first because I like the people in my classes and they wake me up.”* Analiz drew pictures of a bill, an army soldier, the President, the United States flag, the Constitution, and a compass with the word independence used to describe her photos (see Figure 11).

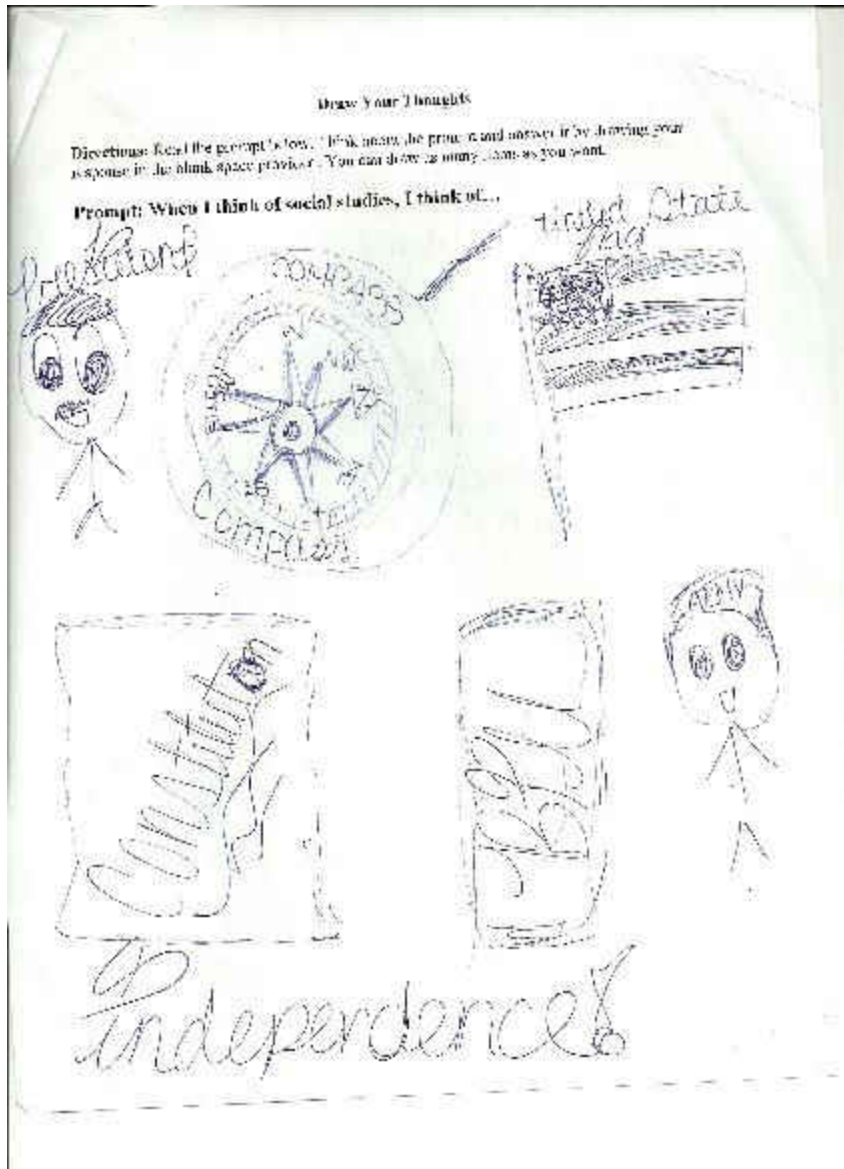


Figure 11: Drawing 10: Analiz

Vickie was not so adamant about her dislike for civics and democratic ideals. When I asked her if she liked civics, she simply responded, *“I think I would if I could like vote right now.”* Vickie’s picture was multifaceted and revealed many themes, but there were democratic ideals in her drawing such as the United States flag and political factions (see Figure 12).

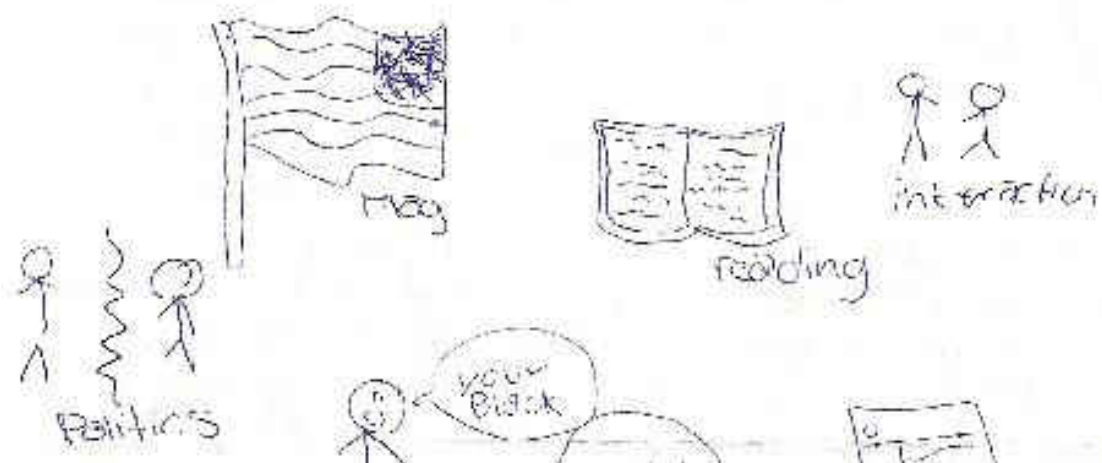


Figure 12: Drawing 11: Vickie

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research study was to get to the essence of the Latina/o student experience in social studies. The research questions for this research study were as follows (see Table 2):

1. How do Latino students in a middle school in the Southeastern United States experience social studies?
2. What factors impact how eighth-grade Latino students in the Southeastern United States describe their experiences in social studies?
3. How do experiences in social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States impact Latina/o students' perceptions of social studies?

Twelve eighth-grade students were interviewed twice about their experiences in middle school social studies. Ten female and two male students participated in the interviews. In addition to the interviews, students were asked to provide written narratives and images that described their experiences in social studies. From 161 pages of transcripts, 216 significant statements were extracted and coded. Data were represented in Chapters IV, V, and VI of the research study in which the interviews were merged with the written narratives and images to describe the essence of the Latina/o experience in middle school social studies.

Table 2

Themes and Research Question/Framework Alignment

Research questions	Themes
How do Latino students in a middle school in the Southeastern United States experience social studies?	The Teacher and the Teaching; The Curriculum and Me; The Curriculum and You
What factors impact how eighth-grade Latino students in the Southeastern United States describe their experiences in social studies?	The Teacher and the Teaching; The Curriculum and You; The Curriculum and It
How do experiences in social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States impact Latina/o students' perceptions of social studies?	The Curriculum and It
Critical Race Theory/Latino Critical Race Theory	The Curriculum and Me; The Curriculum and You

Research Question 1—Discussion

The first research question asked how do Latino students in a middle school in the Southeastern United States experience social studies? A review of literature shows that students typically experience a social studies that is stale in nature. Thornton (2004) wrote that most students did not like social studies, although they enjoyed the topics that were discussed in social studies class. Chiodo and Byford's research study (2004) revealed that students experienced a social studies that was teacher dependent. They noted that students' experiences were tied to the teacher's enthusiasm. If the teacher was enthusiastic and engaging, students saw value in social studies. With regard to students of color, the literature revealed different experiences. Gay (2005) said that students of color experience a social studies that is disconnected from their experiences due to the dominance of Eurocentric, citizenship-based topics. In addition to Gay (2005),

Ladson-Billings (2001) and Howard (2003) alluded to a social studies experience that was void of culturally relevant topics.

Through the interviews, I concluded that students experienced social studies in a boring, redundant manner in which the teacher lacked enthusiasm. The Latina/o students in this research study also could not relate to content due to either the nature of the curriculum or a lack of cultural responsive teaching. This finding is consistent with Thornton (2004), who said that students saw the social studies as boring. In addition to Thornton, Gay's finding (2005) that the disconnect between democratic ideals and lived experiences causes a disconnect between the students and social studies curriculum was accurate as well. However, Gay (2005) assumed that students did not like topics such as Manifest Destiny, the Pledge of Allegiance, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence among others because their lived experiences could not allow them to connect. Students expressed a disconnect for another reason: course sequencing. Students simply felt that it was too early to take citizenship-related classes. Numerous students noted that they saw no value in the class because they could not vote nor be active politically due to their age. Students did indicate that they saw value in the course, just at a later stage in their academic careers such as high school.

Chiodo and Byford's (2004) study signaled a changing trend in social studies, one in which students noted more positive experiences based on teacher effectiveness. What is concerning is that this research study, which was similar in design to Chiodo and Byford's, did not reveal that same trend. Both studies are qualitative and phenomenological in nature. The results from this study revealed that students were not experiencing an enthusiastic teacher who was ready to engage them in social studies topics all the time. It was rare for students to mention

having an enthusiastic teacher, although they recognized the potential that having an enthusiastic teacher could have on their experiences and overall perceptions of social studies.

Research Question 2—Discussion

The second research question asked what factors impacted how eighth-grade Latino students in the Southeastern United States describe their experiences in social studies? Research participants noted that having a teacher who was culturally responsive impacted their experiences in middle school social studies. This, too, was on par with prior research, which suggested the same. In a study of high school students' experiences with a culturally responsive social studies curriculum, Epstein et al. (2011) discussed the impact that Ms. Vega, an 11th-grade teacher, had on her students. In this study Ms. Vega used her experiences as a Latina to relate to her students. The impact of culturally responsive teaching on students of color cannot be understated. This was not lost on students in this research study. Research participants noted that several teachers taught them in a culturally responsive manner, and it was no coincidence that they were teachers of color, similar to Ms. Vega in Epstein et al.'s (2011) study.

Some students bluntly said that they do not think having a teacher of color affected their learning. However, a majority of the eighth-grade Latina/o students' experiences in social studies were negative, with the only mentions of positive experiences being centered upon teachers of color who were culturally responsive to the needs of the students or those teachers who used engaging pedagogical strategies. Salinas et al. (2008) provided a research-based example of how Latino teachers were influential in incorporating a culturally responsive curriculum for Latino students. Salinas and Castro (2010) further studied the role of Latino teachers in implementing a diverse, relevant social studies curriculum. The findings of this study support prior literature, and

I believe this is one area of the study that is truly significant in bringing about change for the benefit of culturally diverse learners in social studies.

Another theme that emerged with regard to the factors that impacted students' experiences was the textbook. In stark contrast to prior research, students did not see the textbook as horrible, but saw it as "kind of helpful" as one student stated. The social studies textbook is often seen as "evil" in the field of social studies. Garcia (1978, 1993) conducted a series of textbook analyses over the past 30 years that has revealed negative portrayals of diverse cultural groups in social studies textbooks. Cruz (1994) conducted a textbook analysis that looked at Latino portrayals and found that Latinos were portrayed as animals, violent, corrupt, lazy, and lawless. Cruz's (2002) study found negative portrayals, too, but what was more alarming was the lack of attention given to Latinos in social studies textbooks. Cruz's findings from her 2004 study were consistent with the experience of Latina/o students in this study. Students saw the textbook as limited with regard to perspective, not really seeing themselves or other culturally diverse groups for that matter in the textbook.

Research Question 3—Discussion

The third research question asked how experiences in social studies in a middle school in the Southeastern United States impact Latina/o students' perceptions of social studies. As a result of eighth-grade Latina/o students' experiences with a culturally irrelevant curriculum that is, in addition, boring and redundant, students perceived the social studies as history dominated and lacking cultural diversity. The social studies curriculum *is* history dominated, and because of that, students attributed all purposes of learning social studies as "connecting the past to the present." Because participants could not see themselves in the curriculum, it led to them viewing the social studies as irrelevant. As one student stated, "It is important but it just doesn't feel like

it is.” Just like Chiodo and Byford’s (2004) study, students were more likely to see the social studies as relevant and meaningful when they were engaged and could see their role within the curriculum.

Social studies has traditionally avoided matters of race and cultural diversity despite providing the ideal curriculum for such matters (Sanchez, 1997). Consistent with prior literature were students’ perceptions of social studies as lacking cultural diversity. Escamilla (1987) conducted a quantitative analysis in which Latino students viewed the social studies curriculum as absent of Latinos. Again, Cruz (2002) mentioned the absence of Latinos in social studies textbooks. Participants in this study felt they—as well as other cultures—were absent in middle school social studies curriculum. They expressed a desire to be engaged in social studies curriculum that was culturally relevant, global, and current in nature. Caldwell (2012) echoed the sentiments of the participants, stating that students need to be given the room to explore their cultural identity in class. In addition to the need for a cultural diverse curriculum, the world is shrinking, so it is important that students be exposed to global issues as well. A move towards a global-centered curriculum at the middle-grades level is necessary, and social studies provides the ideal forum (Johnson, Boyer, & Brown, 2011). Simply put, there is a need for a social studies curriculum that helps Latina/o students as well as other students of color build cultural capital (Gay, 2005; Sanchez, 1997; Yosso, 2005).

Critical Race Theory/Latino Critical Race Theory Discussion

Coming into the study, I was concerned about the research participants’ ability to express the various concepts and constructs associated with Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory. CRT and its spin-offs are typically reserved for higher education or high school–related research in which students have the ability to express themselves better. Because

of this, I provided research participants with various ways to express their experiences in social studies: through interviews, written narratives, and drawings. Nevertheless, my purpose in using LatCrit as a framework for the study was that the promotion of CRT and LatCrit research in the classroom is necessary for reducing racial/cultural stereotypes and bringing disenfranchised groups to the forefront of educational research (Lintner, 2004).

Race was definitely at the center of the eighth-grade Latina/o student's experiences in social studies (see Figure 13). Students saw the curriculum as pertaining only to the Black-White dichotomy of race as a form of oppression and White dominated. Haney-Lopez (1997) and Iglesias (1997) acknowledged that discussions of race are often limited to a Black-White dichotomy, which was consistent with the findings of this research study. More important, however, is the use of LatCrit research as form of liberation. Students were excited to participate in this study, and although their experiences in social studies were racially and culturally oppressive, students still achieved academically in social studies. They chose to respond to the oppression not as a victim but to push through in spite of the racism of which they were aware. It is through instances such as this that the students who participated in this research study will be able to challenge dominant ideology that has victimized them.

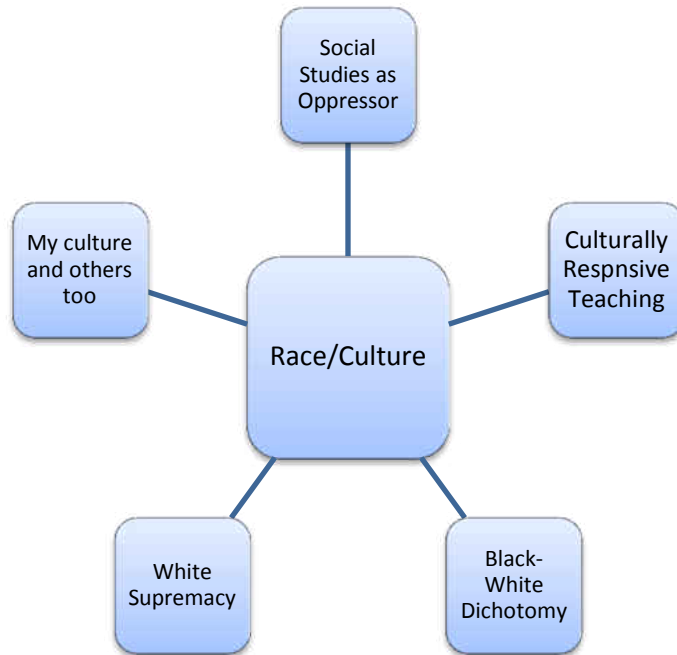


Figure 13: Race as Central to Latina/O Students' Experiences in Social Studies

It is my hope that as this research is disseminated through publication and presentation that social studies educators will understand race in the context of power (Duncan, 2002). The experiences mentioned by students of seeing only Whites in the curriculum and textbook highlight this very notion. The institution that is social studies education has projected its power upon students through its inherent racist power via a whitewashed curriculum. Students could not even see themselves as major contributors to American society, despite the fact that Latin Americans make up the largest minority group in America. When Latina/o students did see race, they saw it in its subservient forms: slavery, the White American taking Native American land, Polk as a hero in the Mexican American War, or the framers of the Constitution's development of the Three-Fifths Compromise. The use of CRT and LatCrit as a theoretical framework was

validated by this study, as race and culture were central to how students experienced social studies, the factors that impacted their experiences, and the meaning of their experiences.

Positionality After the Study

As mentioned in Chapter I of this research study, I was led to do this research because of my experiences as a student of color in social studies and my experiences as a social studies teacher of color to students of color. Going into the study, I assumed that race and culture could be found to be central to the experiences of Latina/o and other RECLD students in social studies. At the conclusion of this study, I am now certain that race is central to the lived experiences of Latina/o students in social studies.

As I was conducting the research, I was unsure about the use of CRT and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks. I assumed that students would reveal “post-racist” thoughts about their experiences in social studies. I thought CRT and LatCrit were too radical, that students would not validate it because the theory was too “deep” for them. I was presenting this research to a group of scholars as I was beginning data collection and was afraid to stand behind the tenets of Critical Race Theory; fearing that this group of scholars would see me as too radical as well, or trying to purposefully pull these racial experiences from the students. Yet, the role of race became clear in the students’ interviews, narratives, and images as the research progressed.

I stand now after this research more convinced of the role that CRT and LatCrit (as well as other spin-offs) can potentially play in educational research. The students’ voices have served as a form of liberation for me going forward in my research as an academic. Their voices have provided me with substantial power to go forward in social studies research, pushing the agenda of race, culture, and the White field that is social studies. In a sense, the research participants have given me a “leg to stand on” as a researcher and as a professor of teacher education.

Implications

This research study has implications for the field of social studies as well as general teacher education. Because I used a LatCrit and CRT framework, I will center the implications upon race.

Diversifying the field

The issue of teacher diversity is not unique to social studies but is an area of discussion across all fields of education. Despite the diversity of our nation's students, teachers for the most part still are White (Collins, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2001). It has been argued within the field of education as to whether teachers of color are the best teachers for students of color (Howard, 1999). The findings of this study indicate that teachers of color have the ability to be more culturally responsive to the educational needs of students of color. With that said, social studies researchers have to bring more attention to this matter and the field needs to be diversified. The participants are being exposed to a racist curriculum, and the responsibility of changing this will not be left to research but through the recruitment of a more diverse teacher workforce in social studies (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Curriculum Gatekeepers

Results from this study showed that students experience a curriculum that is dominated by Eurocentric (White) ideals, and, as a result, Latina/o students feel oppressed. It is important in social studies teacher education that we stress the role of the teacher as curriculum gatekeeper (Thornton, 2004). Teachers have the ability to reach beyond the curriculum and provide students with a more culturally responsive curriculum once they understand their roles as gatekeepers and

not purveyors of a racialized narrative. Teachers must give students the space to be critical of the content (Chandler, 2006), thus helping students to build cultural capital in social studies (Gay, 2005; Sanchez, 1997; Yosso, 2005).

Teacher Preparation

The lack of culturally responsive teaching practices and diverse pedagogical strategies indicated in this study shows that teachers were not prepared to teach diverse students. The lack of preparation was not unique to San Marcos Middle School but is an educational issue prevalent in schools with large minority populations throughout the country (Stairs & Donnell, 2010). It is imperative that teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers to better engage Latinos and other culturally diverse students in the curriculum (Jones & Herbert, 2012). We have to shift the focus in teacher education that deals with schools with culturally diverse populations. We often present diverse learners as a “challenge” rather than an opportunity to engage disenfranchised groups in a meaningful education. The participants in this study were not challenges. They did not have behavioral issues in school, and all made good grades regardless of how oppressed they felt by the curriculum and the teacher. However, they simply expressed a need to be engaged in what they were learning in social studies, and teacher preparation programs have to look at how to best meet those needs.

Future Studies

Although revealing, this study has left room for further research. Social studies research pertaining to Latino learners at all levels is not prevalent. I looked at middle school Latino learners in this study, but there is room to explore the experiences of students at the elementary,

high school, and college levels regarding social studies education. In addition, students' experiences validated the use of CRT and LatCrit as a framework for educational research. Future studies can pursue this line of research to further liberate the voices of Latino learners at all levels of education. From a more practical sense, I think it is important that social studies researchers provide in-service and pre-service teachers with ways to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices for diverse learners. It is not enough to talk about it; it is necessary to show teachers how to be culturally responsive.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to get to the essence of middle school Latina/o students' experiences in social studies. I used a phenomenological research method to get to the essence of their experiences with a CRT/LatCrit framework. Three themes emerged that contribute to the overall essence of their experiences. Students experienced middle school social studies that was boring, culturally irrelevant, and oppressive. As a result, students saw social studies as racist and not attentive to their educational needs. As we move forward through the 21st century, our nation will only grow more diverse. This research study showed that teacher educators and classroom teachers alike bear the responsibility for ensuring that no student feels oppressed in the social studies classroom.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT SOLICITATION LETTER

Hello Students,

I am Mr. Busey, an 8th grade history teacher here at San Marcos Middle School. Not only am I a teacher, but I am still a student just like you, the only difference being that I am in college. In order for me to graduate, I have to complete a research study in which I must interview at least 5-10 Latina/o students about your thoughts on social studies. If you are a Latina/o student and you are interested in participating in the study, please see me in room 434 either before school, after school, or during lunch for more information. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Mr. Busey

APPENDIX B: PARENT INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am Mr. Busey, a teacher at San Marcos Middle School and Ph.D. student at the University of Central Florida's College of Education. I am in the dissertation phase of my studies in which I must complete research in order to obtain my degree. Your child has recently expressed interest in being a part of my study and I wanted to let you know more about it.

The purpose of this study is to determine how Latina/o students experience social studies, and how their experiences influence what they think of social studies. This is an important study in my field because there is not much research on Latino students and social studies education. My goal is to make social studies classes better for each and every student, especially Latino students, and this study is a step in the right direction.

If you consent for your child to participate in this study, I can ensure you that their names nor any information at all about your child will ever be revealed. Not even the real name of the school is given in the study.

I have received permission from the principal Mr. Ruiz, and this study has been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Central Florida and Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) which lets you know that this study is ethical.

If you would like for your child to participate in the study, please sign the Informed Consent Form which will allow for me to interview your child. Students will not be taken out of class as interviews will be conducted before school, after school, or during lunch period.

Thank you for your help in this matter and if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at your convenience. You can reach me via email at christopher.busey@ucf.edu or by telephone at (301) 996-4794.

Kindest Regards,

Christopher Busey
PhD Candidate, Social Science Education
University of Central Florida

APPENDIX C: PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT



The Latina/o Student's Experience in Social Studies: A phenomenological Study of Eighth Grade Students

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator(s): Christopher Busey, MA

Faculty Supervisor: William B. Russell III, Ph.D.

Investigational Site(s): Stonewall Jackson Middle School
Orange County Public Schools
6000 Stonewall Jackson Road
Orlando, Florida 32807

PLEASE RETURN THIS CONSENT FORM TO MR. CHRISTOPHER BUSEY AND KEEP ONE COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS. ONLY SIGNED FORMS GRANTING PERMISSION SHOULD BE RETURNED.

Introduction:

Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study which will include about 5-10 Latino Students at Stonewall Jackson Middle School. Your child is being invited to take part in this research study because he or she is a student at Stonewall Jackson Middle school and has been identified as being Latino

The person doing this research are Christopher Busey of the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at the College of Education at the University of Central Florida. Because the researcher is a graduate student, they are being guided by Dr. William B. Russell, a UCF faculty supervisor in the department of Educational and Human Sciences.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should allow your child to take part in this study only because you want to.

- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you or your child.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the opinion of middle school Latino students towards social studies. Overall, the study will reveal whether or not social studies instruction is meeting the needs of Latino students.

What your child will be asked to do in the study:

Your child will be asked to participate in individual interviews. The interviews will be conducted by Mr. Christopher Busey.

Your child does not have to answer every question or complete every task. You or your child will not lose any benefits if your child skips questions or tasks.

Location:

Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Orlando, Florida.

Time required: We expect that your child will be in this research study for approximately 30-45 minutes.

When: Research will take place either before school, during a lunch period, or after school, so that interviews will not interfere with the students' school work.

Audio taping:

Your child will be audio taped during this study. If you do not want your child to be audio taped, your child will not be able to be in the study. Discuss this with the researcher or a research team member. If your child is audio taped, the tape will be kept in a locked, safe place. The digital recording will be erased or destroyed once it is transcribed.

Risks:

There are no expected risks for taking part in this study.

Benefits:

There are no expected benefits to your child for taking part in this study.

Compensation or payment:

There is no compensation, payment or extra credit for your child's part in this study.

Confidentiality:

We will limit your personal data collected in this study. Efforts will be made to limit your child's personal information to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt your child talk to Christopher Busey, Graduate Student, Social Studies Education Track, College of Education, (407) 249-6430 ext. 126, or Dr. William B. Russell, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Educational and Human Sciences at (407) 823-4345 or by email at william.russell2@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about you and your child’s rights in the study or to report a complaint:

Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Withdrawing from the study:

You may decide not to have your child continue in the research study at any time without it being held against you or your child.

Your signature below indicates your permission for the child named below to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THE IRB EXPIRATION DATE BELOW

Name of participant

Signature of parent or guardian

Printed name of parent or guardian

Date

- Parent
- Guardian (See note below)

Note on permission by guardians: An individual may provide permission for a child only if that individual can provide a written document indicating that he or she is legally authorized to consent to the child's general medical care. Attach the documentation to the signed document.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of the Interviewee:

Hello. My name is Mr. Chris Busey. I am a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida in the Social Studies Education program. I would like to speak with you about your experiences with social studies.

I think the conversation will take between 30-45 minutes. It would be a confidential interview, meaning all information will be kept private. Do you think this is something that you would be willing to do?

I just want you to know that I am required to read a script so my language might seem a little awkward.

I really appreciate that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to talk to me about your experiences with social studies. I want to make social studies better for you and other people with diverse cultures, so I really appreciate your participation. Information that you give me will help us to provide teachers with ways to make class more interesting for you. Results from this study will be presented to a classroom of my peers, and could possibly be presented at local, state, and national conferences. The results may also be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal.

My questions will focus on your experiences with social studies class including the textbook and content that is covered.

There are no right or wrong, desirable or undesirable answers. Feel free to express your opinions, whether they are positive or negative. I just want you to openly share with me what you really think and feel. There are no anticipated risks, to you as a participant in this interview other than the small amount of risk associated with confidential studies where a breach of confidentiality might occur but measures will be taken so that this is very unlikely to occur. With your permission, I will audio-tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. When we are finished with any audiotapes they will be erased and all data will be stored in a

locked filing cabinet. Your responses will be kept confidential and no one will know who said what as a code will be used as identifiers instead of your name.

There is no compensation, or other direct benefits to you for participating in this research you may also choose not to respond to any or all of the questions without an explanation. You may also decline to participate in this interview without any consequences.

If you have any questions about participants' rights, you can direct those to the UCF-IRB Office. I'll give you all that contact information at the conclusion of our interview today.

Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

If yes, turn on tape recorder and continue as follows:

Again my name is Mr. Chris Busey. Today is _____, and I am speaking with _____ . I have just turned on the tape recorder and would like for you to verify I have your permission to tape our conversation now that the tape is running.

As I mentioned, I am tape recording the discussion so that I don't miss anything you have to say.

Do you have any questions before I begin asking questions?

Questions

Experience

1. In general, tell me about school. What do you think about school?
2. In general, tell me what social studies is like for you?
3. How do you learn in social studies classes?
4. Do you like or dislike the topics you learn about in social studies classes? If so, which ones?
5. If you don't like social studies, what do you think could be done to make it better?

Meaning

6. How would you rank your classes with regards to favorites? Include your electives.
7. If you had to rank social studies in comparison to your other core classes (English Language Arts, Math, and Science), with regards to relevance for your future, how would you rank them and why?
8. Do you find much of what you learn in the social studies relevant to your life? Why or why not?
9. Do you think social studies is an important class? Why or why not?
10. How do you perform in social studies classes? Do you think this is because of your experiences?

Narrative

11. What was your favorite social studies class like? Your least favorite?

12. When you think of social studies, tell me the first story that comes to your mind about your experiences?
13. Is there anything else about social studies you would like for me to know?

Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me talk to you today. Your time is very much appreciated, and your comments have been very helpful.

Now I'd like to give you some contact information. If you have any questions about this research please contact me, Mr. Chris Busey Principal Investigator at 407-249-6430 extension 2126.

If you have any questions or concerns about research participants' rights they may be directed to the UCFIRB Office, UCF Office of Research, Orlando Tech Center, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246. The phone number is 407-823-2901.

Would you like for me to repeat any of that so you can write it down? I know I said it rather quickly.

Thank you so very much for letting me talk with you today. Your time, which I know is valuable, is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

Turn off tape recorder. Thank them again, and say goodbye.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2

2nd INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interviewee demographics:

Hello. My name is Mr. Chris Busey. I am a doctoral student at the University of Central Florida in the Social Studies Education program. I would like to speak with you about your experiences with social studies.

I think the conversation will take between 30-45 minutes. It would be a confidential interview, meaning all information will be kept private. Do you think this is something that you would be willing to do?

I just want you to know that I am required to read a script so my language might seem a little awkward.

I really appreciate that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to talk to me about your experiences with social studies. I want to make social studies better for you and other people with diverse cultures, so I really appreciate your participation. Information that you give me will help us to provide teachers with ways to make class more interesting for you. Results from this study will be presented to a classroom of my peers, and could possibly be presented at local, state, and national conferences. The results may also be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal.

My questions will focus on your experiences with social studies class including the textbook and content that is covered.

There are no right or wrong, desirable or undesirable answers. Feel free to express your opinions, whether they are positive or negative. I just want you to openly share with me what you really think and feel. There are no anticipated risks, to you as a participant in this interview other than the small amount of risk associated with confidential studies where a breach of confidentiality might occur but measures will be taken so that this is very unlikely to occur. With your permission, I will audio-tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to

say. When we are finished with any audiotapes they will be erased and all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your responses will be kept confidential and no one will know who said what as a code will be used as identifiers instead of your name.

There is no compensation, or other direct benefits to you for participating in this research you may also choose not to respond to any or all of the questions without an explanation. You may also decline to participate in this interview without any consequences.

If you have any questions about participants' rights, you can direct those to the UCF-IRB Office. I'll give you all that contact information at the conclusion of our interview today.

Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

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As I mentioned, I am tape recording the discussion so that I don't miss anything you have to say.

Do you have any questions before I begin asking questions?

Questions

Experience

1. Tell me about your culture. What does being Latina/o mean to you?
2. Does being a Latina/o change the way that you learn things? Why or why not?
3. Do you think being a Latina/o student causes you to look at what you learn in social studies differently?
4. When you think about social studies classes and what you learn, what are you seeing?
5. When you think about your social studies classes and what you learn, who do you see?
6. How does that make you feel?

7. Do you think your culture is represented in social studies textbooks or curriculum? Why or why not?

Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me talk to you today. Your time is very much appreciated, and your comments have been very helpful.

Now I'd like to give you some contact information. If you have any questions about this research please contact me, Mr. Chris Busey Principal Investigator at 407-249-6430 extension 2126.

If you have any questions or concerns about research participants' rights they may be directed to the UCFIRB Office, UCF Office of Research, Orlando Tech Center, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246. The phone number is 407-823-2901.

Would you like for me to repeat any of that so you can write it down? I know I said it rather quickly.

Thank you so very much for letting me talk with you today. Your time, which I know is valuable, is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

Turn off tape recorder. Thank them again, and say goodbye.

APPENDIX F: DRAWING PROMPT

Draw Your Thoughts

Directions: Read the prompt below. Think about the prompt and answer it by drawing your response in the blank space provided. You can draw as many items as you want.

Prompt: When I think of social studies, I think of...

APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA0000351, IRB00001138**
To: **Christopher L. Busey**
Date: **February 20, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 2/20/2012, the IRB approved the following human participant research until 2/19/2014 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form
Project Title: The Latina/o Student's Experience In Social Studies: A
Phenomenological Study Of Eighth Grade Students
Investigator: Christopher L. Busey
IRB Number: SBE-13-09091
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form cannot be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 2/19/2014, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/20/2013 11:24:43 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

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