

“JUST CALL ME POE”: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LOOK AT CODESWITCHING
AND PASSING

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family. To my parents who made this life possible for me, and to my sister who has remained a constant support. Mami y Papi, I love you more than words could ever describe. Thank you for crossing boundaries, so that I could continue to push them. To Milka, the worlds best sister, thank you for believing in me more than I believed in myself. I love the three of you and I absolutely could not have done this without you. Thank you for giving me a reason to continue, always.

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis is an autoethnographic look at codeswitching and passing in the children of immigrants. Specifically, this thesis uses methods of poetry, frameworks of re-photography, and narrative to investigate my personal experiences with these cultural phenomena over a lifetime. Grounding my work in theories on identity, culture, and co-cultural understandings, I investigate the evolution of my name from Paola, Paula, to Poe, as a representation of the length at which I attempted to assimilate and accommodate to the dominant group (U.S). It is my hope that this thesis helps to create community amongst those who have shared similar experiences, and to bring light to those who have not known this experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	4
Identity	4
Culture.....	11
Co-Cultural Theory.....	14
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	23
Poetry	30
Narrative	32
CHAPTER FOUR: PAOLA	36
Poetry	36
Picture This	37
Reflection.....	41
CHAPTER FIVE: PAULA.....	44
Poetry	44
Picture This	45
Reflection.....	50

CHAPTER SIX: POE	55
Poetry	55
Picture This	57
Reflection	62
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION	66
REFERENCES	72

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At a young age I recognized that I was different than my peers; I was the daughter of immigrants. Unlike a majority of my peers, I lived what I consider a dual life. I was not just Paola. I was also Paula. I was Latina at home, and I was white at school. Paola spoke Spanish, on the weekends she danced salsa in the living room, and during school holidays she learned how to make traditional Venezuelan food with her mother. Paula on the other hand spent a majority of her educational years refusing to speak Spanish outside of the home, avoiding the small number of peers that looked like her, and denying her identity as a person of color. To Paula, comments like, “I had no idea you were Latina,” were occasions to celebrate: she had done it, she had managed to blend in. Later on, the lines between Paola and Paula began to blur. Paola became ashamed of the way she had rejected her identity as a Latina, but Paula became who she was. She was not sure how she would ever make it back to Paola, or even if she could. This was until she made it to college. It was here that she saw an opportunity to test out a world where both Paola and Paula could live, she would become Poe.

Paola, Paula, Poe. These are the names of the identities I have been and have been given. Each portion of who I am negotiated by the world around me. These names, which have each represented different periods of time in my life, come together in this autoethnography to paint a picture of the complexities of code-switching and passing. According to Seeman (1972), names “are a product of prevailing customs, family tradition, and personal significance” (p.2). My birth name, Paola stems from my

Colombian heritage, a name chosen for me by my mother and father, long before I was born. Paula, a version of Paola was given to me as I entered the education system and encountered a world where my name, and my identity would be too difficult to understand. Paula would become a name I associated with a white washed version of myself. Moving forward in life, I recognized the tension between Paola and Paula and rebranded my identity as Poe. Poe is a person who sits at the border lands of both Paola and Paula (Anzaldua, 1987). She is a comfortable identity for both the Latinx communities and the white communities she is a part of. Throughout this thesis, you will see glimmers of all three of these women, for they are who I am today.

Ultimately, I began writing this thesis for Paola. I write to set her free from the pressure to forget who she is and where she comes from. I write to allow her a moment to breathe in the beauty of her identities. In the process of writing this thesis, however, I have come to realize this work is much bigger than Paola. Ultimately, this thesis is for Latinas sitting in front of their mirrors wondering how they have whitewashed themselves into someone they do not recognize. This thesis is for Latinas who have quietly made themselves smaller for the comfort of others. This is for the ones who wake up early before school to straighten their curls, the ones who save their hoops for the weekend, and the Latinas who only speak Spanish at home to hide how easily their first language drips from their mouths. This thesis is for the children of immigrants who watch as Microsoft Word paints their name with a red underline.... incorrect. Most importantly, this thesis is for the children of immigrants who have had no choice but to conform not only to thrive but to simply survive. *It is these people that I write for.* For them, I write to create a space where they feel community. I also write so that they may find this thesis

among the limited literature about marginalized voices written by marginalized voices. *I write to others as well.* I write to those who cannot understand these lived experiences, who have the privilege of overlooking voices like mine in academia, and to those who question the significance of autoethnography as a method of research that can advance both what we know and how we know it. I write to them with an invitation to (re)consider how to understand and research such missing experiences and voices. I write to them to share my experiences with the hope that the impact my voice can have on the lives of others that may be overlooked in academia can be illuminated. *Por que nuestras historias son importantes.*

As previously mentioned, I have chosen to use autoethnography as a platform to share my shame, pride, and struggle as a child of immigrants, in the United States. It is my hope that sharing these moments will personalize experiences faced by other children of immigrants. I hope that by critically analyzing how I used codeswitching and passing in my life, I can create a space for myself to grow and develop, too. To begin this process, I examined literature surrounding identity, culture, and co-cultural theory, followed with writing narratives and poems reflecting my own personal experiences with these phenomena. Overall, this work highlights the impact that code-switching and passing can have on the development of identity, and the ways culture is related to code switching and passing.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity, culture, and co-cultural theory are important factors in the communicative process enacted by children on immigrants. Throughout the following literature review, I will identify the ways in which concepts and theories about these ideas inform one another and shape lived experiences of children of immigrants in the U.S. and my lived experience as a child of immigrants in particular.

Identity

Scholarship on identity is vast and complex. There are hundreds of different interpretations and definitions of identity and its different functions. However, for the purpose of this research I will use identity, to describe the way in which we define who we are and others around us (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Leik & Goulding, 2000). This image of the self and the other encompasses race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status (Deng, 1995). These different layers of our identity are unique to who we are and the different groups we identify with. For example, I identify as a Latina, middle class, woman. It is these identities that shape and create my lived experience. Moving forward in understanding the intricacies of identity, we must consider how these different layers of who we are interact with one another to create our life stories.

Crenshaw (1989) calls this into attention by using the unique experiences of Black women within judicial cases to argue that we often take a singular axis approach to understanding identity. Meaning that we only consider parts of people's identity such as

race, but don't take into consideration how identities such as gender and sexual orientation affect our racial identity. In turn, this approach erases and falsely represents the experiences of our multilayered identities. Utilizing the stories of Black women pushed to choose between aligning with the past experiences of Black men or White women as a way to successfully defend themselves in court, Crenshaw (1989) highlights how a disregard for Black women's multilayered and complex identities simultaneously dismisses the intricacies and dynamism of their specific and collective experiences as Black women. The courts' inability to see their experience as both black and as women asked them to choose just one aspect of their identity. Instead, Crenshaw (1989) argues that this example of failing to value the experiences of both being Black *and* being women as a compelling reason to adopt an intersectional approach to identity more generally.

Although I do not claim that the experiences of Black women are the same as those of Latinas, Crenshaw's (1989) approach to understanding multilayered identities proves helpful in viewing identity as more than just race or gender alone. An intersectional approach requires us to look at narrower aspects of identity such as race, gender, and religion, as always interacting with one another to produce an identity—both individual and collective (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach helps account for layers of identity that function in a world where they are never mutually exclusive. For example, my identity as a woman will always impact my identity as a Latina and my identity as a Latina will always impact my identity as a woman. Overall, Crenshaw's approach reinforces that we are always a sum of any number of narrower aspects of identity and that multiple identities always interact with one another. We are not just a race, a sexual

orientation, a socio-economic status, or a gender, thus an understanding of identity must involve addressing different ways in which identities are developed and formed both separately and in relation to one another.

Scholarship on the formation and development of identity is multifaceted and varied. It should be noted that identity formation is a lifelong process (Streek-Fischer, 2015), and that scholars argue that the most vital part of any identity formation process occurs during adolescence (Erikson, 1993; Streek-Fischer, 2015). Research shows that this stage of life is when we are most “receptive to foreign cultural perspectives, values, and forms of behaviors” (Streek-Fischer, 2015, p. 440). This foundation then serves as a place from which to build the complex and intersectional aspects of identity/s that we ascribe to throughout life in similar and different ways. The process of identity formation can be understood in a variety of ways. These understandings range from inherent and biological to socially constructed (Goffman, 1959; Mann, 2006; Mead, 1934). It is important to note that although some scholarship leans towards one understanding of identity formation over the other, they are not inherently singular. Identity formations simultaneously work together to develop our identities. In order to comprehend how this works we must first recognize each understanding on its own.

The understanding of identity formation as inherent and biological, treats aspects of identity to be fixed and associated with our physical existence as human beings. This includes aspects such as skin color, that then predetermines our identity of one race over another or genital organs that determine our sex. Scholars who argue this, believe that these parts of our identities are not learned but rather are a part of our biological makeup. For example, biological determinism asserts that because I was born with the genitalia of

a female, my identity as a female began at birth and remains inherently the same throughout my life (Mann, 2006). The second understanding of identity formation as socially constructed, argues that our identities are formed through our interactions with social structures (Butler, 1991; Connell, 1983). This understanding complicates notions of race or gender as being physiological and, instead, treats what we know about race and gender as socially learned, normed, and (re)presented as predetermined categories of identity from which we must choose within our given social experiences and interactions. This focus on social construction asserts that all aspects of human life are meaningful only because our interactions with each other make them so (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Mead 1934). For example, while my skin color is similar to my Venezuelan and Colombian parents, social constructionism posits that I learn/ed continually what it means to be Venezuelan-Colombian as I interact with friends, family, media, and other social structures throughout my life. Further, as my experiences and knowledge continued to be informed about Latinx identities in the U.S., the dinner table connected my experiences and knowledge of Colombian foods and traditions with Latina identities more broadly.

Moving forward, Tajfel (1972) introduces social identity which takes into consideration both biological formation and socially constructed identity formation. Social identity takes into consideration how we use social groups to develop parts of our self-concept. A key component of social identity theory is in-group and out-group identification. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that although the in-groups we are a part of help to develop our self-concept, the out-groups we are not a part of can also have an equal or greater impact on our identity. The option to select our in-group and out-group membership however is not always our choice to make. Social identity theory speaks to

this, as it addresses how others decide our membership based on attributes such as implicit and explicit characteristics (Berzonsky & Denis, 2015; Phinney, 1990). Implicit characteristics, such as sexual orientation and socio-economic status hold more agentic value. It is because these characteristics are not often visible, that we have the ability to disclose as much or as little as we would like. On the other hand, explicit characteristics of our identity such as skin color do not offer agency in disclosure. Therefore, we must investigate how this affects the ways in which we perform our identities based on the need to fit certain in-groups.

This investigation of identity display evolved even further toward specific theories of identity performance. Identity performance refers to the relationships between the performance of different social norms and behaviors in relation to identity/s (Lazarus-Stewart, 2015). These performances are engaged in a variety of ways. For example, we may work to align our physical appearance with in-groups we would like to belong to or use specific language to communicate to others whom we aspire to be like (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007). In this way, a collective identity is displayed when people appear and/or act in ways that reinforce belonging. For example, speaking Spanish around my family performs my Latina identity differently than if I spoke English. Goffman (1959) sees this as being either visible or invisible to specific audiences.

Introducing the idea of self-presentation, Goffman (1959) uses the theater to discuss identity performance as similarly utilizing different parts of the stage and different roles as actors on the stage. In particular, he introduces the idea that the back stage is used to prepare us for the different roles and identities we eventually perform on the front stage. Because the back stage is out of the audience's view, it allows time to

both imagine and reflect upon both our own and others' identity performances from the past before we choose how to perform them in front of a "live" audience (Lemart & Branaman, 1997). In this way, we are able to both replicate and alter other's performances by acting out scripts in future performances and otherwise help us understand how to act in the role with which we prefer to identify.

On the "frontstage" (rather than "backstage"), Goffman (1959) claims that we perform our identity in front of an audience. Here, we use certain props, costumes, and recite our lines for others to hear and see (Goffman, 1959; Lemart & Branaman, 1997). Although Goffman used teachers and doctors as examples of roles that are acted out on the front stage, other scholars argue that these performances also occur in more mundane everyday interactions with others as well (Lemart & Branaman, 1997; Metts, 2009). Roles like mother, father, co-worker, and boss are also performed as central parts of our identities. These performances are also enacted regularly and easily vary based on the composition of the audience/s presence. In this way, Goffman (1959) further explains that these performances are actively shaped by the audience/s to whom we perform. In other words, we act accordingly to who is around us; an audience to whom we feel we belong will alter our identity performance differently than if we perform our identity/s in front of an audience with whom we do not feel we belong (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007).

Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) draw attention to the function of our different identity performances in front of our perceived in groups. The consolidation function acts as a tool to help us attach ourselves to a specific group (Smith, Murphy, & Coats 1999). This function supports our fundamental need to belong and uses identity performance as a way to secure respect and admittance into a group. For example, acting in accordance

with social norms invites members of an in-group to treat me the same as other members of that in-group; thus, such a performance reinforces that we *are* the same. This function thus establishes what we often refer to as “group norms,” allowing members of the in-group audience to reject and/or accept an individual as a/part of the group based on how well her or his identity performance aligns with their own.

These “auditions” are used as a measure of potential success and/or longevity of in-group status (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007). Such identity performances further negotiate how we are perceived by out-groups as well. Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) assert that these performances continue to act as a consolidation function even as they are engaged by members of an out-group as well. In this case, an identity performance can be used as a mechanism to categorize a person as a/part from specific groups. For example, the performance of wearing a dress aligns with the categorization of both “being a girl” and “not being a boy.” Such general categorization based on a narrow identity aspect performed can be dangerous and are associated with both negative stereotyping and marginalization of non-conformers.

“When negative stereotypes of the in-group are endorsed or simply implied by out-group members, they can even induce a state known as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), which impairs performance on dimensions associated with the stereotype (e.g., African Americans’ performing more poorly on intelligence tests), thereby becoming self-fulfilling.” (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007).

By manipulating identity performances to appear different in front of an out-group than in front of an in-group, we can “save face”. Cultural hegemony ultimately results from

such manipulations and dictates future expectations of both in-group and out-group members.

To further investigate the effects of cultural hegemony, I have chosen to use the framework of co-cultural theory which is informed by critical race perspectives. This perspective “interrogates power by uncovering hidden ideologies, assumptions, and practices which maintain, perpetuate, and reproduce racism.” (Kelly, Stair, & Price, 2013, p.110). Specifically, critical race perspective uses four main tenants as a foundation for this interrogation (Kelly, Stair, & Price, 2013). These tenants include:

1. Recognizing that racism is real and affects people of color every day.
2. Social movements to transform racism occur only when it benefits the majority.
3. Racial prejudice and discrimination are tied to gender, class, nationality, sexual orientation
4. Research that use critical race perspectives must privilege the voices and experiences of people of color.

When used as a foundation for understanding, these four tenants offer us a unique lens in which to critique the role that culture plays in perpetuating code-switching and passing amongst members of marginalized groups.

Culture

The role that culture plays in the creation of expectations and norms we consciously and subconsciously hold each other accountable to is centrally related to identity performance. Simply put we must investigate, how culture creates, and perpetuates certain expectations and guidelines for identity performances. While “culture” is notoriously difficult to define due to its complexity and varied use across

academic disciplines, clarifying what it means in this thesis is useful. Definitions of culture range from “the total way of life of a people (Kluckhohn, 1949, p.17) to “the system of symbols and meanings, the symbolic capacity that makes us uniquely human” (Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, 2006, p.12). In this thesis, I will be discussing the term culture in relation to the field of communication and the method of autoethnography.

Considering Mead (1934) and Goffman’s (1959) notion that our identities are shaped through social construction, culture becomes the obvious epicenter for where we begin to form our identities. Culture as defined by Warren and Fassett (2014), is a set of learned patterns of behaviors, values, and attitudes shared by a group of people. This definition posits that it is through the co-creation of verbal and nonverbal communication that we develop and adopt culture. For example, traditions that are passed down from generation to generation such as dances or stories are what helps members of a specific group understand and maintain their culture (Nicholas, 2009). However, in co-creating these shared values and attitudes, culture also sets norms and expectations for the way people should and should not act. These widely accepted norms are often described by scholars as hegemonic modes of being (Trujillo, 1991). Hegemony ultimately refers to cultural dominance within a society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For something to be considered hegemonic, it must be commonly accepted by a culture as well as reinforce the dominant ideology of the culture (Trujillo, 1991). For example, hegemonic modes of gender refer to our idealized performances of gender (Schippers, 2007). Hegemonic modes of gender act as a rubric for our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman. In turn, when hegemonic guidelines are violated and or not met, it subordinates other ways of being (Stone & Gorga, 2014).

This can be seen in the hegemonic understanding of what it means to be an American. The societal expectation aligned with the American Dream narrative is that a being “American” requires picking one’s self up by the boot straps and embracing blue-collar work as a way of performing one’s identity as a U.S. citizen. Interestingly this expectation does not require one to be born in the U.S. nor does it explicitly address immigration at all. However, because being born in the United States is implicitly associated with U.S. citizenship, birthplace remains a cultural assumption of “being American” and thus subordinates all other ways of being a “good” American. While inherently ironic, considering the long and complex relationship that the U.S. has with immigration in its rise to global power, the American Dream narrative inherently associates some aspects of identity performances as “more” American than others. Research on attitudes toward immigration in the United States often identify fear as a central component of determining in-group status. Quillian (1995) describes this phenomenon as group threat theory.

Group threat theory posits that when a perceived dominant group senses a rising number of minorities or “others” interpreted to threaten the resources or positions of people comprising that dominant group, negative attitudes towards policies promoting immigration and immigrants appear among the dominant group. As literature shows, this threat in the U.S. is most commonly linked to resources like taxes and jobs (Berg, 2009; Timberlake 2015). Stereotypes linking immigrants as a threat to the safety and well-being of members of the dominant group are then perpetuated in media and serve to co-create a culture of fear in relation to identity performances of “being American” (Larson, 2006). In this way, group threat theory also highlights the relationship between language and the

cultivation of culture. More specifically, the use of terms like “illegal” and “alien” to label immigrants as both “other” and “bad” work to further perpetuate the notion that they are also inherently dangerous.

As a result, immigration has a long history of being portrayed as a threat to U.S. culture. This stereotype in turn affects the ways in which we view immigrants as well as the way in which immigrants view themselves. Ultimately, the ways in which immigrants, as well as the children of immigrants, perform their identities can provide insight into how identity performances change when in relation to others.

Co-Cultural Theory

Grounded in muted group theory, stand point theory, and the phenomenological theory, co-cultural theory helps us understand the unique communicative process enacted by marginalized groups (Allen, 2000; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Kramarae, 1981, Orbe & Roberts, 2012). Although muted group theory and stand point theory serve to help us understand the specific communicative challenges faced in relation to gender, the phenomenological theory helps tie issues of race into the conversation. Only when considering all three grounding theories can we truly understand co-cultural theory. Thus, co-cultural theory asserts that because of their marginalized position in society, groups such as women, people of color, and people in the LGBTQ community develop different orientations to communication based on the need to succeed and survive in society (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Specifically, this theory considers how marginalized groups change, adapt, or manipulate their communicative styles around dominant groups. To better understand co-cultural theory and its presences in marginalized groups, six factors address the maintenance and adoption of certain

communicative orientations by marginalized groups (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014): preferred outcome, communication approach, abilities, field of experience, perceived costs and rewards, and situational context (Matsunaga, 2008).

The first two factors—preferred outcome and communication approach—act as fundamental reasoning for marginalized groups to choose specific communicative strategies over others (Matsunaga, 2008). Preferred outcomes refer to the goals that marginalized people hope to achieve with specific communicative orientations (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Specifically, scholars have discussed three preferred outcomes: assimilation, accommodation, and separation. Assimilation explains the attempt to conform to the dominant group by erasing cultural differences that would set marginalized people apart (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Matsunaga, 2008). For example, changing the way one dresses to fit in with the current norms of a specific culture. For some individuals, this subtle change in clothing allows them to blend into the dominant group. Accommodation, however, speaks to the desire for the dominant group to meet marginalized people in the middle. For example, incorporating portions of both cultures to promote change in society. An example of this can be seen in companies that offer bilingual customer service agents, an accommodation for people with different native languages. The last preferred outcome is separation, this outcome reflects rejection to conform to the dominant group. Instead, separation focuses on the strengthening of bonds between marginalized people. This preferred outcome can often act to establish the presence of the marginalized group as separate and independent from dominant groups. An example of this can be resistance to learning the language of the dominant group.

In order to achieve these preferred outcomes non-assertive, assertive, and aggressive communicative approaches are used (Matsunaga, 2008). These approaches act as communicative methods to help marginalized groups attain their preferred outcomes. The first is the non-assertive approach, this approach is a non-confrontational method. The non-assertive approach puts the needs of dominant in place of the marginalized group. It is often fear of conflict that incites this communicative approach (Orbe, 1998a). The assertive approach to communication on the other hand, creates space for marginalized people to express their preferred goals to the dominant group. In this approach scholars see an increase of visibility by the marginalized group as well as self-advocacy (Orbe, 1998a). Finally, the aggressive approach takes a more hostile turn. This approach can be perceived as defensive and hurtful towards others. Actions associated with this approach are confronting others, ridiculing self, and sabotaging others (Orbe, 1998a). Scholars have found that this approach to communication often stems from the desire to prioritize one's preferred goals over the needs of others (Matsunaga, 2008). It is important to note these approaches to communication are methods used to reach a preferred goal and therefore can be used interchangeably when attempting to accommodate, assimilate, and separate. Similarly, these factors and approaches are affected by outside influences such as: accessibility, field of experience, perceived cost and rewards, and social context.

Scholars argue that because of the uniqueness of each marginalized group, we must look at each groups ability to access different preferred goals and approaches to communication (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). For example, in the preferred goal of accommodation, members of marginalized groups often use liaisons from the dominant

group to assist them when entering in to dialogue with the privileged majority. Crenshaw (1989) argues that this is not accessible to all members of marginalized groups. Similarly, not all members of these groups have the emotional capacity to confront others or educate the dominant. Because we all have different capacities and abilities as people, we must also consider field of experience. For marginalized groups, field of experience refers to how past interactions with dominant groups will shape their future interactions with the dominant group. For example, if a member of a marginalized group has had negative experiences confronting the dominant group, it is likely that they will take a non-assertive approach to assimilation. This negative experience creates fear and pushes marginalized voices into silence.

This example also helps to explain the influence of perceived costs and rewards (Gates, 2003). Perceived costs and rewards describe the process marginalized people go through when analyzing what they may gain or lose when engaging in interactions with the dominant (Matsunaga & Tosrigoe, 2008). In these cases when considering confronting the dominant group, marginalized people might decide that the cost is not worth the reward, and again move into silence to ensure safety. The final influencer in communication between both marginalized groups and the dominant group is, situational context. The communicative nature of this theory lends scholars to caveat that these approaches, influences, and goals are always situational. Matsunaga (2008) assert that there is no prescribed approach to each preferred outcome, but that we analyze each situation to understand the appropriate responses. However, due to the relationship between marginalized groups and dominant groups, marginalized people bear the responsibility of altering their form of communication. As scholars have continued their

research on co-cultural theory, many have developed a better understanding of the different tools used to achieve specific preferred outcomes.

One of the tools used by marginalized groups to achieve assimilation and accommodation, is the use of code-switching. Code-switching refers to the way that speakers change and manipulate their vocabulary including their pitch, volume, rhythm, and tonality to meet the expectations of those who are listening, most commonly done when communicating with dominant groups (Boulton, 2016; Gumperz, 1982; Reyes, 2004). This concept posits that marginalized people use situational context as guidelines for when they need to enact different methods of communication to make dominant groups more comfortable. In a study done to understand code-switching in the lives of Black men in a predominantly White college, Glenn and Johnson (2012) found that Black men actively chose to change their vernacular to “standardized styles of English” in order to mirror their white peers (p.132). The authors found that participants disclosed that code-switching was used as a mechanism to suppress negative stereotypes about their identity:

Jared explains, “you can’t always talk how you want to talk—talking loud or talking Ebonics... because that is perceived as... you are ignorant. ’He adds, “I can switch it up and talk just as professional and probably more professional than you can ... You kinda gotta assimilate to White culture—what they see as acceptable.” (p.357)

The concept of code-switching however does not only live in verbal communication but can also be enacted nonverbally.

Participants in Glenn and Johnson's (2012) study discussed dress as a method of code-switching, stating that wearing khakis and a tie although not always matching their preferred clothing choice, was a small accommodation to make in order to assimilate. Scholars argue that it is these moments of accommodation by marginalized people that leads to dissonance within their group (Glenn & Johnson, 2012; Orbe, 1994). In analyzing the interviews within in their study Glenn and Johnson (2012) found that their participants felt that the risk of disassociating with their in-group was worth the benefit of fitting in with the dominant group. However, many of the participants in the study recognized that because of the color of their skin, code-switching vernacular and dress was one of only methods they could access. That being said, they also expressed that although the risk of dissociating from their in-group was present, it was the color of their skin that would never allow for full assimilation. As mentioned above, accessibility in reaching a preferred goal is not always available to some. However, scholars are now taking a look at the ways in which people who can pass off as the dominant group use this as a tool for assimilation and accommodation.

Like code-switching, passing is a tool historically used by groups of people whose identities have been stigmatized by society. Specifically, passing as an act refers to the process of trying to be seen as a part of a non-stigmatized identity (Scranton, Afifi, Afifi, & Gangi, 2016; Goffman 1963). As mentioned previously, this method of assimilation is not always accessible to others due to the visible characteristics that come attached to our identities, such as skin color. Scholars ultimately identify passing as a method of managing visible stigmas (Scranton et al, 2016). Many of the individuals who can access passing as a tool for assimilation use the following methods: avoiding conversations

about identity and lying about their identity. These methods of achieving assimilation although seeming negative from an outsider's perspective, act as a way to ensure social capital as well as safety, for many marginalized folks.

For example, scholarship on the children of immigrants shows that children often engage in passing behaviors to ensure the safety of their parents' legal status (Scranton et al, 2016) In these cases, passing allows for children of immigrants to protect their parents from any harm that might come of the exposure of their status. Passing in these situations meant the avoidance of conversation surrounding the inability to travel or have a driver's license. These avoidant behaviors although exhaustive for these children created a sense of safety for them and their families. Scranton et al (2016) highlight that marginalized people often avoid conversations due to the high level of risk involved in disclosing personal information. Similarly, these scholars found that if children were not able to avoid conversations, their only perceived option was to lie. These lies included telling friends at school that their parents were in fact documented. Scranton et al (2016) also found that parents as immigrants also partook in lies to help ensure their safety. Many children reported that their parents told them they were visiting Disney and after their trip, they never returned home. Similarly, the tactics of avoidance and lying were also found relevant when looking at passing as a tool to gain social capital. Due to the stigmatization of certain identities such as immigrants and the children of immigrants, many of the participants in the study done by Scranton et al (2016) used passing as a method to gain social capital. Social capital describes how we gain social benefits from our connections with others (Bourdieu, 1986; Scranton et al, 2016). In these instances, passing helped individuals gain social capital by dissociating themselves from their in-

group. Because they were not viewed as a member of the stigmatized group, and chose not to correct others, these children were able to pass and be treated as the dominant group. Overall, when entering discourse about code-switching and passing we must keep in mind accessibility. The ability to pass and or code switch are not always available to marginalized groups. This could be due to skin color, hair texture, and or accents, aspects of identity that are not easily masked. These markers of difference measured by one's closeness to whiteness becomes a ticket for marginalized groups to access privilege. The ability to pass is then inherently inaccessible to those who are not able to.

Due to the stigmatization of certain identities such as immigrants and the children of immigrants, many of the participants in the study done by Scranton et al (2016) used passing as a method to gain social capital. Social capital describes how we gain social benefits from our connections with others (Bourdieu, 1986; Scranton et al, 2016). In these instances, passing helped individuals gain social capital by dissociating themselves from their in-group. Because they were not viewed as a member of the stigmatized group, and chose not to correct others, these children were able to pass and be treated as the dominant group. Overall, when entering discourse about code-switching and passing we must keep in mind accessibility. The ability to pass and or code switch are not always available to marginalized groups. This could be due to skin color, hair texture, and or accents, aspects of identity that are not easily masked. These markers of difference measured by one's closeness to whiteness becomes a ticket for marginalized groups to access privilege. Many of those who can or cannot access code-switching and passing often use their own experiences to further our understanding of these phenomena. In the following section I will outline the ways in which I rely upon my own experiences of

passing and codeswitching to engage in autoethnographic accounting and analysis of these issues to contribute to such literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As I searched for literature to ground my writing, I found myself trying to force my experiences with identity to be appropriately accounted for in traditional research. I began by exploring scholarship on first generation Americans, a term I had identified with my entire life. I had used this term to indicate my identity was connected to being the daughter of immigrants, however article after article indicated I was a *second* generation American instead. How could I have spent the last two decades misidentifying myself to others? I began to question who I was, and whether I had the appropriate words to communicate my identity to myself or others. I began having conversations with the other children of immigrants about the label *first* generation American.

Although informal and anecdotal, each person I spoke with was as surprised by this definition as I was. This was not the way we had been identifying ourselves when we connected ourselves to our immigrant parents. It was in this moment that I realized that allowing others to identify me required me to accommodate their view of me, despite its incongruence with my understanding and shared experience with others like me. I had simply adapted to the definition of second generation American. These researchers had studied their academic scores in school, their rates of criminal activity, and the financial statuses that they averaged. This research, however beneficial for the tangential aspects of our world, did little to help me understand my identity and rather pushed me into a category I did not identify with. I was faced with a clear gap in the literature: my

experiences were not included. Recognizing that a majority of the literature I had read was largely prescriptive and not descriptive, I broadened my search to include the work of autoethnographers. I found research that did speak to my identity and inspired me to better examine my own position in attempt to share it with others with the invitation to (re)consider what we collectively know about the identity/s of children of immigrants in the U.S.

Autoethnography is a method of research that highlights lived experiences in connection to culture (Holman, Adams, Ellis, 2013; Boylorn & Orbe; 2014). This method requires researchers to reflect on their personal experiences, and how these experiences connect to the larger context of culture and society. In other words, autoethnography mixes both biography and ethnography to help researchers better understand the ways in which we are molded and shaped by the world around us (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). This work, however, does not come without critical reflection. Autoethnographers such as Boylorn and Orbe (2014) and Chang (2008) remind us of the expectations that autoethnographic work must meet. Chang (2008) states “we expect the stories autoethnographers to be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context” (p.46). These critical expectations of autoethnography are both complex in emotional labor as well as arduous academically. Although autoethnography does not argue that it creates more reliable or generalizable research, its claims to bring life into research, making it a unique method in comparison to others (Ronai,1995).

According to Holman, Adams, and Ellis (2013), life should be brought into research through commitment to autoethnography’s five central purposes: (1) disrupting norms of research practice and representation, (2) working from insider knowledge, (3)

maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better, (4) breaking silence and reclaiming voice, and (5) making work accessible (p. 34). As I move through each purpose it will become evident that they inform one another. This seamless interaction between purposes is a poetic example of the ways in which autoethnography works to blur the lines between personal and academic.

The first purpose of autoethnography, *disrupting norms of research practice and representation*, is what pushed me to choose this method over others. Traditional research focuses on objectivity and can often generalize or underrepresent the voices of those that are oppressed. Autoethnography on the other hand invites creativity and subjectivity into research, recognizing that we can learn so much from poetry, performance, and narrative story telling. Thus, making it an optimal method to help increase representation in research. It is my hope by sharing my experiences through this autoethnographic work that I can add to the body of research that disrupts the norms of research.

The second purpose of autoethnography, *working from insider knowledge*, is yet another example of uniqueness that this method brings to the table. Unlike traditional research, which draws a firm line between the researcher and the researched, autoethnography takes a deep look at the personal experiences of the researcher, using their insider knowledge to explore cultural problems (Ronai, 1995). This characteristic of autoethnography allows for marginalized researchers to take back control of the stories and experiences of the marginalized. Due to its self-reflexivity autoethnography allows researchers to explore what they know, themselves. When we are able to work from an insider's perspective, we can uncover the true issues at hand within the stories and

experiences of marginalized peoples. This distinct purpose of autoethnography will allow me to speak from the perspective of a first-generation Latina.

Although qualitative and quantitative research can offer insightful understandings of different experiences, these methods can easily generalize or silence the voices that are most often oppressed. Autoethnography on the other hand, gives us the opportunity to highlight and push forward these voices and allow the researcher to become a part of the dialogue. Researchers are not immune to cultural issues and systemic problems, making autoethnography an ideal place to combine both personal and academic world. Once we rid ourselves of the perpetual notion that these worlds must remain separate, I believe research can break down boundaries and begin to represent more than the privileged majority. I do want to caveat that this work however necessary and important for marginalized communities does not come without its own struggles. This style of research can be taxing and strenuous as it requires critical self-reflection and often opens doors into one's lived experience that may not have surfaced before. However, this method unlike others, does offer space to do so.

The third purpose of autoethnography, *to maneuver through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty* has created a space for researchers to open their lives up for analysis. In doing so, others can be invited to understand the confusion, anger, and beauty in everyday life that may be otherwise overlooked. In most cases, autoethnographers are working through issues associated with their identity, which can be extremely difficult and painful. However, the ability to do so can prove to be therapeutic (Holman, Adams, Ellis, 2013). When researchers take the time to move through their stories and reflect on their connection to one's culture, they can often find answers to why they experience

certain things. On the other hand, autoethnography also allows for stories to be told and to be written down, in some cases where there is no answer. Personally, when studying this method, this purpose drew me in. At the time (and even now) struggling through what my identity was and the anger associated with being Latina, I believe this method offers me the ability to express and investigate these feelings. Simultaneously, opening the door for others who relate to my experiences and are searching for ways to understand their experiences as well. Autoethnographers recognize this method as a tool to make life better (Spry, 2011). Allowing themselves to critically work through and connect their experiences to the larger context of culture and society can be helpful in moving forward and understanding why things are the way they are. Autoethnography's call for critical self-reflection ultimately lends itself to vulnerability and exposure.

The fourth purpose of autoethnography, *breaking silence and reclaiming voice*, works from insider knowledge to give agency back to those who have been historically marginalized. Unlike methods that push towards a generalizable understanding of the world, autoethnography allows research to be grounded in the personal experiences and stories of those who are dealing with the difficulties and messiness of life (Tillman, 2009). This space in turn becomes a foundation for the oppressed to have their voices heard. Similarly, autoethnography reclaims voice by working to value the traits of research that in the past have been considered inadequate and irrational (Keller, 1995). It is the value that autoethnography places on emotions and uncertainty that challenges objectivity and predictability (Holman, Adams, Ellis, 2013, p. 35). This challenge to research that pushes away the researcher's perspective in turn breaks the mold of what research can and cannot look like. When considering using autoethnography as my

methodological approach this purpose stood out to me. Struggling to find myself in the research, autoethnography became a beacon of hope where stories like mine were being told and cultural critique gave me answers to the questions I was looking for. By using autoethnographic writing my hopes are to break the cycle of current research which focuses on the generalizable and change the way that people classify research. I want to be a part of changing the way in which we understand research to be and how we decide what research is valuable and what isn't. At the same time, I see this opportunity as a space to reclaim my voice as a woman of color in academia.

The fifth and final purpose of autoethnography, *making work accessible*, implores us to re-examine academic research laden with difficult jargon as at times appropriately labeled as “elite”. At times it can feel like research is developed by those in white ivory towers, only to be read by others in the same tower (Eveleth, 2014). The inaccessibility of research due to language becomes a barrier for those who may be seeking understanding. Autoethnography offers a more accessible take on research by using story telling as a way to share and create knowledge. The way in which this method is written lends itself to a variety of audiences and opens the door for learning. Similarly, due to the creative aspects of autoethnography individuals can share their research in a plethora of ways such as dance, film, visual art, poems, and performances (Holman, Adams, Ellis, 2013). Allowing research to be accessible through a variety of mediums allows researchers to impact audiences beyond academics. As I dive into autoethnography, this remains my primary goal. I believe that by examining my personal experiences through narrative and poetry I will demonstrate how code-switching and passing can also be understood by those experiencing similar struggles.

Gloria Anzaldua, E Patrick Johnson, and bell hooks, it was here that I found myself. Their stories, poems, and performances show how research can provide someone like me with the words and the tools to understand my experiences in new ways. Therefore, I have chosen to use performative writing as a tool to demonstrate the five purposes of autoethnography in my thesis. Performative writing is lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life (Pelias, 2005). This method of writing can take form in narratives, poems, and other forms of nontraditional scholarly writing. For the purpose of my thesis I will be using a mix of both narrative storytelling and poems to best illustrate my journey as the daughter of immigrants living in the United States. More specifically, I will be using poetry as an emotive function to better understand the emotions connected with my experience of codeswitching and passing. To further investigate this relationship with these cultural phenomena I will be using narrative as a descriptive sense making tool. It is my hope that by using poetry to spark an understanding of these emotions that I can then further dissect this in my narratives. Specifically, I will be analyzing my experiencing with codeswitching and passing in three major sections: Paola, Paula, Poe.

I will be engaging in a mix of journaling, memory re-call through re-photography as well as coder reliability through informal conversations with those who are a part of these stories. I hope to share narratives that invite my audience to understand the complexities of code-switching and passing, as well as to investigate their use or participation in these phenomenon's. Throughout this process, I will integrate poetry as well. I will be implementing Pelias (1999) four main criteria for poetic writing: coherence, plausibility, imagination, and empathy. This methodological approach to

poetry writing will keep me accountable to creating pieces that are both intelligible and credible as well as expressive and empathic to my audience.

Poetry

One of the unique characteristics of autoethnography is that it makes possible alternate avenues of research. Specifically, poetry. Scholars such as Furman (2006) have stated that poetry offers “expression of powerful emotions that might not always be easily expressed” through other forms of research (Furman, 2006, p. 561). This method although not commonly used in traditional academia, opens the door for an understanding of cultural phenomena in new and insightful ways. If we look at poetry as the physical data created by autoethnographic work, we can begin to understand its usefulness in attempting to dissect cultural issues such as codeswitching and passing. Specifically, I argue that poetry not only allows me to critically interpret my own experiences with these issues but that it also functions as an invitation for others to understand these phenomena through human experience. Due to the personal and creative nature of this method of meaning making, poetry also invites a different author. Traditional research in its largely linear format has the tendency to silence marginalized voices, however because poetry allows for creative freedom, we are able to invite authors to investigate cultural issues in new and different ways. Using the work of Furman (2006), and Sanders (1976) we can continue to uncover the ways in which poetry acts as a valid and intentional method of research.¹

¹ This chapter was largely informed by the work of Dr. Arellano and her unpublished work on poetry as research.

When looking at the physical format in which poetry manifests, scholars such as Sanders (1976) have recognized that verse fragments act in a similar capacity to bricolage. Specifically, verse frags in poetry allow for readers to digest its content in small doses, decoding and recoding the cultural phenomena being discussed. Ultimately, these fragments in connection with the experience being told, ties the personal to the theoretical. In doing so, the cultural phenomena being investigated in the poetry is open to be analyzed as it stands, or in conjunction with the larger discourse of the poem. By breaking down these experiences into fragments we then allow the audience the chance to investigate the cultural phenomena in a variety of contexts. Similarly, the creative aspect of poetry writing opens the door for an audience of people who might not have been reached by traditional research methods. In the spirit of autoethnographic work, I argue that research should be consistently searching for ways to make discourse on cultural phenomena accessible to multiple groups of people. These phenomena have both micro and macro impacts on our societies and therefore we should be doing our best to investigate it in a multitude of ways. The more we are able to call folx in to the conversation, the more we are able to research its impacts.

Similarly, Furman (2006) recognizes the potential poetry has in calling in folx to these discourses. In his work Furman (2006) highlights the two main functions of compression that allow for unique audience engagement and interpretation of cultural phenomena. The first being author choice. When writing poetry Furman (2006) argues authors go through a process to choose the precise words that express their emotions, that being said throughout this process the poet must first analyze their feelings in connection to the larger discourse. This in-depth analysis accomplishes the larger autoethnographic

goal of critical analysis of one's own experiences. Unlike sharing a story and moving on, this process pushes the researcher to examine their position within the context of the specific cultural phenomena being discussed. In this case, I will be using my poetry to analyze how my experiences tie into codeswitching, passing, and other theories brought forth in my literature review. The second function of compression highlighted by Furman (2006) echoes the call for accessibility being made by autoethnographers.

He argues that the process of choosing specific words to describe one's experiences offers its readers an intentional yet concise story that allows for this accessibility. Due to the length and the precision of word choice in poetry, readers are allowed a different kind of access into the cultural issue being studied. Specifically, Furman (2006) states readers are "invited to explore their own sense of the limitations and potential reliability of the data" (p. 562). This falls in line with my intentions outlined in the introduction to write to create a space for those who experiences these phenomena as well as for those who might not experience them directly. As I investigate my lived experiences and examine their relationship to code-switching and passing, I invite others to interpret and analyze with me.

Narrative

When considering which methods of writing I would use for my autoethnography one thing was certain, I wanted to write narratives. This decision came easily, as I had grown to love the connection, I was able to make with theory through the work of others autoethnographic narratives. This style of writing not only accomplished the accessibility I was seeking, but also gave me the chance to reclaim my story as mine. After considering my options, I decided to use photographs to help spark memories and rely on

narratives to recreate my time as Paola, Paula, and Poe. In choosing certain photographs, I sorted through and picked out the ones I felt best expressed my experiences in each of these three identities. In this process, I further realized that I was using photographs and narrative to investigate how the past was affecting my present, similar to the idea of re-photography. “Re-photography” is the act of using old images of buildings, people, or things and juxtaposing them to of the same building, person, or thing in the present (Kalin, 2013). This approach seeks to demonstrate how images of the present relate to the past. Kalin, for example, shows how an image of a hand holding up an old picture of a busy street in Sydney up against the same city today can reveal slivers of the same architecture but surrounded by entirely new present-day sky scrapers and forms of transportation. This juxtaposition allows for viewers to consider what the past looked like, what the present looks like, and imagine how they came to look so different.

Adapting the framework of re-photography as explored by Kalin (2013), I sought to recall and investigate memories associated with my chosen photographs and then developing associative narratives. Although the original use of re-photography as described by Kalin (2013), uses older photographs of people or places and blends them into newer photographs of these same places or people, I argue that this same concept can be used to explore our past identities in relation to our present identities. Kalin (2013) states “re-photography, rather than a representation of memory, suggests a practice of actively constructing and inhabiting memories and their times and places while also incorporating them into the present as active forces, as taking part in the world.” (p.170). While Kalin (2013) uses this method in relation to memory and space, I am focusing on the ways in which this method can be used in relation to the way memories inform our

identities. I chose the adaptation of this method because I also felt that it tied into the understanding that these memories recall narratives used in the development of my identity.

Our identities are largely socially constructed. That being said the memories that I recall during the process of this re-photography are in fact informed by the narratives shared with me about family histories, including my name. Simply put, the social act of storytelling helped construct my early identity. As Stone (1988) would suggest, these family stories would give my identities “messages and instructions; offer blueprints and ideals” for who they should be and who they were (p.5).

Stone (1988) asserts that we learn who we are through the narratives shared with in our families. These narratives then become guidelines for the way in which we know how to interact in the world. However, this idea extends further, the narratives and stories that we share with friends, romantic partners, even acquaintances help to shape who we are. This understanding of identity development spoke loudly to me as I reflect on the narratives I have chosen to share, many of them informed by my family and friends. Furthermore, I recognize using narratives in the process of writing my autoethnography can work in similar ways. By inviting my audience into stories of my experiences with code-switching and passing, I too have the ability to shape understandings of identity, code-switching, and passing like my family’s narratives shaped me. Recognizing that narratives played such an impactful role in the development of my identity, it only seemed fitting that I used this method to reach both people who have had similar experiences and those who are searching to understand this unknown experience. In the end, it is my hope that those who read these narratives are able to find connection and or

understanding of the experiences of children of immigrants who grow up in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: PAOLA

Poetry**Paola**

Her mother and father named her
Loud, beautiful, passionate
They never blamed her

For her name meant just that
Look it up in urban dictionary
It's literally a fact

This name which had been chosen so carefully
Would become an identity she knew so scarcely

Because at the age of five
This name would be taken
To use it outside would be just forsaken

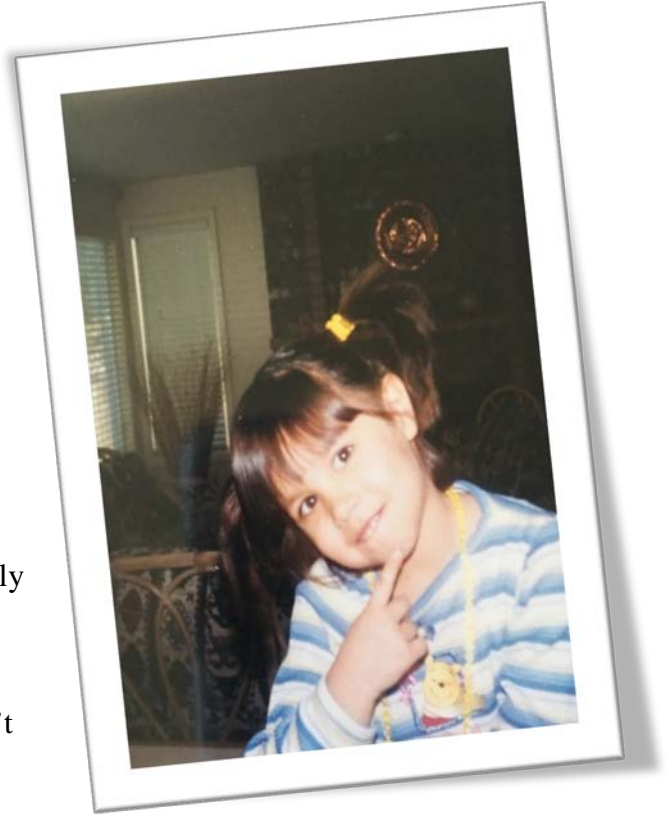
This little girl so filled with passion
Would leave her home
To encounter a world with no compassion

Learn your name I can remember my Papi saying
I picked it for a reason
To let it go would be to commit your own treason

Be proud and don't let them mispronounce
Don't give them anything
Don't give them an ounce

Picture This

She's four years old. Sitting on the kitchen counter of her childhood home. Mami cooking *bollitos* for breakfast. P-A-O-L-A, her mom spells out to her in Spanish. Paper and crayon in her hand, she writes it down a million times. Paola, Paola, Paola, she couldn't get enough of this name, her name. She can remember the excitement and joy that took over her as she learned how to write it for the first time. Suddenly, paper and crayon just weren't enough. She wanted more. So eventually paper and crayon turned to hallway walls and lipstick. She was so PROUD of herself. It didn't even matter that she would eventually get in trouble for writing on the walls and ruining her mom's red lipstick. Because at the time she had no idea the immense sacrifice her parents had made, so that she could sit on that very counter, in that very neighborhood, writing on those very walls. What mattered was that she knew how to write her name. Paola Andrea Joya.



Look how beautiful, she thought to herself as she stared at her name on the wall, not recognizing that all of her a's were backwards. A shadow came over her and her mother began to yell. "Paola! *Quien hizo esto?*" she asked. Paola stood quietly contemplating whether or not she would own up to her graffiti. She turned to her mother with a big smile on her face and said "*Yo! Te gusta?*" Her mother was furious but

laughed as Paola took full responsibility and even had the guts to ask her if she liked it. But that is who Paola was, Paola was confident, she loved herself and was truly unapologetic about it. The one thing she loved the most about herself was her name. The joy she heard in her father's voice as he would tell the story of how she came to get it would become the foundation for this love. He loved it so much, so why shouldn't she?

As Latinx tradition followed, her older sister would be named after her Mother, Milka. But Paola was different, she had a name all to herself. The story goes that this name was chosen for her much before she was born. Her father, born in Colombia would pick out her name at the age of 15, and wait another 15 years to give it to her. Growing up as a pastor's kid, his family was full of people named after biblical characters. Due to his experiences within religion, Samuel vowed that he would break this tradition when it came time for him to become a father. He wanted something different for his children, he wanted something unrelated to religion, in his words he wanted something "cool". At the time (1979) Paola Andrea was a popular name in Colombia, he would share stories with her of how much he loved the sound of it, and how cool he thought it was. She would ask to hear the story over and over again, loving that he had picked this out for her so long before he had even held her. To her it was like he had known her forever. Later on, in life, she and her father would come to find out that the definition of Paola was "small, passionate, loud, women". They would laugh as this perfectly described her personality. The bond she shared with her father over this was truly special to her. Looking back, she felt incredibly lucky to share these moments with him. Similarly, her mother played a large role in the development of her identity as a Latina.

For five years she spent a majority of her days with her stay at home mother. Their time was spent at the beach, arguing over why napping was important for “Mami time”, and cooking family dinners together before her dad and sister got home from their days. For these five years the only world she knew was one in Spanish. The books, the language she spoke, and the culture she knew was only that. On occasion she spent a few hours here and there at a local daycare, while her mother ran errands. It was then that she would be introduced into a world unfamiliar from the one that she knew.

Reflecting back, daycare was one of the first memories of discomfort Poe could remember. Unlike a majority of her daycare peers Paola’s fears didn’t stem from separation anxiety but came from a fear of disorientation. As she sat waiting for her mother to register her for the day, all she could hear were words she didn’t totally understand. This confused her, made her uncomfortable. She can remember struggling to tell the women working at the daycare that she needed to use the bathroom. The words were there, but this woman didn’t understand. She stood at the door of the classroom and pointed outside. After the teacher realized what she meant, she walked Paola down to the restroom. This constant stands off between her and the teachers at daycare was annoying to her. Why didn’t they understand her like the other adults in her life did. Then one day another little girl that looked like her came into the class. Her name was Alejandra. Paola and Alejandra became quick friends as they realized that they could understand each other. One day as Paola became frustrated with one of the teachers in the classroom over a lack of understanding her, Alejandra’s mom came to pick her up. The sound of her voice, the language she spoke immediately soothed Paola in the moment. She ran to Rocio, Alejandra’s mom and clung to her pant leg. Paola had found relief. Rocio soothed

Paola until her mother arrived. Feeling grateful for her help in the moment, Paola's mom thanked Rocio for the comfort that she had brought to her daughter. These two Latina mothers would exchange stories of their daughters' experiences and come to be friends for life. Although Paola and her mother had found a friend at daycare, this feeling of disorientation would continue. Alejandra was not always at daycare, and neither was she. That meant that for a majority of time this constant reminder of difference between her and the other children at daycare would persist.

Little did Paola know, her introduction into daycare would serve as a preface for what was to come. These feeling of discomfort and dissociation would soon become a part of her everyday life. However, the disorientation would soon dissipate as her parents prepared her for the first day of kindergarten. As this date approached, her mother and father would help prepare her, knowing personally how these feelings of difference would soon intensify. Although as a child she couldn't recognize the tone of experimental wisdom in her parents' stories, she would later hear them share their experiences with difference and stand in awe of them as people. Taking their own experiences into account, the first step would be to teach her how to read in English. She can remember sitting on the wicker couches in the living room hearing her mother read to her in english. What she wouldn't remember however, is the fear her mother felt as she read to her hoping that Paola wouldn't "catch" an accent or the times her mother would rename the characters of the book after family back in Colombia and Venezuela to remind her of the family she had left behind. The work done by her parents to ease her into the next phase of her life was hard and grueling. Fielding questions of uncertainty as the date came closer, her parents did the best they could and prepared her for the next part.

This part would be difficult, they would have to fight between the desire for their daughter to fit in, and the fear of her losing the bits and pieces of the little Latina they had raised. She started the first day of full time Kindergarten and from that day on, she would slowly evolve into Paula. Her stories once expressed in Spanish would soon turn to English and her love for her culture would turn into shame and embarrassment. Although Paola would soon disappear altogether, on occasion glimpses of her would peak out of Paula, and Poe. But what was certain is that she would never get the chance stand alone as Paola.

Reflection

Paola was one of the more difficult identities to write poetry and narrative for. Although I had planned to write in chronological order from Paola to Poe (as I had been conditioned to do as a student for all these years), these works took a while to fully develop. As I reflect on the process it became clear that writing both poetry and narratives for Paola were difficult for a variety of reasons. The first being time: I had only truly been Paola for four or five years, before entering the education system and becoming Paula. Although my family still calls me Paola, I have also spent six years away from home getting both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Therefore, it became difficult for me to draw memory from this time. That being said I turned to poetry and narrative to help me further investigate what I was feeling in connection to Paola, as well as how these experiences interacted with the theories of identity, code-switching, and passing.

I started this process by writing poetry. Recognizing the compressive functions of poetry as described by Furman (2006), my hopes were to invite my reader to access a

snapshot understanding of who Paola was. In doing so, I picked words that helped me relay the emotions of joy, discomfort, and grief I felt surrounding my identity as Paola. In writing this poetry I had to continue to push myself to search for a kind of vulnerability even I wasn't fully comfortable with (Pelias, 1999). The struggle in this was not sharing the joy I had felt as Paola but more so the emotions of discomfort and grief I felt as I reflected back on this identity. Writing this poem from a vulnerable place meant I had to come to the realization that I had lost a part of who I was in the process of becoming who I am today. This was extremely difficult. Wanting to understand these emotions of grief, I turned to narrative. Interestingly, it was during this process that I recognized the ease at which I could write in the third person. Acting as an outsider, writing these sometimes-painful experiences became more accessible to me.

Throughout this thesis, narrative would prove to be the sense making tool that allowed me to decode the emotions uncovered through poetry. It was in my narratives that I was able to discover that this feeling of loss and grief I experienced as I wrote poetry on Paola was in fact correlated to the saliency of identity (Tajfel, 1972). Recognizing that identities are salient, meaning that they are ever evolving, the grief I was experiencing was the saliency in the transition from Paola and Paula. Although I felt like I had lost Paola, I was experiencing the pain and beauty in an understanding that our identities are socially constructed. This meant that as I moved through the world, I would become a product of the systems, people, and experiences I was having. In fact, this is how I became Paola in the first place. As mentioned in my literature review, the most crucial time for the development of identity begins in the early years of life (Erikson, 1993; Streek-Fischer, 2015). As stated by Streek-Fischer (2015) it is during this time that

children and teens are more receptive to different cultures, values, and behaviors. That being said, the stories that my parents had told me about my name at such a young age, acted as the basis for how I came to understand who I was. Butler (1991) and Stone (1988) would recognize this story telling as the social construction or blue prints of my identity as Paola. In relation to this, recognizing that our identities are socially constructed meant that I had also learned this identity through the performance of others. Because I spent a majority of my days with my mother, speaking Spanish, and watching her interact in the world and perform the self-presentation of Latina, I too would take on this role (Goffman, 1959). However, the way she performed the identity of Latina was still different than I due to the difference in our social construction. Unlike my mother who had a back stage and a front stage, my stages were blurred. Being that I only interacted with a world outside of my Latinx home once and a while, I only truly knew the identity of Paola. Reflecting back on this time as an adult I now recognize how pure this identity was. I was simply Paola. Although we both had audiences, my audience in this case, almost entirely Latinx reinforced these identities and for five years this performance was rarely ever checked if not praised by those I was around. Ultimately my parents did everything they could during this time to help protect my identity as Paola, because perhaps they knew what was coming? The end of both my poetry and my narratives reflect this understanding as you see my parents begin to prepare me for the battle I would face with the need to assimilate.

CHAPTER FIVE: PAULA

Poetry**Paula**

Sara, Mark, James
 She waits
 Rebecca, Emily, Matt
 Still she waits
 Paula
 Surely, her turn would come around
 Paula
 Still not recognizing the sound
 PAULA
 Her teacher calls out

She's five but she makes the connection
 Raises her hand and rejects her oppression
 MY NAME IS PAOLA not Paula

Hailey, Jessica, Sean
 She waits
 Tyler, Madisen, McKenzie
 Still she waits
 Here it comes
 Her body fills with anxiety
 PAOLA
 She blurts out before they mess up her name
 'Thank you' Paula her teacher exclaims

She's twelve and still rejects her oppression
 Correcting her teacher for the miscommunication
 MY NAME IS PAOLA not Paula

Ryan, Austin, Lauren
 She waits
 Katie, Elizabeth, Alex
 Still she waits
 A pause
 Her teacher begins
 'I'm not sure how to pronounce this'
 It's Paula she calls out

She's sixteen and doesn't recognize she's accepted her oppression
 Her identity has become a new-found obsession

She comes home from school and sits at the kitchen table
 Paola

She waits
Paola
Still she waits
Paola, her mother yells

MY NAME IS NOT PAOLA, its Paula

Picture This

She's sixteen now. She's a sophomore in high school and at this point has fully become Paula. It's the morning of her sophomore year dance pictures. She hated today. Today would be the day she would have to confront the difference between her and her friends. They would stand shoulder to shoulder to take team pictures, where it would become obvious that she didn't look like the majority of them. So, on this day she would wake up early. She would take a long shower in attempt to scrub the brown off her skin and she would straighten her awkwardly wavy hair.



The rest of the morning would be spent painting makeup onto her face. You see, every flaw made her one step further from white. White was perfect. She needed to be perfect.

There was no margin for error on days like today. She didn't have the blonde hair or the blue eyes to fall back on, which meant that her uniform needed to be pristine, her hair needed to be stick straight, and her smile fake as fuck. The worst part of today however occupied the smallest space on the bottom of her uniform. The permanent stamp of difference, her real name. The constant reminder that she was never going to fully be like the rest of the girls on that team. I wish I could say that this day was different for

Paula than the rest, but in reality, this day was just one she hated a little more than the rest.

The young women you see in this picture no longer cringed at the sound of Paula but embraces it. In fact, year after year she grew more comfortable with this name it. All of the sudden it didn't bother her as much that people couldn't pronounce her name correctly, because Paula was a normal name to have. It wasn't a Jessica or a Sara, but it was close, Paula sure as hell got her one step away from Paola and that's all she cared about. This name, Paula, which had been chosen for her at the age of five by her first teacher would become an identity she obsessed over for the next thirteen years of her life. Paula did everything she could to fit in with her white peers. She joined extracurricular activities, made sure she dressed like all of the white girls, and did her absolute best to make sure no one knew that she was different. This entailed a lot of work on her end, but she didn't mind as long as she could be like everyone else. Unfortunately, this meant that in the process she would also be rejecting all of the work her parents had done to teach her about her culture, including her native language. The worst part was that she really didn't care. This time of her life was selfish and uncomfortable, and she would do whatever it took to fit in. It didn't matter to her who she had to hurt in order for her to keep the status of popularity that she had earned. Her biggest enemy was difference and she would work tirelessly to make sure it never won.

However, she came from strong willed parents who would often times remind her that it was important to remember where she came from. So, when it came time to choose her electives for school...she had no choice, she had to take Spanish. She absolutely hated that her parents would force her into this. She wanted so badly to just rid herself of

anything that would connect her to the one thing that made her different from her peers. She fought hard but didn't win. On the first day of Spanish class she dragged her feet all the way to her seat. The first assignment was to choose a "Spanish Name", this would be the name used to address you for the remainder of the semester. Instantly she was filled with panic. She had worked so hard at staying Paula and now her Spanish teacher wanted her to choose a "Spanish Name". What were the odds. Before she could think of what to do her teacher looked down at her roster and recognized the name. She called out "Paola", Paula's heart sank. She had said her name correctly, how...this lady was white? As she sat there waiting for the next words to come out of the teachers mouth, she could feel her heart pounding. Ms. Play speaks up, "Looks like we already have someone with a Spanish". Paula's worst nightmare. She was instantly furious. Not Ms. Play thought, she furious with parents. Why would they name her this? They had been in the U.S. for so long before she was born. Why couldn't she have been a Hannah or an Elizabeth. Paula smiled back at the teacher and corrected her. She flashed back to the story her father would tell her about the day he had chosen her name, her eyes rolled. "No actually its Paula". Confused her teacher looked at the roster again. She looked confused but shrug it off. She would dread this 3rd period Spanish for the rest of the year.

Every time she entered the classroom it was like she was entering the ring with Paola. Often times she would write down all of the incorrect definitions of vocabulary that Ms. Play had just taught the class. Paola hated this. She hated that she had to stay quiet as she watched her teacher misinform the class, but Paula always made sure she didn't speak up. Paula would study the incorrect definitions regardless of how angry it made Paola. She would go as far as to put them down of tests so that she wouldn't have

to spend time debating with Ms. Play in front of the class. She also knew that using the correct definitions of the definitions on the test would out her to the class. Paula kept a close eye on Paola in 3rd period. She monitored how well she did on quizzes, enough to pass, but not well enough to alarm her friends. She would go back through her exams three or four times to ensure she wasn't the first to turn it in. Most importantly, she made sure to pick a Spanish name and stick to it. For 3rd period only she was Lupita. As she reflects back as Poe, she recognizes the irony in it all. She hated code-switching, didn't feel like she could explain or share these experiences with any of her peers but here they were getting a little taste of what it was like to be someone at 10:00am and be someone different by 10:01am. She lived her life like this for the remainder of her high school career, silencing Paola as much as she could, she would only allow her to come out behind the closed doors of her home when necessary. She had a few slip ups here and there but would work fight Paola away. In doing so she would continue hurting those around her, especially those who knew that Paola was somewhere inside of Paula.

Her parents were most often the victims of the work done by Paula. She wanted them to know that the discomfort that she felt was their fault. If they had just given her a different name or gave her more access to the things that could make her white, she would be happier. What was worse were the comments she made outside of their presence. She would reject her Colombian and Venezuelan heritage, lie about their stories of immigration, and apologize for who they were to others. She would never fully understand the damage this would do. All they wanted for her was to be proud of the incredible life they had provided for her, the work they had put in to give her the world, and all she wanted to do was sweep it under the rug. Paula's parents weren't the only

ones who were hurt by this destructive path to whiteness, she also hurt many of her peers of color in this process.

It was homecoming freshman year of high school: this would be Paula's first big dance. Like her dance pictures, this too had to be perfect. She had picked out the perfect dress, Jessica McClintock, more than her parents could afford, but she convinced her father it was necessary. He agreed to by her the dress. The next step was to find the perfect date. She had a person in mind and crossed her fingers. Two weeks before homecoming she was still waiting. She got a text from a boy at school asking her. The only problem was, he knew about Paola. In fact, he was asking Paola, not Paula. His name was Carlos. She couldn't believe he had asked her, she rarely spoke to him at school and made it a point to avoid her peers of color. There was no way that she would be able to go to homecoming with him and not have people talk. They would lump her with the rest of the students of color, and she knew from hearing conversations amongst her white peers that this was not the place she wanted to be lumped in to. She felt terrible. Paola pushed on Paula. She wanted to go with him, Carlos was a nice guy and they had known each other since they were in middle school. Paula picked up the phone and texted back. "Sorry Carlos but I already have a date," she lied. "I am going with Max". Carlos responded so politely. Something along the lines of, "I'm sorry, I had no idea someone asked you already." Well, that's because no one had.

The next day she got to school and saw Carlos from across the cafeteria. She smiled softly as to give him a nod of acknowledgment. Five minutes later, Max asked her to homecoming. Carlos watched as the entire thing unfolded, and in that moment, he knew I had lied to him. The guilt destroyed Paola, but Paula reminded her that this was

what was best. She couldn't go with Carlos, Paula reminded Paola. It wasn't an option. The cost did not outweigh the reward. This moment, this pain, this disregard for others was who Paula was. She craved the popularity associated with her ability to act white, she never wanted to let this go.

Reflection

Both the poetry and the narrative for Paula came to me much quicker than the others did. As I reflect back on why this might be the case, I believe that it stems again from the framework of time. I spent a majority of my life as Paula, and she really became who I was. It wasn't until I entered the education system that I started to notice the difference between my friends and I. Growing up in Seattle, Washington I had the privilege of seeing diversity around me pretty often. However, due to the school district I was a part of, that diversity quickly dissipated. I went to school at a predominately white elementary, middle, and high school where I was one of very few students of color. I was so ashamed of who I was that I desperately wanted to rid myself of any markers of difference. I could not get rid of my skin, or my dark features but I recognized that if I didn't correct the way people mispronounced my name, that I could live as Paula – a step closer to white version of myself. I wanted this work to reflect the evolution of how I became Paula. I wanted it to be clear that this was not something I asked for but was pushed into. This identity of Paula was easier for everyone else around me. So, one day, it did become something I wanted. It made me less of a hassle and it also helped me blend in. Throughout this poetry and narrative, you can watch this unfold as I paint a picture of myself working hard to assimilate into a hegemonic culture that would work harder to reject me.

I now recognize after writing this poetry that what I was experiencing was in fact different aspects of co-cultural theory. I had not only accommodated others through the process of changing my name to Paula, but in doing so, I had also begun altering the way I communicated to match that of my white peers (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Orbe & Spellers, 2005). In this case, my preferred outcome was to assimilate. To do so, I needed to accept the mispronunciation of my name so that it would accommodate the dominant group's ability to physically say it. This change of name to assimilate into the dominant group would evolve into changing the way I dressed, hyper focusing on the way my English sounded, and erasing any markers of my Latinidad. In trying to achieve this goal, I used a nonassertive communication approach, as described by Orbe (1998b). Specifically, as I settled into my identity as Paula, I placed the needs of the dominant group above my own. This meant not correcting others when they mispronounced my name for fear that this would cause conflict or discomfort on their end. Using this nonassertive approach to communication was also fueled by my personal analysis of cost and rewards (Gates, 2003).

Perceived costs and rewards describe the process marginalized people go through when analyzing what they may gain or lose when engaging in interactions with the dominant (Matsunaga, 2008). As someone who often had the privilege of passing as a white individual, I saw and benefited from the rewards of walking the world as pseduowhite². That being said I also witnessed the racist commentary made by my white peers regarding other students of color. Experiencing both sides of this caused me to analyze every social interaction. Should I say something about their racist comments, I

² When I say 'pseduowhite' I am referencing my ability to pass as a white individual.

thought? If I do will they remember that I am brown? Will they stop being friends with me? This was a constant cycle of thought for thirteen years. Unfortunately, I rarely chose to step in, sometimes for fear of my physical safety and others for fear of losing social capital. I wasn't proud of this. I'm not proud of this. Although difficult to write, I wanted my audience to be able to cringe as they read the narrative of me refusing Carlos to homecoming. I wanted this because this was actually an outcome of needing to assimilate. Not only painful for the person who gets in the way of the assimilator but, also for the one who assimilates.

This tension between Paola and Paula as described above, would manifest in a life time of code-switching (Boulton, 2016; Gumperz, 1982; Reyes, 2004). I spent a majority of the day as Paula and then came home and bounced back between Paula and Paola. Reflecting on this I recognize that my home, unlike school, was a space where I was more comfortable engaging in both identities. It didn't matter to me that my parents saw me as Paula, as long as my peers never saw me as Paola. At the time I wanted to be Paula permanently, I knew that home was a place where Paola needed to be performed as well. So, when my parents would pick me up from school, it was time for me to introduce Paola back on stage (Goffman, 1959). This constant code-switching between Paola to Paula would become a new normal for me as I grew into a teenager. As I entered high school however, Paula was the only person I wanted to be.

I hated the fact that I had to go home and be someone who I honestly felt I wasn't anymore. My nonassertive approach turned assertive, but not as Orbe (1998b) would have described it. In contrast to being assertive with the dominant group, I became assertive towards my parents. The new preferred outcome was complete and total

assimilation in to the dominant group. Simply put, I wanted to be white. I pushed back hard on my parents, asking them to call me Paula and not to correct other people when they would mispronounce my name. I was no longer just avoiding conversations at school around my identity but was out right lying to people who would assume I was Latina. Most embarrassingly, I did my best to avoid peers at school that were Latinx, for fear that my white peers would place me in the same category. Anything I could do to pretend that I wasn't the daughter of immigrants was done. I wanted so badly to fully be just Paula, your run of the mill, American girl next door.

As I reflect back on this as Poe, I feel a sense of anger, shame, and guilt. These emotions stem from grieving the partial loss of Paola's connection to her culture and heritage, as well as the pain I caused others I care about as Paula. I should state, that although this reflection caused me to confront these emotions, I now understand that this self-disciplining stems not from a personal space but largely from a cultural expectation of me to fit in to the dominant group. That being said, I now recognize that my actions at the time were driven by the immense pressure I felt to fit in. This pressure informed by hegemonic modes of being, although not intended to hurt those around me, have created a long-lasting impact on the way I and others now navigate the world (Trujillo, 1991). This time in life specifically impacted the relationship I now have with my family. Ultimately, these thirteen years caused tension between my parents and I as we renegotiated who I was at home. Often times ending in arguments where I outwardly rejected my heritage, this tension would only increase as the tangible effects of accommodation and assimilation began to arise. Soon I would lose the ability to speak spanish, which would cause conflict between my parents and I. The more I pushed away from my parents, the

more they tried to pull me in. It wasn't until I reclaimed my heritage through Poe that we would mend these tensions.

CHAPTER SIX: POE

Poetry**Poe**

A girl who is easy to know

She's brown
But not too brown
She's white
But not too white

The perfect amount to keep things light

Poe is the kind of girl you bring home
Loud yet quiet
Ethnicity....
Seemingly unknown

What are you?
They ask

She pauses to a pick which mask

Paola peaks out—*Dile*, come on, tell them
Paula calls out--Don't you dare
To which Poe responds kindly--Why do you even care?

I'm human and that's what should matter
Explaining this causing her soul to scatter

Poe is the perfect in-between
She has mastered the art to adapt
Proud to be Latina, yes!
But that could easily be capped

She reminds herself that to act white ensures her safety
A security so sweet

So why does Poe feel like the ultimate defeat?

It's because she stands on the border of two worlds

Unsure of which to cross

This identity, this girl, she feels like she is lost

What are you?

I am Latina!

But don't worry, I was born here.

I am the daughter of immigrants!

But don't worry, they're documented.

I am Colombian!

But don't worry, my family sells roofs not drugs.

I am Venezuelan!

But don't worry, I like the U.S.

I am a graduate student!

But don't worry, I didn't steal your scholarships.

I am brilliant!

But don't worry, I won't overshadow you...I've been trained not to.

I am beautiful!

But don't worry, I know not by your standards.

I am Paola!

But don't worry, you can just call me Poe.

Picture This

I'm 24 years old now and have been Poe for the past six years. I am currently in graduate school studying communication and working as a graduate assistant resident director for residence halls here at Boise State university. I have spent the last six years fully immersed in higher education. During this time, I have been actively involved in housing and residence life, as well as my academics. Developing myself as a young professional, I have worked to combine all of the good of Paola, while reconciling the pain of Paula.



Poe is the living tension between these two women. Unlike the tension that I had lived when I was Paula, trying to silence Paola, Poe allows room for both of these women to openly interact with one another. I embrace and perform Latina, but still hold characteristics of Paula from my formative years. This version of myself seeks understanding of systems of oppression, pushes back on racism, and does her best to live through a framework of social justice. That being said, I have also struggled immensely with unlearning the thirteen years of assimilation and accommodation from my time as Paula. Coming to college, I was excited at the opportunity to be in an environment where no one knew Paula. I wanted the chance to continue to unlearn and become someone I could be proud of, so I became Poe.

The name Poe is a family nickname. This name originally stems from the name Pao which is a common nickname for people with the name Paola in South America. I loved this nickname because it combined both of my worlds. The one where I was Latina and the other where white people could say my name. I instantly connected to this name, and the potential that this identity held. It was short, powerful, and unique. All of the characteristics of who I was and who I wanted to be. When I arrived at Boise in 2013 for my first semester of college, I knew this was the perfect time to test out this new identity. I was hesitant at first. I found myself reverting to what was comfortable, introducing myself as Paula the first few times I met people. It was hard to let go of the person I had been for the past 13 years, even though I resented her for the pain that she had caused herself and others. After a few weeks, I felt comfortable in my new environment and began to introduce myself as Poe to others. Most of my friends caught on quickly and began to address me as Poe. Although I had solidified this new name with my peers, it wasn't until I started writing Poe on assignments and on exams that this identity felt real. Hearing the name Poe being called out as my professor's roll called attendance somehow solidified my new identity. All of a sudden, I was no longer Paula, I was fully Poe.

Who was she? What was important to her? What was did she like? In the next few years of my undergraduate degree I would come to figure this out. Getting the chance to explore in an environment where no one knew Paola, or Paula I was able to test out what Poe could be. After four years of investigating who Poe was, I had finally perfected her. She was Latina, and she was white. She would become incredible at code-switching. At the time I had no idea that this was the case. I thought I had finally gotten rid of the shame I felt associated to being Latina and being the daughter of immigrants. I openly

spoke about who I was and praised my parents for the incredible sacrifice they had made so that I could live the life that I did. But deep down, I still felt anxiety related to being different. I would tread lightly in new environment. trying to decipher how much Paola I was allowed to share. The cost and reward analysis were never ending. But for some reason this somehow felt different than before. I didn't understand why all of the sudden the code-switching didn't feel like a burden. It just became a part of who Poe was. I wanted to make sure everyone around me was comfortable, but I was also searching for a scenario where I could be who I wanted to be as well. This never-ending tension between wanting to make both the Latinx communities and the White communities I was a part of comfortable would finally come to a head in my last year of graduate school. Although I always knew that Paola and Paula were working together to make me who I was, it wasn't until recently that I would be become aware of what this meant for me as a person.

I spent my first year of graduate school as a teaching assistant giving courses on the basics of communication but had received an offer over the summer for a graduate position in housing and residence life. This new position offered housing and full tuition waivers, so I jumped at the chance to change assistantships. I had no idea how much of an impact that this change in assistantships would have on my life. As I sat waiting for Alec to come into the office, I looked around their space. Every wall was covered in who they were. Pictures of them with students they had worked in on the past, their pride flag, drag culture, and so much more. There was a sense of comfort and discomfort as I sat in this space. Each artifact on the wall told me I was safe in this space. I had permission to be Paola here. At the same time, this was my first official meeting with my new boss, so Paula reminded Poe that she needed to remain professional. In that moment something

clicked. Why was Paula yelling at her to stay professional. Could Paola not be? I waited, silently contemplating this. Alec walked into the space, sat down, and jumped into business. I grabbed pen and paper and began jotting down notes. Half way through our meeting, Alec turned to her computer and clicked to play Selena. Paola immediately lit up. Selena Quintenilla was her childhood favorite. She had almost all of her songs memorized. Her eyes shot across the office, recognizing that the door was open. Her heart began to pound. This was not the space to be listening to Selena, Paula thought. There were white people just outside the door. But Paola loved that her new boss was playing this music. “Is this what it was like to have a supervisor of color?” she thought. Recognizing that this was her first supervisor of color at the age of 24, she felt strange. The tension grew, and Paula spoke. She told Alec she couldn’t believe that he was playing this music in the office. Alec laughed, confused at her comment. “Why not?” he asked Paula. This question snapped her back to Poe.

“Why not?” would become the theme of the next six months of my life. Why couldn’t Selena be played in the office? Why was this any different than her past supervisors playing country music? Why couldn’t Paola be professional? Why was her white identity more professional than her brown identity? At the time of this conversation I was in the midst of developing my graduate culminating project. My plan was to develop a collection of workshops on inclusive excellence. I had spent the summer preparing this and was getting ready to start diving into my literature review. For the next few weeks I would stare at a blank page. All of the sudden this thesis didn’t make sense to me. How was I going to go into spaces to discuss the importance of inclusive excellence when I myself had not done the personal work yet? Did I think that inclusive

excellence was important? Yes, it was important to be inclusive and celebrate diversity. The irony of it all was that I preached this but had spent a majority of my life avoiding what made me different, erasing my Latina experience, and excluding others who did want to celebrate diversity. In that moment I knew that I could not do this project. I needed to work on myself before I could develop any kind of workshop that would teach others the importance of diversity and inclusion.

So, for the next few months I re-imagined a new thesis. This thesis would examine my experiences with code-switching and passing. As I immersed myself in literature on identity, co-cultural theory, code-switching, and passing, I gained an awareness that changed the way I navigate the world. I now had words to explain my actions and an understanding of the motivations for my experiences. This also meant recognizing that renaming myself did not magically give me the agency I was searching for; my accommodation for myself was intertwined with my accommodation for Latinx communities beyond my own. But I was ready to interrogate this. This did not, however, prevent the fight against the thirteen years of Paula still left inside me.

A few weeks ago, I entered a dialogue in class about the importance of choice for marginalized identities who are often expected to educate others on their lived experiences. I expressed to my classmates that it was not the responsibility of the oppressed to hold the hand of their oppressors through their own oppression. This struck a chord with one of my classmates. She responded that this statement made her uncomfortable and that, in general, my comments made her not want to speak out as a white woman. She later pressed on, telling me that I had made her feel like the experiences of white women weren't valid. In the moment, I felt the tension between

Paula and Paola. Paula was first to speak. She immediately apologized to her classmate for making her feel like her thoughts or opinions were invalid. She felt guilty and embarrassed that she had caused another person to feel this way. After apologizing, Paula walked away from the conversation feeling ashamed that she had made someone upset. But soon Poe stepped in to remind her why she had done this. Poe reminded me that this was how systems of oppression worked. I was supposed to feel bad because I had upset a white woman. I knew that the cost of not apologizing would lose me my hard-earned social capital. I later regretted not telling this woman that the two hours of discomfort a week that I had caused her was what it felt like as I navigated the world every day. But I did have peace of mind knowing that in the end, this thesis had provided me with the agency I had been looking for all along.

Reflection

The last two poems and narrative were by far the most difficult to write. However, they were difficult for reasons I had not yet encountered in my previous work. These were difficult, because I am currently Poe. As it turns out it is much easier to reflect and create an understanding based on the experiences of the past, than it is to engage in current self-reflection to develop poetry about who you are today. That being said, I uncovered a lot more about myself in these last two pieces than I had originally anticipated.

After writing draft after draft, the final version of the poem Poe came to life. I closed my eyes in the parking lot of Hyde Perk and just let my fingers hit the keyboard. I thought maybe this poem would be a piece dedicated to the agency that the identity of Poe had brought me. I would use words like “choice” and “unique” and phrases like “she

is finally her own.” Instead I found myself yet again torn between the dichotomy of my Latina self-Paola, and my white self-Paula. This came as shock to me. A poem about Poe, should be one about finally getting the chance to name myself and the agency that this had given me to walk the world as my own person. What I had not realized until the day I wrote this poem was that the sense of agency I had clung to as Poe for the past six years was not as agentic as I had first assumed. Word after word, this poem wrote itself in my phone. Tears hit my cheeks as I sat in the parking lot. Poe was still taking a nonassertive accommodation approach to interacting with others (Orbe, 1998a).

I would use this reflection to uncover what this new understanding meant as I approached writing more in-depth narratives. Unlike assimilating into the dominant group like Paula craved, Poe craved a sense of calm. So, at the age of 18, I arrived at Boise State University thrilled at the chance to start fresh in a city in which I knew no one. I introduced myself as Paola for the first few months of college, not sure how to integrate my two polarized identities. After listening to people mispronounce Paola for a while, I fell back into being Paula. But the continued discomfort made it clear that this was the perfect time to start introducing myself as someone new. So, I became Poe. Poe, or Pao, is short for Paola but could also help me establish the new identity I wanted.

This new identity gave me the chance to start from scratch. This version of me was different. This time I was proud of where I came from. I could embrace my Latinidad and find others at school that identified as Latinx. I could make new friends and love college. As I reflect back, I now realize that I was looking to leave my identity as Paula behind, and reintroducing Paola to the stage was important, too. What I didn't consider in that moment, however, was the difficulty in trying to leave Paula behind so swiftly. As I

continued through four years of undergraduate study, I worked to make more of Paola come out than Paula. I rejected my desire to pass as white and worked hard to perform being Latina. I worked towards a new preferred outcome, one that clearly separated these two ways of being. Although I did not want to wholly separate myself from the dominant group, I began to openly reject dominant hegemonic modes of being. I spoke Spanish in the hallways, updated my parents about my experiences at school, and allowed myself to wear red again. I shared cultural traditions with new friends. Paula pushed back hard sometimes. There were many moments of discomfort as I reevaluated the cost and rewards of my interactions with others as Poe. I recognized that too much of Paola and not enough Paula got me into uncomfortable positions, so I attempted to find more balance. This is apparent in the narratives and the last two poems as I interrogate these tensions that I have not until now fully recognized in Poe.

I went back my literature, trying to understand how I could have failed to fully recognize this tension before. I turned to Orbe (1998a) who describes my experience as nonassertive communication used to reach a preferred goal of accommodation. What I had not recognized the first time was that as Poe, my ability to code switch between Paola and Paula had become so smooth that I did not even know I was still accommodating. Poe was no longer socially constructed as Paola or Paula but was a blended version of both my understanding of what it means to be Latina and what it means to be white into a new identity altogether. As I navigated through the next few years of both my undergraduate and my graduate degree, I learned that the cost of this identity was worth the reward. Poe allowed me to move in the world as a chameleon. Unlike the abrupt code-switching from the past, Poe was smooth and comfortable in her

switches. This, in turn, disguised her as separate from both Paola and Paula. Although deep down inside I knew this about Poe, it was poetry that allowed me to express this in a new way.

It became apparent that there was still tension in Poe, too. I had not escaped it as I had been telling myself. I recognized that I had never stopped accommodating. I was accommodating not just for white communities this time but for the Latinx communities as well. My agency felt superficial. I recognized the beautiful opportunity that autoethnography presented me. Although I now find myself even more confused about what I prefer people to call me, I have found clarity in embracing that confusion. I have the ability to interrogate Poe just like I continue to interrogate Paula and Paola.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Why does any of this matter? This is a question that I have been afraid to face for the past year. I have avoided facing it because the answer seems to defy adequate explanation. Nonetheless, I will try. This autoethnographic examination of my experiences as a child of immigrants in the U.S. seeking to reclaim my identity in the present moment matters because for the first time in the last twenty years of my education, I am finally a part of the story. My voice as a person of color, the daughter of immigrants, and as a human who engages in everyday life in ways that are not always recognized or valued by the dominant systems that organize it can now be heard. This matters because I am not the only one who experiences the world in ways that do not resonate with white privileged positions. And like me, many others are also looking for answers and community. I am one of millions of children of immigrants in the U.S. who have been forced to live in a way that makes others comfortable (despite my own discomfort), who has felt shame about their identity because it is “different,” and who has been conditioned to understand silence as an appropriate response to injustice. This matters because we need to listen to these voices and recognize these experiences that can help us change the dominant discourses about what it means to be a child of immigrants, a person of color, and/or a marginalized body. Finally, this matters because autoethnography makes it possible to change these discourses by making experiences like mine and voices like mine accessible to non-academics while simultaneously inviting academics to learn from these otherwise overlooked understandings in scholarship.

Writing an autoethnography has been one of the most difficult yet rewarding processes I have engaged in my life. Although I knew this method required coming to understand the world around me through difficult self-introspection, nothing quite prepared me for the kind of vulnerability that would be associated with such critical self-reflection. This was hard and at times even painful. Writing about my experiences as Paula were particularly difficult. I was forced to confront the pain that I had caused others and the pain I had internalized for thirteen years. This was something I did not expect to uncover when I started writing. Before this thesis, I was unaware of the depth of emotions I had been harboring. Autoethnography helped me maneuver through this pain, confusion, and anger (Holman, Adams, Ellis, 2013) while inviting others to (re)consider the pain of this process in relation to others who may find themselves in similar situations. It helped me grieve the loss of Paola while celebrating the emergence as Poe. It gave me the confidence to break my silence and reclaim my voice through narrative and poetry. Most importantly, it allowed me to introduce my experiences into an academic space that has not appropriately represented the way I have experienced the world. In these ways, autoethnography also provided me with the opportunity to extend theory to better account for voices like mine.

Specifically, the use of re-photography built upon previous research exploring memory and rhetoric to invite narrative as a way to further connect the past and the present. Using photographs to connect memories of myself during this time allowed me also to investigate how these past versions of myself affect my current identity provided a new way to consider both memory and narrative. I hope to invite future narrative work to not only help increase accessibility by catering to visual learners, but to also encourage

auto ethnographers to dig deeper into the relationship between past narrative and future narrative. I believe that using autoethnography to examine identity can help scholars uncover aspects of identity that may not have otherwise been available to them through other tools of memory recall. Overall autoethnography can help explorations of identity produce complex understandings of individual experiences that incorporate the physical and emotional consequences of confronting those complexities. Specifically, the work I did in regard to poetry allowed me to contribute in a descriptive way. Using verse-fragments in my poems allowed for me to further an understating of these experiences in ways that traditional research might not have. This is due to the connection between emotion and research that autoethnography lends itself to. For me, interrogating Paola, Paula, *and* Poe provided an entirely new understanding of both myself and identity in relation to the specific, and generalizable, experiences of being a woman of color, a child of immigrants in the U.S., and a person with a complicated sense of agency.

In investigating how Paola, Paula, and Poe fit into the literature I uncovered moments of truth as well as moments where the literature fell short of my experiences. As I explored the communicative styles of being Paola, Paula, and Poe I found that although the literature addresses them in relation to how we communicate with the dominant group, they can also be examined in relation to marginalized communities as well (Orbe, 1998b). This became notably apparent as I examined my experiences as Paula. Although I clearly used nonassertive communicative approaches towards the dominant group during this time, I used assertive communicative techniques to communicate with my family. In attempt to avoid conflict with the people I was trying to fit with, I was simultaneously using assertive communication to pull away from my Latina identity.

These forms of communicative strategy, thus, have a relationship with one another that should be more central to examinations of accommodation, passing, and communication style. Future research should consider this relationship as it works to better address the tenets of co-cultural theory.

Orbe (1998a) suggests that the preferred goal of separation focuses on the strengthening of bonds between marginalized people. This preferred outcome establishes the presence of the marginalized group as separate and independent from dominant groups. However, in my experience, this preferred goal worked in a different way. In achieving assimilation, I was forced to separate myself not from the dominant group but from my marginalized community. This suggests a relationship between the preferred goals of marginalized folx. When considering future research in this arena, scholars should work to embrace the relationship that each of these preferred goals has with one another rather than generalize about all of them. Similarly, research focusing on code-switching and passing should take a closer look at the ways in which marginalized communities' individual voices engage in such tools to inform their identity/s. I found that an emphasis on how people code-switch and pass was present in existing literature, but a lack of focus on the ways in which these tools require labor that impacts those who use such tools in consequential ways. Focusing on how code-switching and passing impacts marginalized voices in particular could further invite us to change the discourse/s about assimilation and accommodation in relation to identity formation in important ways. I believe there is more work to be done to both theorize how marginalized identity/s are formed as well as the consequences of understanding this process as more complicated than simply "being".

Engaging in this autoethnography has taught me an incredible amount not only about my own identity past and present, but also about the ways in which systems of oppression are intertwined with communication. The specific ways in which oppression affects the children of immigrants like me is particularly impactful. Recognizing that I was not just a “bad” Latina daughter because I rejected Paola helped me to recognize the power of societal pressures that pushed me to want to be Paula in the first place is significant. The journey of coming to understand this was difficult, there were many moments where I had to come to terms with new understandings of my identities, and how the larger society had impacted me. Although this was difficult, these moments were not all negative. There were many beautiful moments where reflecting on my relationship with these cultural phenomenon’s proved to be useful in regaining my agency, in my learning, and in the overall academic understanding of codeswitching and passing.

I hope that this self-reflection can help others who are living similar experiences to realize their own complicated relationship/s between identity and larger cultural forces of influence. I have also learned that agency can be complicated in its understanding as both a state of influence and a self-regulated feeling of choice. People continue to ask me, “what should I call you?” I have an answer now: “Just call me Poe.” I want to be called Poe because this autoethnography has provided me the agency to make this choice thoughtfully and with the hope that others can reclaim a similar agency for themselves. To be comfortable with who we are now, no matter who we have been in the past, provides unfettered potential for becoming an ever-growing future self. In the spirit of that ever-growing self, I feel compelled to end this thesis by expressing my gratitude. Thank you to auto ethnography for re-introducing me to my agency. Thank you for

allowing me to come to terms with my past selves and to look forward to whatever my future self might help me to know, see, and do with brighter eyes.

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