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"WE ARE STILL HISPANIC": OKLAHOMA LATINAS AND THE MEANINGS OF (UN)EXPECTED COLLEGE SUCCESS

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By
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"WE ARE STILL HISPANIC": OKLAHOMA LATINAS AND THE MEANINGS OF (UN)EXPECTED COLLEGE SUCCESS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated…

to my parents, Keith and Tabatha, who have supported me since the beginning of my studies;

to my sister, Katie, who is an incredible source of inspiration;

to my aunt and uncle, Cindy and Jim, for providing me with my first experience with graduate school;

finally, this thesis is dedicated to all those who believe in the richness of learning and the power of equality and citizenship.

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Introduction

American education – from elementary school to college – has significant inequalities in academic achievement, both historically and today. It has been sixty years since *Brown V. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court case which desegregated public schools and institutions in the United States and paved the way for the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Nevertheless, inequalities in high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation among ethnic groups continue to be pervasive. American scholars and the public have seen this as a "problem" for which causes must be found, and as a result have disregarded the solutions created by ethnic minority students who *do* succeed. By studying inequality in education from the perspective of success, rather than failure, this thesis provides Latina minority students' own perspectives and strategies for their academic success at the University of Oklahoma.

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The night of the first rehearsal of the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU beauty pageant was a cold Sunday evening in late January. Although I did not yet know most of them, the eight young Hispanic women in front of me, wearing t-shirts, black leggings, and sneakers, holding glittering platform heels in their hands, would shape my research through their academic perseverance, commitment to their communities, and their stories. One young woman was the reigning pageant queen, one had been her first runner up and was now the pageant chair, and the other six young women hoped to be crowned the next Miss Hispanic OU.

The six contestants sat on the stage beside each other as competitors and mostly strangers. Teresa,[1] the pageant chair, said, "[a]lright girls, put on your heels and we are going to start learning the dances tonight." As they learned the dance choreography, the six young women who were this year's contestants were nervous and quiet. To break the ice, Selena, the reigning Miss Hispanic OU pageant queen, coached the women on how to do a "pageant pose." She said, "[t]his pose is supposed to make you look the most flattering because it gives the audience the narrowest view of your body."

The contestants laughed as Selena placed her hand on her hip and pranced across the stage and down the stairs between the desks in the musty lecture hall, never breaking the pose or dropping her "pageant smile." One contestant joked that they had a lot of practicing to do in their heels, saying she would probably break an ankle or fall on her face in front of everyone on the night of the pageant. This comment made the other women laugh, and their nervousness temporarily dissolved.

On this night and at many of the rehearsals over the next four months, the women frequently complained that the problem with wearing heels is that they did not want to appear taller than their dance partners. Even though they did not know each other well, the other contestants teased one woman about her boyfriend, who is close to her in height. This student quickly fired back that they all have the same problem with their dance partners and their boyfriends as she glanced at her boyfriend, who sat in the back of the lecture hall, grinning. Aside from the occasional jokes and nervous

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis to protect the identity of research participants.

giggling, awkward silences filled the evening, and the contestants asked few questions. Selena and Teresa also talked to the contestants about their talent performances, and gave the women many ideas about what they could do. Selena insisted it was important not just to pick something they are good at, but something that the judges, who are older, will "get."

As the first rehearsal came to a close, Teresa said they needed to talk about shoes. She told the students that there would not be enough money from the Latino Student Life program to provide them with matching shoes and she asked if they were willing to purchase matching shoes with their own money. The six contestants agree and one student suggested that they choose nude-colored shoes because they will "makes your legs look longer."

All of these women easily fit mainstream American and Hispanic definitions of beauty, with lengthy, lustrous hair, manicured nails, and dark eyes framed by long, thick eyelashes. The term "pageant queen" could easily describe any of these young women; and, despite their insistence that Miss Hispanic OU is "not about beauty," their pageant performances and behaviors did not depart from cultural norms of gender and beauty in pageants.

Although the six young contestants began the evening mostly as strangers, they would later become close friends, with each other as well as with Selena and Teresa. Over the next four months, all eight women would find confidants and activists in each other, relying heavily upon on their fellow contestants for support in their many plans and dreams to make positive changes in their communities and in achieving their academic goals.

Class and Performativity: Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis frames the Miss Hispanic OU beauty pageant and Hispanic[2] minority student experiences at the University of Oklahoma as sites of culture and class performance, drawing primarily from Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Douglas E. Foley's theory of class culture.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have long attempted to answer the question, "Why do some ethnic minority students fail?" These researchers have developed theories about the importance of culture in academic success or failure, and some of these theories became more relevant than others to the research analyzed in this thesis. But by focusing on the search for "causes" of academic failure, strategies used by students themselves, and what academic success means, have largely gone unnoticed. Therefore, although asking why and how students from certain ethnic groups fail academically is important, this thesis instead addresses the question, "Why do some ethnic minority students succeed?"

From the anthropology of education, I use Douglas E. Foley's research on class and race, and also John U. Ogbu's research on ethnic minority student performance, as theoretical bridges between students' day-to-day experiences and larger issues within education, as discussed in the following section. Drawing on Foley's study of racial politics through the lens of socioeconomic class, I frame these Latina students as political activists, addressing how the pageant functions as an

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[2] In this thesis, I use Hispanic and Latino/a interchangeably, as my research participants have.

agentive channel for students' political and social platforms. These two theories, discussed in the following section, are useful in studying education, despite their inherent contradictions. Ogbu's theoretical framework, in defining the minority student paradigms, portrays ethnic group experiences with education as static and lacking the potential for change and the subversiveness of these categories. Foley's theory of "class culture," while opening up the possibility for shifts within these paradigms, still presents a narrow definition of academic success and failure as an either/or product of socioeconomic class.

In examining the agency of these particular students, Judith Butler's theory of performativity supplements my analysis and allows me to reframe my understanding of academic success in a way that is much more open to the possibility of change. Although I began the research of this thesis using the definition of academic success provided by Ogbu and Foley, these two frameworks reify the narrow idea and categorization of academic success as that which is determined strictly by educational rubrics (grades, retention, and employment). However, as I began to study my research participants' behaviors and choices as performances, Butler's theory became a more useful tool for thinking about academic success and studying students' actions in terms of how they are influenced by and interact with their communities, families, and the university. In order to shift to a new definition of academic success, we have to understand that students are only successful if their communities and societies deem them to be, regardless of "arbitrary" qualifiers such as grade point averages and graduation.

Butler situates cultural identities as configurations which "can never be finally or fully achieved" (Butler 1993:125), suggesting that the tensions between academic and ethnic identities for these young women may never be fully resolved. Performativity is, according to Butler, renewable action without transparent beginning or end, enacted not only by the agent but also enabled by larger social and political contexts (Butler 1997:40). Through the lens of performativity, these students' agency is enacted in the pageant to the extent that linguistic and cultural constraints prescribe from the outset.

In the research I conducted on Hispanic academic success at OU, I also address why some Latina college students would choose to compete in a beauty pageant in the first place, given conflicting ideas about beauty pageants among the American public. I also explore why this pageant, Miss Hispanic OU, has become so meaningful to these students' success. Over the course of this research, Miss Hispanic OU became increasingly important to understanding how these students perform and negotiate behaviors of various class, racial, ethnic, educational, gender, political, and citizen identities.

Anthropological Research on Academic Success

Early studies of American education in anthropology began around the mid-twentieth century; however, John U. Ogbu's (1974) study of how ethnic minority students responded to social inequalities produced the first theory which did not claim that the fault of academic failure was a result of cultural deficiencies. Ogbu's research on black and Mexican American students in California led to his definition of "acting

white" as an acquired academic identity (1974). "Acting white," according to Ogbu, is a behavioral adaption to the social and racial/ethnic environments of the American education that minority students use to succeed (1974). Ogbu suggested that involuntary minorities are very much aware that they are subordinate to dominant groups, and they internalize sociocultural contexts of discrimination, making them "castelike." Involuntary minorities, or "castelike" minorities are, as explained by Ogbu, not allowed to compete for the most desirable positions in society on the basis of their individual training and abilities (academic success) because they are considered, as a group, to be inferior by dominant social groups. Ogbu included Hispanic peoples in his definition of involuntary minorities, although the experiences of Hispanic minority groups are quite different. According to Ogbu, involuntary minorities enact a self-fulfilling prophecy; these subordinate groups think they cannot do well in school (because their group has not been historically rewarded for achievement), so they do not. In other words, a minority student will recognize that the civic and employment opportunities offered to them post-graduation will not be the same as those offered to students from the dominant group. As a result, minority students rarely attempt to succeed, because they are aware that the inequalities do not end after high school or college graduation. Ogbu argues that this victimization by the victims themselves creates opportunities for oppositional cultural practices to emerge, as minorities interpret their groups to be "alternative cultures," choosing to fail rather than to succeed in order to avoid accusations of "acting white" (Ogbu 2008:8).

The creation of oppositional culture in academic performance is not merely an adaptation; it is a result of both societal and community contributions. People's

perceptions shape symbolic beliefs of collective identity and beliefs about the value and potential rewards of educational success. The racial environment of educational aspirations produces various cultural models for both voluntary and involuntary minorities, including varying degrees of trust and engagement in American "white" institutions (Ogbu 1992; Ogbu and Maute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu and Simons 1998) and the transformation of ethnic differences into cultural capital or the decision to dissolve such primary traits in hopes of gaining cultural capital in the dominant culture (Trueba 2002; Suárez-Orozco 1987; Foley 1990).

Recent research has built on Ogbu's work and refined his ideas about different aspects of social identities among ethnic groups. For example, although trust in institutions of education may be minimal, anthropologist Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (1987) has shown that Hispanic immigrant students and parents still consider education to be the single-most important avenue for class mobility, although the pathways to education are quite different. In *Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep in the Heart of Tejas* (1990), Foley additionally suggests a problem of class minority for some groups, rather than caste minority as Ogbu suggested. Foley argues that "Anglo" and "Mexicano" youth in South Texas exhibited academic success or failure on the basis of socioeconomic class, in addition to racial and ethnic identities.

According to this more recent research, academic success may have less to do with "castelike" or subordinate identities and more to do with structural conditions, such as socioeconomic class and racial politics (Jaffe-Walter and Lee 2011; Flores-Gonzales 1999), school culture and "college knowledge" (Koyama 2007; Vega and Martinez 2012), gender (Fordham 2008; Stambach 1999), and cultural capital (Trueba

2002; Hubbard 1999; Mehan et al., 2009). Moreover, both academic success and failure are variable and culturally constructed (McDermott and Raley 2011; Kohl 1994), and can be understood as a spectrum, rather than a binary in which a student may only succeed *or* fail.

Much research has been conducted regarding the social and cultural barriers and pathways *to* college, but ethnographies of education have generally skimmed over what actually happens *in* college, especially the strategies students use to continue to succeed after achieving college acceptance and enrollment. Moreover, the college experiences of ethnic minorities have seldom been pursued in academic research.

Existing studies of ethnic identity in high school and college have shed light on gender inequalities and the sense of loss or isolation from ethnic identity. Anthropologist Elizabeth Meador (2005) found that "Mexicana" girls were unable to acquire the label of "good student" from their teachers or peers because they were neither white, male, nor student-athletes, all of which were qualifiers for being a "good student" in the rural Southwestern United States. Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) ethnography analyzing the experiences of women at two Southern U.S. universities revealed similar gendered and racial processes: their research found that many women in college downplay their college and career aspirations and instead emphasize cultural norms of marriage and family as college graduation nears. Holland and Eisenhart's research suggests that after college enrollment, family expectations for women's lives after college increasingly weigh heavily on their choices.

College changes students' identity and values in ways that they cannot imagine or expect. In Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore's *First Person, First Peoples:*

Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories (1997), Native American students expressed feelings of isolation and loss of connection to their cultural identity after leaving home to attend college. Brian McKinley Jones Brayboy's (2005) "Transformational Resistance and Social Justice: American Indians in Ivy League Universities," similarly found Native American students experienced cultural isolation from other students, changes in personal identity, and the use of "acting white" strategies to compensate for these challenges and still become successful students. These "acting white" strategies in college include withholding disclosure of native identity from other students, changing dress and hairstyles, and learning to interrupt a class in order to talk about cultural perspectives or to use a professors office hours to talk about how the curriculum being taught differed from their education on reservations. The use of these strategies allowed students to be "both good student[s] and "good Indian[s]"" (Brayboy 2005:202). Although "acting white" strategies begin long before college, these practices become even more important for minority students as they near college graduation and leadership positions and social networks become crucial for future success.

Latino Students in Higher Education

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are vast disparities between white, non-Hispanic and Hispanic students in college enrollment and graduation rates.

- In 2011, more than half of white, non-Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college, compared to only 13.7% of Hispanic students.

- ❖ Of students who enrolled in college in 2005, 60.8% white, non-Hispanic students graduated within 6 years. Among Hispanic students, less than half graduated within that time, 47.9% (NCES 2011).

In Oklahoma, the overall rate of graduation is lower than the national average but reflects the demographics of the national cohort where white, non-Hispanic students have the highest levels of academic success and Hispanic students have disproportionally the lowest levels of graduation.

- ❖ The number of white, non-Hispanic students in Oklahoma graduating from college within six years is 48.1%. Hispanic students graduate at an even lower rate of 38.5%; barely more than a third of Hispanic students who enroll in college go on to graduate in Oklahoma (NCES 2011).[3]

The research site of this thesis, the University of Oklahoma, remains predominantly white in its student body and currently has a population of about 600-700 self-identifying Hispanic students, representing only 2% of the student body. This number appears relatively small, but OU has several vibrant and active Hispanic-oriented student organizations that maintain close ties with Hispanic communities in Oklahoma City. Many Hispanic students at OU transfer from community colleges in OKC and Tulsa, coming directly from local communities. Although increases in Hispanic student enrollment and graduation are slow in Oklahoma, increases nationwide are significant.

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[3] Mexican Americans are proportionally the largest Hispanic group in the United States and in Oklahoma (U.S. Census Bureau 2010), yet their college enrollment and graduation rates are disproportionately lower than all other minority groups and the dominant white, non-Hispanic student group.

- In 1980, 445,000 Hispanic students enrolled in college nationwide. By 2009, that number had increased to nearly 2.5 million Hispanic students (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

NCES predicts that by 2021 there will be a 42% increase in the number of Hispanic Americans who have college degrees (NCES 2011). Moreover, the U.S. Census Bureau also projects that by 2030, Hispanics will represent 23% of the total national population and over 30% by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Although we have projections for increases in both educational attainment and population of Latinos, these data sets are often not proportional because the data do not consider all factors relating to Hispanic students. First, many Hispanic students attend vocational or technical schools before (or instead of) college, as high achieving students preparing for their career, even though it is not at a four-year university. Second, statistics relating to college degree attainment may also not accurately reflect the number of degrees attained at online and for-profit universities.[4] Finally, because the U.S. Census population data do not accurately count the population of undocumented Hispanic students, population and educational attainment projections do not necessarily reflect undocumented population growth, or the real percentage of Hispanic students that attend and graduate from college.

The statistics presented by the U.S. Census Bureau and NCES emphasize achievement in education in a way that presents a singular path to college degree attainment: Hispanic students are less likely than *all* other student groups to go to a

[4] For example, the University of Phoenix.

four-year university and to be successful within a six year period. These statistics have consistently contributed to the representation of failure in education among ethnic minorities, by defining academic success as college graduation in six years. Research that uses such data as a heuristic inevitably focuses on failure and may not consider that the "academic" component of college success may not be how students themselves define their success. Though national statistics project low academic aspirations and expectations of success among Hispanic students, anthropological research has shown that Hispanic students have extremely high goals and expectations for academic success (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Foley 1990; Flores-Gonzales 1999). Given this anthropological research and the predictions for both population demographics and college degree attainment, we should anticipate significant changes in class, education, and citizenship in the United States in the remainder of the 21st century. The U.S. workforce will soon transition from its foundation of baby-boomers to a Latino majority, resulting in different education and employment priorities of the new majority (Vega and Martinez 2012:43).

Hispanic students possess valuable social and cultural capital in their ability to achieve bicultural academic success. Using French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's definition, social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). Cultural capital, as explained by Bourdieu, is the array of linguistic and cultural abilities, i.e., culture, that people may or may not be able to use to negotiate their position in society, or the "subtle modalities in the relationship to

culture and language" (Bourdieu 1977:82). The analysis of how Hispanic students use bicultural social and cultural capital in college is incomplete. How Hispanic students create strategies of success has largely gone unnoticed not only by anthropology but also by the larger field of social science research.

Minority students negotiate both received and self-selected racial/ethnic identities. The far-reaching terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" were developed as racial categories for the U.S. Census, thus making them imposed identities which are recognized and supported by the federal government. However, these terms have also been embraced as panethnic cultural identities, superseding the national origins of Latin American immigrants and their families. Social anthropologist Fredrick Barth explains that ethnic categories in general are "maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories" (Barth 1969:10). The cultural characteristics which signal ethnic boundaries, determining who is a member of a given ethnic group and who is not, may change, but the maintenance of the ethnic groups themselves is sustained (Barth 1969:14). As a result, the identifiers of what it means to be Hispanic may change, but the existence of such a category is reaffirmed by such changes.

Latino groups differ both demographically and historically in their experiences and responses to marginalization, therefore we cannot make generalizations about all Latinos and their educational aspirations and levels of academic attainment. However, when considered as a group, Latino students (Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central American groups) do have the lowest rates of educational attainment of all ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Despite this, many ethnic minority students *do* succeed, and a holistic approach to the larger, more complex questions of identity and college culture would inevitably expand current knowledge of academic success. This thesis aims to contribute to these questions.

The use of citizenship in this thesis refers to both legal and cultural citizenship. Full citizenship in the U.S., as defined by Renato Rosaldo, includes legal documentation, but requires an expansion beyond the federally recognized right to democratic participation. The ability to participate in civic and social engagements is also key to citizenship and is not defined by legal documentation, but by cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship is not an either/or construction; it functions as a spectrum in which degrees of citizenship may be attained. Rosaldo defines cultural citizenship as "the right to be different and to belong…the notion of belonging means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one's destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions" (1994:402). The history of institutionalized racism, anti-immigrant policies, English-only policies, and anti-immigrant discourse in the U.S. has contributed significantly to the restriction of access to cultural citizenship of many Latinos today as they struggle to find a sense of belonging.

Mexican Americans and other Latin American groups were historically classified as nonwhite for some years before government classifications shifted to consider all Latinos as white. In some cases, racial classification for Hispanic peoples have changed multiple times. Currently, government classification of race status for Hispanics is self-selecting, and the overwhelming majority of Hispanic people identify as white for racial classification in state and official functions. Historically, Hispanic

people have received limited access to citizenship which is most easily accessible through forms of whiteness.

Student and family experiences of Hispanic identity and education are, of course, extremely different. There is no "general Hispanic identity." Every student's experiences of education and Hispanic identity are intersubjective and unique. Students whose families have recently emigrated to the U.S. will have entirely different conceptions of pan-ethnic identity than students whose families are third or fourth generation Americans. Furthermore, although my research participants were nearly exclusively Mexican American, many Hispanic students have different frameworks for Latino identity and citizenship. For example, Mexican American and Dominican students have not only different paths to citizenship and education, but they also experience the framework of white racism differently. Mexican American students typically have the largest barriers to cultural capital and cultural citizenship because of national sociopolitical constructions of Mexican Americans as "illegals."[5] This construction resonates particularly strongly in Oklahoma, given the state's immigration laws, which represent some of the most extreme forms of immigrant policing in the nation.

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[5] The term "illegals," short for "illegal immigrants," describes people who have crossed the Mexico/U.S. border without authorization. In recent years, the use of the term has become increasingly derogatory and frequently used in anti-Hispanic and racist discourse. Other racist terms used in the Midwest and the South that are synonymous with "illegals" include "wetbacks," and "meskins."

Latino History in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has had a small but consistent Hispanic presence in the state for at least two centuries; the Oklahoma panhandle area was controlled by Mexico until 1848 (Smith 1980). However, the documented history of Oklahoma Latino heritage is minimal.[6] The first wave of Hispanic immigrants to the state began around the turn of the century, with many Mexican people fleeing the 1910 Mexican Revolution (Smith 1980:17). Although this wave of immigrants numbered less than eight thousand, many young Latino men in Oklahoma went on to enlist in World War II and then stayed in Oklahoma permanently, attracted by the benefits of the G.I. Bill. Following WW II, Oklahoma, like many other states in the Sunbelt region, saw an increase in immigration for construction, agriculture, and ranch employment (Smith 2013).

Since the 1980s, a consistent and more numerous wave of immigration from many Latin American countries has brought Latinos to Oklahoma. U.S. economic developments in the last thirty years have recruited a relatively new and rapidly growing Latino population in the state of Oklahoma. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Hispanics make up the largest ethnic minority group in Oklahoma, passing Native Americans only within the last decade (Census.gov). The current Hispanic population in Oklahoma, according to the U.S. Census, is estimated to be around 358,000, or about 9.3 percent of the total population (Census.gov).

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[6] In my research on Hispanic history in Oklahoma, I was only able to find two primary publications on the subject. See Smith (1980) and Hoffman (1987).

Political Setting in Oklahoma

There are few studies of Midwestern American culture and even fewer works on marginalized ethnic groups in the Midwest, aside from Native American studies. The Midwest has long been considered the cultural "heartland" of America, and remains unchanged in public perceptions, despite dynamic economic and demographic shifts to an increasingly diverse population (Allegro 2013). Cultural depictions of the Midwest, particularly Oklahoma, reveal values of hard work, family solidarity, religion, farming, and small businesses. One facet of anti-immigrant discourse in the Midwest is the long-standing tradition of nationalism and, as a result, commitment to protecting "American" ideals. Anti-Hispanic and anti-immigration discourse strains found in the Midwest are, however, contradictory to these local values of family, religion, and hard work because pan-ethnic Hispanic values are virtually the same.

In Oklahoma, patriotism has been an important cultural discourse and is plainly reflected in state government. Most recently, in May 2014, SB1143 was passed by the state legislature requiring all public school districts to display the United States flag in each classroom and to recite the pledge of allegiance a minimum of one time per week for the "preservation of public peace," although students may decline participation (Oklahoma State Senate 2014:2).

In 2010, Oklahoma voters passed an amendment to the state constitution, HJR-1042, making English the official language for all government proceedings and

business (Oklahoma House Joint Resolution 2009). [7] All transactions performed by the state government – from conveying weather emergency information to public school functions – must be done in English. Prior to the amendment, state functions were conducted in both Spanish and English because there were no policies mandating language use in government function (McGuigan 2010:1). People within the state of Oklahoma are not entitled to non-English translations or explanations (Oklahoma House Joint Resolution 2009:3).The creation of an official language in Oklahoma was publicized by the state legislature and "nonpartisan" lobbying groups as an "American issue that unites us all" (US-English.org 2010), and as a means to "increase the incentive for immigrants to learn English, *assimilate* and succeed in the U.S." (McGuigan 2010:1, emphasis added). The amendment states that one purpose of the establishment of English as the official state language is to "[t]each English to those who are not fluent in the language means teaching English in the most rapid, efficient and effective manner available…This phrase does not authorize bilingual education programs which maintain a student in a language other than English" (Oklahoma House Joint Resolution 2009:2).

The growth of a relatively new Latino community in Oklahoma has coincided with economic transformations in the U.S. heartland in recent decades, which have restructured the political and cultural landscape. Oklahoma can be viewed as a "border state" not physically located on the border on the U.S./Mexico border for several key reasons. First, Oklahoma has been influenced by the anti-immigrant climate of other

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[7] According to the bill, exceptions are made only for Native American languages and federal laws.

Midwestern and Southwestern border states like Texas and Arizona and has passed similar legislation to these border states regarding the treatment of undocumented immigrants. Second, Oklahoma relies on economic partnerships with these border states and much of the recent industry growth in Oklahoma has come directly from businesses in Texas and other nearby states. Additionally, food processing factories and other processing plants which used to be located on the Texas border have relocated to Oklahoma in the past two decades, and have attracted a Hispanic labor force from Texas to fill minimum wage and unskilled labor positions (Allegro 2013).

In response to the changes in labor force and economy, Oklahoma has passed some of the most controversial laws in the nation regarding the treatment of immigrants. In 2007, the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act (HB1804) made sheltering undocumented persons in homes or vehicles a state felony. The state legislature reported that "[t]he State of Oklahoma finds that illegal immigration is causing economic hardship and lawlessness in this state" (Oklahoma House of Representatives 2007:2). In Oklahoma, private businesses are required to check documentation status of employees and to report undocumented persons to the state, though this action is common in many states. HB1804 is more extreme than other states' laws because it criminalizes not only undocumented persons, but documented and native-born citizens who fail to become enforcers of the law for the state can be criminalized as well.[8]

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[8] Documented and native born citizens convicted of violating HB1804 may be fined a minimum of $1000.00 or imprisoned a minimum of 1 year (Oklahoma House of Representatives 2007:4).

HB1804 has been harmful to the Latino community of Oklahoma because: 1) it promotes the assumption that unauthorized border-crossers are predisposed to be violators of the law; 2) it contributes to the racial discrimination against all Latinos as "illegals" who supposedly do not contribute to their local societies in any meaningful ways (Allegro 2010); and 3) rather than leaving the state of Oklahoma because of its immigration laws, Latinos in Oklahoma have simply become less visible, less mobile, and less active in seeking pathways, such as education, to civic and social upward mobility (Pedroza 2012).

Undocumented students have been protected to some extent from Oklahoma's restrictive "state of capture"[9] laws through the recent federal Deferred Action policy. Under Deferred Action, undocumented individuals who entered the U.S. under the age of 16 can qualify for a social security number, a work permit, and delay deportation actions against them by the federal or state government for at least two years. Oklahoma students qualify for in-state tuition at public universities if they graduate from any Oklahoma public high school, regardless of documentation status. However, to receive in-state tuition, undocumented students must either register with the university (and thereby the state) as undocumented, putting their status in the U.S. at risk (and potentially the status of other individuals), or apply to Oklahoma colleges as U.S. citizens with falsified social security numbers. Currently, undocumented students

[9] "State of capture," presumably first used by Pedroza (2012), refers to the danger of being physically "captured" and risk of deportation for undocumented immigrants by merely entering a citizen's home or riding in their vehicle.

are ineligible for federal financial aid, but local and national lobbying efforts continue to seek change to this policy through the DREAM Act.

Oklahoma has three local chapters of the DREAM Act movement, and many Latino students at OU are involved in lobbying for financial aid and citizenship benefits for undocumented students. The DREAM act is a proposed bill (which has failed thus far in both state and federal legislatures) allowing permanent residency and offering federal financial aid to undocumented students. The Norman DREAM Act chapter was started by one of the 2013 Miss Hispanic OU contestants and shaped her platform, which promoted obtaining legal citizenship to parents of Hispanic college students.

Research Questions

The research for this thesis began with a narrow focus on academic success and its relation to cultural identity, agency, grades, recognition, and employment opportunities following college graduation. However, it quickly expanded to include questions of citizenship, racial and ethnic politics, gender, and class once fieldwork was underway and it became clear that these other cultural domains were intertwined with and inseparable from academic success and Hispanic cultural identity. The primary research question underlying all intersections and negotiations of Hispanic and academic cultures has remained, "What does academic success mean?" Or, in other words, "How do highly successful ethnic minority students simultaneously maintain college success and their cultural identity?" Further research questions analyzed in this thesis developed from several prominent themes: race, economic class

performance, academic identities, gender reproduction, and politics and political activism.

Methods

This thesis relies on nine months of ethnographic research beginning in August 2013 and continuing through the end of the academic year of May 2014. Two primary research methods were used: semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

Interviews

Between August and February of the academic year, I conducted semi-structured preliminary 1-2 hour interviews with eight female Hispanic students. About half of these students were asked for follow-up interviews to supplement my preliminary research. The additional eight women mentioned previously – the six students who competed in the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU pageant and the two pageant organizers – became key research participants. On several occasions, I also interviewed one staff member, the Latino advisor from Student Life.

The pageant was held in April, near the end of the Spring semester, and follow-up interviews with the six pageant contestants and two of the pageant organizers were held in the two weeks following the pageant. All interview questions were asked in English, though students often switched to Spanish or "Spanglish" for specific terms.

Participant Observation

During the Spring 2014 semester, the Miss Hispanic OU (MHOU) pageant became the primary context for this research. Ethnographic field research in this setting

entailed attending pageant rehearsals and information meetings, and I was often asked by the students to assist with pageant preparations in minor capacities. These included serving as a stand-in dance partner whenever a contestant's male counterpart was absent from rehearsal, and asking practice interview questions in both English and Spanish from the contestants' flashcards. During the dress rehearsal and on the day of the pageant, the process of participant observation included wielding curling irons and mascara wands, counting tickets, and assisting in quick costume changes offstage.

To supplement my limited knowledge of beauty pageants, I attended several of the many ethnic pageants held on campus during the Spring semester, which is generally regarded as "pageant season." These additional pageants were Miss Black and Gold (sponsored by a fraternity), Miss Blue and White (sponsored by a fraternity), Miss African Queen (sponsored by Student Life), Mr. OU (sponsored by the Union Programming Board), and Miss Asian OU (sponsored by Student Life).

Shortly before the Miss Hispanic OU pageant, I was also invited by some of my research participants to attend the Miss Hispanic/Latina Oklahoma State University pageant in Stillwater. At this pageant, like many of the events I attended on campus, I served as a driver to and from the event. Early on, students became quick to ask me for rides to and from events and rehearsals because they did not own vehicles. Giving students rides across campus from the student union, where the Latino Student Life office is, to the gym where dance rehearsals were held became an excellent way to connect with students and ask them brief questions or ask for clarification of data in an informal setting.

To protect the identity of all research participants in this research, two sets of pseudonyms have been used in this thesis. The pageant was a public event and the decision to separate backstage dialogue from public performance is an effort to protect to anonymity of all students involved. At pageant rehearsals, non-participants often attended: fellow students, friends, advisors, boyfriends, and younger siblings. As a result, I have attempted to disconnect the actions of students in pageant rehearsals from what they said to me in confidence. One set of pseudonyms is used in the ethnographic accounts and in the conclusion. A second set of pseudonyms is used in the interview excerpts in Chapter 1 to separate students' private conversations with me from their public efforts on campus. In many instances in this thesis, non-identifiers such as "one student stated" or "as one freshman remarked," are used to further protect the autonomy of my research participants.

Key Research Participants

The eight women mentioned in the ethnographic sketch at the beginning of the introduction informed and shaped my research in valuable and unexpected ways. Below is a brief introduction of each of these women and their college majors, motivations for competition in the pageant, and family backgrounds.

Pageant Contestants

Sara, a freshman, was excited about the prospect of winning Miss Hispanic OU; she wanted to become more involved in Hispanic-oriented events on campus. Originally from the Dominican Republic, Sara spent most of her childhood in urban neighborhoods in New York City and later Oklahoma City, and she attended low

income schools. Sara had high expectations for academic success; she is majoring in International Business Marketing with a minor in Spanish.

Cecilia, a sophomore, was well-known and embraced on campus by staff and students alike for her involvement in Camp Crimson, a summer camp for incoming freshman. She also served as the Vice President of the Hispanic American Student Association during her sophomore year. Cecilia is a second generation American who was born in the U.S.; her mother is from Panama and her father is from Syria. Cecilia is an International Business major with a double minor in Political Science and Spanish. Although Cecilia entered the pageant competition with low expectations for winning, her primary goal was to celebrate Panamanian culture and promote broader awareness of ethnic inequality.

Julie, a sophomore, hoped that the pageant would offer her a position of leadership in the Oklahoma City Hispanic community where she grew up. Her family is from Lima, Peru, and they emigrated to the U.S. when Julie was a small child. Julie plans to advocate for bilingual healthcare and education through her studies as a Pre-Med Microbiology major and Spanish minor.

Rosario is a freshman from Wichita Falls, Texas, who was born in the United States. Her parents are first generation Americans who are somewhat bilingual. Rosario is the first in her family to attend college and she is majoring in Biochemistry Pre-Dental with a Spanish minor. Rosario hoped to become more involved in Hispanic events on campus and establish her presence as a leader quickly.

Ana, a freshman from Oklahoma City, is also a first generation college student. Ana is majoring in Secondary Education and double minor in History and Spanish. Her parents grew up in Mexico but moved to the U.S. before Ana was born. Ana's graduation from U.S. Grant High School, a local low-income public school, motivated her to compete in the pageant because she wanted to use her pageant platform to help students from her own high school.

Sonia is a junior whose family moved to Oklahoma City from Chicago when she was a small child. She is a third generation American. Sonia is majoring in Human Relations with a Spanish minor and intends to work in education administration. She is also part of a Hispanic-oriented sorority. Her decision to compete in the pageant was motivated by encouragement from her sorority "sisters" and her cousins who had competed in other Hispanic pageants.

Pageant Organizers

Teresa, the chair of this year's Miss Hispanic OU pageant, won first runner up in the pageant the year before. She enthusiastically and meticulously planned out every detail of this year's pageant. Teresa was born in the United States; her parents emigrated to the U.S. when they were young adults. Teresa is a junior from Oklahoma City majoring in Public Relations with a double minor in Spanish and History. As the first person in her family to go to college, Teresa's path paved the way for her sister, who is a freshman, to also attend college.

Selena, the 2013 Miss Hispanic OU queen, was a graduating senior with a major in Public Relations and a double minor in Spanish and Anthropology. Selena is

a third generation American; her mother was born in the U.S. but their family is from Mexico, while Selena's father is from Pakistan. She has received numerous academic honors and has greatly expanded the role of Miss Hispanic OU at the university. Selena's family lives in Houston and she has one older sister who also recently graduated from college.

All eight of these women attend college full-time at the University of Oklahoma while working a part-time job. Several students are hostesses at local restaurants, while one student works for an insurance company and another works as a receptionist for an auto repair store. All of the students would benefit greatly from the one-thousand dollar scholarship given to the winner of Miss Hispanic OU. Most of these students receive some financial aid, although some are ineligible for instate tuition.

All six of this year's contestants, had never competed in a pageant before and their knowledge of pageants was limited to what they had seen on television or from family and friends who had competed in Hispanic pageants. Surprisingly, several of these students had cousins or best friends who had competed in ethnic city pageants like "Miss Latina Norman, Oklahoma" or "Miss Hispanic Amarillo, Texas." The six contestants relied heavily on mentoring from Teresa and Selena during pageant preparations.

Of these eight students, only one student's parents spoke monolingual English. The other students' parents are fluent Spanish speakers with varying levels of bilingual competency in English. Parents' ability to speak English has significant influence on students' ability and choice to speak Spanish. Student encounters with

Spanish vary immensely; some students were not allowed to speak Spanish at home or school, some do or do not speak Spanish by choice, and others desire to speak Spanish but cannot. Although the pageant was performed almost entirely in Spanish, the students worked very hard to memorize their Spanish speeches and struggled with any Spanish communication which was not scripted. Research participants' encounters with language use and inequality are discussed and analyzed throughout this thesis.

Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 of this thesis, "High School Graduation was a Surprise, College was Unexpected": Language and Identity Negotiation, and "Acting White,'" presents a discussion of how Hispanic identity is enacted in relation to both academic success and students' expectations of socioeconomic class mobility. Within the circle of students I interviewed, being accused of acting "too white" and/or "not Hispanic enough" by their Hispanic peers was a common reflection of high-achieving students. I use Jane Hill's (2008) analysis of racist language to inform my understanding of prejudiced and racialized language used by Hispanic students, peers, and family towards Hispanic students, through a framework of white racism. I also argue that Hispanic students exhibit racism denial and personalism ideology (Hill 2008) to negotiate Hispanic identity. In this chapter, I also discuss other key issues of identity that became relevant during my fieldwork, including the pressure of being a "first generation" college student, and the meaning of collective success for the family rather than the individual.

The first chapter provides the framework for my study of the Miss Hispanic OU pageant (discussed in Chapter 2) by emphasizing that contradictions of identity that arise from becoming a high-achieving student come from within the Hispanic community. In other words, becoming "successful" is to become different, and therefore seemingly less Hispanic, despite greater access to the cultural capital that Hispanic families seek for social mobility in the United States. Although my research participants themselves frequently say they are more "Americanized" than some of their peers, family, and friends, they do not feel they have diminished their Hispanic identity and they consider themselves to be "still Hispanic" even though they are accused of "acting white" by their peers.

Chapter 2, "It's not about Beauty!": Agency, Gender, and the Miss Hispanic OU Pageant, examines the Miss Hispanic OU pageant as a microcosm for the ways in which Latinas' different social worlds are negotiated. How Latinas come to conceptualize success in both campus engagement and planning for the future are reflected in their involvement in Miss Hispanic OU. The pageant is an avenue for Latinas to network both on campus and in the Norman community (through gaining sponsorships and recognition) *and* to gain approval from their parents about their progress in college and their continued commitment to Hispanic cultural practices. This approval is obtained through performance of both gender and "Latina" identity on the beauty pageant stage.

In Chapter 2, I discuss my research findings on gender, familial approval, agency, and the skills and opportunities acquired through beauty pageant competition not accessible elsewhere on campus. First, meaningful success does not come from

grades. Second, the families of research participants were very involved in major academic decisions and these women framed their performances in the pageant in reference to their parents' pride, sacrifice, and approval. Lastly, though the pageant requires the contestants to have a social platform and students typically chose projects which promote higher education and both documented and cultural citizenship for Hispanic families (with and without documentation), the actual pageant stage deemphasizes political issues and instead highlights ethnic pride and cultural authenticity.

Many of these students are involved in activist projects, contributing to their ability to secure scholarships, nominations, and potential employment following graduation. Their activist platforms, outlined in Chapter 3, "Politicians, Not Beauty Queens": Promoting Citizenship through Hispanic Culture and History, primarily focus on the redirection of Hispanic youth through mentoring and college preparation programs where volunteers and mentors come directly from the OKC Hispanic community, giving Hispanic youth successful supporters who are "still Hispanic." Although social activist platforms are hallmarks of traditional beauty pageants, the issues addressed in these women's platforms – inequality in education, gang violence, language disparity, and lack of knowledge of and access to healthcare – are social realities in Hispanic communities.

Latina students involved in the pageant engage in meaningful dialogue with older leaders from the Oklahoma City Hispanic community. These leaders act as pageant judges and see the students, as one judge put it, as "politicians, not beauty queens." Through their interactions with the Hispanic community (sponsorships, interviews

with judges) and their onstage performances in the pageant, these young women make both direct and indirect political statements. Chapter 3 builds on the discussion of ethnic and immigration politics in Oklahoma, as Latina students understand them. Latinas on campus are remarkably knowledgeable about Oklahoma and national policy concerning immigration and citizenship rights (especially the DREAM Act and Deferred Action). Their awareness about state, national, and international citizenship and immigration discourses issues are framed by their high school experiences; Hispanic cultural and immigration history is not taught in the Oklahoma and Texas public schools that the students attended, and many of these students first became aware of the issue of documentation when some of their friends or peers from their graduating high school class did not go to college because they "didn't have papers" and could not afford to pay.

To address the question of "What does academic success mean?," the outcomes of the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU pageant and research participants' immediate academic and social accomplishments are presented in the final chapter, "We Are Still Hispanic": Expecting Academic Success and the Performance of Class and Culture. For many Latina students, Hispanic culture and socioeconomic class are performed in college, and students enact the cultural identity and socioeconomic class they expect to occupy following graduation. These performances are constrained by having to negotiate "white" academic behaviors, but these students break with these constraints through the use of the college campus as a site for advancement of ethnic politics.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I also address the relevance of studying academic success, rather than failure, among ethnic minority groups. It is not only productive to

search for factors of failure. As my research on Hispanic success at OU demonstrates, it is also important to study the ways in which students effectively excel in academic environments, overcome challenges, network and plan for the future, and maintain close ties to family and ethnic identity. In the conclusion I also offer research implications for both anthropology and the forthcoming social and political transition to a Hispanic majority workforce in the United States.

The implications for anthropological studies of education that this thesis provides are as follows: 1) success and failure are cultural and historical constructions; 2) for many Hispanic students, success is constructed in relation to the power structures and discourses of citizenship, ethnic identity, and collective gain for the students' families; and 3) students' motivations for academic attainment and the meanings of their academic success are closely linked to their expectations to transcend the class status of their parents.

Chapter 1

"High school graduation was a surprise, college was unexpected": Identity Negotiation, Language, and "Acting White"

High school and college experiences have enormous impact on the cultural framework and responses of students. In many of my conversations with Latinas at OU, our discussions about high school and college turned to their experiences with social difference. Every research participant mentioned at least one experience of having someone tell them they were acting "too white," "not Hispanic enough," or that they were "losing touch with their Hispanic identity." Their Hispanic friends and family used these labels to refer to their student behaviors – tests, homework, and new languages. This conflict of identity (i.e. perceived as not quite enough or too much of something) manifests itself as a form of racialized and prejudice discourse that exists within Hispanic communities. This chapter explores how high-achieving Latina students at OU continue to negotiate their Hispanic identity simultaneously with the construction of an academic identity. Understanding how these Latinas intertwine their status as students with family identity and approval is crucial to their involvement in racial politics,[10] and class performance, gender, and their agency.[11]

"Acting white" must also be placed in the context of minority education success/failure constructions. Hispanic students' success in the U.S. generally has not been attributed to being Hispanic. Rather, Hispanic students have long internalized the ideology that insists that they must work harder *because* they are ethnic minorities

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[10] Discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
[11] Gender and agency are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

(Ogbu 1974).[12] The rewards of education are not as easily available to them as they are to non-minority students, once filtered through the experiences of race and class (Ogbu 1974).

If Hispanic students have internalized the ideas that academic success in educational institutions is linked to negotiation and acceptance in dominant white culture and is not attributed to Hispanic culture, students must seek alternative ways to maintain both their Hispanic and student identities. All research participants stated that although their parents wanted them to do well in school, their parents did not have the financial or social means to facilitate these pathways for them. The cost of college is, of course, an important factor, but an understanding of the steps to get to college and then to graduate are just as critical to a student's success. These steps – how to write an admissions essay, how to talk to a recruiter, when to tour a college, how to apply for financial aid, how to write college essays and take exams – are what researchers have termed "college knowledge." The parents of the students who participated in this research at OU had never attended college and, as a result, had no experience with these crucial tasks for academic success to offer their children.

While many Hispanic parents encourage their children to become high-achievers in education, the actual outcomes of achievement take place in schools and

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[12] In my first interview with the Latino advisor at OU, she stated that OU's diversity enrichment programming has made a conscious decision to no longer tell students that they will struggle "because they are Hispanic." She went on to say that they have recently implemented changes to their freshmen and transfer student orientations for ethnic minority student groups (African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian American) where they tell students that "The choices you make here at OU have nothing to do with your ethnicity. You will not fail or success because you are [ethnic identity]. You will fail or succeed based on what you do here at the university."

colleges rather than at home. Thus, students' struggles and successes in academics are both ideologically and physically distinct from their Hispanic communities. Since academic success is attributed by both Hispanic and non-Hispanic people to institutions of mainstream American culture, students who become high-achievers are accessing white capital. "Acting white" uses prejudiced language to label high-achieving Hispanic students in ways that are harmful to students (Ogbu 2008; Fordham 2008). Accusations of "acting white" are also made without regard to actual phenotypic features – students are not attempting "passing," nor is skin color mentioned as a factor (Fordham 2008). Students in participating in my research also denied that "acting white" accusations are harmful.

Hispanic students are identified racially as "acting white" in a social framework where being white is still placed higher in the social hierarchy than being Hispanic, even among Hispanics. Research participants often identified themselves and other students in racial statements such as, "People say I act white even though I'm Hispanic, but it does not matter" and "All of my friends in high school were white and we were all successful, I was the only Hispanic girl." Through students' behaviors, community expectations, and students' own expectations for their futures, the "acting white" phenomenon is tied to larger issues of racism, class, status, citizenship, community, and education.

With the passing of HB1804 (discussed in the introduction of this thesis), white/Latino political segregation in Oklahoma has widened, and citizen/noncitizen ideology has become increasingly intertwined with ethnicity. Given these political conditions, Hispanic parents, peers, and other family members perceive high-

achieving Latina students as "acting white" because they have gained cultural capital in institutional spaces that have been culturally and historically preserved for white citizens. Latina students perform whiteness through their academic achievement. Everyday college experiences hide ethnic prejudice issues for students in some general ways, such as writing papers, sitting in classroom lectures, studying for tests, which all students do. However, "acting white" problems are not functions of campus interactions. These everyday racial epithets are constructed at home through interaction with Hispanic friends, family, and peers. Academic behaviors are enacted in the isolated environment of the college campus, while interactions with other Hispanics in which successful students are accused of "acting white" largely take place in non-campus locations. As a result, that activities that students engage in on campus that are school-related are seen as "acting" behaviors that do not "belong" to the students because they are different from the behaviors that parents' expect students to use at home.

"Acting White"

Anthropological research has suggested that academic success changes the ways that students construct their ethnic identity. Part of the reason for accusations of "acting white" is that students are negotiating identities that their peers and families do not understand. "Understanding" includes not just the meaning of words and symbols but also the meanings of social worlds (Bailey 2006). "Acting white" constitutes a "counter-hegemonic erasure of the devaluation of academic achievement" (Bucholtz 2009:95). In other words, "acting white" is a performance of negotiation. One student's experience with being a successful is particularly telling,

> [t]hey called me "fresa," which means "strawberry." I was always called that, especially by my friends in middle school and high school. I didn't find out what it really meant until I was older, in high school, and I realized they called me the same thing in English. It basically means someone who is "acting white" and too good for everyone else.

This student's statement given during a private interview reveals that her school peers differentiated early on between students who were "acting white" and those who were not. Anthropologist Signithia Fordham defines "acting white" as "race as performance" (2008:228).

In her study of gender, race, and academic achievement among African American youth, Fordham found that high-achieving students were accused of "acting white" by those who saw them as forming an academic identity, which had little to do with their African American identity (2008:228). Fordham states that, "[a]cting white is the embodiment of what U.S. culture has historically defined as success and quintessentially American. Significantly, what the culture defines as success and as "the" U.S. identity continues to be the prerogative of those who are white, as well as male. To put it bluntly, White and Whiteness are synonyms of power" (Fordham 2008:234). In this context, prejudiced language is used to denote that the identity of an individual actor is neither belonging to widely accepted "whiteness" (because they are accused of "acting," not "being" white), nor the historically recognized identity found in their minority neighborhood.

According to Fordham, "acting white" is socially accepted, attempted identity theft (2008:237). The use of the word "theft" is nevertheless problematic because it is

intrinsically negative, implying that the agency that these students exhibit was never really theirs in the first place. Still, the implication of a strong degree of agency does indicate that high-achieving students are able to intentionally modify, borrow, and perform whiteness in ways that are to their advantage. For example, one student I interviewed stated that prior to college, she felt that she was a "big shot," and a "superstar" in her predominantly Hispanic high school in Oklahoma City, because of her significant academic accomplishments. Upon arriving at OU, however, she realized that her high school achievements were comparable or even lower than those of many other OU students. Because most of the students in her high school were Hispanic and were not expected to go to college, she said, school administrators and teachers did not prepare them for the academic skill set that most white, middle class students who attend OU are aware of and learn to use by the time that they graduate high school. These skills include, for example, how to decide what your college major and minor(s) are, who your advisor is, and how to negotiate different linguistic registers used for professors, advisors, tutors, and peers. After enrolling in college, this student quickly learned to modify and appropriately perform these skills to her advantage, actions which were then labeled by her family as "acting white." Although academic skills are not defined on the basis of race by any institution, for many Hispanic students in American universities learning to do these things is an indicator of "acting white."

The definition of "acting white" provided by Fordham also implies that because "acting white" is only an attempted identity theft, it is never truly adopted and can be discarded at any time. However, the ability to discard whiteness and academic

identities for successful minority students is unlikely, as other scholars have noted. Garrod and Larimore (1996) found that Native American college graduates expressed conflict with ethnic identity following graduation: students reported that they were directly told by their families and peers that they were not the same. Students felt a keen separation between their academic identity and cultural identity, raising larger questions of what "academic identity" actually means for students during higher education and even after graduation.

Suárez-Orozco (1987) suggests that identity construction is related to the ways in which different groups of minority students experience educational adaptation. There is no "ideal paradigm of immigrant adaptation to schooling" (Suárez-Orozco 1987:288). However, educational achievement is the single most important avenue for status and class mobility, a unifying principle across ethnic education research in general. More importantly, Suárez-Orozco argues that education as a mode of mobility in the U.S. is constructed differently than conceptualizations of mobility in Latin American countries. Suárez-Orozco suggests that Latino culture in the U.S. recognizes that U.S. mainstream culture presents education as an amassing of prescribed and specific knowledge needed to "get ahead." This framework opposes the traditional networks of family, friends, and friends of friends used as mechanisms for mobility in Latin America. In other words, nepotism and knowledge are at odds in terms of class and education mobility. All of this culminates in, Suárez-Orozco argues, a dual frame of reference between "here" (the U.S.) and "there" (country of origin) (1987:291). Although my research participants are primarily second and third generation

Americans, their parents' "here/there" framework still exists and is manifested in the form of "Hispanic/white" and "self/other."

Many students were quick to point out that the differences between themselves and white students were blatantly obvious every day on campus. During one interview, a student told me that in her World Music course this semester, her white professor asked her in front of the class if she could show them how to dance salsa. She said that the incident did not offend her, saying, "I didn't feel discriminated or anything, it didn't matter. I feel that people don't really ask me or assume that I'm not Latina enough. Actually, I've been told that I'm *really* Latina [laughs]. *Too* Latina. [laughs]." She went on to explain that she thinks that Hispanic people feel that she acts "more" Latina than white, which is confusing to people, she says, given that she is so involved in campus leadership. She says people expect her to "act white" because she goes to college and are surprised when she does not.

When I asked another student if she had ever been told she was "too white" or "not Hispanic enough," she laughed and said, "Of course. I guess I have assimilated more, it has changed my personality, how I act, how I speak because I'm always being told "oh, you're more [*sic*] white than me" or 'too white.'" Similarly, another student remarked, "I feel like once I do hang out with people from my race, they would say "Oh, you're too white for us, go hang out with your white friends," you know. Once you hang out with a different group and then you go back to your own people, that's when you'll be judged." Whenever I raised this question, my research participants always stated that these accusations came from their Latino families, friends, and acquaintances.

Personalism and Racism Denial

My research participants dismissed any ideas that accusations of "acting white" were racist. Students were quick to tell me that they were teased or accused of "acting white," but they did not think about the issue in racial terms, often stating that they knew that racism was bad, but that these instances were not cases of racism. When I asked students for an example of racism, or why "acting white" was not racist, they said that racism always had to be obvious discrimination or violence, or that "acting white" was not "that bad." As one student put it during an interview about her Hispanic identity,

> [It] happens if you let go of your Hispanic community and Hispanic culture because you want to hang out with other people. I've seen it happen before to some of my friends. I mean, I'm cool with it, I don't care who you hang out with, and it's your choice. I mean people say this stuff playing, and only goofing around. But if you think about it, it does affect a person if they're told, "oh, you're too white for us" or whatever.

There were, of course, instances of racially-inflected statements made during my fieldwork that were likely without harmful consequences. Students mediated issues of identity on campus by making racial jokes to one another. At one Sunday evening rehearsal, two of the students arrived deeply sunburned after playing soccer in the sun all day, becoming the target of many funny jokes that night, along the lines of "It must suck to look like a white person to get sunburnt like that!" The students also often teased each other at rehearsals about their dancing skills; those who could not dance

very well were told "You can't dance like a Mexican, you dance like a white girl!" Although these jokes indexed racial categories, they were not made in contexts that necessarily fostered prejudiced discourse.

Many students were initially hesitant to talk about race at all, and felt that they might themselves be racist by discussing it. The students often offered expressions of concern similar to this one: "Sometimes, I don't know, like I think about it and I don't know if I'm being too Mexican or too white sometimes. I try not to think about the color of my skin too much though because then I think I'm being racist or maybe I'm over thinking it or maybe it's bad that I think about it so much."

Linguistic anthropologist Jane H. Hill (2008) demonstrates the ways that fundamental aspects of day-to-day language allow racism to thrive despite denial. Hill uses anthropologist Michelle Rosado's concept of "personalism ideology" (1981) to explain the way that most Americans assume that each individual has both beliefs and intentions stemming from an inner self (Hill 2008:88). By assuming that speakers have intentions, then speakers also have the ability to "mean something" through the words that they use. Speakers also have "true" beliefs that are conveyed through words. Personalist ideology separates intentionality into two locations: the "head" (where speech mistakes may be made), and the "heart" (the truth) (Hill 2008:111). Through the construction of individuals' ability to "mean" what they say, also constructed is the ability of individuals' not to "mean" what they say, so harmful language can be used without a person truly "meaning" to generate the consequences of their speech.

Several students stated that they felt that the comments made to them were not meant to be offensive, implying that the speakers' intentions did not stem from their

true beliefs. Despite this, when students are ethnically marked as "acting white," they are also linguistically marked by their speech in both Spanish and English. Although it has become acceptable, and even encouraged, to talk about race in the United States, public discourse emphasizes "blackness," "whiteness," and "colorblind" issues rather than ethnic difference. Discussions of race within and about Hispanic communities is therefore constrained, and often limited to discourses of cultural pride, such as *"Si, se Puede,"*[13] functioning as ethnic uplift and minimizing positions which foster ethnic prejudice within the Hispanic community.

Language Inequality

Hispanic students walk a fine line between successfully accessing the social and cultural capital they need to succeed in college and maintaining what they see as their "true" Hispanic identity. These students do not articulate that they have an "academic identity," though they often refer to themselves during their time in college as being "more Americanized"[14] than the way that their parents and grandparents grew up, even parents who are native born American citizens. This point can be illustrated by the students' choices to speak Spanish or English in various situations. Most Latino students are bilingual at least to a minimal degree, but the use of each language is

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[13] "Si, se Puede" is the motto of the United Farm Workers, a labor union for agricultural and seasonal laborers which was led by Cesar Chavez for nearly thirty years. "Si, se Puede," which roughly translates to "yes, we can," or "yes, it is possible," was the rallying cry at many labor force and civil rights and protests in the mid-twentieth century.

[14] "Americanized," as I will discuss later, is a category that research participants used to distinguish their lifestyles from that of their parents. They maintain that they *are* Hispanic, but that they are Hispanic in ways that are different from their parents' Hispanic-ness.

situationally defined. Students' are marked as "acting white" by their choice to use English more frequently than Spanish in certain situations.

Tolerating "acting white" accusations is a means of maintaining ideology for many minority students. Mehan et al. (2009) found that when low-income black students rebuked their black peers for "acting too white," they were actively resisting white structure, even if they performed well academically. Similarly, Latina research participants, they are not called "too white" because they are less Hispanic; they are called white to maintain their ties with their Hispanic community. The languages spoken by research participants were negotiated primarily by who their audiences were, and they often switched back and forth between English, "Spanglish," and Academic English on campus. Very little Spanish was spoken on campus and only in conversations with older adults, advisors, or parents. During an interview early one morning in the library, I asked one student when and where she spoke Spanish and English. She provided me with a meaningful illustration about her language use,

> I was in Student Life last week and my mom called me and I started speaking in Spanish and I felt that all the staff members immediately looked at me like, "oh my gosh, she's speaking in Spanish," like they were immediately fascinated. But when I'm with my friends I speak Spanglish. You know, mostly English but some Spanish. It just naturally comes to me but for full-blown Spanish, I only speak it with my close friends. Even then, that doesn't really happen, we mostly switch to Spanglish, which comes into play most of the time. It just depends on who I'm with, but it doesn't happen much.

In both interviews and conversations with research participants, and as evidenced by this example, I found that these students rarely speak Spanish on campus. Students noted that very few students in the Hispanic American Student Association (HASA) at OU speak Spanish fluently, and very little information presented at the HASA meetings I attended was given in Spanish. Students' use of Spanish with their close friends varied, but in general, it was rarely used. Research participants explained that they also rarely spoke Spanish with their siblings but most consistently spoke Spanish with their parents. Many research participants stated that they used Spanish at home because their parents would not understand what they meant if they spoke in English. The student mentioned about went on to say that she,

> [u]ses Spanish with my parents and when it comes to my siblings, I speak English with them. Sometimes I don't remember a word in Spanish though, so I will just say it in English and help my mom translate, but she doesn't really know English. My dad knows a little bit more, but it's still a struggle with the language barrier thing. You know, you speak English here at the university and just everywhere you go and then when you go home and Spanish comes into play, you forget how to say something. It's a challenge, it really is.

Since the students in this study rarely speak Spanish with anyone but their parents, their level of bilingual competency is low, although I was often told that there were more strong speakers of Spanish in this year's pageant than ever before. That number totaled three students whose bilingual abilities were strong. Even these students, however, were afraid to speak Spanish in front of the pageant judges or other people in power who were native speakers.

The ties between language and culture are so strong that using a marked language in front of other people is often frightening. In formal settings where it was expected, research participants reluctantly used Spanish, preferring in most cases to use English. At the Miss Hispanic OU pageant, for example, contestants had to give an interview in Spanish. Two students noted that the pageant was one of the rare times they had ever spoken Spanish on campus. A student who won the pageant in a previous year said that answering questions in Spanish was stressful because she and her siblings had not been allowed to speak Spanish at home growing up because her parents did not want her spoken English "to sound Mexican." Another student said that she was a native speaker of Spanish and had learned English in third grade, but her anxiety stemmed from the pressure to answer to older native speakers. These students often stated that they were afraid to say something in Spanish incorrectly to older leaders because they had often heard older people in the community express some form of the sentiment, "If you do not speak Spanish, you are not a good Hispanic."

Students also often pointed out to me who in their families spoke English without "an accent" and who did not whenever I asked about their language use. This makes it apparent that it is not simply the ability to speak English that matters, but also that they must be able to speak English in a way that is socially valued (Philips 2006). English has more power in the U.S. because it is unmarked. Bucholtz and Hall state "when one language category is elevated as an unmarked norm [General American English], its power is more pervasive because it is masked" (2006:372).

The students did not indicate that they perceived any language inequality in codeswitching between Spanish and English. Students only attributed Spanish

language choice to the ability of their audience to understand, rather than inequality. Hispanic students see their Spanish/English codeswitching as a result of language barriers, much like the student's statement below,

> Most of the time I'm speaking English the whole time… and if I do talk a lot of Spanish, it is probably with [her parents], if I call my mom or talk to my dad and I'm trying to describe something complicated to him that he probably wouldn't understand in English. But sometimes I don't know the word in Spanish either.

As this student noted, language is intertwined with "understanding." To understand is social accepted as normal, while to misunderstand is not, and a breakdown of communication. Misunderstanding is seen as both a cause and an emblem of social difference (Bailey 2006:396). When these students are unable to communicate in Spanish with people in power – parents, business owners, pageant judges, and others – their inability to speak the language is seen by older community members as a problematic loss of ethnic identity. During the pageant interviews when all of the students were absent from the room, one older judge in the Miss Hispanic OU pageant remarked to the other judges that the next pageant queen needed to speak Spanish because, as she boldly stated, "This is Miss His*pan*ic OU. That means Spanish."

"Acting Hispanic" and Class Identity

The use of ethnically prejudiced language in defining ethnic identity has become increasingly tied to class discourse in the U.S., as well as the expectations that

Hispanic college students have regarding the class mobility their education will afford them. During interviews about Hispanic identity, students sometimes offered explanations of what they felt to be were different degrees of "Hispanic-ness." One student explained,

> [s]ometimes, when we go to like the supermarket, we see like, Hispanic people, and we're not like immediately saying "they're Mexican," but they are, more than us, for sure. There are some people who come from really small towns in Mexico and they just come here to the U.S. and with them they bring like, you know, the "*big* Virgin Mary's" and like, their boots, and hats, and really extravagant cars and just you know, they have their own luxuries that they just want to express. And the neighborhood we live in, like a couple of streets down, is another neighborhood and over the years there have been a lot of Hispanics moving in and my mom drives by and she's like, "[t]hey need to take better care of their homes" and she's just like, "[t]his is why some people in the U.S. don't like us because they think we're dirty and we're drunks and we like to play our music really loud." So when it comes to that, sometimes I do think we're even judging ourselves in our little minority or race, or ethnicity, I forget which term. We even judge ourselves; it's not really like, "oh you're too American," but I do know, my mom works with some people and they're like, "Wow, your daughters, your family is so Americanized."

This student's remarks show that she understood that class and material goods defined how her family, and others, were perceived by both Hispanics and non-Hispanics. She also made a point of telling me that her family had abandoned some Mexican

traditions, such as painting their home a bright color or placing a Virgin Mary statue in their yard. These traditions are, of course, not associated with middle classness in the United States. In comparison, her family still continues to enjoy soccer games and cookouts; sports and the quintessential backyard barbeque are recognizably American middle class events.

In her categorization of lower and middle class Hispanics, this student also referenced the pressure to *be* American. As a result, she offered fairly negative comments about lower class Mexican people, saying that it was "easy to spot them" because,

> [w]e call like, really, *really*, Mexican people, we call them "paisas" [*sic*] which I don't know, I guess, would mean like "Mexican ghettos" but they're not dressed in gang clothing, they're dressed in really point boots, and that's a real thing and they go to like, dance to this, uh, special music that is like Mexican country music, kind of. Sometimes, it's like you come here [to the U.S.] and it's like you're "too Mexican."

Another student remarked to me that "there's different levels of Hispanic people and we're the Americanized ones, but yet we still have a lot of Mexican customs," and she classified her family as "more American" on the basis of their economic status, discussing at length the house her parents bought, and her family's neighborhood and school district. Both of these highly successful students made these descriptions of being "more American" in distinct contrast to the neighborhoods and people which she considered both "more Mexican" and lower class because of their socioeconomic lifestyle.

Research participants often used the term, "Americanized," combining ethnicity and class. In other words, those who have achieved greater social mobility have become "more American" and those who have not are simply constructed as "more Hispanic" or "more Mexican." When I asked one student in an interview whether her parents had gone to college, she was quick to say "No, they're still considered working class, I guess. They just work regular jobs." While I was introducing the topic of education by asking her who in her family had gone to college, she immediately linked class to schooling. In this sense, higher education is, as Karen Brodkin puts it in her discussion of Jewish American class mobility, "segregated from the ways of *being* working class" (1998:71, emphasis added). Many students added that, by going to college, they felt they were achieving their parents' American Dream.

In *Anthropology and Social Theory,* Sherry Ortner (2006) argues that class is a central category of cultural discourse in the U.S. that is hidden under discourses of race, ethnicity, and gender. Class discourse is displaced because American social thought is ideologically individualistic, but class cannot be conceptualized in those terms (Ortner 2006:26). Ortner suggests that the hiddenness of class operates on two levels: public culture and subjectivity (2006:79). In public culture, the discourse about class is muted, where people talk about class inequality in terms of gender, race, and ethnic disparities. For example, most of the contestants in the Miss Hispanic OU pageant choose platforms that promote higher education to Hispanic families in the Oklahoma City metro area. What is not stated is that most of the Hispanic families in the OKC metro who do not or cannot direct their children into higher education are

lower class families with little access to cultural capital, economic capital, and college knowledge. Discussions of class in public spaces, like the Miss Hispanic OU pageant, are usually limited to the discourse of the American dream and ways to increase Hispanic education and achievement.

Muted public discourse about class becomes absorbed into the subjective experiences of individuals' daily lives. The linguistic and social differences between students' forays into the middle class world of academics and their parents' experiences in working class jobs are quite apparent. Students' parents do not understand why they must "work" (study) late at night and cannot come home to visit every weekend, and students see their study habits as luxuries for which their parents sacrificed. Moreover, these students view their ability to succeed academically (and secure stable employment), as both a collective gain for their families to mobilize their class status and as the reason that they are accused of "acting white."

Academic Identities and Success as a Social Construct

Hugh Mehan et al. suggest that the formation of academic identities and achievement ideology occur in three steps: 1) isolation of group members; 2) public markers of group identity; and 3) formation of voluntary associations and relationships (2009: 108-110). As students form an academic identity in college, they are usually physically isolated from their families through administrative requirements to live on campus during the first two years of their studies. Although public markers of group identity vary enormously for students, markers that stand out most to Latinas' parents

are the books, computers, and other coursework materials[15] that most students carry with them when they go home to visit their families. Lastly, voluntary involvement in campus organizations helps to solidify these Latinas' academic identities. These students are all involved in Hispanic American Student Association (HASA) programming, but many are also involved in larger student organizations on campus, like the Union Programming Board, the OU Daily (campus newspaper), and the Campus Activities Council. One very successful student I interviewed, a student athlete and a Broadcast Journalism major, felt that she had an obligation to become a leader to help other Latinas "make it" to college. She said,

> I grew up in a home where college was important but it wasn't realistic. If it happened, it happened, but, if not, then you just worked…I feel that Hispanics now have problems with families supporting them [in college] because there is a language barrier, they don't quite understand there are a lot of opportunities and a lot of financial help out there to go to college. That's why students drop out in high school, because their parents need financial help at home now – they can't wait until you graduate college and have a career, they need you to help pay bills now and that is something really realistic to me.

Many Latina students have to choose (or know of peers who face such a choice) between going to school full-time and living on campus (the traditional pathway for a successful college student) or working to help to contribute to their family's income. If they choose to work and support their family, campus resources

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[15] Having these kinds of materials at home – books, study guides, etc. – are middle class markers.

are less accessible, making it difficult for them to build for themselves an image of a "good student" (Meador 2005). In the past, the "worthy student" in American education was a white, middle class male student, which later shifted to also include white, middle class women (Meador 2005; Tice 2012).

Ethnic constructs contribute to the ways that students and their families experience college (Stambach 1999:443). The only times that the parents of my research participants came to campus were during Hispanic-oriented programming and cultural events, such as the Miss Hispanic OU pageant. This means that these brief familial encounters occur only during explicit performances of Hispanic identity. Miss Hispanic OU and other Hispanic campus events (such as Eve of Nations or the Latinos Without Borders conference) do not challenge prejudiced discourse or parents' expectations of students. Instead, they promote recognizable cultural traditions, including dance, music, and language use, as means for students to gain approval from their families of their identities as students.

Latina students see their efforts in courses, campus activities, and skills training on campus as mechanisms for collective gain for their families. By promoting their academic accomplishments as achievements for their families, rather than only for themselves, they are creating an integrative framework where they can be both Latina and successful, despite being told they are "acting white." Students frequently stated that they are in college to succeed because their parents want them to. Many students even stated that everything they did was for their parents and that parental approval means everything to them. These Latina students want their college and future careers to provide them with income for their families' class mobility, rather

than their own class status individually. In fact, not a single student framed income, employment, or class expectations in exclusive terms of her own personhood.

Success is also framed in the ways that students are able to integrate their academic experiences with their family's expectations. Accusations of "acting white" are undeniably problematic, fostering ongoing fissures between Hispanic and academic communities, as well as larger social cleavages between Hispanic and mainstream white American communities. However, Latinas are lessening the impact of these accusations by focusing on integrative efforts, such as the Miss Hispanic OU pageant and other kinds of "culture nights," where they present a message of ethnic uplift and inclusiveness on campus and strengthen cultural ties between students and their parents. Through these are events, students perform their engagement in "Hispanic-ness" and deemphasize whiteness to come to terms with their families' expectations.

Chapter 2

"It's Not About Beauty!": Agency, Gender, and the Miss Hispanic OU Pageant

As the stage curtain rose, a saddle sat on a stand on the right side of the stage, Mexican rodeo music began to play, and Ana, dressed in a man's *charro* costume, strutted out onto the stage in an exaggerated "manly" walk, keeping her thumbs hooked in her belt loops and bending her knees. She strutted back and forth across the stage for a few seconds, and began to speak when the music ended,

Buenos Noches [sic]![16]

Señoras y Señores, Ladies and Gentlemen...I am here for one specific purpose and that is to rid you all of any doubt...of the bravery of a Mexican!

I'm going to tell you about a sport! But not just any sport...Oh no, no, no! Es la Charrería*! The bravest sport of them all!*

At this, the audience burst into applause, recognizing Charrería with excitement, and Ana beamed, wearing a set of bushy, fake eyebrows and a mustache stuck on over her many layers of pageant makeup and glitter. Her hair, which was agonizingly curled and hair-sprayed only a few hours before, was now tied back in a low bun, tucked into the collar of her Western-style buttoned shirt, and hidden by the sombrero she wore.

We do not dribble a ball down a court. We do not wear gear to protect our body! We, los charros, go face-to-face with bulls that can weigh up to 1,500 pounds and ride

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[16] Correct gender form, "Buenas Noches!" Research participants are either not native speakers of Spanish or have low level bilingual fluency and, as a result, often made grammar and pronunciation mistakes in their Spanish usage during the pageant. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

beautiful horses all while doing death-defying stunts...for fun! Charrería consists of ten scoring events in a particular order. One event is for the beautiful señoritas, las charras, the ladies, which is, of course, my personal favorite to watch...the escaramuza.

With this statement, Ana lowered the pitch of her voice and leaned forward, as if she was letting the audience in on a secret. She raised her eyebrows up and down suggestively, tipping her sombrero with one hand, to exaggerate her portrayal of a charro whose affection for watching charras is not a secret at all. After Ana received the laugh from the audience that she expected, she continued with the presentation, this time switching from portraying a character to demonstrating her knowledge of Charrería.

Two or more ascociaciónes*, or teams, compete to become state champions, then regional, and then, finally, national championships. We are judged on both execution and style! Charrerías are held in arenas called Lienzo Charro...We wear a traditional* traje de charro*, which includes a closely fitted suit, botines, and your sombrero. When all the events are finished, the winners get awards like saddles and belt buckles. After all of the awards are given...THE FIESTA BEGINS!*

As Ana chronicled the end of the event, she threw both hands up in the air, trying to communicate through her body language the enjoyment of the fiesta that follows Charrería. Then she continued, reaching her conclusion but maintaining the level of excitement and energy that she hoped would win her the pageant crown,

...Charrerías are an all-out experience, even for the audience...Aside from competition and fun, Charrería is a Mexican tradition. It is culture and it is pride! I

know that I am proud to represent the strength and bravery of a Mexican through the sport that I participate in. Estoy orgulloso de representar la fortaleza y la valentina de los Mexicanos con el deporte en el que participo que es la Charrería.

The audience broke into loud applause and cheered once again. Ana tucked her left thumb into her belt loop and raised her right hand above her head, making a fist as she took a step forward toward the front of the stage, planting each foot squarely and with exaggerated purpose. She proudly declared, "*Viva los charros, Y VIVA MEXICO!*"[17] Following this statement, the music returned and Ana did a small dance off of the stage, shuffling her boots, with one hand on her sombrero.

One week after the pageant, I interviewed Ana about her presentation. When I asked her about her choice to play a charro instead of a charra, she said,

> [o]f course I was concerned about portraying a man, but women as leaders or admirable characters are hard to find in Mexican culture. If you asked me right now for a leader's name, I would probably spit out a man's name. I would have also been uncomfortable dressed as a charra. I couldn't take a woman as a leader and make it a joke or make it funny, and I needed to be funny to make people remember it.

In this year's Miss Hispanic OU pageant, the cultural presentations and talent performances focused on the theme "Flavors of the Culture" to highlight the diversity of Hispanic traditions. Ana's take on this, along with that of the other contestants, was to give a performance that elevated Hispanic culture through the glorification of men's

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[17] Full text of presentation is included in the Appendix.

roles. No portrayals of women or women's roles were represented in ways comparable to the representation of men's roles, even though the pageant is supposed to produce the best "*Miss* Hispanic" representative of local Hispanic culture.[18] Presentation of Hispanic women's culture in the pageant is limited to the performance of folkloric dances. This one performance, Ana's Charrería, symbolized four months of pageant rehearsals and fieldwork. These women chose to perform what they believed to be the most "authentic" demonstration of their knowledge of Hispanic culture. This was achieved by praising men's roles as charros, baseball players, and Mexican revolutionary war heroes, among other portrayals, to gain academic, economic, and civic opportunities through winning the Miss Hispanic OU scholarship pageant. In this chapter, I position the various performances of Latina students in the Miss Hispanic OU pageant as extensions of their agency, though their ability to choose what to perform in order to win is constrained by reproductions of beauty and Hispanic and American gender norms.

In other settings, eighteen- and nineteen-year old women's portrayals of Hispanic men's roles might be unacceptable or largely ignored. On the pageant stage, however, it is a way to gain approval and negotiate cultural identity when it is juxtaposed with evening gowns, sparkling princess crowns, feminine folkloric dances, and other domains of beauty pageant competition.

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[18] Last year's presentation only contained one presentation representing women, a Frieda Kahlo monologue.

Beauty Pageants as Research Sites

Beauty pageants are valuable sites for cultural research. Pageants can be considered ritual "dramas," as they are formally enacted; there are rules that order the actions of all who participate. Pageants have defined roles for judges, contestants, organizers, and announcers. There is also a single transformation: one contestant becomes a queen with new duties as a representation of the ritual itself. The winner of a beauty pageant becomes the ultimate sign of the values and practices of the community she represents. The appearance of the contestants is the embodiment of the best feminine representations of their community. However, beauty pageants in the United States have also long been considered by nonparticipants, sites of women's repression through the objectification of their bodies in competition with other women. Considering this, it is unexpected then, that contestants of any beauty pageant would reflect on their experiences in such a competition as both rewarding and enjoyable. Nevertheless, many pageant contestants consider the pageant experiences empowering, as the contestants of the annual Miss Hispanic OU pageant have. From collegiate ethnic beauty pageants to Miss America, all beauty pageant events provide a competition stage suffused with symbols of the broader gender systems in which they operate.

Contestants from the Miss Hispanic OU pageant stated that they decided to do the pageant because it "isn't a beauty contest." The contestants also emphasized that the pageant allowed them to form greater connections to the local Hispanic community and more clearly define their goals to "help make a difference in the world." Overall, the Miss Hispanic OU pageant is a rewarding and upwardly mobile avenue for the

Latinas who choose to compete. Pageant contestants feel that this ethnic beauty pageant is uplifting for the local Hispanic community and that it helps them to achieve their social justice goals. In Miss Hispanic OU, like many other beauty pageants, contestants do not conceptualize the event as repressive. Thus, beauty pageants are not as inherently repressive for the individuals who choose to compete as the public assumes. Instead, pageants are often appropriated for greater opportunities through the agency of contestants.

The history of pageants on college campuses presents a complex meaning of what it is to be an educated, female citizen. Education, after all, *is culture* (Foley et al., 2000:38). It continuously reproduces, remakes, and transmits symbolic meanings to future publics. College gives students experience moving between and maintaining ties to both familial and campus cultures. Constraining reproductions of gender and race in ethnic beauty pageants are undeniable, but they can be appropriated through the contestants' agency. Miss Hispanic OU is unique as a pageant in its ability to create opportunities for all contestants, not just the one who takes the crown. My analysis draws from preliminary interviews with contestants from the 2013 pageant, four months of participant observation during the 2014 pageant rehearsals, and follow-up interviews with contestants after the 2014 pageant.

At their very core, pageants are cultural domains which reproduce social and historical discursive realities. Sex and gender constructs within beauty pageants are accessible from a particular ideology of race, ethnicity, and class, yet they have historically and publicly supported what has become a seemingly "natural" standard that all women should strive to attain.

More than Miss America: The Rise of Beauty Pageants

The earliest modern American beauty pageants (the overt display of feminine characteristics in a competition setting) began in the 1850s in circuses, with little interest from the conservative American public. Pageants first gained real popularity in Atlantic City in 1921 when the first Miss America pageant was held to extend the tourism season past Labor Day. Miss America was considered the first of its kind because it judged contestants on more than beauty. The structure of the Miss America competition has become the hallmark of most pageants today.

The crowning of beauty "royalty" on college campuses has existed since at least the rise of Miss America; women college students were named queens for homecoming, local festivals, and even academic departments. In 1950, the University of Minnesota *Gopher* yearbook proclaimed, "no campus event is complete without the selection of a princess, sweetheart or dream girl" (Tice 2005:256). In the early twentieth century, few extracurricular activities or student organizations existed on college campuses for women compared to numerous activities available for men. Beauty pageants afforded women prestige and exclusive ritual space on campus (Tice 2005:251).

As cultural sites of competition and gender reproduction, pageants have become sites of women's struggle for representation. Rather than seeing beauty pageants die out as part of a bygone era, we have seen them increase in both number and publicity since the early twentieth century. We have also witnessed the rise of ethnic pageants (and a limited number of pageants for men). Ethnic pageants are very popular on

college campuses throughout the United States. Contestants' motivations for competing in these pageants are typically a combination of scholarships, job opportunities, and ethnic or cultural pride (Tice 2005:269). Ethnic pageants on campus are usually sponsored by college departments of student affairs programs or cultural centers. Ethnic beauty pageants have risen to extreme popularity on college campuses across America in the last sixty years. Education scholar Karen W. Tice argues that ethnic pageants are popular on college campuses because the ethnic minority students who compete face different issues of representation of their bodies and cultural identities than white women have in non-collegiate pageants.

Ethnic pageants play a significant role in the discourse of racial uplift by purporting to train future leaders. These pageants also offer a direct challenge to the idea that poise and respectability and other beauty pageant values are reserved for middle-class white women (Tice 2005:252). The emphasis on culture in ethnic pageants represents a subtle departure from the portrait of the mainstream ideal, feminine beauty queen.

Anthropological research suggests that the authenticity of culture in local ethnic pageants becomes its primary aesthetic property (McAllister 1996:106). Discussions and definitions of authenticity are prevalent in anthropological studies of beauty pageants, highlighting authenticity's potential for empowerment and resistance (McAllister 1996; Siu 2005; Cohen et. al, 1996). Anthropologist Lok C.D. Siu, in her study of the Queen of the Chinese Colony pageant in Panama, explains that authenticity legitimizes pageants as places of politics defined by larger power structures. In the case of the Queen of the Chinese Colony pageant, being able to

speak Chinese and assert belonging to the home country, rather than to Central America, are qualifiers of authentic "Chineseness" in the pageant (Siu 2005:82). In her research on Guatemala's Maya Queen, anthropologist Carlotta McAllister defines the authentic representation as "one in which the relationship of form to content, of signifier to signified, is intrinsic and therefore eternal…the authentic sign must be performed, in that its meaning is negotiated and contextualized between the performer and the audience through evaluation of its form" (1996:107-108). In other words, the performance of "authentic" culture in pageants – language, talent, beauty, ideology – is made into "real" culture through the acceptance of the performance by both the performer and the audience.

Ethnic pageants align women as reproducers of local culture, nationalism, transnationalism, and diaspora (Siu 2005:59). Miss Hispanic OU shares this trait with other ethnic pageants examined through ethnographic research, such as the Queen of the Chinese Colony in Panama (Siu 2005), Miss Navajo (Luther 2007), and the Powwow Princess (Roberts 2005). Ethnic pageants distinguish young women as "icons of their community" (Roberts 2005:152), intertwining them with local ideologies and political discourse. Beauty pageants are never neutral since, as local sites of power, they are linked to national and global hierarchies and histories of race, ethnicity, and gender. The Miss Hispanic OU pageant is also a source of renewal for the Oklahoma City's Hispanic community's link to OU's campus culture, reinforcing this connection through the presentation of the contestants' accomplishments as Latinas first and students second.

The Miss Hispanic OU Pageant

The Miss Hispanic OU pageant, which began in 1996, takes place in the Spring semester every year, and the winner promotes her platform during the following academic year. The pageant is part of a series of Hispanic cultural events on campus, sponsored by the Hispanic American Student Association (HASA), and the Department of Student Life at the University of Oklahoma. The contestants compete in a thirty-minute interview with the pageant judges two weeks prior to the onstage competition. On Pageant Day, the competition resumes with four additional categories: onstage questions, a cultural presentation, a talent performance, and an evening gown category. In the cultural presentation category, contestants have to demonstrate their knowledge of cultural traditions, history, and symbols of their country of familial origin or the home states of their parents or grandparents. This year, there were six contestants in all: three women represented Mexico, and the other three contestants represented Peru, Panama, and the Dominican Republic.

The requirements to compete in the pageant are a GPA of 2.5 or higher, full-time student status, being unmarried and without children, "having an understanding of Hispanic culture," letters of recommendation from faculty members, and a statement of social and political platform goals. The Latino Student Life Advisor supervises the pageant, although a committee of student volunteers carries out the organization of the pageant event. Student volunteers, the Latino advisor, and pageant contestants all state that the pageant is about the "spreading and celebration of Hispanic culture." One runner up from the 2013 pageant noted that the first thing the contestants were told at

the information meetings was, "This is not a beauty pageant. This is about the Hispanic community. This is to help you be someone and to help those in need."

Through the analysis of this research, I have determined that there were two unstated objectives for the night of the pageant. First, students' performance of ethnic and cultural celebration was aimed at receiving approval of campus activities from their families and the OKC Hispanic community. Second, the competition between these students demonstrated their civic and social skills in order to gain future academic and socioeconomic opportunities by becoming Miss Hispanic OU. These goals, discussed in the remainder of this thesis, became apparent through the students' determination to win the pageant, what they were willing to give up in order to win, and their careful choices regarding family approval made during the months leading up to the pageant.

The Miss Hispanic OU pageant opens with a choreographed dance number in which all contestants perform the same dance together. Contestants are not judged on their ability to master the dance. A choreographed dance serves as an opener in most beauty pageants. This is also when contestants are introduced, their biographies are read by the masters of ceremonies, and their families are recognized in the crowd.

The first publicly judged portion[19] of the pageant is the talent portion. Rosario performed a *folklorico* dance, *La Negra*; Cecilia wrote and performed a spoken-word piece titled, "Glass Ceiling"; Sonia and Sara danced *salsa*; Ana rapped a spoken-word piece; and Julie sang "Mi Peru." Although this portion was scored, it too served as an

[19] The first judged section of the pageant is actually the interview, but this is completed a week prior to Pageant Day.

opener for the cultural presentations, which are the most anticipated and most important performances of the night. The contestants expressed concern early on in rehearsals about their talent performances. Selena, the reigning Miss Hispanic OU, often advised them about their talents, giving the contestants advice and ideas about what they could do. In order to win, they must balance their own preferences and skills with what they think the judges will find impressive (as is the case in any pageant).

Two performances in the pageant provide illustrations of this balance between the strength of the contestants' skills and the need to be "authentic" in the eyes of the judges. One contestant had originally planned to play the piano and sing "I'm Yours," a contemporary American pop song. After having difficulty with the piano performance, she switched her talent at the last minute to a new song, and with some coaching from the pageant organizers, picked something that everyone in attendance at rehearsal that night agreed was "more cultural." She wore a traditional dress, and danced barefoot on the stage while she sang. Smiling, she was greeted by frequent applause and cheering as she sang and a friend sat in the corner of the stage and played the *cajón*, a small Peruvian percussion drum.

Another contestant shifted her talent performance from her personal preferences to fit the expectations of the pageant consumers, the judges and the audience. Sonia, a skilled dancer, danced a *salsa y bachata*. Sonia has had years of practice, and her partner was a fellow dancer who was also her choreographer. Her dance was very flirtatious and the crowd cheered often during her performance. Sonia had been warned by the pageant organizers that if she was going to dance the salsa, which is considered a suggestive, flirtatious dance, that she had to wear a very modest costume.

She wore a black dress that had a high-cut neckline, with small cutouts on the sides, and a full, knee-length skirt. She also wore low, black heels instead of the strappy red platform heels she usually wore to practice. This student chose a black costume because she thought it would appear modest and demure, since most of the other contestants wore red during their performances.

The contestants all chose talent performances that indexed Hispanic culture. Although this was not required, it was understood that in order to win, all aspects of performance must be related to Hispanic pride, according to the past pageant queens. The pageant organizers frequently advised the contestants that they had to choose talents that the judges would recognize as "Hispanic" talents.

After the talent performances came the cultural presentations; these cultural presentations were the students' greatest opportunity to win the pageant, other than the interviews with the judges, because they were worth more points than other portions of the competition. This year featured cultural presentations about a traditional Panamanian Quinceañera, Catholic *posadas*, folkloric dances, and portrayals of a charro (as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter), Dominican baseball player Sammy Sosa, and Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. The contestants chose cultural presentations based upon their strengths (monologues and theater performance or dance), rather than on their knowledge of cultural traditions. They learned the cultural history given in their presentations by asking their parents for help in preparing for the pageant, though the students also searched for information online and through the library. After the pageant was over, the contestants spoke positively about their

cultural presentations. They stressed that it strengthened ties to their families because they asked their families for information about cultural traditions and Hispanic history.

Following the cultural presentations came the evening gown walk, although the contestants dismissed the importance of wearing the gowns. There used to be a title given to the contestant with the highest score for "poise, presentation, grace" during the evening gown presentation, but this title has not been awarded for the past few years, because the pageant organizers decided that they did not want the contestants to be judged according to the dresses they could afford to buy. The final category of the pageant was the onstage question. In traditional pageant style, each contestant stepped up to the jar of questions, drew a slip of paper, and handed it to Selena, who asked the questions slowly and clearly, then held the microphone out for each contestant to answer.

While the audience and the judges placed the most emphasis on the cultural presentations, the contestants memorized those performances, making them more confident in their execution, in contrast to the onstage questions. These questions were given and answered in English, marking a strong departure from the Spanish-dominated interviews, talent performances, and cultural presentations. These questions mirrored traditional beauty pageant questions, such as, "Why is Hispanic culture important to you?," or "Why do you want to win Miss Hispanic OU?" The content of these questions and answers is brief, following the typical beauty pageant structure. A contestant might be given the question, "If you become Miss Hispanic OU, what will you do for the Hispanic community?" and the expected structure of contestants' answers is as follows:

> [t]hat is a great question Selena, thank you. If I were to become Miss Hispanic OU, I would begin instituting my platform plan into four local high schools. My platform, "Si Se Puede," aims at building individual bridges between students and success in college. I went to a local high school myself, so I know what these students are facing. I want to be with them every step of the way and to be a role model for their success. I want to show them that they can do it, that it is possible, because they are Hispanic.

The tone of these answers was formal in the beginning, and then as the content became less rehearsed towards the end of the answer (since the answers are given on the spot), the contestants' tone became more passionate, drawing more on emotional practice rather than rehearsed answers. Although the onstage questions were the last judged portion, by this point in the competition, the winner is likely already chosen in the more heavily weighted categories of the cultural presentation and the interview.

The Miss Hispanic OU pageant shares many similarities with traditional beauty pageants. The categories and structure of the pageant (how the winner is chosen) is typical of the way that pageants are judged. The roles of winner and runner up reproduce those of a typical college pageant's reigning queens' duties. The roles that contestants perform on stage are coached and dictated by the pageant's organizers and producers, an inherent part of any pageant's structure. Despite these similarities, Miss Hispanic OU exhibits several important departures from the traditional beauty pageant model. The most obvious difference is the cultural presentation category, but also that every contestant's talent performance was connected in some way to Hispanic cultural traditions.

Second, in traditional beauty pageants, contestants rehearse and build their platforms entirely on their own (Tice 2005:252).while contestants in Miss Hispanic OU meet every weekend during the Spring semester to prepare together and work collaboratively on their platforms. The pageant's history of collective effort and building a network of activists is therefore reconstructed every Spring semester over the course of four months.

Finally, contestants repeatedly mention that Miss Hispanic OU is not about beauty. The Miss Hispanic OU pageant creates a representative that embodies the Hispanic ideal of an educated, feminine citizen. In studying ethnic pageants in Minnesota, anthropologist Robert Lavenda explains that local pageants "are supposed to find [a representative] that local people believe to be the best of themselves – talent, friendliness, commitment to the community and its values, upward mobility" (Lavenda 1996:31). When I asked the contestants what they thought the purpose of Miss Hispanic OU was, they referred to being told by the pageant organizers from the onset of pageant preparations that it was to strengthen the ties between OU's Norman campus and Hispanic families living in Oklahoma City. Describing the way that she was recruited into the pageant based on her activist work in Tulsa before transferring to OU, one student said,

> [t]he HASA and advisors had heard of me because of newspapers and because of the events that we were hosting and doing legislative visits and just lobbying and all of that, so they said, "You know, the Miss Hispanic OU pageant is about your platform and about what you're going to bring to Oklahomans, to your community." There is a barrier between Norman, the university, and the OKC

community and I think that they want the Miss Hispanic OU to be that face and that person they [the community] can contact.

This year's pageant included four freshmen who saw the pageant as a way to quickly establish their presence on campus. One freshman stated that she could work "really, really hard" and still not have perfect grades, or she could maintain good (but not great) grades, but have time for volunteer work, activism, networking and leadership on campus and that would mean more to her and her family than having the highest GPA. She felt that her parents would not understand why a high GPA was useful, but they would understand and be proud of her involvement in Latino-based programs.

The chance to win Miss Hispanic OU is also a chance to gain leadership positions in student organizations, become a campus representative, win scholarships, travel and participate in Latino student leadership conferences, and gain approval from parents and families about their choice to come to college.

Reproductions of Gender and Ethnicity in Pageants

Gender in pageants is performed through the rehearsed cultural qualities (grace, poise, intelligence, and so on) that pageant contestants are supposed to embody. Understanding gender as performative is to recognize that gender is, "[not] a preexisting identity...[but] created through sustained social performances" (Butler 1999:192). In standard beauty pageants, femininity is presented through evening wear and two-piece swimsuits, as well as the smiles and tears that contestants of pageants not only practice, but that consumers (the audiences) have come to expect. Beauty pageants create beauty as one of the fundamental dimensions of femininity, thereby

structuring beauty as "natural, essential, and universal" (Wilk 1996:218). This means that the consumers of the pageant (the audience, the contestants, the sponsors, and the judges) can dispute the meaning and the spectrum of beauty (who is the most beautiful), but not the existence of beauty. In this pageant, femininity takes on the same structure; who is the best feminine representative may be disputed but the fact that all contestants must be feminine is incontestable. By establishing beauty and femininity as standards in the competition, beauty pageants reaffirm the gender, race, and sexuality status quo, attempting to deny any subversive culture, gender, or sex performances.

One particular instance highlights the power of the status quo in beauty pageants. At one dance rehearsal in the week prior to the pageant, the freshmen contestants asked me if I had ever gone to a tanning salon. They planned to get spray tans to look darker on pageant day. One student claimed she "doesn't want to look white or pasty!" and the other girls nodded in agreement. Tanning for darker skin has multiple purposes: 1) tanning is a common practice in beauty pageant culture; 2) recent dominant, heteronormative constructs of beauty in the U.S. promote tanned skin for young women; and, 3) the contestants felt that they would score better if they "looked Hispanic." In the pageant world, tanning only increases the contestants' ability to win and gain opportunities. During normal day-to-day experiences on campus, however, the students stated they would rather people perceive their skin to be lighter than darker, reproducing constructs of white, heteronormative beauty.

Barriers of women's representation in pageants are also reinforced in Miss Hispanic OU through its requirements for students to be unmarried and childless, i.e.,

"innocent," as was often stated by pageant organizers. The term "innocent" was frequently used by contestants and organizers to describe how students should appear on stage and whenever Hispanic community leaders were present. The contestants often remarked during rehearsals that if they won Miss Hispanic OU, they would not be able to go to parties or be seen out with men at night during the year of their reign as queen because they knew they could not be seen participating in such activities by their community. The guidelines requiring contestants to be single and childless, standard for nearly all beauty pageants in the United States, reinforce the idea that the most beautiful and "best" feminine representative of a community is an unmarried, maiden young woman. This woman still "belongs" to her family and her community because she does not yet "belong" to a husband and has not become a caretaker for her children.

These guidelines have restricted some highly successful Latinas at OU from accessing the cultural citizenship opportunities that Miss Hispanic OU offers. For example, on the day of the pageant, I was helping Camila, one of the pageant volunteers, count tickets. Camila asked me about my research and I asked her if she had ever competed in any pageants. She replied that she had never done a pageant before, but that she had really wanted to do Miss Hispanic OU. She applied to compete in the pageant this year but her application was denied. Camila is a single mother, with a toddler, and she is engaged, but not married. Camila's situation is just one illustration of the ways in which pageants empower women, but only through the reaffirmation of particular gender norms. The expectation that the most qualified queen (and representative of her community) is an unmarried and childless woman,

who is also white and trained in the "poise" and "grace" of middle classness, reproduces the notion that it is these qualities which make her the most qualified to participate in politics, social and cultural change. Thus, when a queen is crowned, her ethnicity is superseded by her femininity, and it her mastery of these feminine qualities which gives her the greatest access to cultural and legal power.

Butler (1999) theorizes that sex is culturally constructed as well as gender, and this concept can be extended to the production of ethnic and sexual identities performed in beauty pageants. Ethnicity in pageants is only "authentic" to the degree that it is performed as expected. Pageant contestants have been disqualified or ignored, and pageant winners dethroned when an alternate image of them surfaces, one that exhibits far more sexual agency or ethnic/racial identity other than a strictly middle class, white, feminine identity. For example, the first (and only) Jewish Miss America, Bess Myerson, was crowned in 1945. Pageant officials attempted to convince Myerson to change her name to "Betty Merrick," which was "less ethnic." Myerson refused on the grounds that the two hundred and fifty Jewish families living in her Bronx apartment building would know she was the daughter of the Myerson family. Although Myerson was not dethroned because of her refusal to comply with the pageant officials' request, Myerson encountered endless anti-Semitism during the pageant and even after she was crowned Miss America (Jewish American Hall of Fame 2014).

In a more recent example, seven-year-old Jakiyah McKoy was crowned Little Miss Hispanic Delaware in August 2013 and subsequently dethroned three weeks later for failing to provide documentation of Hispanic lineage to Nuestras Raíces Delaware, the pageant's producer. Her family claimed that the seven year-old's grandmother was

Dominican but passed away shortly before the competition. While the pageant had explicit rules about contestant eligibility, the organizers' explanation for why she was dethroned has raised public questioning about whether or not Jakiyah's racial features (Jakiyah is phenotypically black) played a role in the scrutiny her Latina heritage, given the fact that other child contestants who "looked Hispanic" were not investigated so closely. The controversy produced an online petition with over 47,000 signatures and dozens of open letters published through the Huffington Post asking for Jakiyah's title and crown to be reinstated (Huffington Post 2013).

The first African American Miss America, Vanessa Williams, (who first entered the pageantry circuit through a college pageant) also provides an appropriate illustration of this kind of dethroning. Williams was crowned in 1983 and received hate mail and death threats because of her racial status (not unlike the threats made to the 2013 Miss America who is Indian American). Less than a year after she was crowned, nude photos of Williams, which were taken before the pageant, surfaced and Williams was stripped of her Miss America title and crown. The media and discourse surrounding the controversy depicted Williams as an oversexed black woman in a white competition of feminine poise and beauty. The resulting portrayal of William's actions reaffirmed negative stereotypes and culturally constructed representations of African American women's sexuality because of the status and prestige that beauty pageants hold in the United States.

In his explanation of sexuality as a social construct, Foucault explains that centers of power sustain discourses which emphasize specific kinds of gender and sexuality (1990:49). By overemphasizing femininity and deemphasizing sexuality onstage,

pageants are centers of power in which women's femininity is the most valued form of gender and sexuality. This is evidenced by the performance of traditional pageant domains: evening gowns, stage presence, swimwear, advocacy,[20] all of which enforce femininity to a greater degree than they appear to enforce sexuality. Thus, the objectification of women in pageants is sustained not by constructs of beauty or idealness of bodies, but by mores, politics, power, and ideology.[21]

In *The History of Sexuality*: *An Introduction*, Foucault describes centers of power as processes of reproduction which take on new or changed meanings over time (Foucault 1990:48). History provides the models and contexts for symbolic meaning in ethnic pageants where ethnicity and gender are overemphasized. Pageants "serve to legitimize the perspective of the status quo with regard to the immaterial powers of young females, publicly identifying them as signs of social and civic institutions" (Stoeltje 1996:14). I am suggesting that, although the representation of women in ethnic beauty pageants is through a performance which voluntarily segregates students by ethnicity and therefore indexes the existing ethnic inequality in mainstream pageants, it is possible instead to understand ethnic pageants, particularly Miss Hispanic OU, as a medium of opportunity for Latina women on campus. It is possible for women to compete in a pageant based upon their ethnicity that reinforces gender norms, requires conformity to standards of beauty, and local discourse about ethnicity and still emerge with a greater sense of agency and empowerment.

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[20] These categories vary by pageant.
[21] See Moore 1988 and Blackwood 2002 for a discussion of the influence of politics and norms on gender and sexuality.

College Women as Educated Citizens

Collegiate beauty pageants are part of larger institutional and cultural ideas about what it means to be a woman with a college education. Education and gender norms present on college campuses are "not socially static, and sex-specific" (Stambach 1999:441), but rather they are linked to broader cultural values embedded in social organization and indicated by social inequality. For example, the difference in ways that students navigate student-faculty relationships demonstrate broader expectations about authority, or the ways that college knowledge is transferred from college students to parents and siblings and community demonstrates broad social networks and cultural transmission. Answers to questions about gender constructs in collegiate beauty pageants also require the same kind of broader exploration beyond the campus site of formal organizations to community and societal norms. To understand why Miss Hispanic OU is important to students, and why it offers opportunities on campus not accessible elsewhere, a thicker description of students' own experiences with families, peers, and leaders on and off campus is needed.

All of the contestants in Miss Hispanic OU sought (and received) approval from their families, friends, and boyfriends about their choice to compete because it was a chance to be involved in cultural promotion, as well as a chance to show that they had made gains, as Latinas, in college.

For Latinas competing in Miss Hispanic OU, Hispanic culture norms are reaffirmed. Several of the women who competed in the 2013 and 2014 pageants remarked to me that they agreed to do the pageant once they realized "it was not a

beauty pageant" and it was to "promote the culture." In this sense, Miss Hispanic OU is both reproducing and rejecting mainstream cultural meanings of pageants by the production of what is deemed a cultural pageant rather than a beauty pageant. The following is from one of the runners up from the 2013 competition, on why she decided to participate in the pageant after seeking advice from a former Miss Hispanic OU and the Latino Student Life advisor:

> They said, "It's not a beauty pageant and you would be the key person for Oklahoma and you would just continue your activism. So I was like "that's fine, you know, I can use the crown for my platform as well and I can continue doing my activism," and that's why I did it… [My family] just knew it was really expensive because we see that on TV. We see the gowns and the, uh, bikini contest and just all of that and they didn't know why I was doing it or what it really was. They didn't realize there was a platform behind it and it was actually to help the community, it wasn't just to have a pretty face out there.

Another 2013 contestant expressed a similar experience when informing her family of her decision to participate in the pageant,

> [t]o be honest, this is kind of hard to say. Their [her parents'] first reaction was, "Oh you're pretty, you'll win." The typical pageant thing, you know, and I'm like, "No, it's not about beauty." I was explaining to them the point of Miss Hispanic OU. For them, it was like, "Pageant equals beauty, pageant equals prettiness. Oh, you're pretty, oh you're this." Once [they realized] it is a competition about who has the best to bring to the Hispanic community, they were happy I was doing it.

> They saw that I was putting in the work and that it's not just beauty; there is something to it. There's actually meaning to the pageant.

This student was upset that the first thing her family told her was that she would win because she is pretty, not because she had talent or something to offer. In another instance, the same problem arose. In the week before the 2014 pageant, I helped to "chalk"[22] the sidewalk outside of the union and other places on campus with pageant information, and contestants of this year's pageant expressed similar concerns about their family's perceptions of the pageant. One student stated that she "wished her parents and friends thought she could do the pageant for some other reason than that I am pretty." Another contestant nodded in agreement, lamenting that her family would not understand what she was trying to accomplish until they saw her onstage.

Following the pageant, I asked the students about what they planned to do after college, and what their parents expected them to do. While drinking coffee in the coffee shop in the library basement the Sunday after the pageant, two contestants talked about what they wanted to do following graduation. Both said they wanted to travel for a short amount of time, but they also hoped to find a husband not too long after graduation. One student remarked,

> I cannot imagine, at nineteen years old that I would be having kids anytime soon, but my family always asks. Whenever my mother is on the phone with my family

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[22] Chalking is a common practice on college campuses; it involves writing the details of an event (event title, date, time, cost, etc.) in chalk on the sidewalks and outside the entrances to high-traffic buildings such as the student union and the library. We wrote, "HASA Presents Miss Hispanic OU Meacham $5 April 2, 7 p.m."

> in [country of origin], they always say, "Is Cecilia married yet? Does she have a baby yet?" They ask if I am doing well in school, but they don't care about it as much as they would if I had a kid.

The other contestant said something very similar,

> [i]t's like being stuck between two worlds. On the one hand, of course I want to achieve a career and an education, and achieve all of my goals. On the other, it's not like I don't want the Hispanic norm. It's a sweet idea that I could find a Mexican boy and be married by age twenty-three and be taken care of and make my parents happy. And it's worse to wait until after college and career to do those things because it's frowned upon to get married at thirty. My parents certainly won't mind if I find a boy here in college so I can be married at twenty-three.

Several key themes can be inferred from their remarks. First, although these Latina students want to put their college majors to use, they do plan to do this within the context of marriage and having children. Second, they feel that their cultural and familial expectations to become mothers and wives are at odds with their immediate college responsibilities. They do not look down on their mothers for their roles, nor are they against assuming such roles themselves. However, being on a college campus constrains their ability to value widely accepted expectations for Hispanic women to get married and have children. Lastly, they do feel a sense of urgency and pressure to achieve these norms quickly; their families are supportive of their education and career ambitions, so long as they are reconciled to marriage and motherhood during or shortly after college. There is no cultural ideal of Hispanic women who are unmarried and without children at thirty years old. As a result, my research participants expect

unequivocally to become wives and mothers, while they are less confident of their academic and career success, even while they do everything in their power to make this happen.

Agency and Familial Approval

The Miss Hispanic OU pageant is an instrument for Latinas on OU's campus to navigate their social worlds, creating opportunities for themselves that might have been unattainable without the pageant. Performing culture in Miss Hispanic OU allows students to create bridges between parents and education institutions. Miss Hispanic OU improves dialogue between students and parents not only on stage, but also throughout the months of rehearsals, because the students ask their parents for help with pageant preparations, creating an opportunity for parents to teach students about cultural traditions. Students' relationships with their parents and the status of their Hispanic identity are positively negotiated when a student goes to her parent and says, "I want to learn this from you."

The Miss Hispanic OU pageant illustrates how beauty pageant norms are shaped and appropriated by cultural groups. For the Latinas competing in the pageant, only personally valued experiences resulted from their participation. The pageant strengthened students' agency on campus by proving to their families (and also by informing them) that the pageant is a site of cultural activism, a site of support for Hispanic values on campus.

Karen W. Tice identifies three possible "zones" that beauty pageants can occupy on campus: *contact, comfort,* and *combat* zones (Tice 2012:103). *Contact zones* exist

where varying racial, ethnic, or gender constructs bump up against each other but do not break down or interfere with the existing cultural systems. Miss Hispanic OU is certainly a contact zone, as evidenced by the fact that the pageant was repeatedly constructed as "not a beauty pageant." Even though pageant organizers, producers and contestants all insist upon denying beauty as the primary category of competition, the pageant still employs traditional beauty pageant categories such as the evening gown portion and, as discussed in Chapter 3, the need for contestants to appear "innocent." The beauty pageant/cultural pageant contradiction does not disrupt or break down the gender and cultural performances in the competition, nor do they take away from the social activism platforms the contestants promoted.

Comfort zones are havens in which people participate in order to protect or safeguard their cultural identities. Ethnic pageants are safe "home-places" to counter racial exclusion, according to Tice (2012:103). Miss Hispanic OU can also be considered a comfort zone as a Hispanic-oriented competition designed to strengthen the connection between OU and the Hispanic community in the greater Oklahoma City metro. The pageant provides a safe venue for students to perform and explore their knowledge of their ties to Hispanic culture, in a space where they know their efforts will be celebrated. The pageant has very little to do with OU's larger campus culture and the connection to the metro community is much greater than the pageant's connection to the rest of the OU student body. Miss Hispanic OU remains isolated from other campus pageants as well, since there is little interaction between Miss Hispanic OU and any of the other ethnic pageant royalty – Miss American Indian OU,

Miss and Mr. Asian OU, Miss Black and Gold (Miss African American), although Miss Hispanic OU does attend other Hispanic pageants in the OKC area.

Lastly, *combat zones* are spaces of direct confrontation, conflict, or breakdown of existing systems. Miss Hispanic OU does not fit the model of a combat zone because it does not disrupt or challenge existing gender and racial/ethnic norms, nor does it challenge any aspects of campus culture. Recent constructions of celebrated cultural diversity on college campuses make it easier to appropriate and shape pageant norms in campus space more than collegiate pageants in the past. Because of this, pageants can also be more easily appropriated by the individual contestants to gain socially valued skills. Miss Hispanic OU promotes Hispanic solidarity, belonging, and tradition through the constraints of the beauty pageant structure. Through a performance that is "not about beauty," Latinas use their identities to stake a claim in the greater discourse about who is and can be "Hispanic" and "American."

Chapter 3

"Politicians, Not Beauty Queens": Promoting Citizenship through Hispanic Culture and History

Cecilia stepped confidently out onto the pageant stage for her cultural presentation, a cordless microphone in hand. The audience waited quietly for her to speak. Cecilia had no props and no costume; she took a deep breath and leaned forward, making eye contact with the judges, and she began by asking,

Is the ceiling above your head made of glass?

From the first line, it is clear that her presentation would challenge some expectations of the Miss Hispanic OU performances. The crowd became still as she continued,

Has it ever restricted you from getting something you've wanted in the past?

What is a glass ceiling? Some of you might even ask...

Well... it's not an easy matter...

A glass ceiling is an unseen barrier that keeps a person from rising higher on society's ladder.

It's the ceiling above the man who has worked his job for 30 years, but has yet to receive a raise.

It's the ceiling above the woman who scrubs hotel floors every night and barely receives minimum wage.

It's the ceiling above the students who stress, cry, and work their fingers to the bone... to earn the education they are told they need to own...

It's not local…It's global. Enough to drive somebody loco. It doesn't matter si hablas espanol or you understand un poco. And even though, it's sad to say…these realities are suffered every day. En Panama, en Mexico, en Guatemala, y en los Estados. En todo el mundo!

Por eso… yo prefiero, that is, I'd prefer to take my chances, punch the glass and have it cut into my flesh than to forever wonder what is on the other side…

As Cecilia loudly and confidently stated that she would rather "take her chances," the crowd cheered, and she smiled down at the judges, knowing she had made her point. She continued,

Yes! Hitting glass is going to cut! It's going to hurt! It's going to bruise!

But the strong spirit of a young Latina *cannot lose!*

College students in the crowd snapped their fingers along with the applause, in a gesture of approval that signified that Cecilia's message was felt deeply, and not just heard. People cheered in support of her piece. Switching to a lower pitch, Cecilia softened her voice and gestured with her hand out into the crowd at her mother,

My mother, mi madre, is an example of what a strong spirit is. The glass ceiling of a Panamanian dictatorship was not enough to hold her back.

Hold her back from coming to the U.S. alone.

Hold her back from leaving everything she's ever known.

Hold her back from providing for others without a single moan or groan.

You could give me a million balboas *but it will never cover what my mother is worth. Mi madre is beautiful like a* pollera colorada. *Unique. Distinct. Y otra igual no será encontrada.*

Strong. Fuerte.

Like the rushing water through the Panama Canal. Her courage is my motivation to hit the glass as I am doing now…

Standing squarely in the center of the stage, Cecilia held the microphone in her left hand and placed her right hand over her heart.

Me. I'll hit the glass until it breaks and smile once I hear the sound a million pieces make.

And I challenge anyone who has a dream…. Browns, blacks, whites, olds, and teens…

To conquer their ambitions. To become kings and queens,

By breaking the glass ceiling, even if the punches sting.

So. Don't let the glass ceiling break you down and make you less. Instead you must break it and become. One. Less.

Although I knew that Cecilia was nervous during rehearsals about forgetting her piece or stuttering onstage, she executed her performance smoothly. Her tone was passionate, drawing the audience in at key points, and she often looked down at the judges to make eye contact. Cecilia's message was one of both cultural pride and self-confidence. This was reflected in all of the pageant performances, as well as during the Hispanic-oriented events I attended during my nine months of fieldwork.

Academic success, in this sense, is partially shaped by students' display of cultural pride.

The content of this performance departed from the dance performances and the historical presentations (Pancho Villa, el charro, and Sammy Sosa). Cecilia's performance acknowledged both her journey as a student and the journeys of parents and families to gain class mobility and cultural and social capital in America. To acknowledge both of these simultaneously, and publicly, is unquestionably political. It challenges expectations of age, gender, and ethnicity. Cecilia's position as a nineteen-year-old, Syrian Panamanian woman contrasts with her position as a political activist who makes statements about social change. Yet, through her education, and through her agency in this pageant, Cecilia negotiates these identities purposefully and successfully.

Latina Students as Political Activists

Local politics are inseparable from discourse regarding Latinas, especially in college. Women's relations within the state are defined by gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and citizenship status. These identities define access to the state's resources (particularly citizenship) and access to power recognized by state institutions (Moore 1988:129). The Miss Hispanic OU pageant is a space where contested inequalities between Hispanics and non-Hispanics in Oklahoma are brought to light, directly addressed as problems to be solved, but no blame for these problems is assigned. These inequalities are therefore indirectly confronted, reflecting a grander scale of indirect power contests and representations of marginalized ethnic groups and

women. Broader concepts, such as transnationalism and panethnicity, that concern local the Latino community, are frequently put on stage in beauty pageants like Miss Hispanic OU.

In this thesis, involvement in politics is defined as taking part in the public discourse of nationality, citizenship, immigration, and understanding of state policies. I define students as political activists because they choose to take part in politics, take on leadership positions, and define goals for themselves, which involve politics, for their future, and for their communities as well.

Although two of the contestants in this year's pageant were planning to complete degrees in health-related fields, most of the contestants and the majority of Latinas on campus in general major in one of two fields: Business (or International Business, with minors in Spanish and Political Science) and Education (Elementary or Secondary Education, with minors in Spanish, Anthropology, or Political Science). Although none of my research participants were political science majors, many of them stated they wanted to become politicians or other policy makers. One student's aspirations are to serve in the U.S. Senate and run for President of the United States. For those students majoring in Education, they first want to become teachers, then educational policy makers and school administrators.[23]

Very early on in my fieldwork, I realized that these students are very knowledgeable about immigration and education politics and state policies that particularly affect Latino families. The contestants of both the 2013 and 2014 pageants

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[23] As previously discussed, these career plans are made in conjunction with plans for marriage and children.

understood local immigration and citizenship policies, which was surprising, because few eighteen and nineteen-year-old college students generally know the requirements for U.S. citizenship or understand federal and state immigration policies.

Their understanding of these policies is indicative of their motivation to do more than win a beauty pageant; the contestants worked hard to become informed about public policy and to create tangible, achievable platforms. It was surprising how frequently Deferred Action, documentation, citizenship, and the DREAM Act were brought up in everyday conversations. I did not introduce Deferred Action or any immigration policy into our conversations because I had assumed the students would not know about these policies, based on my experiences working with many other college students. However, these women brought these topics into our conversations as important issues that they had to be able to address in their platforms, answer questions about in interviews and, more importantly, understand in order to influence social change.

Understanding and awareness of state and federal policies at such a young age is key to Latinas' positioning as future Hispanic leaders. My research participants tied their awareness to direct confrontations with documentation status and the concept of personhood in terms of citizenship. However, knowing whether someone is documented is different from knowing how Deferred Action functions and who may be eligible. In other words, many Hispanic students have seen the direct effects of immigration policy in their homes, their schools, and their communities. In local settings, a coalition of students well-informed about policy and citizenship has become key to Hispanic ethnic politics and to immigration policy reform.

When I asked the Miss Hispanic OU contestants about their choice to become involved in local activism, they all spoke about friends or family members who were unable to attend college because of financial or documentation problems. The contestants cited their connections to friends who "didn't have papers" or had to work to support their families as the reasons for their involvement in promoting pathways to college for low-income and Hispanic families. During an interview, when I asked one student about how she became involved in politics and leadership, she said that her interest in promoting citizenship and college attendance stemmed from her transition from high school to college:

> I played soccer and I had my friends with me and we were all excited to go to college and we were all seniors. We didn't know how we were going to get to college or what college we were going to go to and, at that point, it was almost a little too late because we were already seniors. We weren't educated on it at all. But I got this opportunity called "The Tulsa Community College Achieves program"…I went to the community college. So the opportunity was pretty much given to me. And I told my friends and they were just pushing me away, like they wouldn't even talk about it, they would change the topic and I didn't know why. I was telling them how easy it was and how we could all go together but they wouldn't listen. So I went by myself and joined the Hispanic Student Association there and that's when I learned there were undocumented students in Oklahoma. I had thought undocumented only meant parents; I didn't know it could mean my peers or friends.

Both of these statements reflect a general understanding of how these students became aware of and involved in political activism. Although students' experiences varied enormously, documentation status and citizenship as essential for future success become extremely important in students' lives around the time of high school graduation.

Despite the attention to politics and policy, there was very little open discussion of race and ethnicity between the students. When their identity as political activists takes the center stage, students minimize their attention to racial inequality and instead present a unified image of racial harmony, in which equality of education and citizenship are key discourses unattached to race. Discussions of race and ethnicity with the students occurred during interviews whenever I directed the interview toward the topic. Otherwise, I only heard one open discussion of race between the students, even though they were willing to talk to me alone about race during interviews. When I asked an older student about this, she said that "it isn't that we avoid it, it's just that we talk about other things that are more important, things that have more power. Like education and getting financial aid or support from our parents." Students limit their discussion to the uplift or mobility of race on a blurry spectrum, where education and citizenship are the uplifts. White/Hispanic politics are minimized by the rhetoric of "skin color doesn't matter, so long as you support equality." Students do not frame race in terms of an unequal/equal rights binary. If race is situated as class, however, their conceptualization of racial/ethnic pride (and its ability to increase or decrease through socioeconomic status) can be more easily understood. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these students negotiate racial identity on a

daily basis, yet they are unable to talk about race in open dialogue with each other or anyone else. Instead, politics of nationality, citizenship, education, and ethnic pride take center stage.

The Pageant as a Site of Politics

In the Miss Hispanic OU pageant, Latinas are able to articulate their political positions in a safe, recognized way. Politics of citizenship and Latino identity are both directly and indirectly addressed. There are numerous instances where indirect politics are addressed in the pageant. Foley describes a cultural event where these indirect political statements are used as a "public celebration to encourage racial harmony" (Foley 1990:23). However, there were several key instances of direct confrontation of politics. First, Cecilia's spoken word deliberately addressed Latinos' historical position as lower class, unskilled laborers: "The man who has worked for 30 years, but has yet to receive a raise…The woman who scrubs hotel floors every night." This articulation is, as Foley explains about the political behaviors of Hispanic youth in South Texas, a "cultural practice of expressive speech that people perform to establish class identities" (Foley 1990:186).

Second, Ana's talent performance, a spoken rap in Spanish, was a performance of politics through both words and her nonverbal actions. The message of the song promoted cultural strength and courage of Latinos stemming from national pride they bring from their countries of origin to the United States. Ana sat on a small stool in the center of the stage, and behind her were handmade paper flags of each Latin American country represented by the contestants, covered by black cloth. During the bridge of

the song, she stood up and walked around the stage, unveiling each flag, and, in the center of the stage, she unveiled a white sign with bold, black lettering that said, "*Somos un solo*," or "We are one." The audience responded to her tone, excited and filled with pride, and with each flag she unveiled, people who had ties to that country cheered. Ana's presentation was a huge success.

Ana's presentation did not include the United States flag. This is important to note because 1) Ana was born in the United States, 2) and by excluding the U.S. flag, the authenticity of Latino culture is tied to identification with national origin. It also reflects Ana's agency in her ability to consciously make this decision. One week after the pageant, I asked Ana why she did not choose to include the American flag. She said,

> [b]asically, the song is about immigrants, oppression, and how, despite discrimination and exclusion, we as a community are so strong. It also means that all the Latin American, Central American, basically all the Hispanics and Latinos come to this country with the same purpose and the same ending. The last poster I unveiled said, "We are one." We are one *in* the United States. That is why I didn't include the U.S. flag. It isn't necessary. The United States is the privileged country.

Ana said that by "discrimination and exclusion," she meant the long history of ethnic discrimination against Latinos, especially in education. Racist agendas toward Hispanics through the "English Only/Official English" movement have been particularly pervasive in bilingual education (Hill 2008:126).

What Ana's presentation, along with Cecilia's spoken word, reveals is that these women are highly aware of and influenced by their parents' "here/there" framework (Suárez-Orozco 1987) between the U.S. and their countries of origin, and they come to understand life in the United States as privileged, despite inequalities in citizenship, education, employment, class, and gender. Their everyday experiences are also influenced by pan-ethnic constructs of Latino identity – the idea that all Latinos share the same struggles, history, values, and culture.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the pageant is a place where ethnic and cultural authenticity is performed. Indirect and direct addressing of politics is sometimes difficult to define, and the distinction between what is direct and what is not is often blurred. For example, early on in the rehearsals, contestants who were representing Mexico stated that they were representing "Mex-ih-co"[24], and then they were coached by the pageant chairs and their advisor to use the Spanish pronunciation instead, Meh-hee-co."[25] On the one hand, authenticity in this sense becomes a very subtle way to gain ground socially and politically. On the other hand, the politics of what is "culture" and which nationality they want to index through the pronunciation of their words are quite explicit.

Pageant Platforms

Miss Hispanic OU platforms have become a way for students to define and promote change in Latino communities in Oklahoma. Although their platforms

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[24] [mɛksɪkoʊ], English
[25] [mehɪko], Spanish

resemble state, local, and federal mentoring, anti-violence, and academic achievement programs, they are different in that they are designed to be implemented by Latinos and for Latinos. In other words, they intend to promote change directly through members of the community, rather than looking for leadership from the outside.

Rosario's platform, "Latinos Contra la Violencia," aimed to end gang affiliation among Latino youth and to portray Hispanic culture in a positive light in Oklahoma schools in order to reduce gang violence. Rosario says that Latino families are unaware of or refuse to recognize gang violence in their own neighborhoods and among their students. Her platform proposed a mentoring program between young Hispanic professionals – teachers, youth pastors, and counselors – and Hispanic youth who are at risk of gang affiliation.

Cecilia's platform, "Shattering the Glass Ceiling," would generate more fundraising and scholarship opportunities for Latino high school students to attend college. The larger goal, she says, is to see more Latino lawyers, doctors, and CEOs. Cecilia's platform was class-based, aiming for greater class mobility for Latinos through the pipeline of higher education.

Sonia's platform, "Latinos Avanzando: Una Nuevo Futuro," aimed to encourage students to continue with their education by first graduating high school and then college, rather than dropping out of school to gain immediate employment. She has served as a mentor in Norman and OKC high schools and says her leadership in these positions has led her to realize the potential of Latino youth.

Sara's platform, "Preservando Una Cultura Especial," proposed to instill in Latino students a sense of honor and respect toward their culture. Her goals are to encourage Latino high school and college students to become involved in Hispanic-oriented organizations and events to preserve their Hispanic values and bilingualism. Sara's platform highlights the importance of family approval and involvement in students' knowledge of their cultural heritage.

Ana's platform, "Building the Bridge to Education," was to put forward an individual mentoring program to empower and educate Latino youth about their ability to attend college. The program proposed establishing partnerships between Latino students at OU and high school students at OKC public schools, including the high school that Ana attended, where she plans to teach following college graduation.

Julie's platform, "Bringing Awareness: Preventative Care," aims to advocate and educate the OKC Hispanic community about the importance of healthcare. She is majoring in biology, pre-med, because she wants to combat a general lack of knowledge about health in Hispanic communities. Her plan is to offer free health seminars in Spanish in OKC and Norman, specifically to college students and their parents, as she believes college students will be able to best understand and, in turn, assist their parents in living a healthier lifestyle.

"Professional, Confident, and Innocent"

Along their pathways to academic and political success, these Latinas have significant dialogue with older community leaders, particularly through the pageant, and the implementation of their platforms after the stage performance is over and the

glitter and high heels are gone. As mentioned in the introduction, a past queen coached the 2014 contestants, telling them that if they want to win Miss Hispanic OU, they must appear to the community as "professional, confident, and innocent." Older community leaders see potential in Latina students, particularly those students who plan to stay in the OKC Hispanic community following college graduation, which is likely, given family and relationship ties.

In the 2014 pageant interviews, the contestants were asked about how they would implement their platforms and use the Miss Hispanic OU crown to promote their platforms in the Hispanic communities of Norman and Oklahoma City. I was invited by the pageant organizers to sit in on these interviews. Each contestant was called into the room for an interview that lasted twenty to thirty minutes with the panel of judges. Although I was not able to interview the judges of the pageant, I did speak with them and participate in discussions during the brief minutes in between interviews about the questions and answers being given.

The interview questions were given in both English and Spanish. Three of the pageant judges were in their fifties and sixties and from the Oklahoma City metro, while the other two judges were younger university staff members. All of these judges were Hispanic. The older judges rarely spoke in English, if at all, while the two younger judges, who were university staff members, only spoke in Spanish when addressed by the older judges. The judges were: Cesar, a journalist for an OKC Spanish newspaper; Estela, OU staff in Diversity Enrichment; Dolores, owner of a

local Hispanic radio station; Francisca, event organizer and philanthropist for Hispanic nonprofits in OKC; and Alma, a language professor at OU.[26]

Although the pageant judges were instructed to choose from a predetermined list of interview questions to ask the pageant contestants, they quickly deviated from these questions. The judges were also instructed that if they did ask additional questions, all contestants were supposed to be given the same questions. This was not the case, and the two older judges asked the contestants challenging questions that were not on the list. Dolores asked questions about immigration reform, the Affordable American Healthcare Act (or "Obamacare," as she called it), and education for special needs children, while Carlos asked the contestants about the achievement gap in higher education. The students had prepared for typical pageant questions such as, "What sets you apart from the other contestants?" "Why do you want to be Miss Hispanic OU?", "How will you implement your platform?", "What made you choose your platform?", and "How will you balance the duties of Miss Hispanic OU with work and college?" As a result, they were less prepared for the more politically-charged questions. Although students were able to articulate their political and social positions regarding immigration reform and citizenship, they were taken by surprise at the judges' request for students to give their answers about these topics in Spanish.

These interviews took place a few days before the pageant and following the interviews, I asked the contestants how they felt about the questions they were given on healthcare, immigration, and special education. One student quickly responded,

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[26] All judges' names are pseudonyms.

> It's not that I couldn't talk about special needs education, it's just that we don't talk about it in Spanish. In schools, on TV, every time it is brought up, it is brought up in English.

Another student nodded in agreement and said that because her parents do not speak English, she had never spoken to them about these issues. Moreover, she did not know how to answer these particular interview questions in Spanish. She remarked,

> I don't even know the word for healthcare in Spanish. You heard me, whenever I got to it [the word] in Spanish I was like "Si. Uhhh…healthcare….es importante para los Hispanos porque…" and I didn't even know how to say it.

This student's exposure to the politics of healthcare had been on TV, the internet, or at college, and all of these exposures have been in English. So, while these students have a strong level of bilingual competency in both Spanish and English, their day-to-day interactions as college students talking about politics and policy are segregated in various forms of English, making it difficult to express their understandings to older community leaders who primarily converse in Spanish.

Older community leaders (pageant judges) were asking young, emerging leaders, like the Miss Hispanic OU contestants, for new solutions to old problems. Latina students' values and aspirations for the future are in agreement with those of older community members. The students agree that maintaining Spanish competency is extremely important for Hispanic identity and culture, and to be successful. Two students remarked that they were glad they had been asked to give their pageant

interviews in Spanish because now they felt that, should they have to give a job interview entirely in Spanish in the future, they would be prepared.

Most importantly, older leaders wanted to know if these students have new solutions to the educational achievement gap. Cesar, the only male judge, asked each contestant, "Did you know that only two percent of OU students are Hispanic? Two percent. Were you aware of this, and what do you think can be done about it?" Each contestant responded that they were indeed aware of this statistic and, in traditional pageant style, cited the goals of their platforms as one way to increase the number of Hispanic students at OU, and in college in general. When Ana answered this question, Cesar pushed her even further, stating,

> Everyone says they have a plan to change the system. But we have been saying that for twenty years and there is still no change. Except for Selena and Isabel [2013 and 2012 MHOU queens]. They have made changes. When you look at those girls, what do you see? Are you ready to take on that responsibility? Because, when I look at them, I see politicians, not beauty queens.

Ana smiled, took a deep breath, and stated,

> Yes, I am ready to be Miss Hispanic OU. And although I am committed to my platform whether I win or not, becoming Miss Hispanic OU will help me reach more students than I could without the crown. I went to one of those high schools. I was the student no one expected to go to college. I even thought about quitting. So I want to build the bridge for incoming students and I want to do more than build it. I want to take their hand and cross it with them.

Although I had begun to see Ana "take the lead" in pageant preparations (asking pageant organizers for additional advice, attending extra dance rehearsals with Teresa, practicing articulating her platform), it was clear with the way that the judges pushed Ana farther than they pushed any other contestant, that they began to see her as a potential Miss Hispanic OU queen. As evidenced by the unplanned questions that the judges asked regarding political issues, the judges were looking to see not only how committed the students were to their platforms and informed they were about social issues that the Hispanic community of OKC faces, but also to what degree students were able to advocate for the Hispanic community in both Spanish and English.

Miss Industrious

The winner of Miss Hispanic OU receives a scholarship of at least one thousand dollars; any additional money donated beyond this minimum also goes to the scholarship fund. Although the pageant received some monetary support from campus departments (the Office of the Provost and Student Affairs), the bulk of sponsorship money came from sponsorship contracts with local Hispanic-owned businesses. The pageant contestants solicit local businesses for their support in exchange for advertising spots in the pageant program. The contestant who collects the most money in sponsorships wins the title of Miss Industrious, but only wins the scholarship if she wins Miss Hispanic OU.

A number of the contestants' friends and family also paid for advertising space to have their messages of support listed in the program. Two of the contestants' sororities also purchased advertising spaces and offered messages of support; "Sister,

you strive for success so we know that you will do amazing on your big day. We are super proud of you!" and "Always an exemplifying example of a leader, friend, and sister we are extremely proud of all she does. We can't wait to see where life takes our vivacious sister!"

Because the sponsorships were secured early on in the pageant preparations, I was not able to observe how the students' approached business owners to ask for support firsthand. The contestants did not know me well enough at the beginning to invite me along, but they talked to me about their sponsorship campaigns on several later occasions. One student described her experience getting a sponsorship from an auto glass store in Oklahoma City. Her family knew the owner of the shop, but she did not know him well. When she arrived, she greeted the front desk clerk and asked to see the owner. He came out to greet her and she extended her hand for a handshake, a gesture that she reserved for sponsors, judges, and other older people. She gave a short speech, explaining that she was competing for the title of Miss Hispanic OU and asked for sponsorship in exchange for advertising their business in the program. She emphasized that the pageant was to strengthen OU's ties to the OKC Hispanic community and, she said, to bring more business to local companies. The auto glass shop agreed to give her a sponsorship, and although her family had connections to the business already, she felt she convinced them to support her through her speech.

Asking for sponsorships also places students in spaces of local politics; Hispanic-owned Oklahoma businesses have experienced decreases in customer base and profits since the implementation of HB1804 (Allegro 2010). By requiring the contestants to get sponsorships from local companies, the pageant creates a network of

contacts for all of the contestants, not only the one who will go on to win. Moreover, by asking for financial support, the contestants now have personal contacts with future potential employers not only for themselves, but also for siblings, and parents. They may also use these contacts as support for implementation of their pageant platforms.

Personal Experiences Reflected in Political Activism

Most of the choices that the students made during the pageant, their platform organization, and their college plans, reflect their personal experiences of high school education in the South and the Midwest, as well as their exposure to social issues during this time. Like any pageant, the contestants' platforms are supposed to focus on improving social issues. For the Latinas competing in Miss Hispanic OU, however, these social issues are realities of their communities.

One example was Rosario's choice to advocate against gang violence in schools because some students in her high school in Texas were victims of gang-related murders, beatings or other violence. All of these students have watched some of their friends, siblings, and cousins become high school or college dropouts, resulting from gang violence and peer pressure, or the need to support their families financially.

Those who did stay in school were accused of "acting white," and told that their plans to attend college were unreasonable because college was too expensive and that college was not the "reality" for Latinos from their communities. Several of the students grew up in Oklahoma City, and the prospects of attending college were slim. Most of their friends, if they did attend college, went straight to community college,

and very few transferred to four-year universities. Given that so few Latinas from their communities attend college, these students' very presence at OU puts them in a position that their communities see as "acting white."

In many of our conversations about their high school experiences, the students cited the lack of Hispanic history taught in Oklahoma. Consequently, there is also no mention of Hispanic history in Oklahoma in the Miss Hispanic OU pageant. If the purpose of the pageant is to serve as a connection between the OKC metro and OU, it seems as if celebrating Hispanic presence and history in Oklahoma would be key to promoting the contestants' activist platforms and strengthening that connection. The absence of local history in the rhetoric of the pageant is a product of larger anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic discourses in Oklahoma. Hispanic presence in Oklahoma history has been erased.

Hispanic history is not taught in Oklahoma public or private schools, and rarely in Oklahoma colleges.[27] Several of these students attended public school in Texas where Hispanic history is also absent.[28] While Oklahoma has no ban on ethnic studies,[29] there are also no guidelines or curricula in place to teach Hispanic studies, or ethnic studies of any kind in Oklahoma public schools. Student awareness and positions on

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[27] College courses on Latin America are sometimes offered, typically through international/area studies, geography, and anthropology departments, but courses in Chicano/Latino studies are less common and few courses are offered on Hispanic history in the U.S.

[28] Both Texas and California have significant Latino populations and have failed to support bills to teach Hispanic studies in their schools. Texas and California also have immense power in dictating cultural histories being taught in public schools across the nation due to their huge populations and the number of textbooks they purchase from national publishers.

[29] Arizona currently has a ban on ethnic studies in public schools.

the lack of Hispanic history taught in public schools is another way that their views do not differ from older community leaders. My research participants felt that their high school teachers and administrators did not help them prepare for college because they were prejudiced against Latinos, or their teachers simply dismissed student's their cultural identity as unimportant. This issue was tremendously important; students saw the lack of Hispanic studies in schools as one reason why they had so many disadvantages in high school.

Students' ability to identify the absence of Hispanic history in their schools, gang violence in their communities, and friends' and families' struggles with legal documentation is evidence of their willingness to participate in civic and social engagements. Their commitment to being knowledgeable about state policy and their determination to change their communities in spite of these problems, as well as the institutional barriers blocking the solutions, is only further evidence of the multiple meanings of academic success.

Conclusion

"We Are Still Hispanic": Expecting Academic Success and the Performance of Class and Culture

All six contestants stood in a semi-circle on the stage, smiling with their hands on their hips in the same pose that they had learned four months earlier at the first rehearsal. They had been coached to stand that way, smiling and poised, regardless of whose names were called. Their escorts brought out flowers bouquets for each student. The judges' scores were totaled up and the MCs prepared to announce the winner of the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU pageant. The winners of Miss Industrious, People's Choice, Best Cultural Talent, Best Talent, and Best Interview were announced first. The auditorium became very quiet in the moments before the awards were announced,

And Miss Industrious goes to…Sonia Lopez!

Sonia smiled, accepting the small, glass trophy from one of the pageant volunteers.

People's Choice goes to…Ana Ortega!

Ana, who was trembling onstage because she was so nervous, smiled and accepted her trophy. The People's Choice Award was voted on during intermission by the audience. Ana remarked to me, only moments before walking onto the stage for the last time, that she hoped she would win just one award. She did not expect to win anything because she is a freshman.

Best Cultural Talent goes to…Ana Ortega!

Best Talent goes to…Ana Ortega!

Best Interview goes to…Ana Ortega!

The volunteers neatly stacked the trophies near Ana's feet, as she could not hold them all. The look on Ana's face showed that she knew she had won, but she was nervous that someone else's name would be called or that she had misunderstood how the scores would be totaled. The other girls stood with smiles on their faces, but it was easy to see they were disappointed. Since Ana won all but one of the individual categories, it was impossible for anyone else to win the title.

And the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU Runner Up is…Cecilia Medina!

Cecilia smiled, taking the trophy she was offered. The runner up takes over the duties of MHOU should the queen be unable to continue. The crowd turned quiet, and the MCs ask the audience for a drumroll. The crowd clapped their hands on their laps and on chairs, excitedly.

The 2014 Miss Hispanic OU Pageant Queen is…Ana Ortega!

With tears streaming down her face and a big smile, Ana looked every part a pageant queen as she accepted the winner's sash that read "2014 Miss Hispanic OU." Selena came over and placed the sparkling 2014 crown on Ana's head. The other contestants continue to pose and smile, despite their loss and Ana's incredible sweep of the awards. Loud classical music began to play. The photographer quickly stepped out onto the stage to take photos of the moment, followed by many more sets of photos with all of the contestants, the other pageant queens in the audience (2011-2013 MHOU queens, Miss Latina Teen Oklahoma City, Miss Hispanic-Latina OSU), and Ana's family.

Stories of Success: Accomplishments of 2013 and 2014 Miss Hispanic OU Pageant Contestants

Ana's win was expected, given the points she received in the interviews and her existing connections on campus. The Latino Student Life Advisor is her older cousin, and Ana became involved in leadership opportunities from her first semester as a freshman. She served as the Freshman Chair on the HASA Executive Leadership Board and she was the only Latino student in the OU Class Council 2013-2017.[30] She was also selected as a high school senior to become a Henderson Scholar.[31] One week after the pageant, I asked Ana to meet with me to talk about the outcome of the pageant and her immediate future plans. Since becoming MHOU only a week earlier, opportunities had started pouring in for Ana. It is expected that she attends other pageants at OU, and at other universities. She was invited to speak at her former high school at this year's commencement ceremony. Ana was also meeting with her advisor and local school administration to implement her platform. Other appearances she has made include serving as master of ceremonies for the annual awards banquet for Latino Student Life, and she was asked to judge this year's Miss Cinco de Mayo pageant in OKC. She was also asked to be a presenter for the Kids' Day Festival of OKC.

The other contestants' also continued to succeed in academic and civic endeavors. Julie, following the pageant, maintains her high GPA and is preparing for medical school. She was also elected HASA Vice President for her junior year. Cecilia

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[30] Members of the Class Council plan events and a class gift for their graduating class.
[31] Henderson scholars are incoming students with high GPAs and demonstrated community service commitments who receive scholarships and mentoring during their time at OU.

will serve as a counselor for Camp Crimson this summer and has been selected as a McNair's Scholar for her junior year. Sara serves on the HASA planning board for Latino cultural events at OU and wants to create "block parties" and parades on campus and in Norman, similar to the ones held in the New York City Dominican neighborhoods that she lived in as a child. Rosario has been elected the campus Latino Liaison by HASA for her sophomore year. She will also serve as a mentor for the National Honor Society in OKC high schools. Sonia serves on the planning board for Latinos Without Borders, an annual conference at OU to increase Hispanic student enrollment. She also will serve as a mentor at Norman and OKC high schools this year.

Most of my research participants wanted to continue to compete in Latina beauty pageants, motivated by the scholarships, networks, and employment opportunities discussed in Chapter 2. Teresa served as a co-chair for the 2014 Miss Hispanic OU and her family wants her younger sister and her cousin, both OU freshmen, to compete in the pageant as well. This year, students from the 2013 and 2014 pageants will be competing in other "Miss Hispanic" pageants in Oklahoma and Texas. Sara recently competed in Miss Cinco De Mayo Oklahoma City. Gloria, a 2013 contestant, is currently Miss Latina Norman and recently competed for the title of Miss Latina Oklahoma. Sonia, Sara, Camila, and Teresa will compete in the Miss Hispanic Oklahoma City pageant this summer, which is a feeder pageant for next year's Miss Latina Oklahoma. Selena is currently Miss Latina Spring, Texas and will be competing for the title of Miss Latina Texas this fall. Both of these state pageants, Miss Latina Oklahoma and Miss Latina Texas, are feeder pageants for Miss Latina USA and, eventually, the international Miss Latin America pageant. For my research participants,

competition in beauty and culture pageants is one part of their negotiation of success in college.

Further involvement and leadership in Hispanic communities is also a hallmark of success among Latinas at OU. Carmen, a student I interviewed, was elected as the HASA president for her senior year. Diane, a 2013 contestant, is now the State Capital Representative for DREAM Act Oklahoma and plans to apply for graduate school. Selena, in serving her duties as the 2013 Miss Hispanic OU, hosted both community and campus events and served as the face of the Hispanic community in the Oklahoma City Metro – she met with many high profile visitors to the city, including ambassadors and embassy officials from Mexico, Argentina, and other Latin American countries. Angela, the student who organized the 2013 pageant, has been accepted into Adult and Higher Education graduate program at OU and is the executive chair for the OU Latinos Without Borders conference. The eight students mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis all received Academic Achievement awards this year from Latino Student Life for their high GPAs. These students also made the Dean's List. The seniors, Selena and Angela, graduated with honors.

No En Vano

Two weeks after the Miss Hispanic OU pageant, I thought I was more or less finished with my fieldwork. I only had a few follow-up interviews left to complete and was spending most of my time typing up field notes and lists of questions I still wanted to ask. My fieldwork was wrapping up on such a positive note, and I was excited by the narrative of ethnic empowerment and the accomplishments of my research participants.

The pageant had all of the students and the Hispanic campus community on an emotional high, and everyone was excited for the end-of-year academic awards banquet. In my own studies, I had a final presentation to give in a seminar one Monday evening called, "'Acting White": Linguistic Racism and Hispanic College Students." That same night, the university Writing Center, where I hold a graduate assistantship, was holding an event called "Writing from the heART: Letters to the family of Luis Rodriguez," and I was asked to help at the event. The event was formed in response to a violent incident which occurred during the middle of my fieldwork, exposing the pervasiveness of racism in Oklahoma, though the details of the event were slow to come to light.

On the night of February 14, 2014, Luis Rodriguez stepped outside of a local movie theater in Moore, Oklahoma to break up an argument between his wife and adult daughter. Three off-duty Moore police officers and two Oklahoma game wardens working private security for the theater confronted Luis and asked to see his ID. When he refused, the officers decided to detain him for unclear reasons. The officers pepper-sprayed his eyes and nose before brutally beating him face first into the asphalt of the parking lot and knocking him unconscious before handcuffing him. Luis's family stood by watching as their loved one died in the parking lot of the movie theater with the weight of five off-duty police officers on top of him. Luis's death has been ruled a homicide. Although the loss of a husband, father, grandfather and friend is immeasurable, the Rodriguez family has since attempted to ignite both awareness and change in the treatment of Latinos in Oklahoma.

When I arrived at the Writing Center for the event, the Rodriguez family was just starting to arrive. They were dressed up in mostly black "church clothes," but the unusually cold weather required coats, so the five or six little girls who attended (about ages seven to ten) wore bright pink, turquoise, and purple bejeweled jackets over their somber black dresses and boots. The family asked everyone to step out in the hall to pray first. Twenty-five people or so crowded out into the narrow hall and stood in a circle, holding hands, but the prayers were silent prayers, each person offering their thoughts quietly. Although the event was not private, it was not well publicized, so few OU students attended.

As the family and their friends poured back into the Writing Center, they smiled and laughed and hugged the Writing Center staff. One of the graduate assistants had turned on a local Spanish radio station for music. The projector displayed the words, "In loving memory of Luis Rodriguez, February 14, 2014," over the Puerto Rican flag. In the back of the Writing Center, tables held pizza, pretzels, and lemonade.

At the front of the Writing Center, small tables, normally used for reading papers and correcting grammar errors, were covered in newspaper and piled high with arts and crafts supplies. One table held pens, markers, and pencils, and colored paper to write notes and make cards. Other tables held paint and paintbrushes, hot glue guns and an assortment of plastic gems, and inkpads and stamps. The last table held empty glass votives, bottles of loose glitter in bright colors, and pictures of Luis Rodriguez printed on adhesive paper with the words "No En Vano, February 14, 2014" below the photo. At this table, I sat with the little girls for most of the event, opening bottles of glue and passing out glitter to decorate the votives. The youngest girl asked me to pass her the

lime green glitter and, in the same exchange, pointed to the small photo of Luis on her votive and said, "This is my grandpa." It was difficult to know how I should respond to this, and I asked her, "Do you miss him?" and she nodded, quickly turning back to her project. Moments after this, the little girl's older cousin accidentally spilled glitter into the youngest child's lemonade. I quickly jumped in, saying, "Hey look at that, your lemonade sparkles!" to keep her from becoming upset. The two girls giggled and sprinkled more glitter into the lemonade. The younger girl told her cousin, "I can't believe you did that!" still giggling. Her cousin replied, "Well, it is your fault. You left it there." An adult who was briefly leaning over the girls to look at their projects as he passed by, presumably a parent or a family member, overheard the exchange and reprimanded the children, saying, "Girls, you never blame the victim. It is not her fault, it just happened." Although the girls had been lighthearted and giggling prior to this adult's statement, they recognized the somber tone of his voice and quickly altered their behavior to quiet gestures and general avoidance of the adults, continuing to hide at the back table with me and the many bottles of glitter.

The juxtaposition of this event held for the Rodriguez family on campus was striking; I had constructed the campus, as a whole, as a place of outreach for literacy and education, not a place where racism and social justice converge. The transition from studying the academic success of enthusiastic nineteen-year olds to sitting in a room full of people who had been recent targets of violent racism was surreal, even though the intersections were very much the same. The intersections of race, ethnicity, racism, language, class, gender, and agency are continually remade in everyday interactions, further complicated by college education and the meaning of academic success and who

can "be" an educated citizen. While my research participants' attentions were working on their own academic endeavors and what they could do for their families, the Rodriguez family confronted the same issues of citizenship and racial equality that these students seek to do.

"We are Still Hispanic"

In one poignant conversation about "acting white" accusations and racism, one student simply stated, "You know, I don't know why this happens. We are still Hispanic." This statement, along with the many conversations about race during the course of my fieldwork, led to a troubling question: Have the linguistic categories of "Americanized"/"acting "white" become nominal categories for academic achievement for Hispanic students? And, if so, is this a problem for anthropology, to recognize such a category, knowing that it is reconciled through personalist ideology and denial? This tricky question is inextricably raised with larger questions of pan ethnicity, white racism, and class discourse. Hispanic identity is linguistically and culturally "othered" from mainstream American identity because the fluid intersections of success, class, and education in the U.S. are always tied to whiteness. If public discourse constructs academic success as achieved whiteness, then meaningful constructions of academic success which differ from this, such as class mobility for families or raising cultural awareness on campus, are neglected, or suppressed.

Studies of whiteness have become increasingly useful in studying culture, class, education, and citizenship in the United States. America has an extensive history of fluctuating categorizations of race and whiteness for many different groups, and

especially for immigrant groups. Karen Brodkin's (1998) research on the transformation of Jews in the U.S. from nonwhite to white in the twentieth century highlights the permeability of whiteness and race discourse in America. Historically, Jewish immigrants, through varying political and social contexts, were able to rather quickly negotiate a new status as white citizens. African Americans' social mobility, conversely, has much been much more constrained by white/black dichotomies, and as a result, has limited African American cultural citizenship. Hispanic groups have historically drawn parallels to both Jewish and African Americans in terms of their access to citizenship and their interactions with whiteness.

The "acting white" phenomena among ethnic minority students, first defined shortly after the Civil Rights movement (Ogbu 1974), continues to be a part of public discourse, both in local Hispanic communities, and nationally in pan-ethnic Hispanic and African American communities. The term itself has gained much attention in the last decade. In 2004, then-Senator Barack Obama stated at the Democratic National Convention, "children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white" (The New York Times 2004). Since Obama's use of the term, studies of "acting white," have become popular, continuing with the trajectory of Ogbu's research on the identity formation of ethnic minority students.

Some scholars have disputed the "acting white" theory as a reason that minority students fail, suggesting that both white and nonwhite students fail based on the same degree of social pressures (Cook and Ludwig 1997; Fryer, Jr. and Torelli 2009). However, no research disputes that the "acting white" theory has weight for minority

students who *do* achieve, and recent studies have suggested that "acting white" accusations are the most pervasive for minority students who are the highest academic achievers and occupy leadership positions (Fryer, Jr. and Torelli 2009; Fordham 2008). It is difficult to understand how "acting white" accusations play a part in the experiences of successful students when they continue to deny that these accusations are racist. It is important to include in the analysis of "acting white" perspectives that do not position the phenomenon as discriminatory, even if anthropology has understood it as such, especially because academic success is a variable social construct in linguistic and cultural terms.

Promoting only one ideal path to academic success is a problem because it privileges and assumes the white, mainstream American definition. It also continues to legitimize prejudiced discourse, such as "acting white" accusations, for ethnic minority students because it continues to construct the "traditional" model of a "successful student" in ways that are most easily accessible to white, middle class students. Faculty and staff in higher education unknowingly push the performance of whiteness onto ethnic minority students, but our assumptions about what students want to do, what they are able to do, and who they are doing it for, are all based on the idea that students construct academic success in the same (white) way.

Performing Class and Hispanic Culture in College

The powerful rhetoric of cultural performance in college is evident in not only the popularity of ethnic pageants, but also ethnic student associations like HASA, multicultural sororities and fraternities, and diversity enrichment programs. Through

these programs and events, Latina students enact the social prominence of their class through cultural performance. Studying colleges and schools is crucial to understanding intersections of race and ethnicity with class, gender, and politics because it stages performances of social inequality. Racial and ethnic performances on college campuses are essentially "cultural practices of expressive speech that people perform to establish class identity" (Foley 1990:186). These Latina students are thus creating their status as successful, middle-class citizens through repetitive performances of middle class behavior, i.e., constructing class and academic success through performativity.

Students also enact their class status by what they wear and how they appear. Class comes into play with Latina students' choices to tan their skin for occasions when they want to "appear Hispanic," but, during everyday interactions on campus, it is more beneficial to "appear white," and "professional, confident, and innocent." Because of these students' very strong expectations for class mobility, they enact middle class social norms in everyday dress. They make an effort to wear the same t-shirts and leggings that are worn in white sorority culture. Latinas with hair that is naturally curly straighten their hair every day before coming to class. Latinas with straight hair use a curling iron to create large, barrel-style curls to show they have gone through the same effort of styling their hair every day. Many of these students also join multicultural, usually Hispanic, sororities in order to further perform the behaviors of a "typical," middle class college student.

The students in this study came from generally lower or lower middle-class families, with a few from solidly middle class families. No research participants occupied upper middle or upper class statuses. Most of their parents received only a

middle school education; few graduated high school and none attended college. All research participants in this research are second or third generation Hispanic Americans and first generation college students. Their key to success is their ability to expect and enact their expectations of being successful, middle class Latinos. By being at a middle class institution of higher education, taking on leadership opportunities, and positioning themselves as "future" leaders of the OKC Hispanic community, these students are performing the social class they intend for their families to occupy.

Class seeps into educational opportunities in expected ways. This is easily recognizable; lower income students have higher rates of dropouts in both high school and college. Latinas whose families fall into the middle class bracket have greater chances for successful opportunities from the very beginning. Middle class students are more likely to speak fluent English without a perceivable "Spanish accent," because parents limit students' use of Spanish, especially outside the home. Middle class families are also more accustomed to the rhetoric and language of higher education. Students whose families who can afford to pay college tuition have more access to cultural capital because students who do not have to work full-time while in school or drop out to of school to work will have more time to access on-campus opportunities and, as a result, have more access to agentive channels for becoming successful leaders.

The road to becoming a successful student and community leader is, of course, sometimes confusing and can be fraught with problems. Many students struggle with the major that they choose, because their parents, despite minimal or no knowledge of degree requirements, often dictate students' college and career decisions. As a result, students may not change their major when they desire to, or feel compelled to ask their

parents if they can do so, and are often denied this choice. Latino advisors at OU see this happen often during students' freshman and sophomore years, and make an extra effort to intervene between students and parents in these situations by speaking to parents in Spanish and holding "town hall" meetings in Norman, where parents of prospective college students can attend information meetings, although attendance at these meetings is very low. Student may also be forced to delay graduation because of additional classes they need to take if they do indeed change their major or because they have to retake courses.

The ways that students conceptualize college and their expectations for future education and class status are shaped by high school experiences. Research participants' experiences with high school teachers and counselors parallel the findings of Ogbu (1974) and Foley (1990): middle class students who were expected to graduate high school were mentored and encouraged by school staff and teachers to go to college; lower class students were largely ignored if teachers assumed students' families could not pay for college. Only the students who were "going to make it" were told they would succeed, while lower class students were not expected or encouraged to attend college, much less become highly successful students or community leaders.

A student's class expectations shape the behaviors they enact which are needed for academic success. Hispanic students with high expectations for class mobility have strong commitments to maintaining good grades, making network connections, and serving as leaders on campus. These commitments are evidenced by my research participants' willingness to participate in four months of beauty pageant rehearsals while taking between four and six 3-credit college courses, solicit community business

owners for sponsorship money in order to win the pageant scholarship, and continue to build on their social and political activism through their pageant platforms. Moreover, the ability to perform "authenticity" on a pageant stage is also class performance. It is a product of middle classness to be able to take pride in one's ethnicity in the United States. Students' actions allow their families to gain ground in both education and racial uplift, though the students must negotiate their "white" actions with their families' experiences with lower class environments.

Students who enact whiteness by having high levels of general English and academic English competency, who have access to college knowledge, and who already occupy higher levels of socioeconomic class, have the greatest agency in constructing their own success both in and out of the university.

Academic success is also a practice of reiteration. Latina students succeed by repetitive acts of the criteria which make them successful, although these acts may not be recognizable as such. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states "…certain reiterative chains of discursive production are barely legible as reiterations, for the effects they have materialized are those without which no bearing in discourse can be taken" (1993:187). In other words, the "reality" of being something – in this case, academically and socially successful – is achieved by behaving in ways which lead to that reality, although individual actors are unaware that they are enacting those behaviors prior to being accepted as someone with that identity, such as a high successful student. Although students' success and identity (Hispanic and academic) is performative, its effects are seen as unexpected. The family, friends, peers, and school administrators of Latinas expressed surprise at their success, despite the students' discursive

performances and use of "success" rhetoric in order to make their advances. This is because their enactment of academic success and middle class behavior is, although agentive, limited and constructed in terms of their cultural and historical constraints. These students' success in college is often unexpected by their communities and schools at least partially because of the anti-immigrant and prejudiced politics in Oklahoma. Their ability to perform traditional gender expectations and gain cultural approval in the Miss Hispanic OU pageant also results from the cultural constraints of gender norms and education politics in both Hispanic and American mainstream culture.

Latinas' ability to make political statements – to publicly support the DREAM Act, to understand and articulate their understanding of Deferred Action, HB1804, and national immigration policies – is further evidence of *expected* future success. Knowledge and articulation of public policy and citizens' rights is a middle class value in America, and is key to participating in social and cultural change. Political activism is perhaps the best bridge that Latina students can build between their Hispanic communities and their newly formed academic identity and status. By doing this, they gain approval from their families, reconcile white/Hispanic behaviors, and become academically successful in ways that are culturally meaningful to them and offer socioeconomic benefits to their families. Latina students consciously use the linguistic and cultural behaviors they have learned in both Hispanic communities and the historically white university to further the discourse and recognition of racial and ethnic uplift of Hispanic culture.

My research participants often stated that they and their families did not expect their academic success. However, their ability to successfully perform and enact the

identity of a "good student" who values her culture promotes and projects future success – success that is anticipated. Future success is understood and realized through their shifting subjectivities, first as unexpected high school graduates, then as unexpected college attendees, and finally as Latina leaders on campus with high expectations for college graduation, employment, marriage and family, and upward class mobility.

Understanding and studying the stories of successful Hispanic students – what academic success really means to them – is important for not only the study of education but its application in creating a space for cultural diversity on campus. By asking successful ethnic minority students how they navigate and assign meaning to college and career, we can support students' alternative strategies, such as Miss Hispanic OU, and celebrate the culturally-specific meanings of college success with students. Latina students' leadership in their communities allows them to succeed both on and off campus, creating a positive impact on the academic future that Oklahoma Latino students and the granddaughters of Luis Rodriguez will have.

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Appendix

Full text of pageant performances described in ethnographic accounts

Ana's Charrería

Buenos Noches!

Señoras y Señoras, Ladies and Gentlemen... I am here for one specific purpose and that is to rid you all of any doubt…of the bravery of a Mexican!

I'm going to tell you about a sport! But not just any sport…Oh no, no, no! Es la Charrería! The bravest sport of them all!

We do not dribble a ball down a court. We do not wear gear to protect our body! We, los charros, go face-to-face with bulls that can weigh up to 1,500 pounds and ride beautiful horses all while doing death-defying stunts…FOR FUN! Charrería consists of ten scoring events in a particular order. One event is for the beautiful senoritas, las charras, the ladies, which is of course, my personal favorite to watch…the escaramuza. Two or more ascociacones, or teams, compete to become state champions, then regional, and then finally national champions. We are judged on both execution and style! Charrerías are held in arenas called Lienzo Charro…We wear a traditional traje de charro, which includes a closely fitted suit, botines, and your sombrero. When all the events are finished, the winners get awards like saddles and belt buckles. After all of the awards are given…THE FIESTA BEGINS!

Charrerías are an all-out experience even for the audience. Aside from competition and fun, Charrería is a Mexican tradition. It is culture and it is pride! I know that I am proud to represent the strength and bravery of a Mexican through the sport that I participate in. Estoy orgulloso de representar la Fortaleza y la valentina de

los Mexicanos con el deporte en el que participo que es la Charrería. Viva los charros,

Y VIVA MEXICO!

Cecilia's Glass Ceiling

Is the ceiling above your head made of glass?

Has it ever restricted you from getting something you've wanted in the past?

What is a glass ceiling? Some of you might even ask…

Well… it's not an easy matter…A glass ceiling is an unseen barrier that keeps a person from rising higher in society's ladder.

It's the ceiling above the man who has worked his job for 30 years, but has yet to receive a raise.

It's the ceiling above the woman who scrubs hotel floors every night and barely receives minimum wage.

It's the ceiling above the students who stress, cry, and work their fingers to the bone… to earn the education they are told they need to own.

A glass ceiling has no boundaries - has no sympathy.

It can make the most confident person wonder like "Wow. What got into me?"

It's not local… It's global. Enough to drive somebody loco.

It doesn't matter si hablas espanol or you understand un poco.

And even though, it's sad to say… these realities are suffered every day.

En Panama, en Mexico, en Guatemala, y en los Estados. En todo el mundo! Bajo el techo de cristal nos encontramos.

Por eso… yo prefiero, that is, I'd prefer to take my chances, punch the glass and have it cut into my flesh than to forever wonder what is on the other side.

To hit the glass so that I can chase my dreams and walk with pride.

To hit the glass so that I am not afraid to speak my mind.

Yes! Hitting glass is going to cut! It's going to hurt! It's going to bruise! But the strong spirit of a young Latina cannot lose!

My mother, mi madre is an example of what a strong spirit is…The glass ceiling of a Panamanian dictatorship was not enough to hold her back.

Hold her back from coming to the US alone.

Hold her back from leaving everything she's ever known.

Hold her back from providing for others without a single moan or groan.

You could give a million balboas but it will never cover what my mother is worth. Mi madre is beautiful like a pollera colorada. Unique. Distinct. Y otra igual no sera encontrada.

Strong.

Fuerte.

Like the rushing water through the Panama Canal. Her courage is my motivation to hit the glass as I am doing now.

Or even… To hit the glass like Sotomayor when she was told she couldn't achieve political success.

Or even…To hit the glass like Martinelli when he was told Panama could not progress.

Me. I'll hit the glass until it breaks and smile once I hear the sound a million pieces make.

And I challenge anyone who has a dream…. Browns, blacks, whites, olds, and teens…

To conquer their ambitions…

To become kings and queens…

By breaking the glass ceiling, even if the punches sting. So. Don't let the glass ceiling break you down and make you less. Instead you must break it and become…One. Less.

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