"We are not the Same"-An Examination of the Relationships Between Mexican Americans and Mexican National on the US-Mexico Border

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“WE ARE NOT THE SAME”-AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEXICAN AMERICANS AND MEXICAN NATIONALS ON THE US-MEXICO BORDER

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“WE ARE NOT THE SAME”-AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEXICAN AMERICANS AND MEXICAN NATIONALS ON THE US-MEXICO BORDER

by

ANGELA JACQUELINE SILVA, BA

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1. Introduction

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, as of 2013, there are an estimated 33.7 million persons of Mexican-origin (native and foreign-born) currently residing in the United States. Mexican-origin persons currently occupy 17% of the total population of the country (Stepler and Brown 2015). Although this population has a long standing history in the United States, generations of exclusion, assimilation, and identity formation among Mexican-Americans has been an important topic of research within the study of race and ethnic relations. Though “Mexican” may be thought of as an ethnic designation, the category is also a racial one. Race has been described by social scientists as a socially constructed category that is based on social, political and economic factors, and a category that is often used as a justification for systemic oppression and discrimination (Omi and Winant, in Rothenberg & Mayhew 1986). Moreover, Mexican immigration and the discourse on Mexican immigration has often led to the racialization of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (Massey 2009). Racialization is commonly defined as “[t]he processes by which a group begins to be treated as a race” (Golash-Boza 2015:450). Racialization are the social process(es) that create and maintain systemic unequal life chances between hierarchally ordered populations, where the “superior” one is generally viewed as the dominant or majority while the “inferior” group is viewed as the subordinate or minority (Alba, Jimenez, and Marrow 2014). For instance, if we examine the perceived threat that Mexican immigration poses to American society and culture we see that politicians and the media racialized Latino/a immigrants, specifically those of Mexican-origin, to the U.S. in the 1990’s (Santa Ana 2002; Chavez 2005; Massey 2009). In California various legislation aimed to limit the prosperity of the lives of Mexican immigrants living in the state by blocking their
ability to access emergency healthcare services and access to public school for their children (Santa Ana 2002; Chavez 2008).

Additionally, an important focus of research has been on how racial identification manifests itself within different Latino/a communities and how racial identification affects intra-ethnic group relations amongst different Latino/a groups as well as between native born and foreign born Latino/as (e.g., Knoll 2012; Morales, Murga, and Sanchez 2013). Because Mexican origin persons are the largest group within the pan-ethnic group of Latino/as research on the group has become especially important. Extensive research on Mexicans and other Latino/as is vast, which includes but is not limited to, education, racial/ethnic identification, and immigration/immigrant incorporation. However, research on intra-ethnic group relations (Mexicans and Mexican-Americans) is limited (for exceptions see Gutierrez 2000; Ochoa 2004; Knoll 2012; Morales, Murga, and Sanchez 2013; Dowling 2014; Alba et al. 2014).

In order to understand the complexities of the experience of Mexican-origin persons in the United States and intra-ethnic group relations it is important to take into consideration the history of this group of people. The history of persons of Mexican-origin in the United States has been a rather tumultuous one. The start of the difficulties that Mexican and Mexican-American people would experience arguably began in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This would lead to the annexation of Texas to the white settlers as well as put an end to the Mexican-American war. Events leading up to the signing of the treaty were motivated by an ideology of manifest destiny by white protestant settlers which meant that they believed that the rights to the land in the northern provinces of Mexico were God given (Saenz and Murga 2011). It was at this time that the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma were ceded by Mexico to the United States (Gutierrez 2000).
During this time, Mexicans that remained in this territory were advised that they would become United States citizens and would be afforded the same rights as any other American citizen (Gutierrez 2000). However, this was not the case and instead from that point on Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were treated as second class citizens. Soon after, Mexicans residing in the former Mexican territory were perceived as a “mongrel race” and many white citizens moving towards the southwest agreed that they did not want Mexicans to be considered part of their nation. Mexicans were often compared to being the same, if not even more inferior, than Blacks folks were during this time (Gutierrez 2000).

Moreover, one of the ways that we think about the relationships between the U.S. and Mexico revolves around the economics of labor. For instance, an on and off again demand for exploitable labor called for Mexican migration to the United States and even encouraged the migration of Mexican citizens to the United States. That is, Mexico and the United States have a long standing relationship that is based on labor relations and exploitation. During the First World War, Mexican labor was needed to make up for the men that were fighting in the war; after the war Mexicans were expected to leave because the work ended. Mexican migration was put on halt during the Great Depression with many Mexicans and Mexican Americans experiencing mass deportation that is referred to as repatriation because of a shortage of U.S. labor demands (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Because of the Great Depression and lack of work, Mexican immigrants and even native born Mexicans were targeted for taking up jobs. They were also accused of being public charges and forcing working Americans to pay for them. That being said, repatriations of up to 50,000 Mexican origin persons were conducted and approximately upwards of 500,000 Mexicans were either deported or self-deported to Mexico during this time (Fox 2012). Repatriations were set up as a means to offer Mexicans a way to
leave the United States with some payment, however if Mexicans did not want to accept the payment they chose to self-deport because of the negative treatment by the welfare system and the American public (Fox 2012). Later during the Second World War, the U.S. established a guest worker program with Mexico because of the need for workers. The Bracero program allowed Mexican laborers to obtain work visas to work temporarily in the United States. Since Mexicans were not considered by many to be immigrants their migration to and from the U.S was not considered a problem. Indeed, immigrants were considered to be people that had intentions of remaining in the United States but, Mexicans were only considered to be temporary workers. Chomsky (2014) notes that it was not until these Mexican laborers began to remain in the country when their visas expired that they were clearly defined as an immigrant group. This was the beginning of the tipping point in which Mexican immigrants were seen as a “problem.”

In the 1980s, there was what is considered to be a massive influx of Mexican immigration into the United States and in some regions such as California and Texas people of Mexican descent were more than a third of the population. Because of the Immigrant Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), concerns over the “browning of America” began to arise. During this time, immigrants residing in the country prior to January 1, 1982 were given the opportunity to become “legalized,” and requirements for hiring immigrants were made much more stringent (Acuña 1995). During the 1970s there had been an economic recession in the United States, which had led to a discourse surrounding Mexican immigrants in particular. During that time, the alarm was that Mexican immigrants were taking away jobs from U.S. citizens. However, the jobs that were occupied by Mexican immigrants were mainly low paying, blue collar and service sector jobs (Acuña 1995).
Considering that people of Mexican ancestry encompass a large proportion of not only the immigrant population in the United States but that they are also the majority of the Latino/a population in the United States, coupled with the fact that persons of Mexican origin have strong cultural ties to the United States and have resided in the Southwestern United States for centuries, it is immensely important to understand the experiences of this group of people in the United States. My research aims to examine the relationships and perceptions that Mexican-Americans have towards Mexican immigrants and Mexican transnationals in a setting in which the two groups reside in close proximity to one another. I aim to contribute to the existing literature problematizing the idea(s) that because of the close geographical and social proximity between these groups that Mexican-Americans will have positive relationships and positive perceptions of Mexican immigrants and transnational Mexicans (Knoll 2012). Moreover, it is important to recognize the history of the region and the people residing in the region in order to contextualize the experiences of these groups. The rich history of Mexican origin people in the Southwestern United States is important in understanding their current position as well as understanding the relationship between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. A history of conquest and war of the Mexican-origin people in the United States as well as deportation, repatriations, and second-class citizen status are all crucial in understanding the experiences of the Mexican-origin population today. Because of the nature of the history of Mexicans and Mexican immigration in the United States, not only has the general population developed their own perceptions of the “Mexican problem,” but other Latino/a groups as well (Acuña 1995; Ochoa 2004; Knoll 2012; Morales et al. 2013; Dowling 2014). Some of the issues impacting the relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans are around race and racial identification (Ochoa 2004; Stokes-Brown 2012; Morales et al. 2013; Dowling 2014). Issues
related to intra-ethnic relations contingent on language, racial identity, and citizenship are the main concerns in the above mentioned literature. Extensive research has been employed to understand Mexican-Americans and Latino/as in the United States with this research focusing on race, racial identification, ethnic identity, as well as language and its role in determining perceptions around Mexican immigration and bilingualism (Ochoa 2004; Morales et al. 2013; Dowling 2014). Not only is it important to examine these experiences, but it is also important to examine the interactions and consequences of these relationships by examining how these situations shape the relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants.

As a result, my research examines the relationship between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants along the U.S.-Mexico border. El Paso, Texas is on the U.S.-Mexico border with the El Paso/Juarez region considered to be a transnational region. The border is a bi-cultural, bi-national space that people navigate on a daily basis. While the border is man-made as originally determined by the Río Grande River and it is also a political divide. That is, the El Paso-Juarez border is a historical space contextualized by a socio-political relationship between two countries. The differences among the people living on either side of the border have been created by governments and this has had real consequences in terms of the relationships between people. Indeed, limited research exists that examines racial identification and relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants in a transnational border context. I aim to contribute to the literature on intra-racial group relations among Latino/as and specifically Mexican-origin persons, by recognizing the significance of the border context. Indeed, because people residing on both sides of the ‘border’ share common ancestry, as well as history, it may commonly be assumed that there will be strong relationships between the two groups.
As a result, the substantive research questions that have guided my research project are: considering the interesting context that the El Paso/Juarez border region provides, what factors characterize the relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in the region? Additional questions include: how does working in a customer service environment affect perceptions of Mexican nationals by Mexican-Americans?; how does nationality and citizenship affect perceptions of Mexican nationals by Mexican-Americans?; and, how do stereotypes and common discourse of Mexicans affect intra-racial group relations amongst Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals?
2. Literature Review

Anti-immigrant sentiment and the Latino threat narrative have been prevalent in regards to determinants of how the American public perceives Latino/as and particularly Mexicans and Mexican immigration (Chavez 2005). Whether this also has an effect on intra-ethnic relations is not often discussed and is an issue to be explored throughout this research project. It will be examined in order to understand how anti-immigrant discourse has impacted the perceptions of Mexican-Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border. I have decided to focus on three themes in the literature that focus on Latino/a racial identification, the Latino/a threat and anti-immigrant sentiment, and ethnic/intra-racial solidarity as these areas of research are useful in guiding my own work. Because my research focuses on the intra-racial relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals and immigrants, these areas of research provide a good framework for my own work. For instance, I will start with Latino/a racial identification because research (Ochoa 2004; Morales et al. 2013; Dowling 2014) has shown that the ways in which a Latino/a chooses to self-identify in terms of race, could predict the way that they will feel towards Latino/a/Mexican immigration and the foreign born. Next, I will discuss the Latino/a threat and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States because these sentiments have been popular among the general public and I am interested in how these sentiments have impacted people residing in a border region. Finally, I will discuss ethnic solidarity because the factors that affect or cause ethnic or intra-racial solidarity will be helpful in understanding if this phenomenon also occurs in my study.

2.1 Latino/a Racial Identification

The issue of Latino/a racial identification has been a particularly interesting area of research because when we think about race we typically examine it within a black/white
paradigm. Moreover, Latino/a self-identification is important to examine when looking at intra-ethnic groups because it can cause either solidarity or conflict (Dowling 2014; Ochoa 2004; Morales et al. 2013). Latino/a self-identification has also shown to be a factor that contributes to the relationships between the native born and the foreign born when looking at Mexican-origin groups. In, *America’s Shifting Color Line? Redefining Determination of Latino Self Identification*, Stokes-Brown (2012) writes that Latino/as may be shifting the black and white paradigm of racial identification that has historically existed in the United States. Stokes-Brown (2012), discusses Latino/a identity formation and how the government has made it difficult for Latinos to select a certain racial identity. This mostly happens because of the distinction and separation of ethnicity from racial categories, thus leaving Latino/as out of the race conversation all together (Stokes-Brown 2012). Because ethnicity and race are distinct categories, Latino/as often are able to select Latino/a or Hispanic for ethnicity but are often left with no choice for the race category which often times leads them to selecting white or some other race (Stokes-Brown 2012). Stokes-Brown (2012) continues by stating that Latino/a racial identity formation is contingent on social and political factors as well as social interactions. Using data from the 2006 Latino National Survey, Stokes-Brown notes that over 60% of the Latinos surveyed choose to self-identify with some other race as opposed to choosing white or black as their race. Her findings suggest that those that have a stronger command of the Spanish language are more likely to select some other race as opposed to white while those that prefer to speak English are more likely to identify more with American whites (Stokes-Brown 2012). Stokes-Brown predicts that based on survey data, Latino/as’ self-identification in terms of race are shifting the black/white race dichotomy that has dominated the United States since its inception. However, she also notes that many of her variables such as, socioeconomic status, education, and
phenotype are strong determinants of whether Latino/a’s adopt a white racial category over some other race, thus questioning whether Latino/as are really shifting the color-line. Moreover, Stokes-Brown (2012) notes that arguments made about whether Latino/as will continue to assimilate into white American culture or the white/nonwhite binary will continue to exist, but thought of in different ways because of the inclusion of Latino/as and Asians in the white category or that Latino/as will eventually become a racial category. As a result, the racial hierarchy may maintain Blacks at the lowest end of the hierarchy.

For instance, Gilda Ochoa (2004) explores racial and ethnic identity in *Becoming Neighbors in a Mexican American Community* and also finds that there are many factors that influence how Mexican Americans identify in terms of race/ethnicity. She found that the racial and ethnic identity of Mexican-Americans was influenced by a myriad of factors including negative stereotypes of Mexican-Americans, perceptions on assimilation and language abilities which also related to assimilation for many respondents in the study. Individuals that she interviewed had both positive and negative things to say about their racial/ethnic identities. While some Mexican-Americans identify with their Mexican ancestry, they choose to select a hyphenated identity because while they are proud of being of Mexican-origin, they also feel it necessary to identify that they are American. On the other hand, some respondents chose to completely separate themselves from their Mexican-origin ancestry because of negative perceptions of being Mexican and the respondents’ beliefs that Mexican immigrants do not assimilate into American culture the way they should (Ochoa 2004). Ochoa found that regardless of the negative perceptions of being Mexican, some respondents indicated that they identify solely with Mexico and being Mexican because they felt that others knew that they were Mexican (primarily Whites) and they knew they were citizens. Regardless of being American
citizens, they identified as Mexican (Ochoa 2004). These experiences and responses confirm how salient and heterogeneous race and ethnic self-identification can be within a group that is considered to be the same.

Historically race has been an often debated social category. In more recent history, social scientists have concluded that race is not biological and there are more differences within the same “racial group” than amongst different groups. Indeed, race has been concluded to be a social construction and that it is determined by social, historical, and political factors (Omi and Winant, in Rothenberg and Mayhew 1986). That being said, race as a construction is always changing depending on social, economic, and political factors in a process called racial formations (Omi and Winant, in Rothenberg and Mayhew 1986). Gilda Ochoa (2004) finds that racial and ethnic identification is indeed fluid and is often affected by external factors within her own work. For instance, external factors include the idea that Mexican immigrants do not assimilate into mainstream American culture, which causes an overall negative view of Mexican immigration and Mexican immigrants. Ochoa’s respondents indicated that speaking Spanish was frowned upon at the time of the study, which is another factor involved in self-identification. Language proficiency as well as identification have been shown to influence in the way that one views immigrants (Ochoa 2004). Furthermore, respondents in Ochoa’s study were found to be more pro-assimilation for recent immigrants from Mexico if they did not feel connected to Mexican culture and often that connection was defined as being proficient in Spanish. Mexicans defined Mexican-ness often by one’s ability to speak Spanish so if you are unable to or are not fluent enough in the language then you are frowned upon. You are not considered Mexican enough if you are not able to speak the language and that can be harmful in the way that individuals identify and how they view immigration.
U.S. Latino/as fall along a race continuum when it comes to self-identification on race. As a result of the historic black/white paradigm of the U.S. Latino/as’ racial self-identification may fall somewhere in-between this rigid dichotomy. While they have been racially defined as white legally, socially they have been treated as non-white (Dowling 2014). Race has been defined by sociologists as a social constructed category that is based on perceived biological differences, ethnic, and cultural attributes shared by a group with common ancestry (Dowling 2014). Dowling (2014) argues that some Latino/as and primarily Mexican Americans (Mexican Americans are the focus of her work) adopt a color-blind ideology due to historical, political, and social changes in the U.S. and that over time, Latino/as have adopted different views of race. This means that they choose to not identify race as an important aspect of their lives nor the lives of others. For example, Dowling (2014) notes that some of her respondents would claim that racism is in the past, all groups experience their form of racism (minimization of racism) or believe that their environments will not affect their life chances. Consequently, some of these Mexican-Americans choose to select white in census documents while those that select “some other race” tend to be more understanding of and confronting of how race affects their lives. Dowling (2014) notes that Mexican-Americans that select white in census forms as well as on other legal documents are likely to desire to be viewed as full Americans and associate American with being white (Dowling 2014). Still, while people may self-identify on legal documents as “white,” some respondents could “pass” as white while others may be perceived as non-white by others. As is the experience among other Latino/as, Mexican-Americans fall into these same racial ideologies. While Mexican-Americans are not technically defined as a racial group, they have indeed been racialized. The racialization of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans can be traced back to when a large portion of Mexico was annexed by the United States and the Treaty
of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. When the treaty was signed, Mexicans residing on what became U.S. land were promised land and full citizen rights, however in practice this did not play out as planned. Powerful white elites were able to make the decision that some Mexicans could be considered white. These Mexicans were typically chosen because they had some sort of power or money (Feagin 2008:80). Mexicans in the region were considered to be white, but still remained at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Indeed, while Mexicans were defined as white, in reality they were treated as non-white. Historically, Mexican-origin people that were able to identify or pass as “white” were those that had higher social status while those that were racialized as non-white were darker skinned and had lower socioeconomic status. Dowling (2014) writes that today Latino/as that select white are usually light skinned, speak English, and have higher socioeconomic statuses as compared to darker skinned Latino/as that select “some other race,” and are less likely to identify with America.

Furthermore, often times multigenerational Mexican Americans experience discrimination because they are racialized as non-white. However, they experience discrimination by other Mexican Americans and Mexicans because of perceived assimilation or because they are thought of as being “too Americanized,” which in turn affects racial identification (Dowling 2014). Indeed, Dowling (2014) notes that Mexican-Americans experience discrimination from Mexican nationals/migrants because they are perceived to be too American. This is often because younger generations of Mexican Americans were not taught Spanish and being able to speak the language is a strong cultural identifier. If you are Mexican-American and are unable to speak Spanish, you are perceived negatively not only by Mexican nationals but also by Mexican-Americans (Dowling 2014). Racial identification for Mexican-Americans has been a very complex subject because while they are considered white legally, as a
social group they have been racialized as non-white. Thus discrimination and outside labeling and othering has affected Mexican-Americans views of themselves.

Rochmes and Griffen (2006) have addressed some of these issues by examining how the “seduction of whiteness” has often impacted Latino/as and Mexicans’ racial identification. This means that because Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and other Latino/as have historically been legally classified as white, it has been easier for these groups to elect whiteness as a racial identity. Rochmes and Griffen (2006) explain that the dangers of this lies in that by accepting whiteness Latino/as are upholding the black/white paradigm that exists describing racial formation in the United States. The authors note that since Latino/as and Mexican-Americans in particular have not “liked” being treated as citizens of color, close to the way Blacks are treated, they have wanted to aim for whiteness. Whiteness usually entailed assimilation, an abandonment of cultural ties and values, and an alignment with American nationhood. One key way that Mexican-Americans and other persons of Mexican origin have been able to adopt whiteness has been by signaling their superiority to Blacks. However, Mexican-Americans and other Latino/as have negated to recognize that despite the legal adoption of whiteness, Mexican-Americans and other Latino/as, have never been treated or truly recognized as being white in U.S. society. Indeed, they have always been treated as non-white which may explain why some Latino/as and Mexican-Americans are drawn to whiteness; they perceive that whiteness signifies full assimilation and entrance into “American” nationhood.

2.2

The Latino threat narrative is described as a discourse surrounding Latino/a immigration in the United States with an emphasis on Mexican migration. The Latino threat discourse often places national blame onto Latino/a immigrants for the country’s ills (Chavez 2005). For
example, these narratives include: Latino/a immigrants are taking American citizens’ jobs, Latino/a immigrants use many public resources and do not pay taxes to contribute to the aid that they use, Latino/as will not learn English and assimilate to American culture, and Latino/as are damaging the cultural fabric of the United States (Chavez 2005). The Latino threat narrative has been a vehicle that many politicians use in order to convince people through the use of the media that Latino/a immigration is a problem and that the public should pay particular concern to Mexican immigration. Historically, immigration laws have either been covertly or overtly racist. In the early part of the 20th century, overtly racist immigration acts sought to limit the immigration of people from different parts of the world, primarily from Asia, Africa, and European countries. Indeed, during this time, policies such as the 1924 National Origins Act used explicitly racist language to restrict entry to immigrants into the United States (Douglas, Saenz, Murga 2015). With the passing of the Immigration Act of 1965, national origin quotas were eliminated, however a limit placed on western hemisphere immigrants indirectly affected immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Because limits had been set in place, as well as legislative restrictions, undocumented immigration began to rise, predominantly undocumented Mexican immigration (Douglas et al. 2015). Finally, immigration reform in 1986 and 1996 would represent some of the most restrictive policies set in place by the U.S. with policies disproportionately affecting Mexican immigrants (Douglas et al. 2015). While anti-immigrant sentiment has driven legislation it has also had an effect on restrictive immigration legislation.

In the 1990s, there was public panic of the “browning of America,” because of the “influx” of Mexican immigration to the United States (Santa Ana 2002). Mexican immigration became a “Mexican problem.” This painted Mexicans in a negative light. In California,
Proposition 187 or the “Save Our State” initiative focused on barring recent immigrants from using social services (Santa Ana 2002; Santa Ana 1999). These services included emergency hospital and healthcare as well as public education to undocumented immigrant children and the children of immigrants (Santa Ana 1999). The legislation also required that teachers, social workers, and employers to report undocumented immigration/immigrants if they were aware of it/them. While the legislation was later deemed unconstitutional, it was clear that the population in California were concerned about “illegal immigration” as a public charge. Additionally, Proposition 227, another piece of legislation that was also disproportionately aimed at Mexican immigrants, focused on banning bilingual education (Santa Ana 2002). These two propositions were the focus of the book *A Brown Tide Rising*, which claims that the discourse surrounding the legislation debate really defined the way that Mexicans were portrayed in the country at that point in time. Otto Santa Ana (2002) argues that metaphors in mass media discourse related Mexican immigrants to being animals. The main focus of the book was to examine how Mexican immigrants and immigration was perceived in California during the time that these pieces of legislation were being enacted/proposed. It was important to identify these metaphors because overt racist discourse was not in fashion anymore. However, because of the way that Mexican immigrants were painted by the media and within the media, public support for barring immigrants’ use of emergency healthcare, public education, etc., was high (Santa Ana 1999). That being said, understanding how discourse can affect public opinion as well as perceptions of groups of people and social concerns becomes important.

Moreover, recent immigration debates as well as anti-immigrant legislation have been enacted. In 2010, national attention on the state of Arizona, another state with a large Mexican-origin population, arose as a result of Governor Jan Brewer’s proposed “Support our Law
Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” which was set up to make racial profiling legal. It also allowed for the local police to act as immigration officers as it made it a state crime to be without “legal” documentation (Nill 2013). This, as with prior legislation, contributed to the publics’ fears of the Latino/a, primarily the Mexican immigrant. In that same year, additional public debate centered on the use of the words “illegals” and “illegal aliens/immigrants” when talking about Mexican immigration (Thompson 2011). Closely connected to how Mexican immigration had been talked about in media discourse during the legislation debates in the 1990’s, the concept of “legality” was reborn. In the past, the concept of legality surrounding immigration began when the Immigration Act of 1924 was enacted and for the first time put numerical limits on immigration (Ngai 2003). Over time, issues of legality and “illegal aliens” have risen at various times in history whenever it becomes convenient to target immigration as a problem; while the issue has never really gone away, it has simply been reproduced at different points in time. In more recent history, issues of legality became a public concern because of the way that politicians systematically use language to frame undocumented immigration as criminal (Thompson 2011). Consequently, politicians have been successful in creating a political platform in which undocumented immigration should be treated as a criminal offense. The mainstream discourse around undocumented immigration has been, “illegal aliens” have come into the country unauthorized, they have broken the law and thus should be treated as criminals. This has been an easy way to form overtly racist, xenophobic, and nativist attitudes towards immigrants (Thompson 2011). Unfortunately, some would argue that people of Mexican-origin are most negatively affected by long-standing xenophobic and racist perceptions on “illegal” immigration. For the most part, they are the ones that most immigration conversations are centered on, which could make it difficult for Mexican-Americans to feel commonality as well as identify with their
Mexican ancestry. That being said, this is one of the main issues that will be explored throughout this research, how does anti-immigrant discourse play out in a region that is predominantly Mexican-origin (Mexican and Mexican American)?

Unfortunately, anti-immigrant discourse has not only been common among politicians and the public, academics such as the late Samuel P. Huntington have claimed that Latino/as (Mexicans) were ruining America and that immigration from Mexico was something to be concerned about. Huntington (2004) argued that one of the single most threats to American culture and American identity was the Hispanization of America. He stated that Mexicans were presenting a cultural threat to the United States because they were migrating in great numbers due to proximity and accessibility of the U.S.-Mexican border, a lack of assimilation by Mexicans, Mexicans holding on to the Spanish language, and Mexicans’ feelings and claims toward U.S. land that was once theirs (Huntington 2004). Critical responses toward these views addressed how claims were made without sufficient empirical evidence. One critique was made by Rogelio Saenz and collaborators (2007) in which actual empirical research was conducted in order to challenge Huntington’s claims. Saenz and collaborators (2007), found that despite Huntington’s claims as well as the likely claims of others, Mexicans are integrating and incorporating into United States culture. They are learning English and they are obtaining higher economic social statuses. Saenz, Filoteo, and Murga (2007), concluded that the main cause of alarm against Mexican immigration was grounded on xenophobia, nativism, and overt racism.

In addition to the existence of anti-immigrant sentiment amongst the general American public, nativism and xenophobia amongst other Latino/as often occurs within the United States, as well. Anti-immigrant sentiment is especially interesting amongst Latino/as because there is an assumption that because of either common ancestry or at least a common language (cultural
commonalities) then there would be solidarity. However, various perceptions of the importance of citizenship and legality is common amongst Latino/as, just as it is important amongst the general public. Benjamin Knoll (2012) found that the main factors/predictors of nativism amongst U.S.-born Latino/as towards Latino/a immigrants, tend to be levels of assimilation into the American mainstream and the actual proximity to Latino/a immigrants. His research focused on examining what are the predictors of Latino/a nativism by using the 2006 Latino National Survey and focusing on native born Latino/as (Knoll 2012). Knoll (2012) also found that geographical location is also important when determining whether Latinos feel ethnic solidarity with immigrants, particularly with Mexican immigrants and with Mexico.

2.3 Latino/a Solidarity

In the past, research (Morales et al. 2013; Martinez 2008) has shown that various social factors will affect the nature of the relationship that exists within a particular social group. For persons of Mexican origin, common distinctions between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants/nationals are citizenship, nationality, and language. These social factors also affect how Mexican Americans relate to Mexican immigrants/nationals and how these factors can either cause Mexican-Americans to have either a positive or negative perceptions of Mexican immigration and Mexican immigrants. Latino/a solidarity or in this case, Mexican/Mexican American solidarity is also affected by these social characteristics. As seen in the past, political discourse has an impact on the way that Latino/as/Mexican-Americans/Mexicans relate to each other. In 2006, in the wake of pervasive anti-immigrant discourse, ethnic solidarity became a topic of interest. For instance, Morales et al (2013), showed that in the wake of the immigrant mobilizations in 2006, racial identification played a large role in how Latino/as related to each other. Based on data from the 2006 National Survey of Latinos, the authors found that Latino/as
that identified as white were less likely to concern themselves and show solidarity with Latino/a immigrants. These findings align with previously mentioned research that illuminates that ethnic and racial identity plays a role in how Latino/as identify with each other. However, another study, on the 2006 immigrant marches, found that the negative rhetoric on Latino/a immigration increased the likelihood that more Latino/as will become more politically involved and feel more in solidarity with immigrants (Martinez 2008).
3. Theoretical Framework

I frame my work by using critical theories of the social construction of race. The theories that frame my work are Feagin’s (2008) theory of a White Racial Frame (WRF) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) which was developed in response to the lack of conversations of Latino/as in Critical Race Theory. Both of these theories help me develop my analysis since they are critical of the ways in which “race” works in the United States by examining white supremacy and by critically questioning the position of Latino/as in the country. The White Racial Frame (WRF) documents how the entire history of the United States and the history of the law was built on a racial hierarchy that values white supremacy. For instance, Feagin (2008) notes that white elites wrote the Constitution without the mention of African Americans and Native Americans in mind except as inferior beings (Feagin 2008). That being said, the U.S. Constitution was written as a racist document, indeed it includes sections that highlight a persistent need for slavery as well as named Africans and African Americans as three fifths of a person. In this way, the U.S. Constitution was never written to protect people of color. Thus, the entire legal and governmental systems, were created to be oppressive and racist. Because of an ultimate belief by whites that they were the dominant racial group, a racial framing of the world and the nation was created. Feagin notes that the behaviors, ideologies, and belief systems of whites were built on racist grounds. Originally the White Racial frame was developed to analyze Black/white relations but has been extended to include other groups of color including Latino/as and Asians. Historically, because of the dominant racial framing of the United States, even abolitionists would frame slavery and African Americans and Africans through the White Racial Frame. Feagin (2008), notes that early anti-slavery activists as well as early American sociologists were guilty of framing Africans and African Americans as inferior beings. While
individuals such as Harriet Beecher Stowe who was an abolitionist, as well as Abraham Lincoln, claimed to be anti-slavery, they still framed African Americans using stereotypical views. Thus the WRF examines how white superiority and dominance has become normalized not only within the white mind but also by people of color and how this maintains a system of racism (Feagin 2008). Because the WRF has since been extended to have been internalized by not only whites but also groups of color, the WRF is useful in analyzing my own research data, since I argue that Mexican-Americans residing in a transnational border region have internalized the WRF despite their close proximity to Juarez, Mexico and foreign born Mexicans. Moreover, common attitudes towards race and racism center on how racism is an individual experience and it something that is disappearing as time goes on but Feagin (2008), argues that because of the WRF racist framing, stereotypes, behaviors, and actions are deeply embedded within the minds of all Americans.

Following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s and the establishment of the Equal Rights Act, and the banning of Jim Crow segregation, overt displays of racism have mostly become covert, backstage and frowned upon. However, because of the adoption of color-blindness towards racial issues, racism has continued to operate in different ways. Bonilla-Silva (2003), argues that many white Americans as well as others insist that we currently live in a post-racial society or color-blind society. Indeed, while some progress has been made we have all been ingrained with racist attitudes that continue to exist. Bonilla-Silva (2003) notes four different frames that are used not only among white Americans, but people of color. Research on the attitudes of white Americans towards people of color shows that while white individuals will respond to face to face questions in a non-racist way, when their attitudes are studied covertly, they are shown to be racist (Feagin 2008; Bonilla-Silva 2003).
The WRF, as mentioned above does not only operate within the minds of whites but has also become normalized amongst people of color. In more recent research, Feagin and Cobas (2008) in *Latino/as and White Racial Frame: The Procrustean Bed of Assimilation* examined middle class Latino/as across the nation and presented them with scenarios regarding stereotypical perceptions of Latino/a groups as well as African Americans. What they found was that Latino/as also use the WRF, Latino/as accept the WRF, and experience internalized violence (they have internalized the WRF and believe negative stereotypes towards others Latino/as as well as of themselves). Indeed, they use the WRF to perpetuate racial stereotypes towards other people of color, primarily Blacks. While Latino/as may also experience framing from whites using the WRF, they also are found to use the WRF within their own communities.

This theoretical framework helps guide my research because it allows me to illuminate some of the factors affecting the relationships between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals in a border community. As Feagin and Cobas (2008) noted in their research, Latino/as also experience internalization of the WRF and use it towards others within their own group and towards other people of color. Their research was conducted amongst middle class Latino/as that reside within the states with the highest populations of Latino/as; it is not specified whether respondents were from the U.S.-Mexico border. The theory of the WRF can help us examine the ways in which Mexican Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border have internalized white racism and how that in turn affects the relationships they have with Mexican nationals/immigrants. El Paso, Texas provides an interesting place to examine this situation because it is considered to be a transnational community. Research on racial identification among Latino/as, has found that Latino/as identify as white in an attempt to identify as more American and that racial identification in turn does influence Latino/as perceptions on Latino/a immigrants (Ochoa 2004).
This shows us how the WFR has also been engrained in the minds and actions of Latino/as. In my research I use the theory of the WRF in order to see how Mexican American people in a region that is considered not only transnational, but also as a sister community with Cuidad Juarez, Mexico, have internalized dominant stereotypes and the WRF.

I also used Latino Critical Race Theory, or LatCrit theory in order to frame my arguments and understanding of the relationship between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals/immigrants. LatCrit theory works well with the White Racial Frame as a frame of analysis for my research because both provide critical frameworks that focus on race as a social construction. The WRF specifically focuses on how white Americans operate out of a dominant racial framing of African Americans and other people of color, thus not allowing white Americans to be able to perceive people of color without any preconceived notions that are usually racist (Feagin 2006: 27). Additionally, this framing originally focused on a black/white binary but has more recently extended to include other groups of color (Feagin and Cobas 2008; Feagin 2010). This works well with LatCrit theory because LatCrit Theory’s tenets focus on challenging the black and white binary racial system that is often focused on within the United States. Because LatCrit theory focuses on challenging the dominant racial frame and recognizes the importance of race in regards to Latino/as, it works well with the WRF in recognizing the salience of race among groups that are not identified as a race but have been racialized. LatCrit emerged in response to the lack of Latino critical theory in conversations on race relations in the social world as well as in the law. It became important for Latino/a scholars and law professors to identify that the experience of Latino/as in regards to race was not only different from other groups of color but also that their experience did not fit into the Black/White paradigm of race. Historically, Latino/as and for the purpose of this study, people of Mexican-origin, have been
legally classified as white but they were never treated as white or received the benefits of whiteness. Latino/as have also been provided with the opportunity to elect to identify as white on the U.S. census and on other legal documents. LatCrit theory is important in analyzing and examining the experiences of Latino/as in the United States because it takes into account the various statuses that other groups of color may not experience, for example, citizenship and nationality. The experience of Latino/as is not only determined by their racial identity but also by other intersecting statuses. Important incorporations by LatCrit theory into critical race and critical theory is the identification of intersectionality in terms of the additional social statuses that Latino/as possess (immigrant status, nationality, language ability), bilingualism (bilingualism has often come under attack due to pursuits of English only legislation that became much stronger following the large Latino/a immigrant waves), race and the idea of the colonized mind (where Latinos may reject Latino/a immigrants due to internal colonization), and Latino/a stereotypes which in turn also affect the way that Latino/as experience differs from other groups of color (Stefancic 1997).

One of the key emphasis of LatCrit theory is the idea that Latino/as have been legally considered white in terms of race which has left both erasure in terms of racial identity formation among Latino/as as well as the ability for the law to ignore race in the case of Latino/as. Race is important amongst Latino/as, and especially for Mexicans, because for the majority of the time that Mexicans have been in the United States they have been treated as not only non-white but as second class citizens. LatCrit theory emphasizes that because of the historically Black/White racial frame in the United States those that do not fit nicely within those categories are left subordinated or forgotten (Haynes 2001). Since Critical Race theorists believe that the system, primarily the system of law, in the United States is embedded with systemic racism, exclusion of
Latino/as in terms of race should be problematized. LatCrit theory is a framework that provides us with insight into understanding the complexities of racial identity for Latino/as and whether identification is important in people’s lives. In attempting to understand the nature of the relationships between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants in a border context, LatCrit theory will be useful because analyses will be framed around the aspects that LatCrit theory emphasizes which include, intersectionality (the inclusion of immigrant statuses, citizenship, and nationality), bilingualism, and colonialism.
4. Methodology

In order to examine the relationships and perceptions that Mexican-Americans have of Mexican immigrants or transnational Mexicans in a border context, I conducted a total of 15 semi-structured interviews with individuals in El Paso who are employed in the service industry. The service industry for this study will be primarily be in the retail service sector. Recruiting respondents through retail and other customer service areas will provide an opportunity to gauge how working in this environment has impacted or shaped the views that they will hold toward Mexican nationals/immigrants. Because of the constant interactions these participants have with people from different socially constructed statuses (i.e., gender, race, class, etc.) they are able to speak to the everyday perceptions that we have of others. My participants were all U.S. born persons of Mexican-origin, who have lived in El Paso for their whole life or for more than ten years of their lives (i.e., Cynthia, 32, has lived in El Paso since she was 18 and Chris, 20, moved to El Paso when he was 12). My participants have worked or currently work in the retail or service industries. Interviews were conducted in English with monolingual or bilingual Mexican Americans. I recruited my participants through a snowball methodology or my own personal references. I had connections to various locations because I either previously worked in the store or knew people who worked in these environments. At the time of the interview, I provided participants with a consent sheet that informed them that the interview was confidential, that pseudonyms would be used in my written work, and that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions as well as the right to end the interview at any time. I received approval from the University of Texas at El Paso’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. Interviewees were also asked for their permission to audio record the interviews and once they agreed the interviews proceeded. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and a half and were
conducted in public spaces or in the homes of the interviewees. Questions asked focused on language, language abilities, family, work experience, working in environments that require you to be bilingual, racial and ethnic identification, and generational status. Generational status has been defined in immigration research by recognizing the second generation as the child of immigrants who were born in the United States. The children of immigrants who have been born abroad but brought to the United States as children and have grown up in the states are referred to as the 1.5 generation (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). In my own work I asked respondents to tell me about the last person in their immediate family to have moved from abroad, specifically from Mexico, whether they be parents, grandparents, etc. These questions were used to gauge different factors that have been previously found to affect intra-racial relationships (Ochoa 2005; Knoll 2012; Dowling 2014). Following the interview process, I transcribed each interview verbatim. Once interviews were transcribed I collected all transcripts into one excel workbook and read through each line of data. I then coded each interview transcript for common themes. Themes were not pre-established as they arose in the data. Once all data had been transcribed, I read through the transcripts and found common themes. Once themes had been established, coded data was collected into different Word documents. Using the word documents, I was able to analyze the data more effectively and was able to identify exactly how often theme (e.g. language barriers, language as a racial identifier, and fears of Juarez and Mexico) elements arose in the data.

4.1 Demographics of Participants

For this thesis research I recruited persons of Mexican origin who were born in the United States (Mexican-Americans) who have resided in El Paso for a large part of their lives and have worked in either retail or food service. When recruiting my participants, I asked my prospective
participants if they identified as or were Mexican-American, if they said that they were I asked them if they would be interested in participating in an interview with me. For my work, Mexican-American is defined as someone who was born in the United States but has Mexican ancestry, e.g., someone in their family lineage was a Mexican national. While my recruitment was focused on recruiting Mexican-Americans, I asked questions regarding racial identification because research has shown that Latino/a self-identification is a strong indicator of how a Latino/a will perceive Latino/a immigrants and immigration (Ochoa 2005; Dowling 2014). I recruited people who have lived in El Paso for the majority of their lives because I felt that Mexican-Americans who have lived in the region for a longer period of time would have a better understanding of living on the border as well as their relation to Mexico and Mexican nationals. I aimed to speak to people who had lived in El Paso for at least two to five years because I felt that the longer people lived in El Paso the higher their likelihood of having a stronger grasp and understanding of the region and the people (i.e., Mexican transnationals, Mexican nationals, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants) of the region. As I mentioned previously, I chose to interview people working in the retail and service industries because of their daily interactions with different groups of people. These regular interactions can affect individual perceptions of groups of people because while people identify as not being racist, they may engage in discriminatory behavior due to embedded cognitive biases that often function unconsciously (Brewster, Lynn, Cocroft 2014). Limited research examines the ways in which individual perceptions of groups of people are affected by interactions in service based industries. I interviewed a total of 15 individuals, seven females and eight males. All participants were over the age of 18, ranging in age between 20 and 63. All but two of my participants were currently employed in either retail or food service. The two who were not employed at the time had
worked in retail or food service within the past few years. All of my participants indicated that they had some close family member who had recently moved to the United States, thus making participants either second generation or beyond meaning that they either had parents whom were immigrants or they had grandparents whom were immigrants. All but two of my participant’s report being middle class while the two who did not report being middle class stated that they are lower or working class. All of my interviewees reported having at least some college education, were currently students at the time of being interviewed, and one of my participants reported having a Bachelor’s degree.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Generational Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Server</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humberto</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Barista</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Dept. Lead</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Pharm. Tech</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Distributor</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Generation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the issues that researchers have addressed over the years is that of reflexivity and positionality in research. In particular, qualitative researchers have worked to be more critical of...
their involvement in research by addressing the significance of identifying and recognizing researchers’ own subjectivity in their work. Because research is considered a shared space that is influenced by both the researcher and the participants the identities of both have the ability to impact the research process. That being said, it is important to recognize our own biases because as researchers we have to position ourselves in order to be have the ability to speak on behalf of others (Bourke 2014:3). In order to have the ability to say anything, we have to be able to acknowledge our position as an individual and as a member of a particular group (Bourke 2014:3). Positionality helps us understand the researcher’s position in relation to their research participants and the data they subsequently collect, analyze, and write. This also allows the researcher to address how and why they have pursued their research and the participants they have chosen to study.

In recognizing my own positionality as a Mexican-American woman residing in El Paso, Texas and having worked in retail as well as food service industries, I understand that I may have my own biases when it comes to this area of study. Growing up in El Paso, Texas, I recognized early on the stark differences between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, not only in terms of the actual differences between the two cities, but also the differences between the people. I grew up not knowing Spanish and that was the initial difference that I recognized. Not knowing Spanish created a barrier between me and “them.” I could not communicate properly in Spanish and I was taught that I did not need to know Spanish because I was an “American.” Being American of Mexican ancestry and being told that you were first and foremost an American, created a sense of difference between me and them. This would be where my initial interest for the topic of intra-racial relationships began to develop.
5. Research Findings

5.1 Latino/a Racial Identification

This project addresses the myriad of factors that affect the relationships between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals on the US-Mexico border. In particular, prior research has addressed Latino/a racial self-identification as a crucial aspect of the way in which Latino/as, particularly Mexican-origin persons, relate to each other (Ochoa 2004; Knoll 2012; Morales et al. 2013; Dowling 2014). For instance, Julie Dowling (2014) found that race among Mexican Americans is indeed a complex issue and is important in how Mexican-Americans’ perceptions of Mexican immigrants and Mexican immigration are determined. With this in mind, I first identify the ways that my study participants have chosen to self-identify in terms of race and/or ethnicity. As mentioned before, the categories of Latino/as, and particularly Mexican-American, are not officially categorized as a racial category by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. However, people that identify as Latino/as and Mexican-American have been racialized over time. The racial identifications that people use or identify with can predict the way that Latino/as will perceive issues of immigration and of Latino/a immigration. Initially participants were asked how they chose to self-identify and once participants indicated their response, they were asked what they believed influenced their own self-identification. The main factor influencing how a participant chose to self-identify was language and language ability. Participants who indicated they were bilingual, were much more likely to claim a stronger identification to the categories of Hispanic or Latino/a. In addition, because language was a strong indicator of how participants self-identified it was interesting to learn and examine how being bilingual is important among Mexican-Americans and their relation to their Mexican neighbors.
Language often emerged as a reason for why my participants chose a particular racial identification with monolingual English speakers often choosing to identify with being American, compared to Mexican-American. Dowling (2014) suggests that there is a strong association between what it means to be American and language ability. Additionally, Dowling argues that Mexican-Americans that are monolingual English speaking are more likely to identify more with being American as opposed to Mexican-Americans who are bilingual (Dowling 2014). Consequently, people of color and particularly Mexican-Americans and other Latino/as are found to be at a crossroads when it comes to identity because they do not always fit strategically into a category. The marginalization of people of color as well as the stigma associated with being a Mexican or a Mexican immigrant, results in Mexican-Americans strictly choosing to identify as American because they identify being American with being white. For instance, my participants had a strong inclination to identify themselves with being American, more so than identifying as being Mexican-American because they were not born in Mexico. For example, when asked about her own racial identification, Kathy, 31, a shift supervisor, responded “I guess mostly American but of course I am Mexican too.” Kathy recognizes her own Mexican ancestry but places it below the fact that’s she is first and foremost an American. The superiority of whiteness in the United States has been evident since the very beginning of the nation. Joe Feagin (2010) argues that because the country was built on racist grounds, whites have not only been perceived as the superior beings, but also as righteous Americans. Feagin notes that because racism is embedded within the national psyche, all Americans, including people of color, view their reality through a White Racial Frame. Participants identified as American because they were born in the United States, but because they also felt little to no connection with Mexico despite their Mexican ancestry. My participants chose an American
identity and perceived that the more American they are, the closer to whiteness they are. In addition, being monolingual English speaking contributes to this self-identification because of a sense of not being able to relate to Mexicans due to a language barrier. This is something that Feagin (2010:14) addresses when examining the influence of the White Racial Frame. Feagin notes that people firmly associate whiteness with being able to speak English. Not only is speaking English associated with whiteness, but it is also associated with being an American. Thus making it easy for monolingual English speakers to perceive Mexican nationals and immigrants as the other.

While none of my participants identified as white, the ways in which they discussed their self-identification showed their affinity to whiteness and a separation between themselves and Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals. For instance, Alicia, a 25-year-old shift supervisor who has lived in El Paso her entire life identified as Hispanic. When I asked her to explain why she chose Hispanic, she said that that was just the way that she grew up. Because her dad is of Mexican ancestry, she felt that she could not call herself white. Alicia knows that she has Mexican ancestry, however indicates the only reason why she cannot say she is white is because of her family, which is why she chooses to identify as Hispanic. When I asked her about her family’s heritage and history she stated:

It’s funny because on my mom’s side, where my mom is from, they’re Spaniards, they’re literally from Spain so I don’t, I mean it’s fine, it’s fine to go ahead as far as labels and stuff like that hurts us more than anything, you know sometimes even when I am on job interviews and stuff, they ask what race are you and it’s just like, I always put white, I might get a better job…on my birth certificate, it says white so that is what I put down whenever it is anything formal. Nowhere on
my birth certificate does it say Hispanic or Latin American, so I put white for everything.

When I asked Alicia about what family came from Spain she was unable to answer, yet she knew family that was from and lived in Mexico. Alicia was clear to disassociate herself from her Mexican-origins, but did connect herself to her European ancestry. While Alicia knows she is not white, she recognizes that by saying that she is white on legal documents, she is placing whiteness above her Mexican ancestry. Alicia also identifies the privileges and benefits of being white in the United States. She acknowledges that by identifying as “white” on a document she might incur the benefits (i.e., employment) of whiteness. It is evident that Alicia views her own identity through a White Racial Frame. That is, she holds white superiority, via European/Spanish ancestry, which she cannot fully connect with except for knowing that her mother’s family came from Spain, yet she is able to name family that lives in Mexico or has recently migrated from there. Moreover, Alicia exhibits internalized colonization. Internalized colonization or the colonized mind is often defined as a form of internalized racism, in particular where the “colonized,” in this case Latino/as or Mexican-Americans in particular, have internalized negative stereotypes regarding their own people such as Latino/as being subhuman and undeserving of education or medical care, and also regarding the superiority of whites (Padilla 1998). Furthermore, by claiming that she is “white” because that is what her birth certificate says, she neglects to acknowledge her own ancestry and pointing out that being white is just “better,” and that she can even use this in order to get a better job. This example illuminates one of the ways that LatCrit problematizes the issues associated with Latino/a self-identification. LatCrit scholars note that Latino/as are often seduced into believing that they are white because while they acknowledge that they are not really white, they know and see how a
“hierarchy of race” works and where they fall in it. They realize that they are not “white,” but they also do not identify as Black. In many ways, this situation makes whiteness much more appealing to them (Trucio-Haynes 2001).

While the majority of participants indicated a strong inclination to identify as American, some identified as either Mexicano, Mexican-American, or as Chicano. For these participants, identity was much more complicated than simply saying they were American. For instance, Humberto, a 58-year-old shift supervisor at CVS who has lived in El Paso for the majority of his life grew up during the Chicano movement. His parents were farmworkers and he worked in the cotton fields in El Paso until he was 15 years old and bore witness to segregation as a child. While segregation was not legal in schools as he was growing up, Humberto explained that the “gabachos” (white children) and the Mexican children were always separated within the schools. He described an incident where as a child he had been running in the lunchroom and he was slapped by a monitor for running. Humberto states, “I think that because I was sitting on the Mexican side of the gym, maybe if I had been a gabacho, white, blue-eyed, maybe they wouldn’t have slapped me.” Because of his experiences as a child and as a teenager, Humberto understands the complexities of his own racial identity and recognizes that he is not white. He was never able to take advantage of any of the privileges that come with whiteness. Still, he notes that “white” is one of the only options he ‘legally’ has when it comes to his formal designation on legal forms as well as governmental documents. However, he chooses to identify as a Chicano. Using a LatCrit perspective, Humberto is rejecting the norms of whiteness and claims an identity that is counter-hegemonic. LatCrit theory acknowledges and problematizes the Black/White binary and the ways that people of color, particularly Latino/as, situate themselves along the racial spectrum. By electing an identity that is not the norm, Humberto challenges the
hegemonic standard of racial identity and rejects whiteness. His critical understanding of the significance of race is something that he developed from a young age and is something that he continues to use by problematizing the strict racial categories offered to him by identifying as Chicano.

Another common factor used by participants in order to racially self-identify were their “looks”—their phenotypes (i.e., skin color, eye, and hair color). While this was not something that was asked specifically of my participants, they were asked what influenced the way that they perceived their own racial or ethnic identity. Moreover, if a participant did not feel that they looked “Mexican,” they did not feel comfortable claiming a Mexican or Mexican-American identity. Participants who claimed that they passed as white, or did not look the way they believed a Mexican should look like (i.e., brown skin, dark hair), then they did not feel that they were technically Mexican. Additionally, participants shared stereotypical views of what “looking like a Mexican” meant. Participants agreed that because they were ‘not Mexican looking’ they did not have to deal with the same issues that someone who “looks” Mexican has to. For example, they felt that they were able to get away with not being bilingual. That is, they were not socially sanctioned by people for not knowing or speaking Spanish because they did not look Mexican. On the other hand, if they “looked” Mexican, if their skin was darker, for instance, then they would be expected by people to speak Spanish. So participants felt that they could get away with not speaking Spanish because others already assumed that they were not able to.

Finally, when making determinations about what a Mexican should look like, participants stayed away from choosing a Mexican identity for fear that too much would be expected of them and not being able to prove themselves Mexican enough. For example, I asked Jaime a 22 years
old who was unemployed at the time of the interview, about his perceptions of his own self-
identification. He stated:

Well…I’m trying to better my Spanish, um I don’t, I don’t look like, I don’t even
wanna say that because that is too strong, I’m not like typical looking Mexican-
American, but I don’t want to say that one is better than the other, cause I will be
quite honest like white people scare me and some Mexican people scare me…I
will be honest sometimes I do rely on my appearance to not necessarily assert but
 kinda just maybe I do rely on other people to assume cause I think it might also
protect me.

Jaime is very honest in stating that his appearance protects him from having people
assume that he is of Mexican origin. This allows him to “get away” with not speaking
Spanish. He explained that he holds a specific view of what a Mexican or Mexican-
American should look like, suggesting that he is utilizing a White Racial Frame to
understand the way that Mexicans should look and the way that Americans should look.
People’s use of the White Racial Frame also connects to their use and knowledge of
racial and ethnic stereotypes, which we are able to see in how participants engage
discussions of who looks Mexican and who looks American. Participants’ explanations
of this shows that they strategically connect or disconnect Mexican-ness to whiteness.
For example, they based how much a Mexican looks white, or how close to white they
look, with how close they could identify as American. In comparison, “looking Mexican”
meant that they had more expectations on them to act Mexican (in regards to being able
to speak Spanish) and were less likely to be able to ignore the fact that they were
Mexican-origin. Hence, looking American is code for looking white.
5.2 Mexico and Mexicans as Dangerous

A common theme that arose in my interviews was that of Mexico and Juarez as a dangerous place and a main cause for wanting to identify a distinction between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals. During the late 2000s, the former president of Mexico Felipe Calderon declared a war on drugs and the drug cartels, this had immediate tragic effects on the country (Campbell 2011). As a result there was an outpour of violence with Ciudad Juarez experiencing some of the worst violence the city had ever seen (Campbell 2011; Eisenhammer 2014:1). Between 2007-2011, it was estimated that there were roughly 7,643 deaths in relation to the drug war however it is estimated that the number could be much higher because of unreported deaths making Juarez, at the time, the most dangerous place in the world (Campbell 2011; Morales, Morales, Menchaca, and Sebastian 2013). Today, Juarez is no longer considered the most dangerous city in the world, but memories of those times continue to resonate with many of the residents in El Paso, Texas. During the height of the violence it is estimated that upwards of 220,000 people left their homes in Juarez with approximately 30,000 migrating to El Paso, Texas (Morales et al. 2013). Taking this history of violence into account, it is interesting to recognize how much of the violence has influenced Mexican-Americans living along the border. As I mentioned earlier, the majority of my participants have a close relative who migrated from Mexico and/or still have family residing in Mexico and/or Juarez. When I asked my participants how frequently they cross the “border” into Juarez, all respondents indicated that they do not go to Juarez. The most common response explaining why this was, was because participants do not feel safe going to Juarez. I then asked participants to tell me when the last time they crossed into Juarez was, and all but one participant said that it had been at least eight to ten years since their last visit to the city. The violence in Juarez can certainly provide us with a good sense of why
people avoided traveling to Juarez and why they would fear visiting the city, however participants’ also felt that if borders were to open up then El Paso would become a dangerous city. As a result, participants’ responses not only painted Juarez as dangerous place, but people from Juarez as dangerous, too. Some people may believe that given Mexican-Americans close proximity to Juarez, Mexico would create a more sympathetic view of Mexicans coming to El Paso, Texas, but this did not seem to be the case. For instance, Mary a 24-year-old cashier who has lived in El Paso all of her life indicated that she does not go to Juarez because she does not feel safe. She also mentions that she does not feel safe because she is a woman and does not speak Spanish, so she as though she would be placing herself at risk if she were to visit Juarez. When I asked how she would feel about the borders being opened she stated:

I don’t know I think that it is a good thing too, (the border fence) though because I don’t know if I would want to be one big community. I don’t I just feel safe knowing that there is a border fence there…I guess but I don’t know also all of the things you hear... and I don’t know, they do seem to be a little bit more rebellious and I am glad that America has its ground rules. I have heard that people in Mexico are a little out of order sometimes and I don’t know if want that to come over here.

Mary indicates an overall fear of Mexicans moving to El Paso because she has heard that Mexicans do not follow “the rules.” She also indicates that she feels that the government in Mexico allows people to just do what they want and she would not feel okay with having El Paso and Juarez being treated as one big community. She makes statements that align with the common stereotype that Mexicans are dangerous and that because their government is “uncivil” then the crime would move into El Paso. Mary’s statements illuminate the way in which the
White Racial Frame works. Her views of Mexico and Mexicans have been influenced by the White Racial Frame, which Feagin notes is embedded with racist and xenophobic stereotypes as well as public discourses, which have in turn affected her perceptions of Mexican nationals. While the fear of Mexico and Mexicans came off very subtly in my interviews, it was evident that participants strongly appreciate that they are able to differentiate themselves from Mexico and Mexicans. For instance, Melissa a 21 year old server at a local restaurant who has lived in El Paso her entire life and identifies as Hispanic, stated, when asked if she feels that Juarez and El Paso could be considered one big community:

No because it is a whole different country, they have different laws, different things going on and people think that El Paso is super dangerous because of what happened in Juarez, so I don’t think that it’s all one….

When asked if she believes that the ways in which people perceive Juarez causes her to want to disassociate herself from Mexico and Mexicans she stated: “Well yeah of course, I wouldn’t want them (Americans) to feel threatened by us. Like we are not going to kill them.” Melissa does not want to be associated with Juarez and Mexico because she would not want other Americans to feel unsafe around her. A very common stereotype that is currently circulating in the United States is that Mexicans are criminals and that they are dangerous, and that because of this they need to be out of the U.S. This was clearly noted by Donald Trump, the current frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination when he announced his bid for the Republican nomination. During the announcement he gave that he would be running for the Republican nomination and presidency, he spouted hateful messages of Mexicans as criminals and rapists. For people like Melissa who live in El Paso and knew about the violence in Juarez while it was happening, her comments still show how she has internalized this belief of
Mexicans as dangerous. Like Mary, Melissa believes that it would be better to keep the two countries separate from each other because they would not want any perceived crime or violence to spill over to El Paso. Even though my questions asked about people specifically, both indicated that because of the government in Juarez, they assume that the people from Juarez would be dangerous as well. The White Racial Frame posits that whites and other people of color operate out of this dominant frame in which they perceive White Americans as superior, righteous beings while everyone else is inferior. This framing affects the beliefs and behaviors of everyday Americans and this often happens so subtly that most do not even realize that they are operating out of this frame (Feagin 2008). Mary and Melissa’s comments show that they have an overt fear of Mexico and the ways in which they speak about Mexico and Mexicans clearly shows how they perceive Mexicans and Mexico as “the other.” Despite the close proximity to Juarez and Mexicans, Mexican Americans internalize the White Racial Frame and, for the most part, do not even realize that they are using it. Moreover, in different contexts, participants stated they had no problem with Mexicans or with Mexican immigration and even empathized with Mexican immigrants, but as soon as they are asked if they would consider being a part of the same community the same group of people quickly reverted to their stance of the superiority of being an American.

It is important to note that while the violence has decreased in Juarez, many people living in El Paso, whether they are Mexican-Americans, Mexican nationals, or Mexican immigrants, still hold fears of Juarez because of the drug war that took place just a few years ago. While the fears are rooted in the fact that at one point Juarez was considered the most dangerous city in the world, the current fears of Juarez and the corruption from Juarez and Mexico spilling into the United States still presents a desire of Mexican-Americans disassociating themselves from being
Mexican and from Mexican nationals. It is important to note that while the violence in Juarez of years past is no longer as threatening as it once was there still remain some issues related to violence (i.e., kidnappings and extortion). These realities still affect the lives of Mexican people. Still, the overwhelming thoughts and images of the former violence remain in the collective consciousness and narrative of my respondents. These ideas then permeate into the way that they perceive people from Juarez.

5.3 Perceptions of Mexican Nationals and Mexican Immigration

The main focus of this thesis project has been to identify and illuminate the factors that influence the relationships that exist between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in a ‘border community.’ My particular interests were on the perceptions of Mexican nationals by Mexican-Americans. These perceptions and even interactions were of interest to me because of the anti-immigrant climate that exists in the United States. While this research does not specifically address Mexican immigrants, particularly unauthorized or undocumented immigration, addressing how an anti-immigrant discourse has affected people in the borderlands is important because individuals on both sides of the border share the same ancestry, but not the same nationality. It is often assumed that because people share an ancestry and commonalities in culture and language that senses of solidarity would exist among the two groups. However, that has not always been the case. Research on intra-ethnic relations has shown that divisions exist because of citizenship, language barriers, and nationality (Ochoa 2004; Knoll 2012; Dowling 2014). Still, research on these issues does not examine the causes of these divisions. The White Racial Frame provides us with a framework with which to examine this phenomenon among Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in a transnational border context. It provides us with the necessary tools for understanding the ways in which internalized white racism has affected
intra-ethnic relationships. The White Racial Frame includes negative stereotypes, images, and metaphors involving African Americans and other people of color along with a positive and superior view of whites (Feagin 2008). The White Racial Frame, while originally theorized to examine the Black and White binary in the United States, has been extended to other people of color. One of its main uses is to help us critically examine how whites as well as other people of color have been socialized to operate in a white supremacist society (Feagin 2008). My work aims to examine how far the White Racial Frame extends and permeates into intra-racial perceptions of people that are of the same origin along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In my thesis research all of my participants are native born persons of Mexican-origin and all are natives of El Paso, Texas or surrounding counties. Participants were either second or third generation American citizens and many have family that reside in Mexico. It is important to note these demographics in order to paint a picture of the participants as well as to recognize their close connections with Mexico and people from Mexico, mostly through family. Utilizing the White Racial Frame, I have found that Mexican-Americans in the border region of El Paso, Texas which neighbors Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, indeed have internalized the dominant frame in their perceptions of people from Mexico as well as Mexican immigrants residing in the community. For instance, Cynthia a 32-year-old small business owner who has lived in El Paso for 14 years and grew up in Fort Hancock, Texas firmly believes in the American Dream, individualism, and meritocracy. Ideas about the American Dream can be considered a White Racial Framing of life in America since it promotes the belief that the United States is a meritocracy. This relates to what Feagin (2010:13) calls “big picture narratives” which are often deeply emotionally connected to the ways that whites view life in America. Whites in America tend to have a firm belief in connecting hard work with achievement. For instance, people that
buy into a meritocracy believe in the idea that “if you work hard enough you can attain success,” however this idea does not address marginalized populations that have been historically and contemporarily disenfranchised by dominant social systems and institutions. Cynthia’s mother was a Mexican immigrant who moved to the United States when she was 18 years old. Cynthia considers her mom the “right” type of immigrant because she worked hard and moved to the United States “legally.” When asked about her own perceptions and feelings toward Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals she stated:

The whole immigration issue, I disagree with how people say you are racist if you don’t want people to come in. It’s not against immigrants, it’s against something that, yes the system needs fixing but my views are based on it being illegal…if you are going to come into our country, you assimilate, you work hard, you don’t live off food stamps and you don’t have an anchor baby.

Cynthia’s assurance that she is not “against immigrants” and her firm belief of the stereotypical “illegal” Mexican immigrant who does not assimilate and lives off of the system guide her views of immigrants and immigration. These negative stereotypes have influenced her anti-immigrant and in turn anti-Mexican sentiment. Using a WRF perspective we are able to see how Cynthia’s perceptions of Mexicans and Mexican immigrants are impacted because she places a high level of importance on citizenship and the idea of “legal” status. Additionally, Michael, a 32-year-old department leader at Sam’s Club who has lived in El Paso his entire life and whose parents are Mexican immigrants also places a high emphasis on Mexican’s legal status in the United States. He asserts that because his parents were immigrants and they arrived in the U.S. the ‘right way’
then all “illegal” immigrants should do the same. When asked about perceptions of Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals, he responded:

The way I see it is if my parents did it the right way, why can’t everyone else. I mean that is just the way I see it, like all my friends did it the right way. People are saying why are you going to deport immigrants back to Mexico who get caught and it’s like well, do it the right way you know what I mean…I think for me the biggest thing is following the law. I guess that is something that I don’t understand as to why people don’t do it the right way. They want to reap the benefits but not work for it.

Michael utilizes the White Racial Framing around the idea of Mexican immigrants as “illegal,” which is a common discourse that defends the volatile and highly racist treatment of Mexican immigrants. Discourses of legality and the criminalization of immigration has led to the dehumanization of immigrants. Immigrants are often simply viewed as law breakers thus making them underserving of citizenship and any sort of placement within the United States. This shows us that although Mexican Americans share a common ancestry with Mexican nationals and although they may even have family living in Mexico, they still have internalized white racist views and these operate out of a White Racial Frame. Indeed, these common racist and xenophobic discourses on the criminality of immigrants were created by white politicians in order to invoke a fear of the other. In the end, this provides people with the justification for inhumane legislation that dehumanizes immigrants, strips them of their dignity, and continuously bars them of seeking more prosperous opportunities in the United States.

5.4 Mexican Americans, Work, and Language
For this thesis project, I wanted to talk to individuals who had worked in some type of customer service industry because people in these environments are constantly exposed to interactions with people from many different walks of life. Still, workers do not necessarily know anything about the people they are serving, but may hold judgments about customers as a result of their interactions and experiences. These regular interactions can affect individual perceptions of groups of people because while people identify as not being racist, they may engage in discriminatory behavior due to embedded cognitive biases that often function unconsciously (Brewster, Lynn, Cocroft 2014). In my interviews, I asked participants if they could describe their ideal customers as well as someone that would be considered their most difficult customers. The majority of participants stated their perfect customer would have to be someone who was polite, knew what they wanted, and who was not needy. Likewise, participants stated that their most difficult customer would have to be someone who was very needy, wanted to be helped at the drop of a hat, and were rude. I then asked participants to describe these “difficult” customers to me by describing what they looked like, where they thought customers came from, and describe some of their mannerisms. The most common response was that “difficult” customers were from Mexico, “the people from Juarez.” I asked participants to explain how and why they assumed that those “difficult” customers were people from Mexico and they responded that for the most part, while it may have been stereotypical to make these assumptions, that they could tell because of the way they dressed or the way that they talked. For example, when I asked Michael about who his worst customers were and how he could tell that they were Mexican he stated:

They, they’re different, I don’t how to say it like, I don’t know how to explain it. I guess they expect to be catered to the T, like you help me now. I don’t know if
people are just like, I don’t want to say that they don’t follow the rules over there but maybe they are just rude overall...well it’s kinda weird the way they dress. The way they talk, but I know people live here and they talk Spanish, I guess the way they handle themselves, the people from here that speak Spanish, they are a little bit more humble.

The way Michael describes customers that he assumes are Mexican exemplifies a very common way in which my participants described “Juarenses.” My participants often described Juarenses as being rude and snobbish in their mannerisms. They are often described as having higher class status in Mexico and because of this have certain expectations when they come to shop or eat out in El Paso. My participants often assumed that they were able to differentiate between poor Juarenses and the “snobs” who were the higher class status Mexicans. My participants’ daily interactions with different sets of customers impacted their overall perceptions of Mexican nationals. Although their work environment may not have been the only factor shaping participants’ views of Mexican nationals, they were influenced by the interactions they had with customers in these environments. Based on the above statement, Michael assumes that Mexican customers may just be rude because that is the way they are, and they expect to be catered to. Additionally, he states that people who speak Spanish here, in the U.S., are more humble then people that he notes speak Spanish, but whom he assumes are from Mexico. Michael identifies Spanish speaking people in El Paso as being more polite than Mexicans, thereby indicating that Mexicans nationals are in some ways inferior. Finally, by claiming that Mexicans are less humble, Michael makes a distinction between the class status of Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals. There is an assumption that Mexicans that are rude, difficult, and needy are Mexican nationals that must have more money, which in turn causes them to behave the way that
they do in these interactions. Because these Mexican nationals have money, according to Michael, they expect to be treated as superior and they act that way. In comparison, Mexican-Americans are not as rude or disrespectful as Mexicans and by saying that Mexican-Americans are more humble, he is implying that they are not as rich as these particular Mexican nationals.

Class differences among Mexican nationals are very real and the negative interactions that Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans have towards each other are shaped by those differences as well as by the historical nature of the relationships between these two groups. A more intersectional approach would allow for a more dynamic examination of the way in which class differences impact people living on the border. That being said, the interactions that my participants have had with customers that they assume are foreign born Mexican or Mexican nationals, have also been shaped by these differences. These experiences caused perceptions with Mexican shoppers that included that Mexicans are messier and have high expectations when it comes to the service they receive. For example, Anita a 63-year-old woman who has worked in retail service for 42 years, reported an incident where a customer, a man from Mexico, expected her to only speak to him in English even though she knew him to always speak to her in Spanish. The customer stated that because he was using American money, that she had better speak to him in English. At the time, Anita did not think much of it, but as she recounted the incident she claimed that when he left he said “Que tengas buenas tardes!” (Have a good afternoon!), thus suggesting that he was acting that way because he had money. Anita felt that the customer’s behavior towards her was classed because he made it a point to say to her that he had American money. She felt that he was demanding and that she addressed him in a particular way because that was what he wanted. This negative interaction impacted the way that Anita perceived other customers from Mexico. Anita, who is bilingual, reported that she often does not know when to
address customers in English or Spanish, but often addresses customers in Spanish. Still, because of the negative interaction she had with this man she tries to address customers in English first. Thus the negative interaction impacted her overall perception of Mexican customers because she feels that she must cater to them more in order to not make them upset. When I asked how she could tell the differences between customers that are from El Paso and customers that come from Juarez, Mary reported, “You can see a big mess in a store and you assume, oh the Mexicans (nationals) must have shopped here.” These examples represent how being in a particular space can influence and shape not only perceptions of a group of people, but how stereotypes can be perpetuated. For the most part, my participants did not always know when a customer was a Mexican national or from Juarez, but because they hold certain stereotypes of Mexicans they assume that “difficult” customers must be from Juarez since people from El Paso (Americans) do not behave that way. In the end, this led to the belief that Americans were, in many ways, superior to Mexicans.

Another factor that influenced my participants’ experiences in their work environments was the ability to speak both English and Spanish. The majority of my participants reported being monolingual English speakers or having some sort of ability to understand the basics of Spanish. Since most of my participants were not fluently bilingual, they did express some frustration with having to work with customers who were often monolingual Spanish speakers. The vast majority of the time my participants were not able to communicate fluently with Spanish speaking customers, and at times they indicated that people should speak English. A common belief among people who hold anti-immigrant views is that if people want to live or work in the United States then they should be able to speak English, even though English is not the national language. This was also a common belief among my participants. While they
acknowledge that they are on the “border” and that being bilingual is important, they still believed that if Mexicans are going to be doing business in El Paso then they should learn English. Another assumption is that Mexicans do not want to learn or speak English. For example, Alicia stated that while working in different environments she has hoped that people would be more understanding of her lack of Spanish speaking ability, and expresses frustration when she believes that some people simply act like they do not speak English in order to give her a hard time. When I asked her how she deals with situations in which she is unable to communicate, she stated:

It is really crazy how some people, they prefer just to make it harder. They prefer to talk to you in Spanish even if they know that you don’t know Spanish. I used to work at Walgreen’s with insurance and medications and a lot of our regulars would come and get their medication and I know these regulars were only speaking Spanish, they swore up and down that they didn’t know English but as soon as their insurance thing doesn’t kick in they spoke perfect English, it just baffles me a bit. I am like where are you at that you don’t know English.

Alicia’s comments clearly show how there is a standard of believing that people should and probably do know English, but just want to give workers a hard time. Alicia’s frustration stems from an idea that people should speak English even if their English may not be perfect, they should at least try. This puts English at the top of the language hierarchy with some people assuming that if customers want to do business then they should be speaking English. English, in many participants’ eyes, is viewed as superior to Spanish and leads to negative feelings towards Spanish speakers who are viewed as less than English speakers because they do not speak English. Using the White Racial Frame, we can understand that these types of comments stem
from internalized violence (Feagin 2008) in which Mexican Americans have internalized a belief that in order to be viewed as Americans then they must speak English and those that do not even try are completely different from you leading to a separation of yourself from the Mexican other. Additionally, English superiority responses could be identified as examples of internalized colonialism where English is thought of as superior to Spanish since it is associated with being white (Stefanric 1997). Another participant, Melissa who is a monolingual English speaker, but can make due in her job because she understands some Spanish, states that she believes being bilingual is important however when presented with situations when she is unable to communicate she expresses frustration. When asked if she could recall an incident where she became frustrated because a customer expected her to speak Spanish she provided the following example:

Maybe like a half a year ago, there was a customer that made fun of my Spanish, I don’t care but then there are times when it gets frustrating because they are coming here to America, I think that they should at least take the time to learn English. Like how if we were to go to Mexico, we would, I mean I wouldn’t go to Mexico and try to talk to people in English and expect people will understand me right away…I just think that they need to learn too if they want to come shop here.

As with previous comments, there is an overt belief that if people want to be in America, then they need to speak English or at least make an effort to speak English. This, in turn, makes it so that English and English speakers are thought of as superior to Spanish and Spanish speakers. Using the White Racial Frame we see the association of English speaking with being American and Spanish speaking as un-American. Additionally, it is believed that Mexicans do not even try
to learn English thus making it hard for monolingual English speaking Mexican Americans in their jobs. By placing the ability to speak English over the ability to speak Spanish, my participants are placing American-ness above being Mexican. This has led to a negative and inferior view of Mexicans by my Mexican-American participants. Because of these negative perceptions of Mexicans, my Mexican-American participants have chosen to make clear distinctions between themselves and Mexican nationals.
6. Discussion

My findings have shown that Mexican-Americans living on the US-Mexico border have, like other people of color and whites, internalized the dominant racial frame that Feagin refers to as the White Racial Frame. The WRF is a broad racial framing of society that consists of these main elements: racial stereotypes, racial narratives and interpretations, racial images, language accents and language, racist emotions and an inclination to discriminatory action (Feagin 2010:11). I have found that Mexican-Americans often view their Mexican neighbors holding discriminatory and stereotypical views and boasting the superiority of being an American. A belief that is ultimately associated with a belief in the superiority of whites. A qualitative analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with American born persons of Mexican ancestry shows that Mexican-Americans distinctly separate themselves from Mexican nationals by stating that they have language differences, that they are from different countries, and that they behave differently. The majority of my interviewees express intense pride in being an American and while they may express empathy towards the “immigration problem,” or the current immigration system, they firmly believe that it is important to come to America the “right way,” thus assuming that most Mexican immigrants are “illegal.” The majority of my participants believe that if Mexican immigrants want to come to the United States then they must assimilate to U.S. culture and in that way not fall into the general stereotypes of being “Mexican.” They also believe that Mexican immigrants should learn English even if that is not the national language of the U.S. Although these were beliefs shared by the majority of my participants, they are also widely common among the general U.S. public. People may assume that because people along the border share a common ancestry then there would be more positive views of Mexican nationals and Mexican immigrants by Mexican-Americans, but my research shows that that is
not always the case. Feagin’s theory of the White Racial Frame allows us to understand how white supremacist views permeate our views, beliefs, and actions of people of color and the framework allows us to understand the complexity of Mexican-Americans views and perceptions of Mexican nationals. In my work, I have been able to see how extensive the WRF has become in our U.S. society.

6.1 Summary of Findings

In this thesis project, I have aimed to identify the factors that influence the perceptions that Mexican-Americans have of Mexican nationals on the U.S.-Mexico border particularly that of the El Paso-Juarez border. This research has been a topic of interest for me because growing up on the border, Mexico and Mexicans were a constant presence in my life. As a 5th generation Mexican-American, I was raised to believe and think of myself as an American first and that I should not feel patriotism toward Mexico. Because of this, I was raised and easily convinced that foreign born Mexicans, and that people from Juarez, were inferior to me because I was an American. Although I may have felt a great amount of empathy for the poor and poverty that I saw in the streets of Juarez when I visited the city as a child with my grandmother, I was easily brainwashed and operated out of the White Racial Frame. I was raised to believe that being American was a privilege and that I was not the same as my Mexican neighbors. I was instilled with a sense of superiority, believing that Americans were intrinsically better, which made it easy for me to feed into the common rhetoric revolving around foreign born Mexicans. Ideas that they would not learn English, that they are a drain on the economy, made me feel like they were people that I did not want to associate with. Because I was taught to think this way and believe these things, I wanted to understand the complexities of how and why this happens in a region that has a complicated history. A region where the two countries and their people have a long
relationship to each other. The only thing separating the people is an arbitrary line that has been created to separate the two countries. That being said, my research was guided with an overarching question of what are the factors that characterize the perceptions of Mexican nationals by Mexican Americans on the US-Mexico border? This question was used because I wanted to understand if my experience was a common one and to explore some of the causes of these views.

My findings suggest that internalized white racism along the border is indeed a common occurrence. Utilizing Feagin’s (2010) White Racial Frame as a guiding framework I have found that Mexican-Americans have perceptions of Mexican nationals and Mexican immigrants that mirror the general populations’ stereotypical perceptions. Those common stereotypes include the idea that Mexican immigrants are illegal, that Mexican immigrants abuse or take advantage of the U.S. social system, such as welfare, and that Mexican immigrants are dangerous. These stereotypes have been developed by the media as well as by politicians. They are racist and xenophobic views that are reproduced and remain embedded in the minds of many people in the U.S. For instance, we can currently see how political figures (i.e., Donald Trump) use these stereotypes in order to instill fear in the public about immigrants. In turn, this justifies racist legislation and racism, in general. Indeed, stereotypes and a rhetoric of fear provide the public with the justification for racist anti-immigrant legislation and even push for more protection (i.e., militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border) against the other.

As Mexican-Americans, living on the border with Mexico does not protect us from this discourse. Whether subtle or overt we conceptualize Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals as the other despite living in close proximity to each other and in spite of sharing an ancestral lineage. While some participants were very explicit in their feelings towards Mexicans and
Mexican immigrants, others believed that immigrants are good for U.S. society, that being bilingual is very beneficial, and considered Mexico to be their neighbor. Still, they made comments that clearly showed that despite the best intentions, Mexican-Americans can still operate out of a white racial frame and consider Mexicans as the other. This will be a useful contribution to the literature centering on intra-racial relations as well as literature focusing on race among Latino/as and specifically Mexican-origin persons. It will be a useful contribution because my research has focused on recognizing the border region and how communities of people on both sides of the border, while they share common ancestry, can still be worlds apart in the ways that they think about each other. While my research has made a point in recognizing the transnational border context, looking towards future research, similar questions can be asked about communities that consist of different Latino/as that reside in close proximity to each other without an arbitrary border separating them.

6.2 Limitations

Various limitations to this study exist. For instance, I was unable to include the views of Mexican nationals in this project. Their views and experiences would have enriched my research. As a result, future research could include the experiences of Mexican nationals who reside in Mexico as well as foreign born Mexicans who reside El Paso, Texas. This could provide more extensive analysis of the complex relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals and immigrants. Additionally, my study was limited to analyzing the interactions that Mexican-Americans had in their work environments (i.e., retail or service industry). Further research could center around intra-racial interactions in other sectors along the border. For instance, an examination of intra-racial relationship in the health sector or the social service sector. These areas could provide a different perspective and analysis. Because this study seeks
to illuminate some of the experiences of Mexican-Americans in a border community and their perceptions of Mexican nationals/immigrants, another key group that may be researched in the future would be people who are not of Mexican-origin (black folks) or white folks.
7. Conclusion

My goals in this thesis project were to identify the characteristics that influence the perceptions of Mexican nationals by Mexican-Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border as well as to examine the complex dynamics that cause these perceptions. Because I have been interested in the interactions between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals and what those interactions say about race and nationality in a transnational border region, El Paso, Texas is a good place to examine these issues. This environment is interesting because El Paso and Ciudad Juarez are often considered sister cities and are often spoken about and treated as one big community. Additionally, people in this region are constantly traveling along the border—from one city to the other. This transnational context means that people are constantly crossing back and forth between Juarez and El Paso, whether it be for leisure, business, family, and/or school. An ultimate goal of this research has been to identify and highlight intra-racial conflict since the majority of people along the region are either native or foreign born persons of Mexican ancestry. I utilized the White Racial Frame as a framework of analysis to identify the often subtle, and at times overt, ways that Mexican-Americans perceive Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals. Using this framework, I have been able to identify that Mexican-Americans residing on the border have internalized white racism and internalized violence as they believe that it is better to be an American, or American with Mexican ancestry than to be a Mexican. This highlights the notion of whiteness as superior. Additionally, it helps to recognize and understand the ways in which internalized white racism affects the racial framing in which Mexican-Americans perceive their Mexican neighbors and how this affects their feelings towards Mexican nationals, Mexican immigration, and Mexican immigrants. I have also utilized LatCrit theory in examining racial and ethnic identification among my participants since this
perspective recognizes the complexities involved in Latino/a racial and ethnic self-identification. The perspective takes into consideration that Latino/ as do not fit within the Black/White binary of race in the United States, and recognizes the factors that often contribute to the racial identification of Latino/ as (i.e., nationality, language, and culture).

Research has shown that Latino/a racial identification is important to understanding the way that Latino/ as relate to Latino/ a immigrants, thus making it important to note within this study. That being said, I have used this as a focus because I wanted to determine whether these factors were also important in examining the relationships between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in a transnational border setting. I have identified the importance and salience of Latino/a racial identification among my participants. Their self-identification was definitely important in understanding their perceptions of Mexican immigrants, nationals, and immigration. I have found that language, nationality, and relation to Mexico were the most important factors influencing how my participants self-identified and found that although many participants had parents who were immigrants or had family still living in Mexico, there was a strong desire and emphasis on the difference between themselves and Mexican nationals. Finally, I have also focused on the issues related to nationality, citizenship, and negative stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican immigration and how these impact Mexican Americans’ views of their Mexican neighbors and of Mexican immigration. I have found through utilizing the WRF and LatCrit theory that despite the proximity to Mexico, my participants have indeed internalized negative racial stereotypes towards Mexicans. Furthermore, it can be suggested that the negative stereotypes are often a big part of why Mexican-Americans want to disassociate themselves from Mexicans, and highlights the importance of white American identity among people of color.
These findings extend the literature by recognizing how engrained white racism is in people of color and how white racism prominently shapes people’s perceptions of the other.
References


Angela Jacqueline Silva was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. Angela always had a passion for books and for school but did not have the guidance or support necessary to continue onto college. Angela graduated from Hanks High School in 2008 and took three years off from school before she decided to return to school in 2011 and enrolled at El Paso Community College (EPCC) in order to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice. After earning her associate of arts degree, Angela enrolled at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in the fall of 2012 and by the fall of 2013 declared her second major in sociology under the guidance of her mentors and professors, Dr. Aurelia Lorena Murga and Dr. Maria Cristina Morales. Their endearing support over the course of the past few years helped her to successfully complete her Master of Arts degree in sociology as well as her successful acceptance into a Ph.D. program in sociology. She is forever grateful to them for the guidance and support that she received from them over the years, for the successful completion of this degree would not have happened without them.

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