



Gabriel A. Cruz, PhD

*LATINIDAD*, IDENTITY  
FORMATION, AND  
THE MASS MEDIA  
LANDSCAPE

Constructing Pocho Villa

Latinx Studies

Collection Editor

**MANUEL CALLAHAN**

LIVED PLACES  
PUBLISHING





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This book is dedicated to Rafael, Raquel, Lucero, Leonardo, Nayeli, and Lucia, whose *nepantlas* share borders with mine.

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# Abstract

This volume combines media studies scholarship with autoethnographic storytelling to engage with the construction of *Latinidad* at both the mass-mediated and the individual level. The author synthesizes scholarly literature regarding *Latinidad* as it has been represented through news broadcasts, fictional television, film, superhero narratives, and video games while also incorporating stories from his life that anchor the discussions of each medium in a lived experience. Throughout the volume, a variety of concepts and theories are used to frame each chapter and provide the reader with an academic toolbox, a repertoire of ideas that the reader will be able to apply to the media that they encounter in their day-to-day lives. This approach of utilizing academic media analysis, conceptual frameworks, and personal experience results in critical engagement with the ways in which media informs the personal and collective construction of *Latinidad* while also interrogating the utility of the identity.

## Key Words

*Latinidad*; latinx; media; news; superheroes; fiction; video games; autoethnography; race; whiteness; social constructionism; *nepantla*.





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# Learning objectives

After reading this text the reader will be able to:

- Identify how racial and ethnic identities are constructed within the media.
- Critically engage with media artifacts as vehicles of ideologies.
- Interrogate their own sense of *Latinidad*, for those who are members of the Latinx community.
- Reflect on how the media has informed their understanding of Latinx communities, for those who are not Latinx.
- Identify the role of the media as a system for shaping our socially constructed reality.
- Discern between reductive media that further marginalizes racialized groups and media that facilitates humanizing perspectives of those groups.

# 1

## **A carpenter's son, an academic toolbox**

It might seem counterintuitive, but when you are working on a roof in the warm weather, one of the most important things you can do is wear pants and a long-sleeved shirt as opposed to shorts and a T-shirt. The benefit of doing this is that it protects your skin from the sun. One might think that it would cause you to sweat more, but the truth is that if you find yourself roofing on a summer day in the Southeastern United States, then heavy sweating and dehydration are inevitable. But at 16 years old I had not learned this lesson yet. So, as I worked alongside my dad on the roof of our home adding shingles onto a new office we were building, I struggled in the heat of a North Carolina summer day in 2004. I would later learn about the value of covering up my arms and legs while working with my dad, but not from my dad. Rather, I would learn it from the other Latinos my dad would hire to help build houses, from framing to finishing work. My dad did not wear pants and long sleeves in the warm weather; instead, he opted for a uniform of work boots, jean shorts, a T-shirt (tucked in), and a baseball cap. He was not concerned about the heat, as he had grown up in a village in Durango, Mexico, and spent his youth working outdoors in fields picking crops and shepherding

goats under a harsh sun. Between that and his time crossing into the US without authorization by walking through the Chihuahua Desert for several days, or his time spent in Florida picking crops in the summer, little other than the hottest dog days would give him pause to consider the heat. I began working with him when I was 14, and in the ensuing 12 years of work I can count on one hand the number of times we stopped because of the heat.

Even the pain of sunburn was barely worth his acknowledgment. A few years after this particular summer day, my father was accidentally struck in the head by a coworker who was carrying a piece of lumber, causing his scalp to split open. One of the men on the crew, a veteran of the Mexican military who served as a medic, managed to clean the wound and glue the scalp back shut. Dad waited long enough for the glue to dry before continuing to work the rest of the day, undoubtedly bothered by the time lost from the ordeal. My father is mestizo, a colonial term used to describe those that are racially mixed with Native Mexican and European ancestry. While people like my dad are detribalized, possessing no official affiliation to an Indigenous tribe, they are raised with the understanding that they come from the original peoples of the Americas. To me, stories about my dad being seriously injured and still pushing forward with a task, and there are quite a few, are just more proof that the Spanish were never going to completely eradicate the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico. The Spanish made war with the Native Mexicans, worked them to death through slavery and debt bondage, and used the racial hierarchy called the *casta* (caste) system to keep them impoverished and close to death's door, and yet they have persisted.

This particular summer day my job is to make sure that dad has enough shingles, so I scale the ladder periodically with 70lb bundles and try to keep my balance while moving quickly enough to not fall behind. The sound of dad's nail gun firing as he fastens each shingle creates a rhythm; a noticeably fast one since he likes to use a nail gun that lacks a safety mechanism which would require pressing the nose of the tool against the target surface before the trigger can be pulled. He claims that working without the safety feature lets him move faster. If I move fast enough, I can stack up a few bundles of shingles before he can use them up, and buy myself some time to take a break. It is during one of these breaks that dad does something unusual: he talks, but not about the job.

Sitting on his knees, he sits up and removes his cap, running a dark, clay brown hand over his face to wipe away the sweat and then through his black hair. He and I are the only people in our immediate family with black hair. None of his other children, my younger siblings, have the same color hair, which is a bit funny since he and I do not share DNA. My black hair and lighter brown skin come from my birth father, who is from the same region of Mexico, but that is a story for later.

Dad looks at me and it is a little tough to keep eye contact. He has seldom been unkind and has rarely spoken harshly to me, especially at this point in my life. He has never even threatened corporal punishment when I stepped out of line, and cultural standards (whether his culture or my mother's) would have deemed it acceptable. Yet he is an intimidating man. I often think of my dad as being more solid than the ground he walks on, and that sort of presence can be difficult to deal with directly. It certainly was for me at that time. It does not help that he has a

scar running across his forehead, over his left eye, that makes it seem like he has a permanent scowl; a trophy awarded to him for surviving a car crash when he was young and fell asleep at the wheel, only to wake up as the car drove off a bridge and into a deep river.

"You're old enough now that if you want to quit school, you can," he says, plainly. "But if you do, you'll come to work with me. That is your choice." And then, without further conversation or concern for a reply, he goes back to nailing shingles. At 16 years old, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but I did know one thing for certain: roofing sucked. And if going to class meant doing less work like this, then the choice was clear.

The purpose of this narrative, as with the other stories that I will share throughout this book, is twofold. The first is to frame the chapter relative to the subject matter. Stories like this thematically connect to the core idea of each chapter in a way that serves the overall function of this book, which is an exploration of the role that mass media played in the formation of my Latino, and specifically Mexican, identity. To discuss identity construction, you will need to know about the identity being constructed. I want to make clear that I am not universalizing my experience; my complicated relationship with the media will resonate with some but not with others. Many of the mass-mediated representations of *Latinidad* that I consumed fostered a sense of shame about being Mexican American which developed into internalized racism. This prompted my desire to move closer to whiteness (the mainstream ideology, not to be confused with the related but distinct ethnic White American Southern identity of my mother's side) in my youth, a choice that left me feeling hollow and that

I have worked to recover from for more than a decade as of this writing. I do not mean to suggest that this is the inevitable experience of every person of Latin American descent who engages with US media. Rather, I share my own story to ground this book in a lived experience, to put a face to this phenomenon.

The second purpose of sharing personal stories is to add texture and detail to a discussion that often lends itself to the abstract and can be difficult to conceptualize concretely. We can address foundational elements of identity construction like whiteness, ideology, and otherness in broad terms, but doing so without examples of real-world manifestations hinders the utility of these conversations and thus limits our ability to grapple with these ideas in a meaningful way.

At its core, this book is about Latinx identity, so we will begin with an operationalization of the concept of *Latinidad*. In a strict sense, the term means “Latinness” and is applied to those whose identities and ancestral origins are rooted, at least in part, in Latin America. The idea of Latinness as an identity positions the concept as a quality that is possessed and measures authenticity because to have an identity means meeting certain criteria, and this is where we encounter our first patch of difficult terrain that we will need to navigate. The existence of a single term that encapsulates all of the countries from Mexico to Argentina and Chile and the surrounding islands, and the corresponding application of the concept of *Latinidad* to the myriad communities and peoples within or associated with those countries is intrinsically reductive. Doing so places these complex, multidimensional identities into a discrete category without regard for physical, cultural, or social borders; systemic tensions; histories of

oppression; areas of overlap and divergence; cultural diffusion; and power dynamics. So, rather than conceptualizing *Latinidad* as a fixed and rigid category of identity, it would be more productive to consider it as an umbrella term for identities of particularity, one where the borders of that conceptual space are porous and blurred. By this I mean that *Latinidad* is socially constructed in a variety of contexts that are unified by some basic sociocultural themes, while also engaging in a both/and form of identity construction rather than an either/or paradigm (Gonzalez, Chavez, and Englebrecht, 2014). It is a vernacular identity constituted in a moment in time as a part of a continual chain of ancestry. My father is neither Latino nor Indigenous; he is both as they exist in that contentious conceptual space of *mestizaje*, of being racially and culturally mixed with Indigenous and Spanish ancestry. I am not Chicano or a Southerner from America; I am both, a Latino in the New South. My children are not White or Latina; they are the next link in the diasporic chain, and will exist at the intersection of the power associated with the privileges of their skin color and the modification of that privilege that comes from an ethnic identity which was carried on the back of their *abuelo* (grandfather) as he swam the Rio Bravo. *Latinidad* is not a box to check on a form, nor is it a standard against which to be measured. It is a paint palette where the colors of the past mix with the colors of the present to create something new. Ultimately this means that my *Latinidad*, informed by *Mexicanidad* (Mexican identity) and American Southern whiteness and distilled into a Chicano identity contextualized in the New South, is a sutured identity; an identity that exists within the broader, dynamic context of history and the contemporary moment (Hall, 1990).



Another area of difficult terrain that we must traverse is that of race as it pertains to being Latinx. Race is a social construct, which is to say that it is a human-made concept for organizing peoples into groups. In this case, those categories correspond to physical appearance, and yet there is no biological component to race (Omi and Winant, 2015). Strictly speaking, there is no Latinx race. Latinx people belong to a variety of these social categories; some are White, Black, Brown, and so forth. However, in contemporary society in the United States, one way in which we are racialized is through mass media representations. Racialization is the process through which we become incorporated into a racial hierarchy to fit an existing and ongoing racial regime through a variety of mechanisms such as behaviors, traditions, cultural affectations, and so on, which ultimately leads to the reproduction of the society's structure of racial domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). As I discuss throughout this book, Latinx people are racialized through a range of mass media texts and sites that reinforce a social structure that distances *Latinidad* from whiteness as a racial identity even for those who present an outward appearance of whiteness. A central aspect of this process of racialization is that historically we have not represented ourselves; rather, we have had ourselves represented to us. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall (1990) addresses this phenomenon in the context of the African diaspora in the Caribbean and media representation. He writes,

Where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was a case of that which is endlessly speaking - and endlessly speaking us. The European presence interrupts the innocence of the whole discourse of "difference" in

the Caribbean by introducing the question of power. “Europe” belongs irrevocably to the play of power, to the lines of force and consent, to the role of the dominant, in Caribbean culture. In terms of colonialism, underdevelopment, poverty and the racism of colour, the European presence is that which, in visual representation, has positioned the black subject within its dominant regimes of representation: the colonial discourse, the literatures of adventure and exploration, the romance of the exotic, the ethnographic and travelling eye, the tropical languages of tourism, travel brochure and Hollywood and the violent, pornographic languages of ganja and urban violence. (Hall, 1990, p. 232–233)

Hall’s characterization of Europe “speaking” Caribbean identity and thus constructing it in ways that are exotic, violent, and vulgar and racially inferior could be easily mapped onto the relationship between the United States and *Latinidad*. One salient example of this is through news discourse related to immigration, wherein the phenomenon of migration from Latin America to the United States is heavily associated with dangerous, foreign Brown bodies, to the point that the concepts become seemingly intrinsically linked (Heuman and Gonzalez, 2018). This is to say, to identify as Latinx is to be associated with a Brown body and thus racialized downward in the context of a racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Mass media depictions of people with the same skin color as my father become strategic representations of all Latinx people, and thus situate them in America’s racial hierarchy. In the case of people who do not fit this physical description, to be identified as Latinx is to be at the least ethnically othered, to be seen

as non-American, non-normative (read: not-White-enough). This, along with the ethnicization of labor, and instances like that day of working on the roof with my father, become more than a man teaching his son a skill (Brayton, 2011). Those moments become racialized in a way that pushes me further toward *Latinidad* and away from whiteness.

With that in mind, let us discuss my academic toolbox. I am the son of a carpenter, and for over a decade worked with my father on job sites remodeling homes or building them from the foundation up. My dad did not really have a specialty in the sense of having one specific element of construction that he focused on because he did everything. From doing framing and roofing to hanging drywall, doing tiling, and painting, he could do just about every aspect of home construction, and I was right there alongside him until I was 26 years old. This generalist approach to working helped him to stay busy and also afforded him the chance to learn new skills and techniques. My dad's formal education ended in the sixth grade when he had to go to work full-time to help support his family, but he is a life-long learner. My perspective on academia and research closely mirrors, and was likely informed by, my father's attitude toward his profession. I like to think of concepts, theories, and methodologies as tools in a toolbox, like the tools my dad carries in the back of his work van. Every theory, conceptual framework, and scholastic orientation has strengths and limitations. Each is made to answer different sorts of questions to varying degrees of depth and complexity. And just as no one tool can do everything needed to build a home, no one theory or concept can provide a comprehensive understanding of how society functions in the creation

of identity. So, in order to build this house, or to engage with the subject of identity, let us take a look at the tools that we will be using.

The first and perhaps most important concept for this book is that of *nepantla*. *Nepantla*, as used by Gloria Anzaldúa (2012), refers to a state of liminality, a territory caught in between two or more forces that pull us in different directions. It is a metaphysical border between worlds that those under the umbrella of *Latinidad* have to navigate in perpetuity due to the larger sociocultural and political forces that have shaped our lives and histories. The saying “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,” often associated with the Chicano movement (Cisneros, 2013), still rings true as a commentary on the artificiality of the oppressive international and colonial forces that have shaped Latinx communities. I contend that it would also be accurate to say now that we *are* the borders, as our identities function as contested sites of nepantilism.

Working on the roof with my father that day is an example of those metaphysical borders that reside within us. In the hours that we spent on the roof, several phenomena occurred. An immigrant father was teaching his American-born son knowledge that would be useful for survival. This type of labor, working outdoors with hands and hardware, had been how my father survived in Mexico. This was also the transference of cultural knowledge that defined his identity in terms of his race, his class, and his gender; a dark-skinned mestizo (mixed Native Mexican and European), a *campesino* (peasant farmer), and a *ranchero* (rugged, rural masculine man). In my father’s world, men work, and men like him work outside with their backs bent. On that day and

many others, we represented a negotiation between two very different worlds. I may be mestizo, but I am light-skinned enough that there is always a chance I will be seen as White. I have at times lived within the categories of the working poor and the working class, but I have no point of reference for *campesino* life. I have always thought of myself as a man, but a *ranchero*? Never. To be a *ranchero* in the style of the men in my family required a degree of confidence I did not have at that point, and even when I developed the confidence, I never invested enough pride in the manifestations of my masculinity to see myself as that kind of ruggedly masculine man. But bridging the boundaries between these two worlds, this space of nepantlism, was labor, that is, labor as an expression of identity; labor as a ritual anchored in tradition; labor as a heritage that transcends geopolitical borders, generations, and racial status. And as I learned this type of labor from my father over the years, I did so against a backdrop of mass media that reduced *Latinidad* in general and *Mexicanidad* in particular to a handful of stereotypes that included chief among them, that of the manual laborer (Brayton, 2011). People like my father have historically been fetishized for their perceived capacity for doing extremely arduous work, and pop culture depictions of that stereotype have solidified that perception to the point of being common sense. If there is hard work to be done and quickly, you hire Mexicans. The fresher, that is to say, the more recently arrived in the country, the better. Thus, microlevel moments of interpersonal engagement become imbued with a racialized, decidedly white supremacist, ideology.

Moments like this, whether regarding labor, education, familial relationships, or any other aspects of life, are sites

of struggle between intersecting boundaries. In my case I am, have been, and will be, torn between the worlds of my imagined ancestral homes of rural Durango, Mexico, and the countryside of central North Carolina. I am the border where two worlds connect., One world is that of detribalized natives and mestizo peasants who were remixed into the silhouette of a *ranchero* wearing ostrich skin cowboy boots for dancing and a wide brim sombrero meant to block out the sun while working in a field. tThe other world is that of cast-off Celts and other European laborers who carved out a home in the American South as a part of the British colonial project, occupying land stolen from the Indigenous Peoples of the region. Those roughnecks often maligned as White trash have historically operated as the boots of empire: used to expand Manifest Destiny and stomp out opposition, only to then be discarded without care or concern once they were too broken and damaged to be of use. These are two of the worlds that have created the *nepantla* where I find myself.

Yet, whereas my Americanness has been nourished, my *Latinidad* has often either been starved or fed rancid food—at times by others and at times by me, which has led to the need for constructing and reconstructing my *Latinidad* over the years. My negotiation of nepantilism has been largely informed by the mass media and racial ideologies that have permeated daily life. Ideologies about what it means to be normal (read: White), to be a racialized “other,” and depictions of “good” and “bad” Mexicans, dangerous immigrants, and respectable Americans have constituted the media ecosystem.

The following tools in my academic toolbox will help you to understand how mass media and racial ideologies have operated in concert with each other:

- social constructionism
- ideology
- discourse
- articulation
- racial formation
- whiteness
- otherness
- narrative paradigm
- suturing

At its core, social constructionism is the idea that reality is defined socially and that those definitions are made manifest materially (Guess, 2006). By this I mean that when two or more individuals interact, they construct a reality between them, and the consequences of that reality are dependent on the actions of the individuals. For example, if I introduce myself by saying, "Hi, my name is Gabe," I am attempting to create a social reality with another person wherein we are peers. However, if I introduce myself by saying, "Hi, I'm Dr. Cruz," then I have modified the power dynamic of the interaction by inserting an honorific signifying my education while withholding my first name, which in effect makes the interaction more formal and perhaps even makes the power dynamic asymmetrical in my favor depending on the context. Furthermore, if I introduce myself by saying, "*Hola, me llamo Gabriel Cruz*" with a Spanish-language inflection

in my pronunciation, then I am signifying my *Latinidad* in that social interaction. Each one of these phrases has implications for how the other person will react and will thus impact our relationship and by extension material reality. When the ways in which we are socialized on an individual level are normalized through widespread practice and passed on to the next generation, then these social constructions of reality become legitimized and institutionalized, creating social order (Guess, 2006).

If we understand social construction at the individual level as the interpersonal creation of a social reality, then we must consider the implications at a grand scale, and this is where we encounter the concept of ideology and its relationship with mass media. An ideology is a framework for understanding and organizing social reality; in doing so, ideologies create cohesion within a society but can also cause struggle (Loomba, 2005). One useful way to think about ideology is as a means of producing hegemony. Hegemony, a term coined by the Italian communist party leader and organizer Antonio Gramsci, is the idea of power that is created through force and consent that is wielded by those who have access to the force and means of facilitating consent. Essentially,

the ruling classes achieve domination not by force or coercion alone, but also by creating subjects who “willingly” submit to being ruled. Ideology is crucial in creating consent, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted and, more important, held to be true. (Loomba, 2005, p. 30)

Ideology and the social construction of reality are enmeshed as each informs the other. Through socialization, we adopt



perceptions of what is and is not normative based on the ideologies we are exposed to; and at the same time, we recreate, modify, or subvert a given ideology by creating social realities that are either compatible with or in opposition to those ideologies. In a narrow sense, this could manifest as embracing the “traditional” way of life embodied by your parents or as rejecting it entirely. Both choices involve creating a social reality, and there is no neutral position to take. The process of being socialized into a particular ideology is a complex process involving factors such as, but not limited to, community influence, social networks, institutional affiliation and participation, and mass media consumption. For the purposes of this book, I will focus on the role of mass media as a vehicle for ideologies. Through mass media, ideological messages are disseminated to the public with varying degrees of success in terms of reach and internalization by audiences. Whether through television, film, music, news broadcasts, or literature, every piece of media contains elements of ideological frameworks that advance a given worldview. This is not inherently positive or negative; rather, it is merely the nature of human endeavors to convey information, and as such these messages are not value neutral. Every piece of media reinforces, modifies, or subverts an ideology, and in order to understand how that happens, we must consider the function of discourse.

Discourse is intimately connected to the creation and maintenance of a given ideology. In this context, discourse does not merely refer to conversation, whether written or spoken, but to the multitude of ways that we communicate on an individual and mass-mediated scale. Spoken words, written language, pictures, music, film, painted portraits, everything that communicates

engages in discourse relative to a given subject matter. From this perspective, we must also understand that discourse is intrinsically related to power because the ability to create discourse indicates a degree of sociocultural, political, or economic power. Through communication, power is exerted by individuals and institutions to shape social reality; thus, those with the influence to do so are imbuing with their own ideologies, the tools we use to engage with reality (Kinefuchi and Cruz, 2015). In terms of mass-mediated discourse, we should consider the role of media producers such as news organizations and film studios. Through a combination of language, visual communication, narrative construction, and sound the producers of mass media frame reality in ways that are informed by and reproduce ideologies, such as the idea that poor and non-White residents of a town devastated by natural disaster are dangerous and inclined toward criminality as they struggle to survive (Lacy and Haspel, 2011), or that the violence of aggrieved White men is not only normative but also morally justifiable and heroic (Cramer, Cruz, and Donofrio, 2023). Referring to my experience of working on the roof with my father, the discourse of labor in the United States is often racialized as *Mexicanidad* and is closely associated with physical labor such as construction or agricultural work (Brayton, 2011); and while a Mexican identity is a matter of nationality rather than race, the popular culture representations of Mexican identity have been historically associated with Brown bodies (Heuman and Gonzalez, 2018). Thus, the process of working with my father and learning this type of labor supports the construction of a racialized identity, not because my father sought to pass on his brownness, but because the skills he had learned and decided

to pass on were imbued with a racial quality by dominant mass-mediated discourse.

When the process of articulation, which creates a unity of multiple elements that are not intrinsically linked, (Hall, 2019), and the discursive construction of reality produce understandings about race and racialized identities within a given societal context, such as the United States, then race-making is taking place. This practice of creating racialized identities, whether through mass-mediated articulations, government policy, the praxis of social movements, or interpersonal actions, leads to the development of racial formations. A racial formation can be understood as the “process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 109). This characterization of the phenomenon emphasizes the fluidity and pervasiveness of racial ideologies in a way that cannot be overstated. The race-making process occurs at the microlevel with individual expressions of racial identity and interpersonal experiences of racial solidarity or discrimination, as well as at the macrolevel through mass-mediated discourse evident in popular culture artifacts and news media. Within the context of the United States, racialized identities such as blackness or brownness and ethnic identities such as *Latinidad* are constructed relative to whiteness. The racial formation of whiteness is dynamic, fluid, and constantly evolves in order to maintain its hegemonic position, thus making it difficult to pin down in concrete terms. Therefore, for the purpose of this text and to operationalize the idea in a pragmatic manner, I assert that we should understand whiteness as a racial ideology that is constructed through discourse to be invisible, neutral, and central to society. In their

foundational article “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek (1995) articulate six strategies used to socially construct whiteness as a racial formation:

- The association of whiteness with power and status by virtue of being a member of the majority population.
- Defining whiteness as the lack of any other racial or ethnic identity, thus making it seem to be the default identity as well as a non-color-oriented identity.
- The naturalization of whiteness as a scientific classification that describes a person superficially without social or historical context.
- The territorialization of whiteness by binding it to a national border, in this case the United States. Thus, to be White is to be assumed as American, whereas being non-White carries the implication of being non-American.
- The rejection of whiteness as a label at all, and instead only identifying as American as an attempt to avoid terms that could cause social division. This in turn obscures the role of race in society while attempting to create unity under a national identity that is already heavily associated with whiteness.
- The association of White identity with Europe broadly or specific European countries in a way that positions the identity as an accessory to one’s life but not defining in a meaningful way.

What is most important to understand about these rhetorical strategies for the racial formation of whiteness, relative to the premise of this text, is that by occupying a position of normalcy, centrality, and invisibility, all other racial and ethnic identities are

constructed as deficient, marginal, and aberrant. *Latinidad* is no exception to this rule. Across the various types of media, whether news, political discourse, or popular culture, *Latinidad* has been constructed as a category of "others," racially, ethnically, and socially. From public discourse descriptions of Latin American immigrants as animals (Santa Ana, 2013) and pollution (Cisneros, 2008) to popular fiction framing us as criminals (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, and Ortiz, 2007), we have been consistently constructed as existential threats to the United States despite many of our communities having roots in this landmass that predate this nation.

The American system of mass media has historically served as a vital vehicle for the dissemination of white supremacist ideologies and the maintenance of centuries-long racial formations. However, American mass media is not monolithic and operates as a contested space where prosocial ideologies of race and justice continue to wage an uphill battle. Latinxs like myself who find themselves having to navigate this mass-mediated terrain are bombarded with dehumanizing as well as dimensionally prosocial messages, each attempting to draw us into a particular ideological system for co-constructing reality. A key tool in my academic toolbox, one that I learned the basics of intuitively before I ever entered the world of higher education, is that of the narrative paradigm, and it has been crucial in my navigation of the mass-media landscape. At its core, the narrative paradigm asserts that humans are story-telling creatures that construct social reality through narratives which are told time and again (Atkinson and Calafell, 2009). Over time, these narratives are propagated throughout society and eventually coalesce

into pervasive discursive formations and ideologies that socialize new members of society and normalize perspectives and modes of being (Atkinson and Calafell, 2009). The reason I say that I learned the basics of this concept early in my life is because I, like most people, learned to make sense of the world through stories. I learned to identify with narratives featuring characters who, like me, possessed identities that were considered non-normative. I learned to buy into ideologies that facilitated internalized racism through mass-mediated images of faceless Brown immigrants from Latin America who, if cable news pundits were to be believed, placed the United States on the precipice of collapse. Through mass media narratives, I learned how to increase my proximity to whiteness, both as a matter of survival and as an attempt to escape my own racial trauma.

And this is where we come to the final tool in our academic toolbox: suturing a cultural identity. In the essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall (1990) posits two positions for understanding cultural identity relative to diasporic populations. The first position is that cultural identity is a matter of uncovering that which was taken away by colonization in order to rediscover an identity that is essential, fixed, and eternal, something that fills the gap left by colonization (Hall, 1990). However, it is the second position for understanding cultural identity that is useful for inclusion in our academic toolbox. He writes,

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have