

Dora the Explorer and constructing pan-*Latinidad* identities in the United States

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between positioning the television character Dora as a *Latina* and identification with the *Latino* label in the United States (US). In the historical context of the Black/White binarism of the US, the pan-ethnic *Hispanic* label was created by government agencies to account for the mass immigration of Latin American people. In the 1990s, the term *Latino* began to emerge among grassroots sectors as a more progressive alternative to the state-imposed label *Hispanic*. In the US today, Latinos not only make up the largest ethnic or racial minority group but are also the fastest growing ethnic group. In the year 2000, because of the lack of Latino youth characters on television, Nickelodeon created the show *Dora the Explorer*. Dora was created as a *pan-Latina* character— a character with no specific nationality or cultural identity beyond *Latina*. With *Dora the Explorer* premiering so soon after the embrace of the *Latino* label, one can only wonder if and/or how she reflects changing attitudes towards pan-ethnic labels in the US. Through an analysis of the historical context of these pan-ethnic labels in the US and an anonymous online survey about individuals' relationship to their own ethnic labels and familiarity with the television show *Dora the Explorer*, this study finds there is no strong relationship between identification with the *Latino* label and viewership of *Dora*. However, this study also finds that those who grew up in the US after *Dora the Explorer* aired are the most likely population to identify primarily with a pan-ethnic label. Moreover, both pan-ethnic labels *Latino* and *Hispanic* have penetrated US daily life, and regardless of age, childhood origin, or viewership of *Dora the Explorer*, the majority of people in this study identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label.¹

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Pan-ethnic labels in the US.....	6
3 <i>Hispanic</i> and <i>Latino</i> identity in the US.....	9
3.1 History of the term <i>Hispanic</i> in the US.....	9
3.2 History of the term <i>Latino</i> in the US.....	14
3.3 Other labels: <i>Latinx/Latine</i>	15
4 Language and identity.....	17
4.1 Narrating identity through language.....	17
4.2 Choosing the right label.....	17
4.3 Terminology in this paper.....	19
5 <i>Latinos</i> in US media.....	20
5.1 The role of the media.....	20
5.2 History of <i>Dora the Explorer</i>	21
5.3 Constructing <i>Latinidades</i>	23
5.3.1 Physical appearance.....	23
5.3.2 Language use.....	25
6 Methods.....	28
7 Results.....	29
7.1 Race & ethnicity.....	29
7.1.1 Preferred ethnic labels.....	29
7.1.2 Other ethnic labels.....	31
7.1.3 Preferred race labels.....	32
7.2 <i>Dora</i> and other television.....	33
7.3 Language use.....	35
8 Discussion.....	36
9 Conclusions.....	41
References.....	43
Appendix.....	48

1 Introduction

The words we use to represent ourselves and our various identities act as a means of positioning ourselves socially (Norton 2011; Oboler 1995). In the United States (US), the labels used to describe racial and ethnic identities are constantly evolving in alignment with changing social and political views. In the historical context of the Black/White binarism of the US, the pan-ethnic *Hispanic* label was created by government agencies to account for the mass immigration of Latin American people (Oboler 1995). The last two decades have seen an influx of Latin American immigrants—they are the fastest growing ethnic group in the US (Zong 2022). Today, they also make up the largest ethnic or racial minority group (Pérez-Nievas et al. 2021). In the 1990s, the term *Latino* grew in popularity over the term *Hispanic*; rather than coming from a government agency, this term was born by grassroots organizations (Oboler 1995). Today, the two terms are sometimes confounded, *Hispanic* is often meant to refer to a person from a Spanish speaking country (excluding a country in Latin America like Brazil while including Spain), while *Latino* implies relation to Latin America (including Brazil while excluding Spain). Suárez-Orozco & Paez (2002) define *Latino* as a cultural category that refers to the segment of the population that traces their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds. This is the definition I use in this paper. Because of the origins of the term *Latino* in the US, to a large degree, the term only acquires full meaning in the US and "is relatively alien to the common categorizations elsewhere in Latin America and in Spain" (Suárez-Orozco & Paez 2002: 3). How has alignment with the term *Latino* in the US changed over the past 20 years?

I always believed Dora to be Mexican. Then, the live-action adaptation *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* (2019) came out and I was pleased to find out that she was Peruvian (my family is from Peru). However, she is not. Growing up, my own ethnic and racial identities confused me. On standardized tests, none of the racial categories seemed to fit. Yet, when questioned about my ethnicity, I was always asked if I was Hispanic/Latino (notice the confounding of the two). How have others of my generation chosen the labels they use?

In the year 2000, because of the lack of *Latino*² youth characters on television, Nickelodeon created the show *Dora the Explorer* (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019). Dora was created as a pan-Latina character—that is to say, she has no specific nationality or cultural identity beyond *Latina* (ABC News 2010). Dora has light brown skin, portraying a version of Latinidad that "emphasizes the Spanish European legacy of Hispanics, ignoring their indigenous and black roots" (Guidotti-Hernández 2007: 215). Dora is bilingual, fluent in both English and Spanish. Her physical appearance and language use construct one image of the Latina—an image that has been highly contested for its portrayal of a stereotype rather than real person (Guidotti-Hernández 2007).

With *Dora the Explorer* premiering so soon after the embrace of the *Latino* label, one can only wonder if and/or how she reflects changing attitudes towards pan-ethnic labels in the US. **This thesis explores the relationship between positioning Dora as a *Latina* and identification with the *Latino/a* label in the US.** This study finds there is no strong relationship between increased identification with the *Latino* label and viewership of *Dora the Explorer*. However, those who grew up in the US after *Dora the Explorer* aired are the

² In the following paragraph I use the label *Latino* to refer to Suárez-Orozco & Paez's (2002) definition of Latino people. See section 4.2 for a discussion on the labels used in this paper.

most likely population to identify primarily with a pan-ethnic label. Moreover, both pan-ethnic labels *Latino* and *Hispanic* have penetrated US daily life, and regardless of age, childhood origin, or *Dora the Explorer* viewership, the majority of the people in this study identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label.

Questions I investigated included: What labels do people across different generations currently use? Why? What are their views on the labels that currently exist such as *Latino* and *Hispanic*? In order to collect this data, I used an electronic survey aimed at adults who currently or at some point have resided in the US and feel a connection to Latin America such that they fit into the category deemed as *Latino*, whether they identify with that specific label or not. I first examine the historical development of pan-ethnic labels in the US and then the development of the specific terms *Hispanic* and *Latino*. I briefly discuss newer labels that are moving towards gender-inclusivity but still working within the pan-ethnic framework, including *Latinx* and *Latine*. I discuss why people may choose one label over another and how these labels aid in narrating and navigating one's various identities in the social landscape of the US. Having framed the background on the significance of individual language use, I discuss the historical context in which *Dora the Explorer* was created and analyze *Dora's* Latinidad as a potential benchmark for changing attitudes towards the *Latino* pan-ethnic label. Finally, I discuss the results of my survey and analyze the relationship between different social categories (age, familiarity with *Dora the Explorer*, childhood residence, linguistic ideologies) and choice in identification with the *Latino* label.

2 Pan-ethnic labels in the US

To examine the history of the *Latino* and *Hispanic* labels, we must first discuss the history of pan-ethnic labels in the US. In the context of ethnicity and race, the names by which groups and individuals become known acquire political, social, and personal significance (Oboler 1995). A "common" name, such as a pan-ethnic label, may demand homogenization and uniformization (Oboler 1995: xvii). It is through the dissolution of the distinctions between groups that a common group can be created; anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1998) introduced the notion that it is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (15). Barth's analysis suggests that it is not the commonalities of a group that define it. Rather it is the group's collective distinction as some form of *other* that unites it (Caminero-Santangelo 2012). Today, many different pan-ethnicities exist in the US: African Americans or Black Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, and American Indians or Native Americans. In the following section, I briefly explore the emergence of these pan-ethnicities.

Black pan-ethnicity in the US has a long relationship with colonialism and the exploitation of African nations (Brown 2020). In a study done by Brown (2020) analyzing the development of the *Black* pan-ethnicity, three critical junctures emerged. The first juncture states that the pan-ethnicity was born out of Black slavery which forced the racialization of "distinct African tribes into the category of Black" (iv). The second juncture argues that multiple historical periods following the abolition of slavery reinforced the pan-ethnicity. During Reconstruction, the Black elite class helped newly freed Blacks navigate through the "cultural trauma of slavery;" later, in the Jim Crow era, a celebration of Black culture increased racial pride and provided representation of Black Americans. During the

Civil Rights era, "Black consciousness, the unrelenting quest for Black human rights," and mobilization of individuals and organizations because of activism "permanently solidified" the *Black* pan-ethnicity (Brown 2020: v). Brown's third juncture states that "the emerging native-immigrant divide" may erode the currently strong pan-ethnicity.

Pan-Indianism can also be traced to colonialism in the US. Thomas (1965) articulates the concept of pan-Indianism as identifying as *Native American* while still maintaining distinct tribal identities. Historically, indigenous North American tribes have been treated similarly by colonizing powers despite tribal differences, resulting in shared experiences of oppression. These shared experiences include relocation, coercive assimilation, and marginalization, all of which have contributed to the emergence of a pan-Indian consciousness (Alicja 2002). Specifically, Thomas (1965) suggests that pan-Indianism had its roots in a "developing commonality," particularly in the Plains area—for example, the celebration of *Indianness* via powwows across the plains—and that this commonality "was brought to a head by the reservation system, in the way whites related to different tribes as 'Indians' and by the pressure for assimilation which pushed Indians closer together" (77). Throughout recent US history, American Indians have continued to organize themselves into more complex political and social units that cross tribal lines (Cowger). Both *Black* and *Native American* pan-ethnicities hold rich and deep histories that are distinct from *Latino* and *Asian* pan-ethnicities which have largely been developed by immigration in the twentieth century.

The pan-ethnic *Asian American* label originated in a radical activist movement in the 1960s in response to racism and social and economic inequalities (Kwon 2013; Le-Khac 2020). The threat of racist violence that does not distinguish among ethnicities can be a powerful instigator of pan-ethnic solidarity—a notion seen within pan-Asian solidarity

(Espiritu 1992). Despite the formation of this group, stark class divisions and linguistic differences exist in Asian American communities today (Le-Khac 2020). Thus, the pan-ethnic *Asian* label has been scrutinized over its legitimacy and forced homogenization of distinct groups of people (Le-Khac 2020).

Comparing the *Asian* pan-ethnicity to the *Latinx* pan-ethnicity, Le-Khac (2020) posits that "perhaps the most central conflict for Asian American and Latinx politics in the present is whether these groups constitute groups at all, given the incredibly and increasingly diverse peoples and agendas encompassed by each category" (126). *Latino* and *Asian American* pan-ethnicities are both comparatively new, and continuing waves of immigration add to the sense of instability in both communities.

Despite different historical periods in which each of these pan-ethnicities were shaped, they were collectively standardized in 1977 (Office of Management and Budget 1977). To address race-based claims following the civil rights era, legislation against racial discrimination required US federal authorities to "track" discrimination and the underrepresentation of racial minority groups (Kwon 2013: 140). To do so, there needed to be a standardization of race and ethnicity. Thus, all federal agencies were required to use the following five racial/ethnic categories for reporting and statistical purposes: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Hispanic (Espiritu & Omi 2000; Office of Management and Budget 1977). The role of the government in standardizing these racial categories has had long-lasting effects on the discourse of race in the US today and these five categories have become the *de facto* standard for state and local agencies, private and non-profit sectors, and the research community (Espiritu & Omi 2000). In addition to governmental action, it is important to highlight the roles historical narratives play in constructing these pan-ethnicities.

3 *Hispanic* and *Latino* identity in the US

3.1 History of the term *Hispanic* in the US

In the specific political and daily life in the US, the term *Hispanic* emerged (Oboler 1995). To understand the term's origins, we must go back to the nineteenth century. Following the end of the Mexican-American war in 1848, the public self-image of a unified national community (an "American people") emerged through the combination of xenophobic nationalism and domestic racism. Because this self-image was created in relation to racially perceived foreign *others*, it contributed toward erasing the ways the differences between race, culture, and nationality were understood within the US (Oboler 1995). As an example of the grouping of the foreign *other*, at the height of the Gold Rush in 1849, 100,000 immigrants arrived in California, including 8,000 Mexicans and 5,000 South Americans. However, whether someone was from California, Chile, Peru, or Mexico, or whether they had been in the US for twenty years or one week, was irrelevant—all those who were Spanish-speaking were lumped together as "interlopers" and "greasers" (McWilliams 1968: 129). Additionally, nineteenth century politicians described native New Mexicans as a "hybrid race of Spanish and Indian origin, ignorant, degraded, demoralized," a rhetoric which was projected nationwide and extended to include all Spanish-speaking people (Oboler 1995: 40). The unification of a people based on language use coupled with preexisting xenophobia allowed for the perception of a new foreign *other* which would be the target of racism.

The homogenization of individuals of Latin American descent also ignored class-based distinctions present in their countries of origin. In the late nineteenth century, as certain New Mexican elites' wealth decreased, they began to refer to themselves as

Hispanos. It is important to note that this term was not and is not related to the term *Hispanic*. By using the term *Hispano*, wealthy New Mexicans were intentionally aligning themselves with the Spanish conquistadores who settled in New Mexico and dismissing their mestizo origins. *Hispano* in this sense meant something more like *Spanish American* and not *Hispanic* as we know it today (Oboler 1995). In the early twentieth century, as prejudice and discrimination against Mexicans continued to increase, the term *Spanish American* spread as a way for the elites to distinguish themselves from lower-class Mexicans. Despite the recognition of these class distinctions within their own communities, individual Anglos imposed their segregationist attitudes resulting in the homogenization of Mexicans in the US. Thus, Oboler (1995) argues that ethnicity in the US is "rooted in the segregationist policies of the nineteenth century" (31).

By the mid-twentieth century, because of the Bracero program which had brought in millions of Mexican workers and the gradual immigration of Puerto Ricans after the acquisition of Puerto Rico as a US territory, the number of Spanish-speaking residents in the US had grown. At the same time, white Anglo-Saxons had imagined a "national community." Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Chicanos were all excluded from this community (Oboler 1995). This was the beginning of an ideology that would later extend to all Spanish-speaking people in the US. By the late 1960s, the marginalization and invisibility of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans was enforced by their exclusion from full rights of citizenship.

During the Civil Rights Era in the 1960s, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans formed political movements to, respectively, reaffirm and redefine their national and cultural heritages. The Puerto Rican Young Lords Party was in some ways modeled after the Black Panthers, but the existence of their own movement was important to keep these two fights

separate (Oboler 1995). Individual political movements are important because they stand against the concept of a pan-ethnic label and identity like *Latino* that lumps distinct movements together. Even more specifically, *Nuyoricans* had formed an identity distinct from other Puerto Ricans because of their English language skills that not only placed them in competition with the local labor force but that also led them to face rejection from island populations. The nationalist symbol of Borinquen arose as did the self-identification as *Boricuas*, which is still common today. Blanca Vasquez said of Puerto Rican identity: "We grow up with ambivalence, a sense of belonging to neither place until we begin a more conscious process of finding out who we are, where we come from, why we are here, and what we choose to be, until we begin to struggle it out and name ourselves" (Oboler 1995: 58). Thus, the struggle for finding a sense of Puerto Rican identity was prevalent and reflected in the different groups and identities that formed. Notably, Vasquez describes a key aspect of this conscious process of self-identification: *naming* oneself.

Mexican American and Chicano movements were divided into two groups reflecting two different realities: rural and urban populations. The goals of the two groups differed in important ways. The rural-focused movement led by Cesar Chavez aimed to end pervasive poverty, the caste-like status of Mexicans in rural areas, and discriminatory policies against immigrant labor. Along with Dolores Huerta, Chavez formed the United Farm Workers of America to advocate for workers' rights. Reies Lopez Tijerina goal for his Alianza de las Mercedes was to reappropriate lands taken from Mexicans. The urban movements, including the Chicano Power movement led by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales and La Raza Unida led by Jose A. Gutierrez, rejected assimilationist ideologies of past Mexican-American leaders (Oboler 1995). Chicano movements focused on their identities as second and later generation US-born citizens removed from the culture of Mexican daily life. The

term *Chicano* was adopted at the second youth conference in Santa Barbara. Richard King spoke on the importance of the name: "Choosing a name is an act of profound personal, social, and political significance. It is a way of rejecting an imposed role or identity and making a claim on a new one" (Oboler 1995: 65-66). Echoed in King and Vasquez are voices of other Latin Americans who, through various diasporas, came to rely on language as a way to narrate their own identities. In 1969, the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* rejected Mexican Americans as white (as they had previously been classified in the 1940s Census) in favor of self-identification as members of *La Raza*. Self-identifying as members of *La Raza* was an act of empowerment.

It is important to discuss the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, Nuyorican, Borinquen, rural Mexican American, and Chicano Power movements as separate movements because they had distinct differences. When receiving national attention at the time, each group's specific forms of protests were covered with their particular names, not *Hispanics*. However, amid these movements, on September 13, 1969, an article by the New York Times was published titled: "Hispanic Heritage Week Set." The article was brief, detailing that the week had been set "in tribute to the Spanish-speaking Americans and to promote ties with Latin American neighbors" and that this particular week was chosen because six Central American nations celebrated independence days between September 15th and 16th (New York Times 1969). A year prior, recognition of Hispanic culture had been requested by Congress (Office of the Federal Register 1968). Oboler (1995) raises the question as to why, "in this period of national emergence of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans and in view of their specific divergent demands and cultural affirmation *as two distinct groups*, would the president of the United States designate a 'Hispanic Heritage' week" (81)? Moreover, out of these six countries celebrating independence—Guatemala,

Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Mexico—Mexico was by far the one with the largest US population. At the time, the rest had marginal US populations. The affirmation of the term *Hispanic*, just like earlier in the century with the label *Spanish American*, emphasized Spanish European legacy, "excluding from its definition any consideration of indigenous and black populations" (Oboler 1995: 83). Pan-ethnicity, in this context, can be understood as a "running counter to the driving energies of both Puerto Rican and Chicano cultural nationalisms of the 1960–1970s," which had been focused on the cultural legacies of their respective nations of origin (Caminero-Santangelo 2012: 17).

The *Hispanic* label was legally affirmed by the 1980 Census after a decades-long discussion of what to call the significant group of Latin American immigrants and their descendants. In the 1970 Census, the question "Are you of Spanish origin?" was added, furthering the process of creating a pan-ethnicity that was untied from the practice of speaking Spanish (Meraji 2017). However, this Census failed to count the number of Latinos in the US accurately, which prompted various organizations to write to newspapers—*The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*—criticizing the Census Bureau for its inadequate demographic tally (Meraji 2017). In 1976, Congress passed Public Law 94-311, mandating the collection of information about US residents of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, and other Spanish-speaking national origins (Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020). Advisory members of the Census suggested the term *Brown* be added to the Census to account for this group, but that term was far too ambiguous. In 1980, the term *Hispanic* was added to the US Census for the first time (Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020). The Spanish language television channel, Univisión, was rapidly growing and ran campaigns urging *Hispanics* to fill out the Census. Because political groups, civil organizations, and Spanish language media groups draw upon Census

data, the Census was a critical driver for promoting this pan-ethnic label. Since then, the traditions, history, and experiences of *Hispanics* have been in the process of being "invented" and affirmed by politicians, mainstream media, advertising sectors, and the public at large (Oboler 1995: 83).

3.2 History of the term *Latino* in the US

In the 1990s, the term *Latino* began to emerge among grassroots sectors as it was viewed as a more progressive alternative to the state-imposed label *Hispanic*. By 1997, the US Office of Management and Budget added the term *Latino* to government publications (Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020). *Latino* first appeared on a US Census in the year 2000. Like the term *Hispanic*, the term *Latino* homogenizes class experiences neglecting distinct linguistic, racial, and ethnic groups present within different nationalities (for example, indigenous populations, descendants of enslaved Africans, etc.) (Caminero-Santangelo 2007). The term also suggests a contrast with *other* people who are understood to be *non-Latino*. While the idea that *Latino* contrasts with *Anglo-American* is regarded as self-evident, the fact that *Latino* also potentially contrasts with terms like *Chicano*, *Cuban-American*, or *Puerto Rican* is less apparent (Caminero-Santangelo 2012). *Latino* unity conceals colorism, racism, and discrimination against indigenous populations present within the community itself (Torres-Saillant 2002). The different connotations associated with different labels raise the question of which identity one might choose to identify with and why.

The definition of *Latinidad* is understood to describe the "condition" of being *Latino* in the United States. At the same time, the degree to which *Latinidad* is understood as a pan-ethnic group identity is questionable, and, in fact, largely a product of being in the

United States (Oboler 1995: 20). Cristina Beltrán (2010) has suggested that “Latino is a verb,” a “form of enactment” that is “capable of proliferating in unexpected places ... [and] can start up new lines from where it was once broken or shattered” (157). Understanding *Latinidades* as a lens through which different forms *Latino* emerge is a useful framework in deconstructing a monolithic understanding of *Latinos*.

3.4 Other labels: Latinx/Latine

In the last few decades, variations of the *Latino* label have been created to promote gender-inclusivity. The Spanish language has two grammatical genders connected to two sociocultural genders: masculine and feminine. Grammatical gender is a form of noun categorization in which all nouns have a gender. Sociocultural gender is a sociocultural system of expected behaviors and norms, often based on biological sex. While sociocultural and grammatical gender are separate, some words will converge in marking grammatical gender based on lexical gender. Lexical gender refers to nouns that carry the semantic property of maleness/femaleness. Typically, these are words in reference to humans, such as *girl* or *boy*. In Spanish, grammatical gender and lexical gender converge in words like *amigo* 'friend (male)' and *amiga* 'friend (female)', where the suffix *-o* denotes masculinity and *-a* denotes femininity. The term *Latino* traditionally encompasses both male and female genders, according to the grammatical rules of the Spanish language. In efforts to decentralize the patriarchy and gender binary in which grammatical gender exists, alternative labels have been created.

In online forums in the late 1990s, the term *Latin@* began surfacing as a means to encompass both the terms *Latino* and *Latina*. However, this term still operates within the gender binary of masculinity and femininity and uses an orthographic symbol that cannot

be articulated. Thus, words like *Latinx* and *Latine* were created, removing the gendered suffix from the term, and replacing it with a gender-neutral suffix that encompasses all genders, including those that exist outside of the binary. *Latinx's* birth can be traced to online discussions by progressive scholars and activists in the mid-2010s on gender inclusivity and diversity (Salinas & Lozano 2019). Since then, the use of the term *Latinx* has grown tremendously in academia (Río-González 2021). *Latine* was created as a counterpart to *Latinx*, which speakers found difficult to pronounce in Spanish, thus replacing the *-x* with an *-e*. However, empirical studies on the creation and evolution of these two terms are nonexistent (Salinas & Lozano 2019).

Outside of academia, a 2020 study done by the Pew Research Center showed that while 23% of Latino adults have heard of the term *Latinx*, only about 3% use it. These findings are consistent with previous Gallup polls that have found that only around 4% of Hispanic and Latino Americans preferred the term *Latinx* (McCarthy & Dupré 2021). *Latinx* is a controversial term; while many have praised it for its inclusivity (Salinas 2019), others claim it to be "lexical imperialism" (Newport 2022; Ramos et al. 2023). Ultimately, all these labels are pan-ethnic labels that can be criticized for their homogenization of distinct cultural groups.

4 Language and identity

4.1 Narrating identity through language

Although I have briefly discussed the significance of ethnic labels in previous sections, this section will focus on the role of language use in navigating identities to contextualize why one should care about people's ethnic label usage. Language helps construct a sociocultural identity, where the social aspect of identity references the larger

social world as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, etc. The cultural aspect references an individual and members of a particular ethnic group who share a common history, language, and similar ways of understanding the world (Norton 2011). The distinctions between social and cultural identities are blurred because intersections between the two worlds are more significant and theoretically fluid. The names we choose to identify ourselves with in the public sphere are "as fundamental to the construction of our political and social identity as are our own personal names" (Oboler 1995: 166). In fact, every time we speak, we are positioning ourselves socially in the lines of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (among other social categories). Affirmation and self-identification are also two components of ethnic labels (Corona et al. 2017).

4.2 Choosing the right label

Ethnic labels are not necessarily problematic themselves. However, their meanings become decontextualized over time and their social value changes. There are often gaps between state definitions and individual/group definitions of these labels (Espiritu & Omi 2000). In the context of *Latinidad*, when the group is assumed to have some negative attribute (perceived or real), ethnic labels become a problem because they go from "being merely a method of social categorization" to being a "means of stigmatization" (Oboler 1995: xvi).

Members of the community themselves may choose to identify with a particular label for different reasons. Oboler (1995) claims that identifying oneself as *Latino* and participating in a Latino social movement is a political decision that aims to strengthen "*la comunidad*" (163). Identifying with terms like *Chicano*, *Boricua*, and/or choosing other

national identities over a pan-ethnic label can also be seen as political decisions. In over 15 years of public polling done by Pew Research Center, studies have found that "half of Americans who trace their roots to Spanish-speaking Latin America and Spain have consistently said they have no preference for either Hispanic or Latino" but do have a preference for using country of origin labels over these pan-ethnic terms (Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020).³ It is also important to note that immigrant groups who come from societies organized around different concepts of race and ethnicity often have difficulty navigating and situating themselves within US categories (Espiritu & Omi 2000; Oboler 1995).

Notable authors in what we would call *Latino* and *Hispanic* literature offer different perspectives on these terms. Dominican-American writer Julia Alvarez embraces the term *Latino*: "I think that sharing the Spanish language ... connects us as a widespread Hispanic culture throughout the Americas, and it connects us also with people from Spain" (Caminero-Santangelo 2012: 15). People like Alvarez find comfort in the pan-ethnic label, while others such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1993), a Mexican performer and writer, believe that:

[T]erms like Hispanic, Latino ... are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications. They create false categories. ... There is no such thing as 'Latino art' or 'Hispanic art.' There are hundreds of types of Latino-American-derived art in the United States. Each is aesthetically, socially, and politically specific (46, 48).

Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros is also critical of the label *Hispanic*: "It's a very colonistic term, a disrespectful term, a term imposed on us without asking what we wanted to call ourselves" (Caminero-Santangelo 2012: 16). Rather than condemning pan-ethnic labels

³ However, people from Spain are excluded from identifying with the label *Latino* as it is typically reserved for people from or with ethnic origins to Latin America.

entirely, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) provides an explanation on how different labels may be used in varying contexts:

We call ourselves Hispanic or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out... When not copping out ... we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish ... [and] Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the US (84-5).

These viewpoints should not be taken as representative of the entire community. Rather, they serve to emphasize the fact that differing opinions exist, and that positioning oneself with one label over another is often a very active choice.

4.3 Terminology in this paper

In this paper, I use the label *Latino* as Suárez-Orozco & Paez (2002) define it: a cultural category to refer to the segment of the population that traces their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds. When I use this label, I mean to include people, regardless of gender, who would fit into the category *Latino* as it is defined but may not necessarily use this particular label themselves. I opt not to use the terms *Latinx* or *Latine* when referring to the general population of *Latinos* because, despite my personal support for the terms, I believe these labels should be used when specifically referring to people who identify with them or when intentionally acknowledging gender diversity, and gender diversity is not the focus of this study (Río-González 2021). Additionally, these alternatives—*Latinx/e*, *Latin@*—still operate within a pan-ethnic framework. Pan-ethnicity is the focus of this paper, and, as such, nothing is lost by using *Latino* over the other terms. As a corrective tool for the homogenizing of using a single label to describe such a culturally, linguistically, racially, and economically diverse

population of people, I want to emphasize viewing *Latinidades* as a lens through which to examine interactions among different Latino groups.

5 *Latinos* in US Media

5.1 The role of the media

The role of the media in relation to the construction and negotiation of *Hispanic* and *Latino* identities is crucial. Spanish-language media, such as television networks Telemundo and Univisión, "vigorously" promotes the sense of the unified Latino because it is profitable to do so (Caminero-Santangelo 2012: 22). Marketing towards Latinos inevitably invokes pan-ethnic categories that, again, tend to homogenize distinctions among various Latino groups. This section explores how *Latinidad* has been portrayed in different media avenues, including television, film, and video games, with a focus on the television show *Dora the Explorer*.

The dominant methodology within media discourse studies is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA "studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (O'Keefe 2011: 68). Media discourse studies are interested in the ways that the "discourse (re)produces social domination, ... the power abuse of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist that abuse." Throughout the following media analyses, we will see CDA employed as an analytical framework. One of the ways in which media discourse reproduces social categorizations is through the usage of ethnic labels. Thus, it is important to study how these ethnic labels may positively or negatively affect marginalized social groups in their representations.

5.2 History of *Dora the Explorer*

Turning to the Emmy-award winning children's television show *Dora the Explorer*, I will analyze how Dora's status as a "Latina icon" has been cemented as well as its political context (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019; Guidotti-Hernández 2007). *Dora the Explorer* was created in 1999 and aired from 2000 to 2014 before returning in 2019 to air its final six episodes (IMDb). The original creators of the show, writers Chris Gifford and Eric Weiner and producer Valerie Walsh, were all white. Initially, they envisioned a white girl as the protagonist of an interactive show called *Nina's Pop-up Puzzle* that would be modeled after a combination of Little Bear and Blue's Clues (Giresz). When the creative head at Nick Jr. became aware that there were over 80 characters on television under the age of 18 and not a single one was Latin American, they decided to make the protagonist Latina; thus, *Dora* was born (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019). Because the creators themselves were all white, they hired consultants to assist with properly representing her as a *Latina*. Originally, Dora was to be Costa Rican, "embedded in in one culture," and when the show was picked up for production, six people traveled to Costa Rica for research purposes. Dora was even represented as Costa Rican in the pilot episode (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019; Giresz). Consultant to the show Carlos Cortes, a history professor at UC Riverside, responded to this decision by telling producers: "Look, there are Latinos in the United States of all kinds of backgrounds, and I think it's important that kids of different Latino backgrounds be able to identify with Dora" (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019). As a result, Dora "was developed to be pan-Latina to represent the diversity of Latino cultures," a figure in whom any and all Latinos could see themselves (ABC News 2010).

The show follows bilingual Dora Marquez: a seven-year-old Latina girl who loves quests and adventures. Other main characters include her talking purple backpack and an anthropomorphic monkey named Boots. In the show, Dora is given mestizo—a mix of European and indigenous ancestry—features to represent her Latinidad. These features include brown skin, brown eyes, and straight dark hair. Extensive research went into creating each episode of the show. Each episode would be made into a storybook version which would be shown to over 200 children before the episodes aired. Afterwards, researchers would ask the children a series of questions: "Did the show make you feel sad? Happy? Very Happy? Angry?" and adjust each episode based on feedback (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019). *Dora the Explorer* premiered on a block aimed at preschool-aged children as part of a larger initiative and was tremendously successful, garnering two spinoffs: *Go Diego Go* and *Dora and Friends: Into the City!* (Popp 2006). In the sequel, Dora was aged up to a preteen. Various books and stage adaptations have also been developed since *Dora*. Most notably, in 2019, the live-action film adaptation *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* was distributed by Paramount Pictures.

At the time *Dora the Explorer* first aired, the political climate in the US was fairly anti-immigration. Pat Buchanan was running for president and campaigned for a "Pro English" group that advocated for English to be the sole official language in the US (Cereijido & Llamoca 2019). To situate Dora as a bilingual speaker during this time of anti-bilingualism was a bold move by Nickelodeon. In the show, Dora's bilingualism is portrayed as a superpower. In addition, in 2010, after a bill in Arizona passed allowing police to stop people they suspected to be illegal immigrants and demand identification, an altered image of a mug shot of Dora surfaced online where she was seen with bruises and holding a sign that read: "Dora the Explorer Illegal Border Crossing Resisting Arrest"

(ABC News 2010). Later, an image of Dora jumping a border fence surfaced online in a Facebook group. Associated Press reported that the mugshot image of Dora was being used by both supporters and opponents of the Arizona law at rallies (ABC News 2010). Even though Dora was politicized by anti-immigration groups, the show remained not only on air but also extremely popular, conveying a positive message to those who may have seen themselves reflected in Dora.

5.3 Constructing *Latinidades*

5.3.1 Physical appearance: *Can you imagine how many brown girls with short hair got called Dora in the last 19 years?*

More broadly, through attention to their physical bodies and appearances, characters in US media may be coded as *Latino*. In US media portrayals of *Latinos*, there exist two archetypal characters: the macho, male Latin lover who is dark-haired and mustachioed, and the "spitfire" female Latina who has long brown hair, red colored lips, is accessorized by jewelry, and wears bright, seductive clothing that places an emphasis on her hips and breasts (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004: 211). These tropes exemplify tropicalism, which is defined as the use of bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown/olive toned skin to index *Latinidad*. In other words, they are stereotypes that homogenize what is identifiable as *Latin* and *Latino*.

Dora the Explorer uses tropicalism to narrate *Latinidad*. The landscape is literally tropical and full of vibrant colors, acting as a backdrop for Dora's adventures—a constant reminder of her *Latinidad*. Dora's light brown skin, brown eyes, and black hair construct a version of *Latinidad* that emphasizes Spanish European legacy, ignoring indigenous and Black roots (Guidotti-Hernández 2007). Color, gender, and class hierarchies are blurred

when Afro-Latino and indigenous histories are dismissed under the guise of "mestizaje" (Guidotti-Hernández 2007: 216). We can compare Dora's representation in a cartoon aimed at children, to actresses Jennifer Lopez and Selma Hayek, who represent two "Latina icons" who occupy a space in between the dominant US binary of Black/White identities (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004). Throughout their respective careers, the characters they portray continue to fall into the same tropicalism tropes via the sexualization of their physical bodies. Lopez's butt is oversexualized, and Hayek's breasts, waist, and hips are given marked attention (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004). Thus, in both live action and cartoon media, the physical appearances and portrayal of archetypal characters reduce Latinos to one-dimensional stereotypes that fail to represent the class, color, and varied gender distinctions present in actual Latino communities in the US.

Similarly to television and film, race and ethnicity may also be constructed in video games (Martin 2008). The action of creating an avatar frequently involves choosing a race and gender identity. However, there are exceptions when characters whose race(s) and/or gender may not be modified because those identities are integral to their character—for example, Dora. A study by Children Now (2001) showed that video games often ignore women and people of color and incorporate stereotyped images and roles. In these instances, the act of exclusion from the mainstream represents an example of social domination over women and people of color. The 2001 study found that out of 1,716 characters, none were Latino, thus making Dora ground-breaking at the time (Glaubke et al. 2001). Martin (2008) cites *Dora* as one of two positive examples of race in video games "by providing main female minority title characters" (4). Both the show and game teach the Spanish language. Martin (2008) writes: "By actively portraying her Latina heritage, she reduces chances of being merely a token racial character, and by teaching others about her

race, she expands their racial and cultural awareness while broadening the positive racial content of video games in general" (7). According to Martin's analysis, video games have the opportunity to portray complex racial and ethnic identities in a positive way, proven in the Dora video game. This game also raises the question of what is created as *Latino* and what is *Latino* culture that is taught?

5.3.2 Language use

In addition to the characterization of *Latinidad* by physical appearances, the portrayal of language use in media serves to construct a monolithic Latino identity. Bordieu's (1986) notions of capital state that language serves as a symbolic representation and means of maintaining social power. To understand these notions of capital, we must understand the *linguistic marketplace*. All linguistic acts take place in a market setting and the more desirable or rare a practice, the greater the value assigned to it. Different ways of speaking assume prestige and distinction in relation to one another. There are different levels at which transactions can take place, and the importance of vernacular speech transactions is frequently overlooked.

Dora the Explorer introduces children to bilingualism, which is educationally valuable because bilingualism serves as capital in our society. As such, Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* has been widely noted for its atypical use of language (Popp 2006). Dora was designed around Harvard professor Howard Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligence theory, which states that there are multiple kinds of intelligences beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic—such as linguistic, musical, and bodily-kinesthetic skills—that should be recognized and fostered in children. Each episode features seven intelligence lessons, one of which is bilingualism (Popp 2006). Some parents may be more inclined to urge their children to watch Dora because acquiring this cultural capital sets them on a path to

becoming more "cosmopolitan" people for whom "language becomes a means of advancing into the upper echelons of education, work, and even taste groups. Bilingualism can open doors and act as a symbol of one's tolerance and refinement" (Popp 2006: 17). Not only does *Dora the Explorer* bring prestige to bilingualism, but Dora also encodes a Latina who speaks Spanish and assigns value to that specific Latina.

Comparing Dora once more to Selma Hayek's portrayal of Frida Kahlo, the actress Hayek herself is marked by a linguistic accent that casts her as ethnically different, limiting the roles available to her and demonstrating the lack of capital her idiolect provides her (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004; Bordieu 1986; Popp 2006). In contrast, Jennifer Lopez lacks an accent "that can be clearly coded as Spanish, and therefore coded as racial-other in the United States," widening the pool of roles available to her (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004: 215). Despite Lopez's lack of an innate accent, she does take on a *Latina* accent for certain roles. While Dora speaks both Spanish and English, she does not have an accent in either language, portraying a Latina who does not need to be marked by an accent.

In contrast to typical representations of Latinos through a presence of Spanish, the 2019 live-action movie *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* highlights Quechua, a macrolanguage of Peru which consists of almost 7,000,000 speakers and includes over 40 language varieties (Ethnologue). In the Dora universe, Dora's parents are archaeologists. In this movie, Dora grows up with them in Peru and is then sent to high school in the US. Despite Dora's lack of defined identity, Isabella Merced, who portrays Dora in the film, is Peruvian-American herself, thus complicating the portrayal of Dora's pan-Latinidad (Cordero 2019). Not only is Spanish peppered throughout the film, but Merced also speaks the Cusco-Collao variety of Quechua throughout and has stated that she learned Quechua for the film, practicing with her family and reworking scenes for linguistic accuracy

(Cerejido & Llamoca 2019; Debruge 2019; Llamoca 2019). While there is a specific cultural background in which the film is set (rather than a random jungle as in the television show), tropical beats, certain characters' marked accents, and the use of Spanish still allude to a shared notion of *Latinidad*. Debruge (2019) criticizes the lack of Dora's defined identity, especially when such specific cultural elements and language use are portrayed in the film: "By not exploring Dora's own specific ethnic identity—especially after almost 20 years after her debut—it feels like *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* was missing something." Despite this critique over its lack of defined identity, the film's portrayal of Quechua is handled with care. The lost civilization that the plot surrounds is based on an actual Incan city, *Paititi*, which is represented in the movie as *Parapata*, a Quechuan word meaning 'the rainy hill' (Llamoca 2019). For cultural consultant to the film Americo Mendoza-Mori, highlighting Andean culture was a way to explore different Latino identities (Llamoca 2019). Because there is more focused attention to Peruvian and Incan culture and civilization, it would be interesting to see how people's perceptions of Dora's ethnicity may have changed because of the film. Do people perceive Dora as Peruvian?

In summary, while contemporary representations of Latinas provide spaces for "vocality and action," they further build on a history of "exoticization, racialization, and sexualization" (Guzmán & Valdivia 2004: 217). Dora in *Dora the Explorer* presents a monolithic consumer-ready *Latina*. Although more specific cultures are highlighted in *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*, Dora remains a *pan-Latina* who is surrounded by the Spanish language, a marker of her *Latinidad*. Thus, through the imagined homogenization of a *Latino* people, the media maintains the presence of harmful stereotypes about them.

6 Methods

In order to explore the relationship between viewership of *Dora the Explorer* and identification with the *Latino* label, I created an anonymous online survey that was split into four sections and asked questions about participant demographics, labels used to describe their own race/ethnicity, television, and linguistic ideologies. The survey was written in both Spanish and English, and participants were encouraged to respond in whichever language they felt most comfortable (see Appendix A for survey).

I recruited via email lists, social media, and through personal and professional connections. Criteria for participation included self-identifying as:

- (1) Being aged 18 or older,
- (2) Having lived in the US at some point in their life, and
- (3) Personally, or via their parents, having a connection to Latin America.

The second and third point work together in order to target a population that may be described as *Latino*, regardless of if that is the label with which they choose to describe themselves.

I sent the survey through Google Forms, which required participants to first submit their consent to participate in the study and fill a screening section with the above criteria before reaching the survey questions.

Demographic questions included questions about age, gender, and highest level of education completed. Participants included 30 adults, 22 between the ages of 18-30, five of between the ages of 30-50, and three between the ages of 50-70. There were 16 female participants, five non-binary participants, and nine male participants. Nine participants selected "High school diploma or equivalent" as their highest level of education, 14

participants selected "Some college, no degree," one selected "Associate degree," one selected "Bachelor's degree," and five selected "Advanced degree." 20 participants were born in the US, four participants were born in Mexico, two in Peru, one in Colombia, one in Cuba, one in El Salvador, and one in Venezuela.

7 Results

7.1 Race & ethnicity

7.1.1 Preferred ethnic labels

I asked participants an open-ended question regarding their preferred ethnic label, or the ethnic label with which they identify themselves. I have categorized responses into three types: pan-ethnic labels, national origin labels, and "other." Although nationality is not the same as ethnicity, the two are sometimes confounded when asked for self-identification; previous research has demonstrated Hispanics and/or Latinos tend to prefer identifying themselves by country of origin (Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020). For these reasons, I choose to categorize *national origin labels* under *ethnic labels*. The pan-ethnic labels can be further divided into two categories: *Hispanic* or some variation of *Latino* (for example *Latina*, *Latinx*, or *Latine*). I will denote the variations of *Latino* by using the term *LatinX*. The overwhelming majority of participants aged 18-30 responded they identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label, either *Hispanic* or *LatinX*. Twice as many of those who identified with *Hispanic* identified with *LatinX*. In contrast, half of the participants aged 30-50 responded that they identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label, while one of the three participants aged 50-70 responded that they identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label (*Latina*). The other two participants aged 50-70 responded with *I don't know* and *Native*

American. All three participants aged 30-70 who identified with a pan-ethnic label identified with *LatinX*, not *Hispanic* (see Table 1).

Table 1. Ethnic label use by age

Age	Pan-ethnic labels		National origin	Other
	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>LatinX</i>		
18-30	6	12	5	0
30-50	0	2	2	0
50-70	0	1	0	2

Most participants who reported growing up in the US identified with a pan-ethnic label with twice as many people opting for *LatinX* over *Hispanic*. The majority of participants who grew up outside of the US also identified with a pan-ethnic label. Thus, regardless of the country a participant grew up in, trends in identification with pan-ethnic labels did not change. Overlap should be noted, as six participants identified as having grown up in both the US and foreign countries. The two participants who grew up outside of the US and identified with another label were the same two who responded with *I don't know* and *Native American* from the previous example (see Table 2).

Table 2. Ethnic label use by childhood residence

Childhood res.	Pan-ethnic labels		National origin	Other
	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>LatinX</i>		
in the US	6	12	6	0
outside of the US	2	7	2	2

The majority of people who had seen the television show *Dora the Explorer* identified with pan-ethnic labels. The majority of those who had not seen *Dora the Explorer* also identified with pan-ethnic labels. However, while the majority of those who had seen *Dora* and identified with a pan-ethnic label tended to identify with *LatinX*, there did not seem to be as strong of a preference for those who had not seen *Dora*. Participants

were also asked how regularly they viewed the show: *very often*, *often*, *not often*, or *rarely*. Increased viewership in *Dora* did not affect the general trends found within ethnic label usage. One person who had seen *Dora* responded to the question with *I don't know*, while one person who had not seen *Dora* responded with *Native American* (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ethnic label use by *Dora* viewership

<i>Dora</i> viewership	Pan-ethnic labels		National origin	Other
	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>LatinX</i>		
viewed <i>Dora</i>	5	11	6	1
did not view <i>Dora</i>	2	3	1	1

7.1.2 Other ethnic labels

When asked all of the ways they would feel comfortable with identifying their ethnicity and presented with the options *Latinx/e*, *Latina/o*, *Latin American*, *Latino Americano*, *Hispanic*, *Hispano/a*, and *Other*, 28 out of the 30 participants chose at least one pan-ethnic label they would use. Only two chose *Other* and no pan-ethnic label to describe *Latinidad*. Instead, they specified they would identify with the terms *Native American* and *Mexican*, respectively. Both participants grew up outside of the US and were above the age of 30.

Eight participants shared how their choice of label changes based on social context. Of these eight, four shared that when they are around other Latinos, they may be more inclined to identify by national origin instead of by a pan-ethnic term. When they are not around other Latinos, they may choose to identify with some form of the *Latino* label. One participant said they would be less likely to identify as *Latino* when around other Latinos because of their lack of comfort with the Spanish language. Another participant said that

they would only use the gender-inclusive label *Latinx* in an academic setting if others used it as well.

One participant said they would identify differently based on which country they were in, and another participant said that, although they did not identify with any pan-ethnicity, they felt pressured to do so in the US. This sense of pressure to identify with a pan-ethnic label in the US is reflected in other studies (Oboler 1995).

Other participants simply said "no" or that it "[j]ust depends on what I feel like using at the moment," reflecting an unexplored attitude toward their ethnic label preference.

7.1.3 Preferred race label

The US Census outlines five specific categories for racial identification: *White*, *Black* or *African-American*, *American-Indian* or *Alaska Native*, *Asian*, and *Native Hawaiian* or *Other Pacific Islander* as well as a sixth *Some other race* category. Most surveys—for employment, medical care, polling, etc.—tend to follow these racial categories (Espiritu & Omi 2000; Meraji 2017). I intentionally asked participants about their preferred race label with an open-ended response—rather than a multiple-choice—style question, because, historically, Latinos have had a difficult time categorizing themselves into one of the aforementioned five categories (Meraji 2017).

The lack of a defined racial identity was reflected in participants' responses to this survey. One participant noted their frustration: "Census or legal documents don't fill [the] gray gap in between Black or White so white is selected." Another participant described how they had been told to identify as white but felt that it was not correct and so usually selected *Other*. Eight participants acknowledged that they understood *Latino* was not technically a race and still chose that label to describe their race. Three participants

acknowledged their *mestizaje* while expressing frustration at the lack of acknowledgement of this term by the US government. One participant wrote:

Me enoja mucho que en formularios legales de Estados Unidos, o en la parte de encuesta del SAT, tenga que elegir “Caucasian” o que no aparezca algo que verdaderamente me represente. En formularios legales de Latinoamérica he visto la raza “mestizo”, que se refiere a la mezcla entre gente indígena y conquistadores españoles. [my translation: It angers me that in legal forms in the United States, or in the survey part of the SAT, I have to choose "Caucasian," or that something that truly reflects me isn't there. In legal forms in Latin American I've seen "mestizo" as a race, that refers to the mix between indigenous people and Spanish conquistadores.]

Another person expressed a similar sentiment that “federal agencies force me to pick ‘white’ for race because they don’t have mestizo, or Ladino, which is how we see ourselves in Nicaragua.” The use of the word “force” suggests the feeling of a lack of control in navigating one’s own racial identity in the US. Thus, participants felt that context mattered greatly regarding which racial label they used.

7.2 Dora and other television

Participants knew the study involved *Dora the Explorer* given that they were prompted various questions regarding their familiarity with the television show, but they did not know that I was studying the relationship between their familiarity with *Dora the Explorer* and their ethnic label usage (see Appendix A for survey questions). The first question in this section asked if there were any figures on television when they were growing up that they could relate to. 15 participants included Dora in their answer. All 15 of these participants were in the age group of 18-30.

Nickelodeon describes their own show in the following manner: “This play-along, animated adventure series stars Dora, a seven-year-old Latina heroine who asks preschoolers for their help on her adventures. Along the way, they’ll meet friends,

overcome obstacles and learn a little Spanish!”—explicitly labeling (at least some aspect of) her ethnicity with the use of the word *Latina*. I asked participants, regardless of having seen the show or not, to provide a one-sentence description of the character Dora to see if they would also include any descriptors in reference her ethnicity. 12 participants included a word to index race, ethnicity, and/or nationality including: *Latina*, *Latino*, *Spanish*, *Brown*, *Mexicana*, *Mexican*, and *Brown Mexican*.

To investigate whether Dora's otherness in a US context leads to the assumption of her nationality as Mexican or Puerto Rican by viewers and non-viewers of *Dora* alike, I asked participants in a free-response answer style question where Dora was from. Answers included: *Mexico* (8), *I don't know* (8), *Peru* (4), *US* (2), *Ecuador* (1), *Central America* (1), and *Latin America* (1). Interestingly, some participants selected their answers based on perceived memory: one participant "seem[ed] to remember Central America" as Dora's geographic origin. Additionally, one participant who responded with *Mexico* recalled seeing traditional dresses in the show. One of the participants who wrote *Peru* noted learning this fact from TikTok. Importantly, even when a country was provided, most answers expressed doubt or uncertainty.

Only three participants had seen the movie adaptation *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*. One of these participants was one of the four who had responded that they believed Dora to be from Peru. This means the other two who had seen the movie did not interpret Dora as Peruvian, a somewhat surprising fact. The responses to this section illustrate an acceptance of Dora's pan-Latinidad without question of her national origin; the *Latino* label and therefore identity is enacted through the belief of a "generic" Latino, in this case that Latina being Dora (Oboler 1995).

7.3 Language use

Out of all 30 participants, everyone spoke English and at least some Spanish. In addition, some participants reported speaking Zapotec, German, French, and Spanglish. Three participants responded to the survey mainly in Spanish while one participant used a mix of Spanish and English. The remaining 26 responded to the survey mainly in English.

When asked if speaking Spanish was important to the *Hispanic* identity, half of the total participants responded *Yes*. When asked if speaking Spanish was important to the *Latino* identity, less than half of the participants responded *Yes*. All participants who responded that Spanish was important to the *Latino* identity responded that Spanish was important to the *Hispanic* identity.

When asked if speaking Spanish was necessary to the *Hispanic* identity, only four participants responded *Yes*. When asked if speaking Spanish was necessary to the *Latino* identity, six participants responded *yes* (see Table 4 for a breakdown of responses).

Table 4. Value of speaking Spanish when IDing with pan-ethnic labels⁴

	Important			Necessary		
	<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Hispanic</i>	5	9	15	21	4	4
<i>Latino</i>	11	8	11	20	4	6

When asked to articulate their responses, participants who believed Spanish was a necessary component of these pan-ethnic identities responded with ideas related to remembering one's *raíces* 'roots', and a shared culture. One participant said: "Schools needs to teach their home language at school ... and make connection with our people and

⁴ One participant abstained from answering the question of how important speaking Spanish was to the *Hispanic* identity because they did not identify with that label and said they could not make that judgment.

wonderful culture." Others cited Spanish as important for being able to communicate with others of "Hispanic origin." Spanish was also seen as a tool of empowerment. When asked why they felt Spanish was a necessary component of the *Latino* identity, one participant shared:

Para poder identificarnos y empoderarnos con nuestra raza, nuestra historia, nuestros logros, leyenda, así como las maravillas de arquitectura, ingeniería, y ciencia que elaboraron nuestros ancestros en nuestras culturas. [my translation: To be able to identify and empower ourselves with our race, our history, our accomplishments, legend, as well as the wonders of architecture, engineering, and science that our ancestors created in our cultures.]

Those who said speaking Spanish was important to the *Hispanic* and *Latino* identities but not necessary expressed similar sentiments to the ones above. However, they also noted that it would be problematic to cite Spanish as a necessary criterion for *Latinidad*. Those who said it was not necessary used reasoning including that not all Latin American countries speak Spanish, some Latinos never get the chance to speak Spanish, indigenous ancestors did not speak Spanish before the conquistadores, "language is power but people can do what they want," and language is only one part of identity.

8 Discussion

Out of the 30 total participants, 21 participants identified with a pan-ethnic label, *Hispanic* or *Latino*. There was not a strong difference in correlation with pan-ethnic label usage dependent on different age groups, viewership of *Dora the Explorer*, or childhood residence.

The fact that there was not a significant difference in identification with a pan-ethnic label based on national origin/childhood residence is somewhat shocking. Although some participants answered they preferred to identify with a nationality or expressed frustration at the US classification system based on ethnicity, preferred identification with

national origin continues to support previous research (McCarthy & Dupreé 2021; Noe-Bustamente et al. 2020). One participant described their ethnicity as *Native American*. While *Native American* is another pan-ethnic label, it was not the focus of this study. However, future research investigating how many Latin Americans in the US view their ethnicity and/or race as *Native American* would be valuable.

The strongest relationship found occurred between pan-ethnic label usage and age. Those who were between the ages of 18-30 were the most likely to identify with a pan-ethnic label. It should be noted that this increase, in comparison to other variables like *Dora* viewership and childhood residence, was marginal. Despite the lack of a strong relationship between viewership of *Dora* and identification with the *Latino* label, we can analyze the premier of *Dora the Explorer* as a benchmark of time. In doing so, we can frame participants aged 18-30 who grew up in the US as the group of people who would be the most likely to have watched *Dora* growing up. Based on the results of this study, those who grew up in a world where they would have watched *Dora* were the most likely population to identify with the pan-ethnic labels *Hispanic* or *LatinX*.

Despite weak correlation with viewership of *Dora the Explorer* alone, when contextualizing *Dora* amidst the larger political scope of the US, the fact that most participants did primarily identify with a pan-ethnic label reflects a change in widespread perception and acceptance of *Latino* as a valid ethnicity. It should be noted that data was skewed towards the participants aged 18-30. Nonetheless, when asked all the labels they would be comfortable using, even if not their first choice, the overwhelming majority (28 of 30) responded with either *Hispanic* or *Latino*. Comparing these preferences to those of 30 years ago, attitudes have generally changed (Oboler 1995). Even if it has not been *Dora the Explorer* alone that has affected attitudes towards pan-ethnic labels, *Dora the Explorer* has

opened a gateway for *Latino* youth representation in media, and more broadly, *Latino* representation in media.

Based on the results of this study, Dora's representation in *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* has not impacted widespread perceptions of *Latinidad*. Ultimately, the film was not seen by enough viewers to have an impact on people's ethnic label usage or even perception of Dora's ethnicity. Participants expressed confusion when asked Dora's national origin and did not express the belief that Dora's national origin was Peru as the film might confusingly suggest, except for four participants, only one of whom had seen the film. Thus, the film can be considered practically irrelevant for affecting people's ethnic label usage.

The preferences expressed for different race labels demonstrated a "gray area" in which some Latinos experience race in the US. One person responded that their race was *Brown*. The lack of an agreed upon racial category for *Latinos* reflects larger patterns in the US. In the 2010 Census, *Some other race* was the third largest reported racial category after *White* and *Black* (Meraji 2017). It must be noted that while 13 participants used either *Latino* or *Hispanic* to describe their race, or expressed uncertainty when defining their race, 12 participants had no problem labeling *White* as their race. These results emphasize the different lived racial experiences of *Latinos*, dismantling the notion of the monolithic *Latino*. I would be curious to see how people would respond if asked what race Dora was. Is she *Brown*? Is *Brown* a race? These are questions that demand future research.

Regarding language use, those who believed Spanish was not necessary to the *Latino* identity contrast with the term's origins (a grouping of a people based on language use) and also demonstrate critical thinking against shows like *Dora the Explorer* which propel the bilingual English-Spanish speaking *Latino* narrative. In this regard, Latinos

today, across a wide range of ages, are dismantling the bilingual English-Spanish model of *Latinidad*.

Dora the Explorer garners political and social significance because the representation of her character has the ability to produce discourse about *Latinos*, including debates about race, class, gender, and citizenship in transnational contexts—including linguistic assimilation (Guidotti-Hernández 2007). Her positioning as a *pan-Latina* is critical to the way she creates ideas about Latinas, and the way *Latinidad* influences her construction (Guidotti-Hernández 2007). Through several distinct *Latino* cultural practices, the representation of space, language, music, and racialized visual portrayals of *Latino* children, she feeds into the discussion of what is *Latino*.

With respect to authenticity, Sandoval-Sánchez & Roman (1995) posit that there is no such thing as an authentic *Latino*. If Latinos have been imagined, there never was and never will be a real or authentic Latino. The show's creator, Chris Gifford (2003), stated that "with regard to cultural aspects, we realized to do it right we need to be as authentic as we can be." What authenticity is Gifford referring to? As Guidotti-Hernández (2007) writes,

When Dora is evoked as a real Latina, it is an active forgetting of complex national and individual histories of the people relegated to the racial/cultural category Latina. Therefore, Dora becomes authentic or the real because history is elided in the representation (213).

Latinidad entails hybridity—a cross between cultures, genres, and media. It is the result of geopolitical conflicts that create mixed cultural practices "because there are unlikely proximities of different cultural and national communities" (Guidotti-Hernández 2007: 213). To say there is no *real* or *authentic Latino* is not to invalidate people who identify as *Latino*. However, as Guidotti-Hernández (2007) writes of Dora, this authenticity comes

from the reinterpretation or intentional misremembering of history. *Latino* identity can be understood as an “in-between” or “hyphenated” identity in the sense that it is found “in the boundaries between one so-called Latino group and another” (Caminero-Santangelo 2007: 217). Just as *Dora* requires a reimagination of history, the fact that most people in the study felt comfortable to align themselves with the *Latino* label demonstrates a wider notion of reimagining the *Latino* label, identity, and people.

Despite the term's relative newness, the results of this study have showcased how popularized and embedded the idea of *Latinidad* has become within various Latin American communities in the US. There is a sense of shared culture and/or identity that is expressed through language via the pan-ethnic label *Latino*. In line with Oboler (1995) who posited that the *Latino* identity would thrive under two myths: the myth spun by memory and myth of homogeneity, the *Latino* identity has been cemented in US daily life today. Participants thought they remembered seeing specific-to-one culture traditional dresses and landscapes in *Dora the Explorer*. In general, participants could not name her national origin (which does not exist) and deemed her merely *Latina*. Labels like *Latino* and *Hispanic* are entrenched in everyday language and as predicted by Oboler (1995), “the new generations end up doing to themselves what the society has done to all Latinos: they homogenize, they stereotype, they categorize, and ultimately they divide themselves” (173). Through television shows like *Dora the Explorer* that broadcast and affirm the *Latino* label, *Latino* identities themselves are also created and affirmed. Broadly speaking, the labels one uses in day-to-day language help enact a real sense of identity.

9 Conclusions

This study finds that there is no strong relationship between identification with the *Latino* label and viewership of the children's television show *Dora the Explorer*. However, this study also finds that those who grew up in the US after *Dora the Explorer* aired are the most likely population to identify primarily with a pan-ethnic label. Do they identify with pan-ethnic labels because of *Dora the Explorer*? The sample in this study consisted mainly of young adults aged 18-30 and other factors such as geographic location in the US, length of time lived in the US, birthplace, socioeconomic class, and more are variables that may affect one's choice with which label to identify that are not explored in this analysis. As such, future research in which samples are carefully selected to explore the causal relationship between viewership and/or familiarity with *Dora the Explorer* and pan-ethnic label usage may be able to further investigate this phenomenon. Interestingly, shifting linguistic ideologies towards the removal of Spanish as a criterion for both *Hispanic* and *Latino* identities emerge. Future research would be needed to determine what factors lead to the formation of these ideologies as both ethnic groups have been historically centered around language use.

The character Dora ends up being an example of the commodification of *Latino* identities and cultural practices. Through her physical appearance and language use, and importantly, positioning explicitly as a *Latina*, she helps construct ideas about *Latinidad* that reinforce a stereotyped monolithic identity that does not exist.

Both pan-ethnic labels *Latino* and *Hispanic* have penetrated US daily life, and regardless of age, childhood origin, or viewership of *Dora the Explorer*, the majority of

people in this study identified primarily with a pan-ethnic label. Despite the lack of a *Latino* identity, the validity of this ethnic group is seen through the validity of the label itself.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Defining Latinidad / Definiendo Latinidad

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR / *INVESTIGADORA PRINCIPAL*: Alexa Moretti

Key information about this study / Información principal sobre esta investigación

Your consent is being sought for research. Participation in the research is voluntary. The expected duration of the subject's participation is 20-30 minutes. If you consent to participate in this study, you will be prompted to answer questions regarding your ethnicity/race and television shows, specifically *Dora the Explorer*. To participate in this study, you must have lived in the US at some point in your life and be at least 18 years old. There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study. Should you change your mind about participating, you may stop at any time with no consequences.

Se solicita su consentimiento para la investigación. La participación en la investigación es voluntaria. La duración prevista de la participación es de 20-30 minutos. Si acepta participar en esta investigación, se le ascenderá a responder preguntas sobre su etnicidad/raza y programas de televisión, específicamente Dora la Exploradora. Para participar en esta investigación, debe haber vivido en los Estados Unidos en algún momento de su vida y tener al menos 18 años. No hay riesgos previsibles involucrados en esta investigación. Si cambia de opinión acerca de participar, puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

Additional information about this study / Información adicional sobre esta investigación

Confidentiality:

All records from this study will be kept confidential. You will not be asked to provide your name, nor will I collect email addresses. The researcher will be the only party that will have access to your data. I will not publish any information that may make it possible to identify you.

Who to contact with questions:

Alexa Moretti— amorett1@swarthmore.edu

Confidencialidad:

Todos los registros de esta investigación se mantendrán confidenciales. No se le pedirá que proporcione su nombre ni recopilaré direcciones de correos electrónicos. La investigadora

será la única que tendrá acceso a sus datos. No publicaré ninguna información que pueda permitir identificarlo.

*A quién contactar si tiene preguntas:
Alexa Moretti— amorett1@swarthmore.edu*

Summary / Resumen

- My participation is voluntary. / Mi participación es voluntaria.
- Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. / Negarme a participar no implicará ninguna sanción ni pérdida de beneficios a los que tendría derecho.
- I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. / / Puedo suspender mi participación en cualquier momento sin penalización ni pérdida de beneficios.
- I hereby give my consent to be the subject of the research. / Por la presente doy mi consentimiento para ser objeto de la investigación.

Click next to begin the survey. / Haga clic en siguiente para comenzar la encuesta.

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability, in whichever language you feel most comfortable.

Por favor responda todas las preguntas lo mejor que pueda en el idioma en el que se sienta más cómodo.

Screening / Filtro

Before you begin the survey, the following questions will help determine your eligibility to participate.

Antes de comenzar la encuesta, las siguientes preguntas ayudarán a determinar su elegibilidad para participar.

Are you at least 18 years of age? / ¿Tiene al menos 18 años?

- Yes / Sí
- No

Do you now or have you ever lived in the US? / ¿Vive usted ahora o alguna vez ha vivido en los EE.UU.?

- Yes / Sí
- No

Do you or your parents have a connection to Latin America? / *¿Usted o sus padres tienen alguna conexión con Latino America?*

- Yes / Sí
- No

General Demographics / *Demográficos generales*

The following section will ask questions regarding your age, gender identity and level of education.

La siguiente sección le hará preguntas sobre su edad, identidad de género y nivel de educación.

Select your age-range. / *Seleccione su rango de edad.*

- 18 - 30
- 30 - 50
- 50 - 70
- 70+

What is your gender identity? / *¿Cual es su identidad de género?*

- Male / Masculino
- Female / Femenino
- Non-binary / No-binaria
- Other / Otro
- Prefer not to say / Prefiero no decir

Select the highest level of formal education your parents have completed. / *Seleccione el nivel más alto de educación formal que sus padres han completado. Mark only one oval.*

- Less than a high school diploma or equivalent / Secundaria o equivalente no terminada
- High school diploma or equivalent / Diploma de escuela secundaria o equivalente
- Some college, no degree / Alguna educación universitaria, sin título
- Associate degree / Título asociado (título que se obtiene después de dos años universitarios)
- Bachelor's degree / Licenciatura terminada
- Advanced degree / Pos-grado terminado

Race & Ethnicity / *Raza y etnicidad*

The following section will ask questions regarding the labels you use to describe your race and ethnicity.

La siguiente sección le hará preguntas sobre los términos que usted utiliza para describir su raza y etnicidad.

What country were you born in? / *¿En qué país nació?*

Where did you live as a child? / *¿Donde vivió de niño?*

What countries were your parents born in? / *¿En qué países nacieron sus padres?*

Where are you currently living? (state/province, country) / *¿Dónde está viviendo ahora? (estado/provincia, país)*

How do you primarily define your ethnicity? / *¿Cómo principalmente define su etnicidad?*

What are all the ways that you feel comfortable defining your ethnicity? / *¿Cuáles son todas las maneras en que se siente cómodo definiendo su etnicidad?*

- Latinx/e, Latina/o
- Latin American / Latino Americano
- Hispanic / Hispano/a
- Other / Otro

If you selected "other," please specify below. / *Si seleccionó "otro," por favor especifique a continuación.*

Does the way that you define your ethnicity change in different contexts? How so? / *¿La manera en que define su etnicidad cambia en diferentes contextos? ¿Cómo?*

How do you primarily define your race? / *¿Cómo principalmente define su raza?*

Does the way that you define your race change in different contexts? How so? / *¿La manera en que define su raza cambia en diferentes contextos? ¿Cómo?*

How would you say others who are of the same age and from similar ethnic backgrounds as your own would generally describe their ethnicities? / *¿Cómo diría usted que otras personas de la misma edad y de orígenes étnicos similares al suyo describirían en general sus orígenes étnicos (de ellos)?*

Television / Televisión

The following section will ask questions regarding representation in the media and the children's television show, Dora the Explorer.

La siguiente sección le hará preguntas sobre representación en los medios y el programa de televisión, Dora la Exploradora.

Were there any figures on television in your childhood and/or adolescence that you could relate your ethnic and/or racial identities to? If yes, please explain. / *¿Hubo algún personaje en la televisión durante su niñez y/o adolescencia con la que pudo relacionar sus identidades étnicas y/o raciales? Si "sí," por favor explique.*

Did you watch Dora the Explorer as a child, adolescent, or at another point in your life? / *¿Vio a Dora la Exploradora cuando era niño, adolescente o en otro momento de su vida?*

- Yes, as a child / Sí, de niño
- Yes, as an adolescent / Sí, de adolescente
- Yes, as an adult / Sí, cuando era mayor
- No

If you answered "yes," how often would you say you watched Dora? / *Si respondió que "sí," ¿con qué frecuencia diría que veía Dora?*

- Very often / Muy a menudo
- Often / A menudo
- Not often / No a menudo
- Rarely / Casi nunca

If you are familiar with the character Dora (even if you have not seen the show), please provide a one sentence description of the character Dora. / *Si está familiarizado con el personaje de Dora (incluso si no ha visto el programa de televisión), por favor proporcione una descripción de una oración del personaje Dora.*

Where is Dora from? (please do not search the answer online, answer from memory - if you do not know, simply say you do not know) / *¿De donde es Dora? (por favor no busque la respuesta en línea, responde de memoria - si no lo sabe, simplemente di que no lo sabe)*

Did you watch *Dora and the Lost City of Gold* (2019)? / *¿Ha visto Dora y la ciudad perdida (2019)?*

- Yes / Sí
- No

If you answered "yes," why did you watch *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*? / *Si respondió que "sí," ¿por qué vio Dora y la ciudad perdida?*

Do you feel that you relate to Dora in any way? / *¿Siente que se identifica con Dora de alguna manera?*

- Yes / Sí
- A bit / Un poco
- No

If you answered "yes," in what ways do you relate to Dora? / *Si respondió que "sí," ¿de que manera se identifica con Dora?*

Language / Idiomas

The following section will ask questions regarding your personal language use and ideologies.

La siguiente sección le hará preguntas sobre su uso personal de las lenguas y ideologías lingüísticas.

What language(s) do you speak? / *¿Qué idioma(s) habla?*

What language(s) are spoken in your home? / *¿Qué idioma(s) se habla(n) en su casa?*

What language(s) were spoken in your home as a child? / *¿Qué idioma(s) se hablaba(n) en su casa cuando era niño?*

Do you think it's important for those who identify with the label Hispanic to speak Spanish? / *¿Cree que es importante que quienes se identifiquen con el término Hispano hablen español?*

- Yes / Sí
- Maybe / Quizá
- No

Do you think it's necessary for those who identify with the label Hispanic to speak Spanish? / *¿Cree que es necesario que quienes se identifiquen con el término Hispano hablen español?*

- Yes / Sí
- Maybe / Quizá
- No

Explain your answers to the previous two questions. / *Explique sus respuestas a las dos preguntas anteriores.*

Do you think it's important for those who identify with the label Latino to speak Spanish? / *¿Cree que es necesario que quienes se identifiquen con el término Latino hablen español?*

- Yes / Sí
- Maybe / Quizá
- No

Do you think it's *necessary* for those who identify with the label Latino to speak Spanish? /
¿Cree que es necesario que quienes se identifiquen con el término Latino hablen español?

- Yes / Sí
- Maybe / Quizá
- No

Explain your answers to the previous two questions. / *Explique sus respuestas a las dos preguntas anteriores.*

End / Fin

You have reached the end of the survey. Please submit your responses and thank you for your participation!

Ha llegado al final de la encuesta. ¡Por favor envíe sus respuestas y gracias por su participación!