The Reflexivity of Pain and Privilege

by Ellis Hurd

Abstract

A Mestizo is an indigenous person of mixed heritage. Approximately 20 million Latinos living in the United States identify as Mestizos. Nearly fifty percent identify as White, while the other half identify as Hispanic or mixed. These racial, social, and cultural identifications are largely rooted in Spanish Imperialism and European Colonialism. Furthermore, these Mestizo identifications have vast effects on assimilation and achievement. A fresh and critical perspective frames the concerns surrounding many Mestizos today, as it attempts to offer people of indigenous descent and identification a voice while they continue clearing a path for themselves and those that may soon follow.

Introduction

Investigating how and why those of mixed heritage, or Mestizos, might arrive at their identities is important. It empowers researchers and Mestizos to critically understand what factors historically influenced (and continue to affect) mixed identities and assimilation. It also offers insight into why society may perceive Mestizos in certain ways. These critical factors are ethnographical and phenomenological.

Ogbu (1991) explained how people of minority status, such as Mestizos, operate from imposed identities, or certain identities forced upon them during assimilation and achievement transitions. Others actually create what Ogbu (1992) called cultural inversion. These are minority group behaviors and "collective identities" (Ogbu, 2004) which run against or deny academic norms when Mestizos wish to misidentify with or resist against the dominant academic culture. In these ways, the identities Mestizos choose may not be the same ones they believed they had (Ogbu, 1991).

This study examines the Mestizo identity construct in several ways. It begins with the thrusted influence of Colonialism upon native inhabitants during the Spanish Conquest. A resulting minor caste system initiated from that time period is just one perpetual effect still seen today. The study further shows how assimilation and achievement are strongly influenced by the Mestizo identity con-

struct. What emerges is a critical framework by which Mestizo identity navigations can be understood. This reflexive framework can be known as the dichotomous discourse of pain and privilege which also elucidates the indigenous voice.

A Mestizo Description

The history and review of those called Mestizo is complex and controversial. While some researchers have exclusively studied Mestizos' genetics and racial identities (see Capelli et al., 2001; Wang, Ray, Rojas, Parra, & Bedoya, 2008), many others argue that Mestizos must be studied from a socio-cultural context, as constructions or designations of power and culture (Forbes, 2005; Kicza, 1997; Rodriguez, 2011; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998). Nonetheless, both methodological approaches show how the term Mestizo is derived from Spanish Colonialism.

The Spanish Conquest

Mestizo is a term of Spanish origin, created to designate the peoples of mixed European and Native American ancestry. Typically a Spanish father and an Indian mother had children called Mestizos (Anzaldúa, 2007; Kicza, 1997). They occupied the areas of the Americas from Canada in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south.

During the sixteenth century, European Spaniards sought to colonize what they believed were newly discovered territories. Under establishment of the European "policy of divide and conquer," elite Spanish rulers sought to control and weaken existing native groups (Forbes, 2005, p. 3). They then maintained their so-called superior status by constructing a Mestizo race, with all its arbitrary divisions placed between different groups of the population (Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998, p. 122). Instead of focusing on mistreatment and genocide through foreign diseases, the Spaniards shifted the focus from the Mestizos onto themselves. This left the Mestizos in "isolation from Spanish and Indian society along with the lack of their own culture…often [feeling] pushed and pulled by different segments of society" (Burns, 1994, p. 6).

Sometimes Mestizos were pushed away by Indians who felt betrayed when Mestizos became part of the Spaniard society. At other times, they were pulled in by the Spaniards, welcomed illegitimately for selfish gains. However, Mestizos never became fully accepted into the Spaniard society as it "was too beneficial to the Spanish elite...to differentiate between those with Spanish blood and the Indians…to maintain a certain distance and socially superior status over the mestizos" (Burns, 1994, p. 10). This stratification led to at least three socially constructed races by the Spaniards: the Indian inhabitants, the Mexican inhabitants, and the Mestizos, or mixed Spanish-Indian and/or Mexican inhabitants.

The Minor Caste System and Mestizo Variations

With their new descriptors, Spaniards maintained the power needed for controlling native inhabitants. They infused privileges upon the inhabitants "in order that the native leadership would prevent their people from rebelling" upon the Spaniards (Forbes, 2005, p. 3). Appointed menial jobs kept tribes jealous, "divided and distrustful of each other" (p. 4). This allowed the Spaniards to further exert their self-proclaimed superiority over the inhabitants, namely the Mestizos who had trouble settling into any singular group.

The Spaniards and these various native groups did eventually intermarry. Over time, those groups adopted terms indicative of their particular dialects and geographical areas (as depicted in Figure 1). In Canada, for example, people of European and "Anishinabe" (or Native American) blood were called Métis, or mixed. In the U.S., terms such as half-breed, half-blood, and quarter-blood were used, with mustee and mulatto down South. These terms were pejoratively used for Mestizos and their offspring (see Forbes, 2005; Pilgrim, 2000). Yet oppressions remained for Mestizos because they "had occupied an awkward position in this racial hierarchy, often hated by the Spanish for being part Indian and shunned by the Indians for being part Spanish" (Forbes, 2005, p. 58).

Nation	African	☐	Spaniard	☐	Spaniard	☐	Indian	☐	African
		☐		☐		☐		☐	
U.S. North	Negro	Mulatto; Mixed; Buck		Criollo		Mestizo; Cholo	No-caste; Out-caste; Outcast	Zambo	
U.S. South	Quadroons; Nigger	Mulatto; Mustee; Tom; Coon; Buck				Half-breed; Half-blood; Quarter-blood			High-yellows
Mexico	Negro	Mulato; Mulo				Mestizo; Mexicano; Cholo	Coyote; Pardo	Lobo	
Guatemala						Ladino			
Canada						Métis			
Brazil		Mulato				Caboclo; Mameluco			
Peru						Cholas; Cholos; Campesinos			

Figure 1. Critical Mestizo variations used historically and pejoratively throughout locales and nations. Illustrates several nations' responses to indigenous people of mixed heritage or identity, with respects to African, Spanish, and Indian groups.

Today, many Mestizos may consider themselves minorities. Ogbu (1991, 1992) designated two separate terms for minorities. The first is what he called "Immigrant Minorities," or those who have voluntarily chosen to migrate to the United States "for improved economic, political, and/or social opportunities". Voluntary minorities admit they feel the sting of discrimination, and their children may struggle adapting, but overall "they view these conditions as temporary situations that will improve probably over a single generation" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 41).

Conversely, "involuntary minorities are people who became Americans through slavery, conquest, or colonization…[forced] to an inferior position and denied assimilation" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 41). Involuntary minorities continue to struggle with discrimination, and their children struggle adapting because of their distinct perspectives. They hold to an "oppositional identity" which causes them to see the United States as an adversary. This oppositional identity is largely rooted in and influenced by a series of "belief systems" stemming from the Spanish and American conquests (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Mestizo Assimilation and Achievement

Tozer, Violeas, and Senese (2002) argue the rapid growth of any minority population should be of no real surprise to the United States. The main influx of minorities occurred during the 1820s to 1850s, with the arrival of Chinese, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants. Changes thereafter were traceable in the social class differences between those groups still seen today (p. 51). For instance, Mestizos who seek equal rights in the workplace may face challenges. Certainly some may attain privilege. But the majority of Mestizos will sadly experience inequality in the work place, lower pay for similar work across fields of study, and experience under representation (O'Brien, 1993; Turner, 2007).

These inequities necessitate that we look at how Mestizos might still thrive. Taylor (1994) candidly shares that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others," by which people of mixed identity then "suffer real damage, real distortion, if a group of people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (p. 25). This inequity clearly appears in the media, where certain demeaning and contemptible images of race and culture are portrayed (Dyer, 2005, pp. 10-12). Likewise, history books continue to record unbalanced or stereotypical accounts of Native American inhabitants (Wise, 2005, p. 122).

Similar inequities exist in government. Even though the 2000 U.S. Census questionnaire allowed for a multi-categorization of race (up to six different combinations), there were no tribal categorizations offered. These had to be handwritten on forms, as if to say tribal affiliations were illegitimate for automation. Also, one simply marked "yes" or "no" for "Spanish/Hispanic /Latino" and then marked their race as "White, Black, Indian," or other. No categories existed for nationalities, possibly leading some to mark erroneously (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001).

In fact, approximately 35.5 million people in the U.S. "self-identified" as "Hispanic" when responding to the "question on race" in the 2000 Census (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 1, 10). And "nearly half (48 percent) of Hispanics reported only White, while approximately 42 percent reported only Some [*sic*] other race, when responding to the question on race" (p. 10). This means at least 48 percent of Hispanic participants identified as White, while virtually an equal amount (42 percent) identified as "some other race". Consequently, almost half of U.S. Hispanics may not even consider themselves Hispanic or even mixed. These inequities further perpetuate the stereotypes of minority groups.

Thus, the term Mestizo represents a socio-political and cultural-ecological descriptor of position and power, not just one of race or ancestry. Caution must be therefore exercised when racial terms are accepted without direct ties to ancestry or nationality. Historically, the acceptance of the term Mestizo and all its variations is rather hegemonic; that is, it is to someone else's gain and to the Mestizos' loss.

The Reflexivity of Mestizos

Limited research exists on mixed identity. Auto/Ethnographical works on mixed Native American, African, and Mestizo(a) experience (Anzaldúa, 2007; O'Connor, 1983; Simmons-Bonnin, 1899) show the complex dichotomy between what a person wants to be and what a person is forced to be. These particular experiences of past *Mestizas* vividly illustrated the plight of those who found themselves torn between one race or culture and another. In as much, they never completely fit into the White or Native American/African/Latina cultures. They were always caught in the middle, between binary oppositions. Even so, there is still a large gap within the research field for the Mestizo identity.

To better understand Mestizos, articulating their pain and privilege as reflexive, or recurring, is helpful. The interrelated yet dichotomous discourse of pain and privilege gives voice to Mestizos' largely misunderstood histories within society. But because many Mestizos continuously find themselves marginalized (e.g., racial, socially, and/or culturally), it makes sense to elaborate on their pain distinctively from their privilege. This critical yet vital stance helps to elucidate Mestizos' identity journeys, one characterized by both pain and privilege.

The Reflexivity of Pain

As a collective group, Mestizos may sometimes assimilate fairly well against the oppressions they face. The benefits that counteract those oppressions offer hope during a rather difficult transition in a monolingual society. However, the oppressions they do face cannot be overlooked. These are their pains.

Mestizos experience the discourse of pain in various ways. Referring to the layered relationship between pain and privilege, Johnson (2005) states:

> Living in a particular society can make people feel miserable, but we can't call that misery "oppression" unless it arises from being on the losing end in a system of privilege. That can't happen in relation to society as a whole, because a society isn't something that can be the recipient of privilege. Only people can do this by belonging to privileged categories in relation to other categories that aren't (pp. 106-107).

This description explains how Mestizos experience pain as they identify with at least two groups while also being part of a privileged system. But those privileges only extended as far as other groups allow. They are also part of a losing system by being mixed, unable to fully identity (e.g., experience no tension) within a singular racial, social, or cultural group. According to Johnson, this is possible because "like privilege, oppression results from the social relationship between privilege and oppressed categories, which makes it possible for individuals to vary in their personal experience of being oppressed" (p. 106).

Mestizos also experience pain based on the treatment of their skin color. Sadly, this oppressive act still exists, and it strongly impacts Mestizos' beliefs and identity constructions. One way this causes them to suffer is through racial profiling. Foley (2005) explains that the "wages of whiteness" exist from a convoluted system of privileges that many people of mixed identity seem to enjoy (pp. 62-63). Yet all too often, we see certain groups with darker skin tones treated differently, indeed worse, than others with lighter skin tones. Those with lighter skin tones are more easily accepted into higher status and privileged groups, whereas others are shunned and berated. Mestizos then become relegated to inferior positions simply because of richer skin-color. This treatment can be traced to ill-conceived perceptions rooted in hegemony, existing for any Mestizo group.

Another pain in the Mestizo identity construct concerns how dominant U.S. cultures "still know little about how the family ideology shapes the consciousness and expectations of those growing up in the margins of the mainstream" (Pyke, 2004, p. 438). This is seen with how Mestizos cannot always find authentic foods reflective of their native cultures, how they live with environmental racism (Bullard, 2006, p. 189; Lipsitz, 2005, p. 73), and how they must reconcile against a climate and economic structure very different from their own. Instead Mestizos must consciously swallow the dominant cultural norms at the sacrifice of their own family beliefs. These situations are painful, can lead to a "numbness" and "dislocation between two cultures" (Baker, 2000, p. 69).

The Reflexivity of Privilege

Contemporaneously Mestizos experience privilege. There is a general increased acceptance simply from being mixed (Burns, 1994, p. 224). Even though "much still remains to be done," it seems the overall treatment of mixed people and groups has "changed considerably" and has improved (p. 224). Consider President Barack Hussein Obama who claims to be mixed and historically marginalized based on having a White mother from Kansas and Kenyan father from Africa. Like other Mestizos, President Obama is able to thwart the advances of the "raceless economic" movement, or those without any ancestral roots, by simply identifying with exploited or marginalized groups, even though he may not have personally suffered their pains. This is a privileged act seen as a "resistance" against "Western racism" (Harding, 1993, p. 13).

Likewise, different social situations compel Mestizos to attach themselves to different self-identities which allow some to travel between and negotiate within different groups and self-identifications. These different selves lead to constructed and deconstructed images, dichotomized between what Mestizos want to be (the ideal self) and how others may see them (the limited self). Their educational backgrounds and occupational status significantly influence identity formation in this regard (Hurd, 2010; Ogbu, 2004).

This ability to travel between identities can be clearly seen with those who are bilingual or multilingual; they are able to travel between two or more languages simultaneously through what is called "language juxtaposition" (Wildman & Davis, 2005, p. 97). This position allows Mestizos to think and proceed in more than one language yet speak in only one when needed, or vice versa. The advantages of growing up bilingual or biliterate include: communication, cultural, cognitive, character, curriculum, and cash aspects (Baker, 2000, p. 2). Ultimately, bilingualism will "affect the rest of [Mestizos'] lives" (p. 1). This privilege may also translate into societal advancement.

Another way Mestizos are privileged is through cultural inversion (Ogbu, 1992). A similar concept known as cultural opposition (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998) is more recently discussed in the literature. Yet Ogbu (2004) himself indicated that this idea neglects what he originally called "oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference" (p. 3). Just before his unfortunate death in 2003, Ogbu further developed the ideas of collective identity as a response to others who were misusing and/or misrepresenting it as oppositional culture.

Oppositional collective identity, as represented in cultural inversion (or cultural-ecological theory), demonstrates how Mestizos create alternative subcultures and identities against dominant cultural belief systems (Ogbu, 1992, 2004). "The persistence of a group's collective identity depends on the continuity of the external (historical and structural) forces that contributed to its formation" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 3). Ogbu also explained that the collective identities of oppressed minorities (voluntary and/or involuntary) are "created and maintained by two sets of

factors: status problems and minority response to status problems" (p. 4). Their response to the status problem (or cultural frame of reference) is then seen in their privilege of having and travelling to other self-appropriated belief systems and oppositional identities (Ogbu, 1992, p. 8). These different subcultures/identities act as privileges to which Mestizos can collectively identify.

Thus, privileged Mestizos can at times escape the injustices surrounding them. As Wildman and Davis (2005) claim, "members of privileged groups can opt out of struggles against oppression if they choose" (p. 99). This choice is available to Mestizos because they are of mixed ancestry and identity. They can either veil themselves in the dominant identity, temporarily free from the oppressions of those that cannot, or they may choose to endure pain.

Conclusions and Future Implications

For men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learnt to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives' tales they overheard, they food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poets they read, and the God they believed in. It is all these things that have made them what they are and these are things that you can't come to know by hearsay, you can only know them if you have lived them. You can only know them if you *are* them (Maugham, 1954, p. 2).

Several conclusions can be made regarding the identity histories of Mestizos. There is indeed a fresh perspective by which Mestizos' identities may be understood. Mestizos share in a dichotomized discourse of pain and privilege. The ongoing and interrelated homily of pain and privilege serves to construct and deconstruct the images of race, culture, and social class for Mestizos. These images then become ingrained within their lives, serving as a framework for their beliefs and identity constructions/deconstructions and their assimilative practices.

This critical framework helps to elucidate the Mestizo experience because the reflexive nature of pain and privilege, although dichotomous, is also a means to interpret why Mestizos struggle to assimilate and identify with the mainstream culture. This discourse is not currently represented or explained in the available literature. Even more, pain and privilege factors must be considered as indelibly wed in order to better understand Mestizos' collective identity given that they experience both pain and privilege.

The following list compliments the framework on the dichotomous pain/privilege discourse as seen in the identities of Mestizos:

1. Mestizos construct/deconstruct their identities resulting from social systems.

2. Their identities are socio-political and cultural-ecological images and descriptors of position and power.

3.   Mestizos find they cannot fully identify (e.g., feel no tensions) within a singular race, culture, or social class due to societal fragmentations (change).

4.   Mestizos bear the insinuations of the past, for how their particular identity descriptors have come to exist.

5.   Mestizos experience pain and privilege by travelling between and negotiating within racial, cultural, or social groups and oppositional collective identities.

This framework implies that researchers must employ a holistic lens for gaining insights into Mestizos' affective histories. They must examine Mestizos' different identities from within the reflexive discourse of pain and privilege. Researchers must also consider power and status as they relate to Mestizos' oppositional collective identities. That is, researchers must investigate Mestizos' socio-political and cultural-ecological identities, not just their genetics or race. Some researchers may even find the study of their own affective identities provide counter-point interests and interrelated connection into the understanding of the Mestizo identity construct.

The reflexivity of pain and privilege supports Ogbu's (1991) oppressed minority theory as well as Ogbu's (1992, 2004) and Ogbu and Simons' (1998) theory of cultural inversion. Yet unlike these past theories, the reflexive discourse of pain and privilege actually elucidates how Mestizos suffer from yet simultaneously benefit as a result of the economic system. How Mestizos advance within this inequitable system is not a matter of *either, or* so much as it is a matter of *when* and *by what means*. The discourse also provides evidence for the influencing beliefs systems that amass and further develop to influence their identity construct which remains fluid and flexible, not necessarily culminating to an end belief or identity.

That Mestizos' identities remain continually *open* is confirmed by Du Bois (1982) who discussed Double Consciousness, and by Geertz (1979) who discussed Dual Identity (as reported in Gregg, 1991). These concepts, like the discourse on pain and privilege, illustrate how Mestizos live and negotiate between worlds from within a dichotomous framework. Furthermore, Anzaldúa**'s** (2007) work on Mestiza Consciousness also reinforces the reflexive discourse with how Mestizos are caught between "spaces" or "borders," in what she believed were the crossfires of partial racial, cultural, and social transfusions. Thus, the *openness* or fluid and flexible nature of the Mestizo identity construct helps them adjust and continue to navigate in these oppositional collective identities of pain and privilege.

In this way, Mestizos are pioneers or frontiersmen in the effort to clear a path for those that will follow. Some have fought for the betterment of Mestizos and will continue to offer more perspectives to society by further mingling, merging, intermarrying, and infiltrating the dominant cultures. Others simply have things to say to those who are willing to listen. There is the hope that Mestizos will soon transcend completely, not as token individuals or half-breeds, but as human beings and partners in the course of humanity.

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