Mi Gente Latina: A Case Study

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Chapter 1- Introduction

Last semester I began a project, in my methodology class, that took a closer look at how Latina women form their ethnic identities. Not surprisingly, I did not completely answer the question. I actually found myself raising more questions about these women and the club they are a part of, Mi Gente Latina (MGL). What is MGL? Who is a part of MGL? What is their mission as a club on the F&M campus? Taking a cursory glance at MGL one would rightly assume that it is a club that is all about Latin American culture because it seems that the symbols that the founding members have chosen to represent MGL are stereotypical of the Latin American community. The symbols that have come to represent Mi Gente Latina are a piñata, sombrero, Mexican food and a poncho, all of which would be recognizable to the greater F&M community. However, upon joining the club I learned very quickly that by no means does MGL exist purely to promote an understanding of Latin American culture on the F&M campus. MGL serves a greater purpose to those students who choose to join the club.

Club membership consists of students from different Latin American origins, different races and people who speak different dialects of Spanish. What brings these students together under a title that places them into one group in which all people are, supposedly, closely related in some way? Publically, MGL is a club that desires to share its culture with the greater F&M community. They host campus as well as community wide events, so that everyone can partake, in some way, in enjoying Latin American culture. On the inside, MGL is more like a melting pot of different Latin cultures and races. Five to six different national backgrounds are represented amongst the members who consistently come to meetings and events: Puerto Rico, Guatemala, El Salvador,
Mexico, Colombia and Honduras. For an outsider, like myself, the only way that I could
tell the different nationalities apart was with the help of fellow members or asking that
person directly what his/her Latin American heritage is. From what I have observed, it
appears to me that MGL has created some sort of egalitarian, cultural environment that is
a safe haven for people who are similar yet different, whether their differences are racial,
national or ethnic. In my opinion, MGL is a paradox. Here is a group of students who
trace their origins to a Spanish-speaking country, who attend a predominantly Anglo-
Saxon liberal arts college, but do not accept nor do they resist the labels Latino/a or
Hispanic. They have certainly formed a clearly bounded group within the greater
Franklin and Marshall community.

This intercultural/ethnic/racial mixing was only one of the many important
observations that lead me to do my current project. In terms of gender, the club consists
of primarily female members. There are only three males that attend meetings on a
regular basis. However, it is important to note that when there is a major event, such as a
salsa band, more males will typically attend. Even so, why is there an overwhelming
female majority in MGL? Geographically speaking, nearly all of the members come from
a place near to but outside of a major city, in this case either Los Angeles or one of New
York City’s five boroughs. There is no one from the middle part of America or the
southern portion, for that matter. Is there any significance to this geographic similarity? If
so, is it because of economics and social class? Lastly, it is hard not to notice how
members treat and react to one another. The women treat each other like sisters and even
refer to each other as sisters. The men treat the women and the other men like brothers
and sisters as well. They greet all the women with a hug and a kiss and other men with a
firm handshake. In other words, they have created a family, in which students take on the role of siblings and parents. When members talk to me about MGL, I cannot count the times they, themselves, have referred to it as their home away from home or other family. It is this familial observation that has become my most important one, which will become my basis for my ethnography of Mi Gente Latina. What, if anything, does family have to do with ethnicity, class or gender?

The observation I made about the familial environment that MGL provides and creates leads me to believe they are creating a culture around their shared views of family. As Geertz states in his definition of culture, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs” (1973:5). For MGL, these “webs” are their shared meanings of family. For MGL members, a common idea of a family is what attracts them to one another. Once together, they begin to grow and strengthen the bonds that have brought them together as well as create borders to safeguard their family. What are these shared views of family? What do they mean by family? Who gets to be a part of this MGL family? Is there anyone excluded? These questions will hopefully be answered as my ethnography progresses. It could be that there are rules and regulations that are yet to be seen, when it comes to the MGL family.

As previously stated, MGL is a group of students acting out traditional roles that parents and or siblings would normally play. The eldest MGL women act like the mothers of the group. They greet everyone as they come in, they interrogate everyone about their day and weekend, they sit with you when you are sad and they laugh with you when you are happy. They also have taken it upon themselves to create and give nicknames to many of the members in MGL. In Latin American and Spanish culture, to
give a nickname to someone is a sign of familiarity with that person. It even denotes a very close relationship with that person as well. Take the name Juan. To give it a more familial sentiment one would merely add the ending –ito to create Juanito. The women will typically choose this ending to create the nicknames for members. However there are names in which –ito cannot be used, like mine for example. When the women saw fit to choose a nickname for me, they simply shortened my name from Alison to Alí. As simple as a nickname sounds, getting one is a significant milestone for becoming a member of the family.

Much like a traditional family there are shared morals and values amongst the members. In the case of MGL, there seems to be shared values of sexuality amongst female and male members. Through my observations of MGL women in the production of The Vagina Monologues, as well as my readings of the hyper sexualization of people of Latin decent that they come together as a group that stands against such images. They show their united front simply through their reactions to the sexually explicit subject matter of The Vagina Monologues as well as the way they present themselves in public settings. Further analysis of MGL will tell exactly how this family truly operates.

While the aspect of family sits at the center of importance for the group, surrounding it are the various interplays of gender and class. As I have already alluded to previously, there seems to be an aspect of gender and class that plays a role in Mi Gente Latina. What I hope to accomplish through this ethnography is to better understand, who MGL is by analyzing the various borders MGL creates whether they are within or outside the group.
Methodology

The manner in which I gathered data to answer the questions posed in the introduction was simple. I paid $7 and became an official member of Mi Gente Latina. This money allowed me to have either free or cheaper access to most events. I went to all club meetings and functions so that I could observe the club and its’ members in all different kinds of environments (parties-academic events). During these events or meetings, I was always observing the members. I carefully watched how they interacted with one another, how they interacted with other people outside the group and of course how they interacted with me. It is because of these interactions that I was able to gain so much valuable information about how the club functions as well as information about its’ members. Not only do these observations provide me with useful information, but also they raise important questions. To help me answer the questions raised by my observations I looked to the members to help me understand what I saw or heard. Interviews have also played an important role in helping me put together this project, which is another aspect of my methodology. Before I interviewed anyone, I made sure to ask their permission first, had him/her sign a waiver, and explain my project to them. After they agreed to participate I began the interview. With that said, I plan to use these tools to help put together a complete of project as I can.

The Students

All of the students in the following list are the ones I interviewed and whom I will frequently reference throughout this ethnography. Also, for the sake of confidentiality all their names have been changed.
Rosa: is a vivacious junior from the Bronx, New York. She is currently a member of MGL’s executive board two years running. She is of Mexican decent and will let everyone know how proud she is of her Mexican heritage. There is no doubt that she holds a strong connection to her Mexican heritage, which can be seen within the first five minutes of getting to know her. If she is not wearing a Mexican soccer jersey then she will often code switch between English and Spanish when she is excited. Before meetings, if Rosa is not doing homework she is listening to the latest Mexican or Latin American musician. Rosa is also fluent in Spanish and on occasion will speak to fellow members briefly in Spanish for whatever reason that may be. Whether it be music, the Spanish language or the food Rosa has clearly embraced her Mexican heritage. From what I learned from her, she credits her parents with this strong connection to Mexico and Mexican culture. Her parents take her and her sister to Mexico nearly every summer. When they are not in Mexico her mother and father speak to her in Spanish only. In addition to Spanish being the language of the house they predominantly only eat Mexican food as well. They have altered American holiday traditions like Thanksgiving and have given them a Mexican twist. Instead of a turkey they have stuffed tamales and tacos. Her parents have incorporated so much Mexican tradition into her life that Mexico is as close to her heart as it is to her parents.

Manuel: This is the only first year student, who consistently attends meetings, I have interviewed within MGL. Already this young man has become completely integrated into the club, which has culminated in his newly elected Executive Board position as well as salsa lesson teacher. However, he is still looked upon by many of the female members as the baby of the group, because he is a freshman, even though he holds
an executive board position. Manuel is of Colombian decent, who moved to New York City with his mother, from Colombia, at the age of 7. Manuel has lived practically all his life with only his mother and her extended family. He rarely mentions what happened to his father, but he did say that he is out of their lives. He credits all of his educational success and closeness to his Latino/Colombian heritage to his mother. He has also mentioned how strong of a woman she is and that he would be no where without her and her desire to get him the best education possible.

Maria: Is a senior MGL member as well as former president of the club. She is from the suburbs of Los Angeles and is of Guatemalan decent. She is not nearly as outspoken about her Guatemalan heritage as Rosa. One could say she is very Americanized and has only very recently begun to embrace her Guatemalan heritage. Maria also comes from a home in which her parents are divorced. Her mother, she told me, has fully embraced American culture most likely because of her job working as a cleaning lady in an American household. On the other hand, her father is still very proud of his Guatemalan ancestry. She described his home as “typical Latino” with a car that holds Guatemalan flags all over it as well as a house littered with Guatemalan trinkets. Maria lives her life in three different cultures or worlds all at once, one for her father, one for her mother and the other for herself. One could look at her involvement in MGL as her stabilizing force. MGL has provided Maria with a space in which she can be American and Latina all at one time and no one will judge her for it. I got the feeling from her interview that she constantly changes who she is to appease either her mother or her father. No one expects her to be anyone except herself and she can finally learn about her heritage at her own pace, within the boundaries of MGL.
Diego: Is a junior MGL member and is also an executive board member. Unlike the other students mentioned, so far, Diego lived in Mexico for fifteen years before coming to the U.S. He knows what it is like to live in his country of decent, unlike some of the other members. Like Manuel, Diego’s mother has played a crucial role in his life. It is because of her that he has come to the U.S. His mother wanted him and his brother to receive the best education possible, which could not happen in Mexico. However, his mother is not only strict in her desire for him to get a good, sound education, but to never forget his Mexican heritage. He told me that as soon as she thought he was becoming too American that she would send him back to Mexico to remind him where he came from and who he is. For Diego’s mother, too American, is speaking English over Spanish, becoming too independent, not wanting or accepting the help of others and caring too much about money. Diego told me, that so far she has not had to remind him of this threat and that he is doing everything he can to make sure Mexico, in some way, stays in his life.

Alejandra: Is a junior MGL member from Puerto Rico. She is one of a very small group of members that lives outside of the U.S. She rarely comes to meetings, but she has told me she cannot come often because of her commitment to the college’s orchestra. She told me that she enjoys coming to MGL meetings and events, because she likes to have the ability to talk Puerto Rican Spanish and eat traditional foods from her country as well. In a way for Alejandra, MGL is her home away from home, because within the confines of the club she can freely speak Puerto Rican Spanish with other Puerto Rican members as well as eat food she would typically get at home as well as listen to music in Spanish.
All these students represent the varying backgrounds of the Mi Gente Latina members. They all have unique stories to tell and unique perspectives on ethnicity, class and gender.
Chapter 2- Ethnicity

Description and History of MGL

The history/founding of MGL is actually quite interesting. Mi Gente Latina was founded after separating from the Black Student Union (BSU). Fifteen years ago with the help of the BSU the slowly growing Latin population was able to gain funding as well as recognition for their club. Once recognized, the founding members had the dubious job of creating a name for their newly founded organization. The founding members initial name for the club was the Hispanic Student Coalition. However, some of the members did not like or even agree with the term Hispanic. According to the current club coordinator, Xay Chongtua, she believes they changed Hispanic because they felt it to be too exclusive. They wanted a title that would send the message that everyone from any Latin American and or Caribbean background is welcome to join. Eventually, they all agreed that Latino was a better-suited term for the club, but a title was still lacking. The founders wanted the club to be a home away from home for people of Latin American and or Caribbean origins. Knowing that eventual members would have origins from all over the world they finally settled on the name Mi Gente Latina, My Latin People, thus creating, in their opinion, a more neutral and welcoming title and club.

Initially, the official language of the club was Spanish. However very few people came to club meetings. Eventually, they made English the official language of the club because they realized that with the varying dialects of Spanish not everyone could easily talk to each other in Spanish. Once English was made the official language of the club, more students started to come to meetings and events. MGL today has a very large
membership with an average of 10-15 members coming to each weekly meeting. The current executive board has chosen three words, family, culture and friends, to represent what MGL means to them today. From its’ beginning fifteen years ago, MGL has certainly grown in size and importance to the Latin American community, on the F&M campus.

Mi Gente Latina holds meetings every Monday night at 8:00pm in the International Center. The meetings typically last approximately one hour and cover a variety of topics. Typically, a meeting will start with a welcome by an Executive Board member, which is then followed by various announcements. Presently, there was an empanadas and movie party on the calendar for March as well as a bowling night and a night of salsa dancing in the college center sponsored by the club. MGL does not merely hold social events that are meant to promote member bonding or teach members about a certain aspect of Latino culture. They also co-sponsor many academic events particularly ones relating to Latin American affairs. They are currently planning a reception for a guest speaker that works in Washington D.C that specializes in Cuban policy for the president. As one can see there are a variety of activities that the club is organizing for the rest of the semester. After announcements are made, there is usually some sort of fun activity planned. Activities have ranged from Pictionary to Catch Phrase, but all of the activities are in English. There is no Spanish vocabulary used in any activity that has been played so far. In fact, there is very little Spanish spoken during the general meeting. Typically, before the meeting ends a presentation is given by one of the members. The presentations usually relate to some aspect of Latin American culture or history or just a plain presentation on a Latin American country. For the most part members seem to
enjoy the presentations. They laugh at funny pictures or yell out comments, which are typically provoked by a familiar picture, food or saying. I believe the executive board would discontinue these presentations if they at all felt that the members were not enjoying them. It is MGL’s way to insert new knowledge about the Latin American community into the lives of its members weekly without having to hold a major event.

**Theories on Ethnicity**

I mentioned ethnicity on numerous occasions in my introductory chapter, and asked how does one define the term? From this description of the history and activities of MGL, it appears that ethnicity has something to do with the creation and the activities of this club in a predominantly white liberal arts college. How does one define their own ethnic identity as well as the identity of other people? Fredrik Barth’s approach to defining an ethnic group provides an important definition/interpretation to consider. Fredrik Barth states that an ethnic group is, “a population which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction, has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order” (Barth 1969:11). In summary, Barth believes that the primary basis for the formation and creation of ethnic groups and ethnic boundaries is culture. Looking closely at the last part of his definition, that it is a group that is distinguishable from others, is important for this ethnography; because MGL members appear to mark a clear boundary between themselves and others.
Ronald Cohen, on the other hand, agrees with Barth that ethnic groups and even the term ethnicity imply some sort of boundary maintenance. However, Cohen contends that the meaning of ethnicity varies with history and the context. He notes anthropology has always stressed context as a basic methodological tenet” (1978: 383). He notes further that as soon as ethnic groups see themselves as part of a greater whole, they then become a part of a multiethnic society (Cohen 1978:383). Anthropologists then must take into consideration a multiethnic context/perspective. In terms of the actual meaning of ethnicity, Cohen makes the argument that, “ethnicity is not a ‘most general’ or widest scaled identity but rather it can be narrowed or broadened in boundary terms in relation to the specific needs of political mobilization” (1978: 386). Cohen believes boundaries created by ethnic groups are flexible. These boundaries are under a constant state of adjustment. Ultimately, he defines ethnicity as, “a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. The process of assigning persons to groups is both subjective and objective, carried out by self and others” (Cohen 1978: 387). Cohen adds the importance of perspective when working with ethnic groups as well as the idea that ethnic boundaries are more elastic than once believed.

In sum, Barth lays a solid foundation for the interpretation of ethnicity. Cohen takes Barth’s theory a step further by adding perspective as well as an emphasis on boundary elasticity. Jean and John Comaroff further contribute to the definition or interpretation of ethnicity by not only re-emphasizing the importance of context, but also adding the idea that ethnicity is becoming commodified in popular culture. George Lopez has made millions of dollars from his sitcom. It is a half hour show, where George Lopez makes fun of the Latin American community. He has taken advantage of every stereotype
that exists about the Latin American community and has used them to make money, thus explaining how an ethnicity can be commodified. To further emphasize, again the importance of context the Comaroffs believe, ethnicity, “has always been both one thing and many the same yet infinitely diverse” (2009:1). What the Comaroffs mean is that one’s ethnic identity will change as context changes. In other words, ones ethnic identity is dependent on the context of the situation one might be in. How does the Comaroff’s interpretation of ethnicity play out in MGL? A member of MGL might consider him or herself Honduran within the context of MGL, but that might not be the case outside of the club. Outside of MGL, that same person might consider him or herself Latino/a. In another, situation he or she might even consider him or herself white or black. This particular person could be Honduran, Latino/a and black all at once or they could merely pick and choose as the situation calls for it.

Following the ideas presented by Barth, Cohen and the Comaroffs. I will examine what the members have in common and how they represent and express their connections to each other in symbolic ways to mark themselves from others within the context of a predominantly Anglo, liberal arts college. During this analysis, I shall pay particular attention to the meaning they give to ethnic labels such as Latino or Hispanic and their use of family, which not only have they mentioned but have expressed through their actions, which I was able to observe as a participant observer.

Do the members of MGL join and become active members of the group because they have a common ethnicity? I agree with Cohen and the Comaroffs that ethnicity is contextually based. No one is going to give the same answer in every situation. What I have observed of MGL members in and outside the club, is that they do change
depending on where they are and who they are with. Following Barth, I believe ethnic boundaries do exist and within them there is a shared sense of culture amongst members. However, like Cohen, I am inclined to believe these boundaries are elastic, because context is always changing. Therefore, I ultimately define ethnicity to be based on a common culture that is maintained by elastic boundaries, that allow that person the ability to adjust to the contexts they come into contact with.

**Latin American Ethnicity**

The founders of MGL wrestled with the name they wanted to call their newly founded club. In the end, they choose Mi Gente Latina instead of an option that included the term Hispanic. The literature on Latino ethnicity cautions us against regarding the terms Latino or Hispanic as coming from within a person who traces ancestry to a Spanish-speaking country in the Americas. José Idler, who wrote, “Officially Hispanic,” points out that current usage of either term has changed to fit American racial/ethnic standards. Jorge Gracia’s detailed history of both terms also suggests that usage and meaning of these terms have taken on a more American perspective. How people of Latin American origin might use or define the terms could be very different from how the greater U.S population uses these terms.

Given the caution about the terms Latino and Hispanic, then what is it that explains MGL membership and participation? One hypothesis is that the literature is wrong and that terms Latino and/or Hispanic are deeply internalized and explains why the members join and participate in MGL. Another hypothesis is that the terms have little or nothing to do with MGL and that the members have joined together and have marked
their boundaries because of a sense of a deep-seated cultural connection. A third hypothesis is something in between. A concept that should not go unmentioned, that affects each of the hypotheses presented is the racialization of MGL members, because historically MGL grew out of the BSU. One important aspect of context is the government’s classification of people by ethnicity and race. To better understand ethnic categories for someone of Latin American descent it is best to see its various interpretations.

Census

In today’s society the government has now taken it upon themselves to lay out ethnic categorizations and let the population choose from the list what best describes them. The government has attempted to classify the people of Latin America since the Treaty of Guadalupe and Hidalgo in 1848, where the term Hispano was used to distinguish Spanish-speakers from slaves. The 2010 Census is last in a long list of government applications and ethnic terminologies.

NOTE: Please answer BOTH question 8 about Hispanic origin and question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

8. Is this person 1 of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban
Yes, another Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (Argentina etc.)

This is the exact question from the U.S Census. This question is asking respondents to define themselves using the government’s terminology, or else supply their own term (see last question on census). Leaving aside nationality for a moment, they use terms such as Latino, Hispanic, Spanish origin and Chicano as possible ethnic group options. What do the members of MGL think about any of these terms? Here is an example of a conversation, from Facebook, between an MGL member and some of her friends on this very topic:

Maria: Filling out the census but WHAT IS MY RACE?? Options are white, black, American Indian, or Alaska native; Asian Indian, Chinese, Philipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro or Samoan, other Asian or other Pacific Islander. Already said I’m Guatemalan but they also want me to answer this. What should I write in for “some other race” since “Hispanic Origins are not races??”

Friend 1- ur actually white! If you believe it or not! Ur born in the U.S that makes u white! LOL.

Friend 2: My brother had the same problem…his fam is Portuguese.

Friend 3- Well technically before the Chicano./a revolution we were considered white…oh the stuff I learn in college.

Friend 4- I was confused too so I just put Spanish since Spain invaded every Hispanic country. I’m guessing it’s a mix of Spain and the Indians.
Maria- I’m not white for sure. And friend 3 who is we? I guess the question here is
WHAT IS RACE? LOL

Friend 3- we as in Hispanics!!! Put that you are American.

Friend 5- On our death certificates at work here, when someone passes away in order to
provide statistics on race, of the person was born in Guatemala we just leave it like that,
and then if you’re half and half, meaning born in the US but your parents are from Guate.
Then put white, cuz that’s what would be considered your color ( I know, even thought
you’re not what lol) and then Guatemalan.

Friend 6- Just put black and be done with it.

From what I understand of the conversation, I do not think a conclusion was reached. It is
also my impression that Maria believes that Hispanic should be considered her race and
Guatemalan her ethnicity. What is someone’s race? What is someone’s ethnicity? Can the
term be used synonymously?

**Race or Ethnicity?**

The border that attempts to separate race and ethnicity is constantly being crossed
by society and members of MGL. What constitutes race and what constitutes ethnicity.? By U.S standards it appears that race is marked by ones phenotype (i.e. skin color).
Meanwhile, ethnicity, by U.S standards seems to attempt to define ones national origins.
Even though these terms seem different they are still used synonymously. On the other
hand, race could be used to define a race while race could be used to be defined an ethnic
group, which is what causes so much confusion.
Bonnie Urciuoli, details in her work how race/ethnicity effect how Latino/Hispanic are defined as.

“The racialized construction of Hispanic that Oboler examines is about the imposition, by agencies of the dominant U.S. society, of a generic notion of Hispanic onto Latin Americans, in essence saying, ‘here are all the ways in which you are different.’ The construction of Latino as it actively engages people self-identifying as Latino is in large part a response to that racialization, an unmarking cultural project that stresses national origin distinctions, defining practices, and cultural contributions” (Urciuoli 157: 2003). Could this be why MGL prefers Latino over Hispanic, because Hispanic not only implies colonial ties and a loss of indigenous ancestry, but because it is a racialized term?

According to Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas they claim that the U.S census bureau has declared Hispanic to be the non-racial term. They say, “Relying upon biological or phenotypical notions of discrete racial categories, the U.S. Census has explicitly reserved the "Hispanic" category as an officially non-"racial" one. By treating "Hispanic" as an "ethnic" designation, Latinos are thereby encouraged to identify "racially" as white, Black, or Native American in short, as anything but Latino” (2003:3). It is hard to entirely disagree with them. This year’s census did state Hispanic origins are not considered races. Does Hispanic have racial implications or ethnic? Does Latino have racial implications or ethnic? As one can see these scholars have different opinion about what should be classified as ethnic and what should be classified as racial. Could any of the terms at hand ever be used synonymously?
Hispanic- A History

It is from my understanding that term Hispanic has been adopted by the U.S government and Census Bureau as the most politically correct term, when making references to the Latin American/Caribbean community. Even if the U.S Census Bureau has agreed Hispanic to be the most politically correct term, it still does not explain why it has been chosen over the term Latino. I believe looking into a brief history of the term Hispanic will provide the necessary understanding for the government’s choice in terminology.

The term Hispanic is an English transliteration of the term hispánic/a, and the term hispánico can be traced to the Latin term Hispania, the name the Romans chose to use when referring to the Iberian Peninsula” (Gracia 2000: 2). Eventually the term Hispanic began to be used not only in connection with the inhabitants of Spain, but for inhabitants of Latin America that live in the U.S as well (Gracia 2000: 3). As one knows, Spain eventually ascended to be one of the top colonial powers in the world with territories in North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Spain brought a lot of cultural characteristics that would forever shape and define Latin America, one of which being Hispanic. According to Jorge Gracia, “Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain there was a concerted effort to establish hispánico/a as the term of choice to describe Spanish and Latin American cultural phenomena in an effort to bring Latin America back into the Spanish fold” (Gracia 2000: 4). The use of the term Hispanic was meant to reunite all the former Spanish colonies under one name. Therefore, explaining why Hispanic has come to represent those of Latin American descent within the U.S. as well as that its’ true origins lie in Spain and not in the U.S.
**Hispanic Today**

The meaning of Hispanic has not changed much since its’ colonial arrival in the U.S hundreds of years ago. José Idler, details how the U.S government today is defining Hispanic. He wrote, “the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued policy directive 15 entitled ‘Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative reporting…’ ‘Hispanic’ was defined as a ‘person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (Idler 2007:17). What Idler’s quote from the OMB tells us is that the term Hispanic, today, makes more references to national origin rather than anything relating to culture. Idler’s chapter on the ethnicity and the census concludes with a summary of the revisions the government later made to the categories, which I shall show is in use today. Instead of allowing the Latin American community to pick just Hispanic they now have the option to choose between Hispanic and Latino.

I have seen how the government/OMB and history have defined the term Hispanic. I thought it would also be interesting to look up the term Hispanic in the dictionary, to see what hundreds of people have declared the standard definition and usage to be. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Hispanic means, “of or relating to Spanish speaking countries, especially those relating to Latin America. Of or relating to Spanish speaking person or their culture especially in the U.S. A Spanish speaking person living in the U.S especially of Latin American decent (Soanes 2005). Usage: In the U.S Hispanic is the standard accepted definition when referring to Spanish-Speaking people living in the U.S. Other more specific terms such as Chicano or Latino are used where occasion demands” (Oxford English Dictionary). The dictionary makes it
clear that the current usage of the word Hispanic underplays and even dulls the colonial past of the term. Current usage of the term in the U.S context merely implies national origin, there is no sense of a colonial history left in its’ current usage.

The members of Mi Gente Latina add yet another interpretation and perspective to this term. They all defined it in relation to Hispaniola, an island in the Caribbean, as well as a term that neglected ones indigenous past. A majority of MGL members prefer to use Latino over Hispanic. The founding members originally had chosen to use the term Hispanic in their title, but later decided to change it to Latino. Maybe the members of MGL see the term Latino as politically correct and Hispanic as the more degrading term. Why is there such a difference between MGL’s interpretation and institutions, like the U.S Census Bureau, over the word Hispanic? MGL members make a valid argument. They feel that their indigenous ancestry is an important part of their identity and needs to be included when defining themselves.

**Latino- A History**

The term Hispanic has its origins in Spain, but where does the term Latino originate? The term Latino was actually created by the French, so that they could easily contrast non-Anglo-America from Anglo-America (Gracia 2000: 4). They believed Amérique Latine accomplished this objective. As it would turn out, the term Latin took hold in North America. French America was generally left out and Amérique Latine would come to only include Spanish and Portuguese America, which would ultimately become known as Latin America (Gracia 2000:4). It is my impression that Latino came
to be used to define people that were in the territory conquered by the colonial powers, while Hispanic was used to define an ancestry.

**Latino Today**

When looking at ethnic identity in the context of Mi Gente Latina, the vagueness of and impossibility to agree on one definition or even one term is still there. The Oxford dictionary today defines Latino as, “a Latin American inhabitant of the United States” (Soanes 2005). Again, this is yet another definition that makes reference to national origins rather than culture.

From my interviews, I have learned from MGL members that Latino, for them, does not imply national origins. I interviewed six different members all of which gave me a different interpretation of the word. The only thing any of the definitions had in common was the importance of the Spanish language and some kind of relation to culture. Below is a list that provides the definitions of Latino by the members.

**Diego** - Latino- is an American term.

**Maria** - Latina- A person from or close descent from Latin America or the Caribbean

**Rosa** - Latina- means that you are Spanish speaking. Your parents are from Latin America, not Spain. To speak Spanish is very important to being a Latino/a. To be a Latino/a means that you take an active role in cultural promotion, you are aware of culture (food, music etc) and you appreciate it.

**Manuel** - Latino is a negative term.

**Alejandra** - Latina is a broad term to include all people that speak Spanish that are not from Spain. Latino is also an indigenous mixture
Isabel- Latina includes indigenous peoples from Latin and Central America; Hispanic takes away from that part of their heritage.

I would now like to take a closer look at three different interviews to further explain their reasons behind their interpretations of the word.

Diego, who defines Latino as an American term, lived in Mexico 15 years before coming to the US, which makes for a very unique take on ethnic labeling. He told me that when someone in Mexico asked him what or who he is, he would simply tell him or her that he is Mexican, never Latino. However, when he came to the US he quickly realized that he no longer was Mexican, but rather Latino. He never thought to use the term Latino to describe himself and when I asked him who he is today he will tell you that he is Mexican not Latino. I asked him why he had this reaction to the term Latino and he told me that it is just the American’s way to throw every Spanish speaking person into one easy category/label. He would not say more on this particular subject except to re-emphasize that the term Latino is an American creation not something that is used as a label in Mexico.

Barth states that, “ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that maybe given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems” (Barth 1969:14). It could be that when Diego lived in Mexico there was no need to put everyone in a nice, neat category, because everyone is already categorized according to class. There are class boundaries in the U.S, but it seems that most U.S citizens group people according to race/ethnicity rather than class, as in Mexico. It is also to point out that Diego was most likely referring to the usage of the term Latino, because as its’
history proves its’ origins lie in France. Returning to the U.S, it could be that the government and citizens have chosen Latino merely as an organizational label. However as the 2010 census shows, no one fits perfectly into one category.

Maria the young Latina woman from California, who defined a Latina as a person from or close descent from Latin America or the Caribbean, provided me with yet another perspective on Latino ethnicity. Her interview was particularly interesting, because her discussion of Latino turned into a discussion of nationality. Being unaware of her ancestry I casually asked her what her heritage was. She quickly told me that her parents are from Guatemala, which therefore makes her of Guatemalan ancestry. To be perfectly honest I thought she was Mexican, which I confessed to her after she told me she is Guatemalan. She told me that it is a common mistake that everyone thinks she is Mexican because she has black hair and is from California. I asked her if it bothered her, this Mexican assumption. She told me of all the things that do bother her about her identity this one bothered her the most. She expressed that she will without a doubt correct the person who calls her Mexican to her face. She ended this part of the interview with the following statement, “I am Guatemalan not Mexican. What is so hard about that to remember?” She never really defined Latino for me, but it makes for an interesting point.

I learned from her that some members react negatively to being lumped in with others who trace their origins to different Latin/Central American countries. The term Latino does nothing to help Maria or anyone else for that matter alleviate the labeling confusion. Latino is a broad, indistinguishable, not-unique or special term. It throws everyone who
speaks Spanish and/or is from Latin America, the Caribbean and Spain into the same category. Maybe one’s national identity is more important than one’s ethnic identity within MGL, because it helps distinguishes one person from another.

Rosa, defined Latina as a Spanish-Speaking person, whose parents are from Latin America, but not from Spain. For Rosa, language was super important. She also believed that taking an active role in cultural promotion was important as well as an appreciation of one’s culture. Unlike Diego, Rosa has never lived in Mexico, but has visited the country multiple times. As stated earlier she is very passionate and outgoing. She made sure I knew how proud she was to be a Latina and a Mexican Latina at that. She did not exactly define the word Latino. She more or less gave me what she believed to be the responsibilities the term Latina implied. She believes that Latino implies a type of cultural promotion. It is one’s job if one considers him or herself Latino to promote their culture, to teach others about their heritage. It is also an appreciation for one’s heritage, she then told me. For Rosa, she feels she honors her culture by eating traditional food, listening to traditional music and or anything related to her Latino/Mexican heritage. When it comes to cultural promotion, Rosa actively participates in events like salsa night, nacho sales and tabling in the atrium during Latin American holidays, like Day of the Dead. Latino for Rosa is a sense of pride or one could even say an emotion. She appreciates and promotes her culture/heritage everyday whether that be by wearing a Mexican soccer jersey or participating in MGL community events, she in every way fulfills her own definition of Latino.
Nationality, pride and a North American creation are the three most poignant points I got from these interviews. I believe all three characteristics play an important role in forming a group identity within MGL.

**Literature about Latin American Ethnicity**

The literature on Latino ethnic identity provides some striking differences and similarities between my observations and the observations of other anthropologists. Jorge Gracia, Bonnie Urciuoli and a few other important anthropologists have all done research that easily parallels with mine. Their observations and conclusions help coincide with some of my findings and they even help provide some explanation for my data.

Some of the ethnographers like Jorge Gracia choose to write their ethnography in a more autobiographic format, while other ethnographers such as Bonnie Urciuoli have written theirs based on observation, literature and interviews. Although an autobiography can be equally informative as any other ethnography, one must consider there is a chance for bias to play a role when writing the ethnography. In general, it is also important to keep in mind the context of the ethnography.

I will begin with Jorge Gracia. He has written extensively, from his personal experience, on the topic of ethnicity within the Latin American community, the meanings of the terms Hispanic vs. Latino and on the Latin American community in general. In one of his books, *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity*, Gracia begins by defining the stigmas that are attached to the term Latino. According to Gracia,
“Latino/a connotes laziness, drug abuse, and dealing, poor linguistic skills, unreliability and so on. So the use of labels such as this tends to promote an adverse context for those to whom they are applied” (Gracia 2007:11).

Gracia elaborates further on the use of Latino by saying that, “The use of Latino ignores that those of us presently here are products of a long history of colonialism, making us forget that it is precisely cultural characteristics that make other groups of Americans think we are different” (Gracia 2000: xii). From what I learned from my interviews, one’s colonial history is not as important as ones indigenous history. In fact, the Latinos interviewed preferred the term Latino because it does include indigenous heritage as well as colonial. I would have to say, if this were true, the members of MGL would have to disagree with him. Hispanic negates a crucial part of their ancestry, while Latino is a more all-inclusive term.

Something else that was important in the literature on the interpretations of ethnic identity was the possibility of having two identities. In Gracia’s book, *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States*, he mentions a shift in terminology from bicultural to hybrid identities. Here he is referring to Latinos who talk about having both an American and Latino identity. Gracia explains that the objective of hybrid identities, “is no longer to master one, two or more cultures as wholes, or totalities, that one must integrate and juxtapose to each other in a neat, symmetrical fashion” (Gracia 2000:66). What he is saying is that people today of mixed backgrounds are picking and choosing aspects of each identity and fitting them into one general identity instead of trying to be both at the same time or switching back and forth. This identity duality was briefly mentioned in two of my interviews, but in the terms Gracia states. Both people said they are Latino
and American, but they find themselves taking sides in certain situations. One Latino admitted to lying about his Latino identity and just told everyone he was from NYC so no one would make jokes about him being from Colombia. In another conversation with another MGL member, she told me that she felt some Latino/s would not even switch back and forth between an American and Latino identity, that they would pick the American one, because it is the more prestigious and the less marginalized one. This favoritism of the American identity only seemed to upset one of the Latinas, because it told her that she, like that person, should be ashamed of who she is, a Latina.

Moving back to a discussion of the terms at hand Latino and Hispanic, Arlene Dávila defines Hispanic and Latino rather differently. She states in her book *Latino’s Inc*, “Hispano and its English translation Hispanic had been used as terms of self-designation by Spanish-origin populations in both the West and the East since the nineteenth century” (Dávila 2001:15). The paragraph continues on by detailing that people preferred to use the term Hispano to define themselves and their Spanish legacy so that they could easily distinguish between class and social status (Dávila 2001:15). Dávila, later explains that the US government had to end the labeling/cultural confusion involving the various terms had brought upon its’ immigrant communities so, “the US government coined the official designation of ‘Hispanic’ to designate anyone of Spanish background in the United States” (Dávila 2001:15). One could almost say that maybe the U.S choose the term Hispanic as a matter of convenience, so they could end the confusion.

**Conclusion**

With all of that said, what does Latino/Hispanic mean? Who is a Latino/Hispanic?
According to various anthropologists, MGL members and the dictionary, the meaning of these terms is constantly shifting. Will anyone be able to give a definitive definition of any of the terms that attempt to define the Latin American/Caribbean community? Will there ever be a solid distinction made between race and ethnicity?

What I learned from MGL is that members are obviously united by something else, something bigger than a common ethnicity. I believe, that MGL members are united by their shared cultural characteristics. They might be from a similar region, speak a dialect of Spanish, but the force that ultimately brings them together is culture. Is it important for MGL members to define their ethnicity or for that matter choose between Latino and Hispanic? Latino is a broad and generalizing term and for MGL members Hispanic is a neglectful term. Barth states in his book, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, that, “ethnic groups are seen as a form of social organization” (Barth 1969:13). Maybe MGL uses terms like Latino and Hispanic as a form of social organization. Could it be MGL has chosen a term that makes them distinct from the rest of the F&M campus? Like the one MGL member stated she used Latina as a matter or convenience not as a matter of preference. Could that be the same for the club in general?

The founding members of MGL desired a name that would welcome everyone. They changed the official language to English instead of Spanish to encourage other Latin American students to come to club meetings. They also wanted to make MGL a home away from home. They have told me on a number of occasions that in every way MGL is like a home, a family to them. They say everyone is welcome to be a part of the club is that true? Even though some members might share a common culture, boundaries are formed and maintained within and outside of MGL. What is the reason behind this
boundary creation and maintenance? What are the members trying to protect? As one will see in the coming chapter, members might share cultural values, but is it possible that some Latin Americans are excluded based on class?
Chapter 3- Class

Class is a subject matter that is not frequently discussed within the context of MGL or even outside of it. It plays a subtler role within MGL. It is a concept that is understood and people act around it without thinking too much about it. In the case of MGL, I have identified three distinct class divisions: Latinos who still live in Latin America, U.S born Latinos and rich Latinos who live in the U.S. However, it is not just the economic aspect that helps define each of the classes that make up MGL membership. There is also a cultural and an ethnic/racial aspect as well which is equally important, when discussing class within the context of MGL. The culture that these three types of students represent in MGL is not the same due to the fact they grew up in different parts of the U.S and or Latin America. Furthermore, these students represent different races, black or white. What is important to note here is that class, race and ethnicity are related concepts. As one will soon see ethnicity/race appear to have an affect on class. In other words, one’s social class is assumed due to one’s ethnicity/race.

Bonnie Urciuoli’s paper on the representation of class provides an interesting interpretation about how ethnicity/race affect class. She states, “the poverty (or ‘lower class’) end of the scale has effectively been mapped onto race in both sociological and popular literature on culture of poverty, and underclass, producing a conflation of race and class that routinely appears in media as the ‘paradigmatic poor’” (Urciuoli 1993: 208). It is my inclination to believe that what she means by race in this quote are the minority groups (blacks, Asians, Latin Americans). These “races” have been translated
into a class standing, within the U.S. She continues on in her paper, by stating that in cases where this happens that something like the U.S census can give someone an enormous sense of power. A person subjected to an assumed class experiences, “the power of race/class exclusion as closure, and having a public opportunity to be someone not subject to closure, to exercise control over how they are seen, is very important” (Urciuoli 1993:209). Even though the census might symbolize a conflict between terminologies, it can be seen as a way for minority groups to express who they really are without having to compete against class. It is this constant tug-o-war between ethnicity/race and class that U.S born members have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, Karl Marx’s theory about class and false consciousness could help provide an explanation for the exclusion of some students of Latin American origins and the acceptance of others. Marx believes that, “the class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it” (Marx 1970:82). Like Urciuoli argues ones ethnic or racial identification seems to affect what class one is affiliated with. The Latin Americans who find themselves members of this “lower” class, have parents that typically work in the service industry. They have worked hard to give their children a good education and a chance to go to a college like F&M. However, before leaving home and coming to F&M these students had to contend with the expectations of their class. These expectations being that they, too, would enter the service industry like their parents and other Latin Americans/minority ethnic groups as well. Society is changing the people within in it are beginning to change as well. Douglas
Hertzler writes, “classes and class-consciousness emerge as people are able to observe common positions and relationships within the changing system of expanding global capitalism. Common class interests and conflicts between classes are sometimes obscured by cross-cutting conflicts or ideologies that mystify class relationships” (2005:48). Maybe this excerpt from Hertzler’s article explains the relationship between the three different groups of students in MGL. Could it be that the U.S born members have united to work against the expectations of the minority class? Could it be that whatever cross-cutting conflicts the U.S born members are dealing with are the reason why their relationship with Non-U.S born members or rich U.S born members is nearly non-existent?

As I stated in the introductory chapter, the founding and current members wanted to create a home away from home and or a family. They intended that everyone who wanted to be a part of the club to be a part of it and participate in events and meetings. However, there are members being excluded from the club. What typically happens when a rich Latin American were to come or non-U.S born Latin American, is a lot of awkward silences. There is very little intermixing. A stiff hello and a welcome is about the maximum amount of interaction that will happen. They were not explicitly told not to come, but class borders prevented certain people from coming. As one will see, MGL is not an entirely open group. Class borders/boundaries created by the three groups of members in MGL are the reason some students feel welcomed and others do not.

Marx and Hertzler have theorized about the effects of determining ones future based on class. In the case of MGL, social class stereotypes have severely effected their perspective of other Latin American students. As one will see through the course of this
chapter the U.S born members view non-U.S members as being richer than them, because they still live in Latin America. Like any argument, there are always two sides of the story. The students that still live in Latin America do not agree with this assumption. The rich Latin Americans could potentially see both groups as inferior to them, thus the lack of desire to socialize with them. In the end, class-consciousness is the basis for the borders that exist between these groups of students.

**Ethnoracial Stratification:**

It is important, to first lay out the environment that U.S born members grew up in, because they are the majority group and they did found MGL. José Itzigsohn, has made several observations that help better understand how the various members of MGL view class distinctions. Even though most of his ethnography focuses primarily on the Dominican population and their economic experiences in the U.S closely parallel with that of MGL’s Itzigsohn’s observations of the Dominican community in Providence have lead him to the conclusion that there is some kind of ethnoracial stratification occurring between different communities. He states in one of his descriptions of the Dominican community that, “Dominicans in Rhode Island are part of a system of ethnoracial stratification where minorities, immigrant and native alike…have a lower socioeconomic center of gravity than the white population. The overall pattern of stratification of second-generation Dominicans is closer to that of second generation Latinos and blacks” (Itzigsohn 2009:52). In other words, all the minority groups are grouped together at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, while on the other side of it are the whites. However, Itzigsohn later explains that within the lower end, the minority end, that there is even more division amongst the various minority groups. How the connection to MGL
is clear. Most of the U.S born members grew up in this ethnoracial stratification system, with further division between races and nationalities. They bring what they grew up with into MGL and they apply this system to non-U.S members. However, it should be noted that I have rarely seen them use this type of grouping system amongst themselves. Instead it is more Non-U.S members vs. U.S members with the rich U.S born immigrants being a neutral party in this case. It is because these members grew up always being distinguished from others that they view those members who still live in Latin America differently.

**Demographics: U.S Born Latinos**

The U.S born members of MGL are from either of the two coasts, east or west. Not only that but they are from either the outskirts of Los Angeles or from one of New York City’s five burrows. Even though they are from opposite coasts and from different cities they are still from economically similar areas. They do not live in luxurious houses in the countryside and they do not live in deluxe condos in the city. They live in modest apartments or houses very near to the city. During my interviews, I frequently asked members to tell me about their personal backgrounds, specifically about their home cities.

Rosa: “I live in New York City, actually the Bronx, in an apartment with My parents and sister.”

Manuel: I am from New York Alison. I live in an apartment with my mom.”

As one can see there is a pattern that is beginning to develop here. A list of everyone’s answer to the question would be no different from these two. Not only do these students
live in similar areas but also most of these neighborhoods are comprised of mostly
Latinos and other minority groups. It is apparent that common geography has helped
these club members form relationships with each other, because they can relate to the
common culture formed within these areas. MGL is not only a recreation of a
family/home environment, but also a recreation of what home would look like,
demographically speaking. For example:

The week of Valentine’s Day MGL held a meeting, but there was something
different about this meeting. There were the usual MGL members in attendance,
but there were also a number of members from the Black Student Union (BSU)
and even The Asian Cultural Society (ACS).

The coming together of minority groups is not uncommon in these areas these members
live in. One could say these students are not just coming together as solely minority
groups, but marginalized groups as well. The students from the BSU and ACS got along
with MGL members really well. One would think that these visiting students, from the
BSU and ACS, were always a part of the group. Since that day it has not been uncommon
for members from these other minority groups to stop by during MGL meetings. One
could say this first group of students recreates what one would find in a community just
outside of Manhattan or Los Angeles.

Non-US born Latinos

F&M is fortunate enough to have at least two hundred students that come from all
over the world. A very small percentage of those two hundred students come from South
and Central America. There are about five students that still live in Latin America. There
are two from Ecuador, one from Colombia, one from Honduras and one from Argentina. The South and Central American presence is certainly growing. My freshman year there was only one person from South America and now four more have come into the picture. Only one of the five students come to MGL meetings and events, the woman from Honduras, Isabel. However, Isabel does not even attend a majority of the meetings and she only comes to the dinner and dancing events. José was the only other Latin American born student that has come to an MGL event. It was his presence and his friends that caused quite a stir, which I will further detail in the coming chapter on gender.

One would think that these Latin American students would want to come as much as they could to MGL meetings and events, but they do not, why? One would make this assumption because why not go to a club that will give one a taste of home. They might not speak Spanish all the time during meetings, but they do, on occasion, serve Latin American foods and there are other Latin Americans there, with whom they could possibly relate to. Looking at this particular group from a financial lens one could see why some MGL members make the assumption these students are richer than them. It is not cheap to fly from South/Central American or the Caribbean, to the U.S. It is also not cheap to come to F&M to study for four years. It is more than likely that these students are receiving some financial aid, but even so it does not cover travel costs and living expenses. Because I was an international student orientation advisor, I was fortunate enough to meet these Latin American students over the last four years. I know from talking to them and getting to know them that they go home often. One would assume their families are living comfortably enough to afford to fly the children back and forth.
These families can afford to not only stay and live comfortably in Latin America but also allow their children to travel, which is rare amongst the U.S born members. It is not easy to live in some of these countries without the money to do so.

**Rich U.S born Latinos**

The last group represented within MGL are the members who were born in the U.S, from very rich families. They typically did not attend MGL meetings or events. If they did attend they usually sat on the outside of the core group, very quietly. To better describe this particular group of students I think it is best to refer to a brief story Diego told me.

Before Diego even began to talk to me about class within MGL, he briefly set up the story by providing me a history of class in Mexico. He told me that Mexico is a very classist society. People separate from each other based on what social class they are a part of. The very rich people at the top very rarely associate with people of lower classes. The class one is a part of is the one you will be associated with forever. Diego even told me that class distinction goes beyond Mexican border. It follows that person wherever they go in the world. He then continued by telling me about a Mexican girl named Mercedes. According to Diego, Mercedes is a rich U.S born Mexican-American. Her parents for one reason or another decided to move to the U.S and while doing so they not only retained their wealth it continued to grow. Diego told me that Mercedes never comes to MGL events. The most he has seen her at any kind of event is for five minutes. It does not seem that she has any intention of joining or being a part of the club. He also seemed slightly offended that a fellow Mexican would not even greet or pay him any attention. However,
that was before he found out that she was a wealthy Mexican. Diego does not expect to ever see Mercedes at MGL ever and if she did come again it would be a surprise. I asked him why he felt this way and he just said that is how she acts and how she is raised. Not associating with those of a lower class is something that does not surprise him. Instead of getting to know other Mexicans and other people in MGL, Mercedes spends most of her time hanging out with rich Americans. He ended the story by telling me that class is not just merely about the amount of money one’s family has, it is a way of life, a culture one grows up in.

When I asked Diego about class in relation to MGL it did not take him long to start on this story. This rich, snobby attitude that he believes she possesses has made a deep impression on him. However, one must keep in mind that this story is highly one sided. I was unable to obtain her side of the story. According to Diego it seems that, she does not care about her Mexican heritage she cares about her money and the type of people she can hang out with. I later asked a fellow senior member, Jessica, if she believed there was some sort of class element that played into MGL membership, and if there any students particularly involved.

“Oh yeah definitely! You know them Alison.? Yeah, it is obvious I do not want to say names just think about it some more their names will come to you.”

She was right I eventually did figure out the names of the rich students and it turns out I actually know them as well, through common classes. They are those members who come now and then, but sit in the back corner, hands crossed in front of their chests, stern
faces, generally quiet with an overall look of absolute discomfort and desire not to be where they were. I have no idea why they came, because they looked like they genuinely did not want to be there. I almost felt like some of those type of members came because of some invisible obligation to their culture.

**The club from the perspective of class:**

By looking at a typical weekday MGL meeting, it is easy to see how class plays a role within the club. A regular MGL meeting consists primarily of those members who were born in the U.S, not rich and like always a majority are female. However, as of recent weeks BSU members, mostly male, have been joining in on the MGL fun. One of the BSU members even did a presentation on his trip to Saudi Arabia two-weeks ago. This has been the current trend in MGL as of February, BSU members attending meetings and events. What happens when a rich U.S born Latin/Central American or native Latin/Central American comes to a meeting? An immediate invisible line is drawn between the groups. There is very little reaction of acknowledgement on the part of both groups. If there is any verbal interaction between the groups it is a very quick hello and that is it for the rest of the hour. During the meeting, they sit on the complete opposite side of everyone else just listening to what is going on around them. This scenario does not portray the perfect, happy family MGL members had envisioned. These students are, basically, excluded from the core of the club. The Latin American students are seen almost like strangers, unfamiliar faces or people with nothing in common with them. When these non-U.S born members came to meetings, I felt as if they came because of some invisible obligation to their culture. The core members of MGL did not do much to welcome these students into their family. They greeted each other with silent recognition
and one-worded answers, nothing more. Class boundaries seem to have taken a firm hold within the confines of MGL. Where do these assumptions about these foreign members come from?

**Another Perspective:**

As recently as last week I had a very interesting conversation/interview with an MGL member who still lives in Latin America.

The conversation started off with a conversation about ethnicity, but quickly turned into a discussion of class divisions within MGL. I told her about my observations I have made of the club relating to class and she was very surprised that I had observed any class divisions. Isabel, was under the impression that there were no class divisions within MGL; that everyone was on a even playing field. I told her about the other interviews I have done with other members and then she told me she understood why I was told what I was told. She said many of the students that still live in Latin and Central America typically do not see any kind of class divisions in MGL. She views herself as economically equal. She receives a lot of financial aid and saves as much money from her job as she can. However, she believes that the U.S born members of MGL are the reason that I have heard about and seen any type of class division. She believes there are two reasons for this, their parents and stereotypes about their communities. She told me that the parents of these students are responsible for teaching their children about class, in particular the class they are associated with in Latin America. On the other hand she thinks most of the members ideas about class
come from stereotypes of the communities they live in. She says they are fully aware of the negative economic connotations that are associated with their communities as well as their ethnic group. So they grow up believing that they are of a lower class and they carry it with them the rest of their lives. Isabel then said it is these stereotypes that encourage them to believe that Spanish-speakers from outside the U.S are richer than them, because they did not grow up in their community. They do not see that Isabel and the others that still live in these countries are, in what she believes, similar economic statuses.

Isabel’s story is quite interesting. Could it be that the class divisions I have observed in the club reflect U.S class issues, and that American born members rather than the non-U.S born members create the invisible line? The literature provides some interesting commentary on this particular situation.

**Conclusions:**

In the case of MGL, class does not just symbolize levels of different economic standing. In part, MGL members do view other members through a more materialistic lens, but it is the cultural aspect of class that really causes the division amongst members. These members grew up in a culture where they are seen as only being able to achieve a certain level of economic stability. Their parents were not able to go beyond working in the service industry. The U.S born members in MGL have not forgot growing up in a negative economic environment. The rich U.S born members along with the non-U.S born members are separated from the core group, because they fit in with the greater population, the greater F&M community. They have not been put in the bottom of the
economic food chain like many of the parents of the U.S born members. Whether they come from a different national background, they all grew up in relatively similar environments. When they come together they felt right at home again. There is very little room for rich U.S born members and or non-U.S born members. They might have language and some other cultural commonalities, but they still lack the same life experiences that they U.S born members have in common, which they go back to every semester. Meanwhile the other members go home to their countries and or nice homes in the states. They do not return to a home where they are marginalized and constantly stereotyped.

With all that said it is easy to understand why a majority of the U.S born members feel a stronger sense of connection to the club and each other rather than the non-U.S born. They are united by a shared sense of community as well as economic status that is not shared with the other groups. However, members are not just united with other Latin Americans in the club. They have formed relationships with other minority groups in campus, BSU/ACS. The reason for their interconnection can be explained by a, “positive bond that connects several ethnic groups in an encompassing social system depends on the complementarity of the groups with respect to some of their characteristic cultural features” (Barth 1969:18). It seems to me that MGL, BSU and ACS have recognized that they all have something in common with each other. This commonality between all three groups is that they are all marginalized, minority groups. These three groups together form a boundary against the larger F&M community. In the end, MGL and the other minority groups have formed strong boundaries based on social class; and the members of MGL have gone further by creating their own intra-club class boundaries.
Chapter 4- Gender

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this ethnography, the majority of the members of MGL are women. There are very few men who are consistently involved in club events and meetings. However, it is not just the sheer size of the female population within MGL that is interesting. My participation in the production of *The Vagina Monologues* gave me the opportunity not only to work with other women on campus, but also gain a better insight into how Latina women talk about female sexuality. According to José Limón, Latinas and Latinos have been cast into hypersexual roles due to the eroticization of them within the context of U.S popular culture. The way these women reacted to the play and how they act outside of MGL incline me to think they do not fit into these hypersexual roles. In fact, they refute them.

The women and even the men are doing more than maintaining their moral values that were instilled in them as they were growing up. As I mentioned in the ethnicity chapter I agreed with Barth that boundaries exist, but I also agreed, with Cohen, that they are elastic. By maintaining a modest image as well as changing their personality, outside of MGL and MGL friends, they are maintaining a boundary. Boundaries do not necessarily mean they solely exist within the confines of MGL. As Barth notes (1969:15) “If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories…” (Barth 1969 15). One can see the maintenance of these boundaries by watching how the MGL women downplay their sexuality and downplay their outgoing, vivacious personalities, in public. These elastic boundaries allow these women to interact with other
F&M students, but they still signal a type of exclusion as well as inclusion. Within the boundaries of the MGL club they do not have to worry about sexuality and silencing their true personalities. The common cultural heritage that brought them together is what allows them to feel comfortable with who they are with MGL members.

**Personality**

The only way I can think to describe the women, of MGL, that I have come to know is as some of the most outgoing and kind people I have met. Every meeting when I walk through those International Center doors I am immediately greeted by some of the girls with inquires about how my weekend was and how my day has been so far. It is not just me they greet in this manner, but everyone. It is like watching mothers greet their children coming home from a long day at school. From my perspective, these women possess certain maternal characteristics that contribute to MGL’s familial, empathetic atmosphere. It is also because of these mother-like women that the members have nicknames. It is the female members who have chosen the nicknames that most of the members use when addressing each other in the group talk to each other daily. They are either going to add –ito to the last part of one’s name, to shorten it or give one a completely new name. One’s nickname depends on how close the relationship it between each person.

The MGL women also display compassion for others that helps make everyone feel at home. When someone has had a bad day these women are there to help that person feel better. They seem to change their mood depending on how others around them feel. In other words, they are very empathetic people. On the other hand, these women are
also incredibly competitive and lively. There is never a dull moment during an MGL meeting even if there is no fun activity planned. Any piece of exciting news or the announcement of an upcoming event warrants a dance in place. Rosa, is the first one out of her seat and across the room dancing when there is a particular event she is looking forward too, while her older sister (not blood related) Olivia is right there with her. When there is an activity with a competitive element, these women make sure everyone knows they are out to win. Rosa, Olivia and Maria are the three most highly competitive women I have ever met and are perfect examples of this competitive spirit. They are loud, they intimidate the other team and they yell Spanish idioms (¡OYE!, ¡AY madre de dios!) just because they want to win a simple game of catch phrase or Pictionary. Notice how these women invoke the Mother of G-d and not just G-d himself. These interjections signify a female bond, rather than a male one. It is clear it is going to be an intense meeting when you see the catch phrase game piece in the president’s hand. However, most of the women calm their outgoing and competitive personalities outside of the club. I have seen some these women in the College Center and in between classes and they seemed pretty calm.

On March the 8th I was in the International Center with the rest of the MGL members preparing for the highly anticipated empanadas and movie party. As guests began to arrive with excitement/ anticipation grew for the food they were about to eat. Then in walked José, who has never attended any meetings, arrived at the empanada party with a few of his Anglo hall mates, who also have never attended any MGL events or meetings. They sat down with José and began talking and watched the music videos that were being played on the TV. After 10
minutes Carmen arrived, greeting everyone loudly in Spanish. As soon as she saw five Anglo people in the room, that were not me, she turned around and walked right out of the room. She was so embarrassed it took her five minutes to come back and join the group. All the other Latinos were laughing at her, because of her embarrassment, and because they know that she is a very friendly person who greets everyone like that. However, then everyone began walking over to me to ask me if I knew who José and the Anglos who were with him were. I only knew José. I encouraged them to talk to him, because after all he is from Latin America, speaks Spanish and has many other things in common with them. However, my attempts to get MGL members to talk to José and his friends ended in failure. They were too shy. Not only that but they all calmed down. The new presence in the room caused the whole club to quite down.

This short section from my field notes clearly demonstrates how drastic of a personality change in MGL women when they are in the company of people they do not know. Carmen felt so uncomfortable around people she was unfamiliar with she actually left to regain composure. It also demonstrates how comfortable they all feel in the atmosphere that MGL provides them, when there are no Anglos or even unfamiliar faces present.

**Women keep the tradition going because of their mothers**

Since joining the club, a question that I have always wanted to know the answer to is, why are there more women than men in MGL? The answers I got varied:

Alejandra told me that, in general, there are more women than there are men, on the F&M campus, which is why there are many more women in the group.
Manuel told me that he is involved in MGL because of his mother. She raised him to have a strong connection to his culture and his heritage and, therefore, he feels more connected to his Colombian heritage.

On the other hand, Diego told me that Latino men are not as connected to their Latino roots, because it was more of "a feminine thing". He also said in Mexico you would find the women in the house in traditional clothing, while you would find the men wearing more modern clothing working, outside of the house.

According to Rosa, it is the job of the woman to carry on the culture. It is her job to teach her kids what Mexican culture is. The males who do go are more connected than other Latino males.

On the one hand, it is a common belief that participating and learning about one’s culture is more feminine. However, as one can see there are exceptions to this statement. There are some men who do care about their heritage and take the time to come to meetings and events. There are at least three male members in the club, but they did say they are in MGL because of a strong connection to their heritage. Does that mean the other Latino males do not come to meetings and or events because they feel a lack of connection to their heritage? Looking at other cultural and religious clubs on campus the majority of the members are female. It could be that women are more apt to wanting to be involved in something that represents who they are, whether that is religious or cultural. It also could it be that there are less men involved because of pure laziness, which is always possible. It is also possible that there are literally more Latin American women on campus than men. In any case, there has been a trend of late, in which more men are attending MGL
meetings and events. For the first time in a number of years a male has been elected
president of MGL as well as one other male to the executive board. Slowly but surely
more Latin American males are becoming involved, but women still dominate as the
majority of the club.

Bonnie Urciuoli found a similar pattern within the Latin American community she
was studying. Like myself, she too observed that most members were predominantly
female. Her explanation for the disproportion provides another possible explanation for
the disproportion I have observed, “Members tell me that girls do more organization
work anyway and boys are more likely to find their loci of sociality on sports teams
and in fraternities” (2003:158). The question I would then pose to Urciuoli would then
be, cannot Latin American women could form their “loci of sociality” in sororities and
sports teams as well? I only know of one Latin American male involved in a fraternity on
the F&M campus. There are three to four female members that are involved in sorority
life. I do not believe I can entirely agree with her statement. There are at least some
women and men that participate with sports teams and Greek life on campus.

With all of that said, do females only join MGL, because it is their job as a
woman to assume responsibility for passing their heritage on to others? I also do not this
is the entire story either. I think they join for the close relationships they form. They are
very social girls as one can see from what was stated in the personality section.
Therefore, I believe it is a combination of both the desire to form relationships with
people they have things in common with as well as talk about their cultures and do things
together that represents them.
The Mother and Daughter

Where do these young girls and young adult Latinas learn their values? Dávila in a way answers this question by providing her observations of a young girl who, “wrote a series of stories and journal entries about strong women in her life: her mother (whom she referred to as la mamá valiente or the ‘brave mother’), her teacher, the principle and myself” (Dávila 1999: 74). On more than one occasion, in my interviews, it was the mother who taught their children about their heritage. It was their mother who ran the house, who instilled in them the moral beliefs they still hold onto today. The Latinas who feared telling their parents about The Vagina Monologues, most of all feared their mothers reactions more so than their father’s, because of the strong bond that is forged between them.

In a recent post on facebook by a female MGL member, her status pleaded with people to let her borrow their phone because she had to talk to her mamí. MGL women also made frequent references to their mothers when they are talking amongst each other about their day. They would usually say, “Oh, Carmen I have to go home and call my mamí and tell her everything.” They made no mention of the father at all. It was considered a bad week to not be at home for one’s mother’s birthday or miss an important event in her life. I found this out during our meeting activity, which was to share one good and bad thing about our week. It was traumatic for these MGL women to not be there with the mothers for whatever holiday or event.

Laura, began to tear up as she described how sad she felt for missing her mother’s 50th birthday. She told us that even though she spoke to her for a while on the
phone it still was not good enough. She wanted to be there, she wanted to go home. After she shared her good and bad fact for the week, everyone else after her spoke about their family. Members spoke about everything from the death of an uncle to missing his mother’s birthday, as well.

The mother seems to be the base or the rock for of the female members in MGL. The mother is their guidebook. They look to her for advice, guidance and comfort all the same things most of the members do for others within MGL.

**The Mother Daughter Relationship**

Maria’s mother has become very Americanized unlike her father who has kept Guatemalan culture in his house. Maria is not as in touch with her Guatemalan ancestry as her father would like. Why? I think it is because Maria still lives with her mother and they have a very close relationship. Because her mother has accepted American culture into their lives, more than their Guatemalan culture, so has Maria. Only as of recently, has Maria decided to take the time to hang out with other Latin Americans. But as one can see Maria’s mother’s attitude towards their heritage has affected Maria.

**Sexual Comportment as a Border**

The easiest example of hyper sexualization of the Latin American in U.S popular culture is the George Lopez show. In many ways, it is a comedic sitcom in which George Lopez is making fun of himself and the Latin American population, in the U.S, by dramaticizing stereotypes about his community. Carmen, George Lopez’s daughter, on the show, is portrayed as a hyper sexual teenager. She fawns over the athletic, Anglo boy and uses sex appeal to win his affections. However, other high school boys in the show
use sex to manipulate Carmen as well. There is no actor on the show who portrays a modest and/or conservative Latina, such as I have observed in MGL. I observed many displays of sexual modesty, on a daily basis, among the women in MGL leading me to wonder about the discordance between the actual behavior of the women in MGL and the images of Latina women in popular culture, such as the George Lopez show.

Female Sexuality

One can safely conclude that there is a certain discomfort for Latin American women, in MGL, with a discussion or an expression of female sexuality. Popular music and television programs are filled with stereotyped images of Latin American women. Limón argues that the image of Latina women and men has been eroticized in such a way that a real sense of their femininity and masculinity has been lost amongst all the false assumptions. In an excerpt from an American novel Limón directs our attention to this very image he writes, “by this reading, casting Mexican women in particular as sexually promiscuous made them sexually available within a prevailing code of racism, even as it ratified and extended the right of Anglo conquest to the realm of the sexual” (1998: 130). Many novels that have a plot centered on the colonization of the West (what used to be Mexico) type casts the Mexican woman as sexually active. She is the one that every Anglo man wants, but in the end only uses her for sexual pleasure and then returns to his simple Anglo wife. Using a quote from a review on American literature Limón continues elaborating on the negative portrayal of Latina women that says, “The progressively bleak picture we have presented…reveals a pathetic series of depiction’s of the Chicana in American literature…From the coquettish senorita to the lusty whore…a series of portrayals unfolds that pays little tribute to Mexican femininity” (Limón 1998: 131).
Chicana women have not been showcased in the most positive of lights. They are always type casted in literature or even song as willing participants in sexual escapades. What these authors are trying to say is that these stereotypes and depictions of these women really demean who they are as Mexican women. Mexican women or Latin American women, for that matter, have not been given the proper depiction, or the chance to showcase themselves in a way they want to be seen. A depiction that represents true Mexican femininity. Even today movies and T.V series portray Latina women in a sexier light. Look at any brochure advertising a Latin American culture. There is usually a beautiful Latin women on the front wearing nothing but a bikini. The assumption would be after looking at that picture that everyone in Mexico or whatever country and the women are going to look like that, which is by no means the case.

In fact, Diego told me that it is more likely that you find Mexican women at home wearing traditional clothing. The images of Cancun, he said, could not be a more inaccurate portrayal of ‘real’ Mexican life.

The eroticism of Latina women has not ended. In fact, it has found its way into popular culture solidifying its’ position in society for years to come. Even though George Lopez show is in re-runs it is still wildly popular. It is not just shows like George Lopez that support the stereotype. Lyrics in songs by regatón artists only promote the idea that these women are very sexy and want to have a lot of sex. Daddy Yankee and Tito El Bambino are only two of many examples that write songs that describe how sexy Latina women are and or should be. However, one must ask the question, if these images posed in popular songs and images are only Anglo constructions or constructions coming from the Latin American community as well? I am of the opinion that these images are coming
from both sides. The Latin American community has taken these stereotypes, from the Anglo community, and have chosen to write about them in song or act them out on T.V. Both sides in some way contribute to the continuation of the eroticization of Latin American women and men.

It is not just the women that have been eroticized by the western colonizers. Westerners have found a way to eroticize Latin American men. Limón uses the example of a man named Cisneros, in which he has been depicted on the cover of a magazine, *Texas Monthly*, holding a baby lightly kissing it on the head (Limón 1998:142). In other photos of the same man he is photographed with the state flag, “holding the state flag in both arms while gazing lovingly down at it in such a way as to suggest that the flag could easily be a woman in the arms of her well-dressed Latin lover (who has already removed his coat)” (Limón 1998:143). The sexy, half dressed Latino man is the most stereotypical image one could have of a Latino male. Limón then continues on the eroticization of the Latino male by talking about how westerners have taken Indian warrior imagery and have combined it with that of a Latino male, thus creating the term “Aztec -d” (Limón 1998:143). The depiction of a Latino male as an Aztec g-d and as a sexy, strong guy all adds to the eroticization of the image of a Latino. Not all of the Latino men look like what westerners believe they should be, nor do they act like westerners think they should. The men that I have been able to meet and befriend in MGL are nothing like this other image of Latino males. Every male member greets each member with a kiss on their cheek as well as a greeting. They even greet other male members with equal respect. There has never been any indication of a violent or abusive component to their personalities, further disproving this image in the case of MGL.
These images that have been created of what Latino/as should look like, act and be are not consistent with what I have observed in MGL. These women and men do not in any way represent the image that has been discussed in the preceding section. Never have I heard these women discuss any sexual encounter with a man, unlike what I would typically hear other women talk about. These girls also never wear any suggestive clothing that would attract the inappropriate male attention. They dress tastefully. They wear clothes that make them look beautiful without showing more skin than necessary. Just from these simple observations one can tell these women are different from their stereotype as well as other stereotypes relating to college age women.

**The Vagina Monologues and Sexual Comportment**

The first day of Vagina Monologue rehearsal I was stunned to see some of the Latinas, who auditioned for parts in the play-acting so quiet and shy, when asked to dramatize sexual scenes. It was incredibly surprising to me because it was my first witnessing this drastic personality change of these women and I did not truly understand the reason behind the change until later in my observations. This quite and shy personality was the complete opposite of the lively and outgoing women I came to know in MGL. Their personalities change according to their environment and with the people they are around. Stiff boundaries are maintained until they have taken the time to get to know that new person or member. I am not Latina, I am Anglo, and they do not change who they are around me, but it took months for them to let me within their boundaries. There needs to be some sort of an established relationship between MGL members and their Anglo peers before their true personalities come out. The same could be said about
the play. Until the MGL women became comfortable enough with the subject matter and
the cast, they put on a great and highly entertaining show.

The final cast for this year’s performance included four Latin American women,
three juniors and one freshman. Of all the women that participated, it took the MGL
women longer to get over their fear of talking about vaginas than anyone else. Their
discomfort was obvious, especially when one looked at their body language and facial
expressions. But I noticed a distinct difference between the comfort of the MGL women
and that of the other women in the cast when rehearsing their monologues. The MGL for
the first month or so were incredibly nervous. One could tell just by looking at their faces
they felt out of place. Occasionally, there was some nervous laughter, but their body and
facial expressions revealed to all the other cast members of their discomfort. Every time
it was their turn to recite their monologues there was always a moment of hesitation.
They were only asked to recite a monologue that they have been practicing for months,
but when other people were around their concentration broke or they could not
concentrate with others around them.

The Vagina Monologues, by Eve Ensler, is a play whose mission is to raise
awareness about violence against women and raise money towards helping battered
women. The play is not only sexually explicit in its content but it is also very graphic,
with detailed accounts of rape and spousal abuse. Each year it is the job of the directors
and producers to create the theme for the year. This year’s objective was to make the
show more intimate, especially between the women on stage and the audience. For that
reason, this years directors had all the women on stage, all at one time, in the shape of a
‘V’ wearing jeans and a white, ‘V’ neck T-shirt. The atmosphere they wanted to create
was one similar to that of a therapy group. Each woman on stage was there to support and react to the monologues that were being read. There were no props and no set. It is the job of the actress to bring life to the monologue through body language and facial expressions.

The part that made most of the actresses nervous, in particular the Latinas, was the monologue that pertained to various types of moans. This particular monologue was titled “The Woman Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy” in which a sex worker elaborated on her new profession as a sex worker who only worked with women, rather than be a tax law lawyer. Here is a very brief quote from this year’s script, “There were no props in corporate law. No wetness. No dark mysterious foreplay. No erect nipples. No delicious mouths, but mainly there was no moaning. Not the kind I’m talking about anyway” (Ensler). This is only one example of the erotic nature of this monologue. In fact, the two MGL members eventually performed this monologue and did a wonderful job. One of the women, Alejandra was the most comfortable with her lines, because she had performed in the show before. However, Luisa, took a great deal of time to become as comfortable. By the time the opening of the show came around she was so comfortable she began to improvise some, but it took at least two months of practice. She had the most trouble mastering the monologue where each girl had to perform a moan. To be sure, this part of the monologue got all the cast members nervous. The last moan, “the surprise triple orgasm moan” usually receives the most laughs. Beatriz, one of the four Latin American women in the show, was chosen to do this particular moan. During the first few rehearsals, we all practiced our moans, but she was unable to give her performance. She would turn red and laugh or even look away from us. However, when it
came time to do the show she overcame the embarrassment and did the moan and had the audience laughing in tears. There are some incredibly sexually explicit lines in the show and it took an enormous amount of time for Luisa, and Beatriz to become comfortable enough to improvise and bring the lines to life.

Is it a coincidence or was it intentional, that the MGL women had to perform the monologues with the most sexually explicit lines? According to the stereotype that José Limón has written about, there is a tendency for Anglos to eroticize Latin Americans, Latin American women in particular. I suspect that there was some type casting on the part of the directors when assigning the women their monologues, because of this assumption. I also base this assumption on the casting of roles in this play from previous years. In last year’s performance two Latin Americans performed the raciest monologues in the entire script. The year before that, women from Latin America were chosen to perform those same racy monologues. There were plenty of outgoing Anglo, black and Asian women, that could have read these monologues, but in the end it was the Latin American women who got the parts. However, they were more nervous than comfortable, which is understandable because they had to recite lengthy monologues. What would typically happen is the following:

The narrator would introduce the monologue, if there were an introduction

Then the girl reciting the monologue would begin her recitation. When

Any of the MGL members began their monologues, their voices would

Crack, they would blush, then stumble a bit, then finally begin into their
Monologue.

When it was time for tech rehearsal, they would begin their monologues with little or no hesitation. Beatriz, became so comfortable with her lines she inserted Spanish words when necessary. One section of her monologue was based on a telephone call and she decided to recreate a typical conversation that should would have with her mother using words like, mira and nena. I asked her if she was aware she spoke Spanish in her monologue and she said, “Yeah, I know Alison. I did it for my friends in the audience. I knew they would understand me.” Knowing that her Latino friends were in the audience gave her the confidence to improvise so much with her lines that she inserted Spanish vocabulary into the monologue.

My observation lead me to another conclusion for this behavior and that must be the taboo nature of the subject. I talked to the MGL women casually about their discomfort with the topic and they told me, “I was not taught to talk about sex. It is something that is only spoken about in private.” Even more interesting was that none of them told their parents that they were in the show, because of explicit nature that is implied in the show. I found this out through a conversation back stage at one of our stage rehearsals. We were all talking about the play in general and how the subject is very explicit and sexual.

The MGL women claimed that their parents would have been upset to find out they were participating in the show, that their parents would show very little understanding for their decision to participate in a show with a topic that should
go un-mentioned. The girls told me on more than one occasion that stuff like this (The Vagina Monologues) does not happen or gets talked about in Latin America.

They still participated in the show without the blessings of their mothers, because they believed in cause and the purpose of the play. Their discomfort with the topic of sexuality says more than they are just shy about the topic. In fact, Arlene Dávila provides an explanation for what I have observed, “for girls who operate within a discourse of love and romance is to position themselves as ‘bad.’ This may be especially true for Latinas, who are often stereotyped in good/bad binaries, and for girls within the context of schooling, where being ‘good’ generally requires a denial of one’s sexuality” (Dávila 1999:73). These young Latina girls have been taught at a young age to deny their sexuality. Dávila states this denial is a way for these girls to be good. This good girl must come from the mothers of these girls. It is the mother’s job to instill in their daughters good sexual values.

**Conclusions: Gender and culture**

What does the eroticism of the foreign, the mother, The Vagina Monologues and the disproportionate number of women and men say about the role of gender in maintaining club boundaries? What is the connection between gender and culture in MGL? Women in MGL by far have formed the closest relationships. It is the women, who I have observed, creating the basis of familial like atmosphere and the men reinforce this environment. The women greet you when you arrive, they give you a nickname, they are there when you are down, they are there to cheer you on in your sports game and they are there to support you as you read a poem in Spanish on World Culture Night. The few
men that are active in the club contribute similarly. They greet the women with a hug and
a kiss, fellow men with a handshake, and will try to be at other events to support fellow
members.

The women that have created the support network that exists in MGL is the
reason more and more women are joining the club. They are the foundation for the
familial background. They teach others about Latin American culture because their
mothers have taught them. The younger Latina members look to the older ones to teach
them recipes like Mufungo and empanadas, because they do not know how. These
members whose mothers did not teach them how to cook, there is an MGL member to fill
in and teach that person. Even the Latin American men are taking the opportunity to learn
from other female members recipes and other cultural traditions they want to re-learn or
do. Although the entire executive board is not exclusively female, the women executives
and members still set the tone for the meeting. If they are excited about something then it
will surely get everyone else excited about the same thing. The women are integral to the
day-to-day functions of the club. It is not just that the men and women of MGL have
recreated a home-like environment, they have created a respectful environment. No one
has to worry about sex or doing anything they are not comfortable with. They are free to
treat each other like brother and sister or mother and child. The one-hour meeting is a
chance for all the members to let their guards down, talk about problems they are having
or be in a place that feels like home when they are feeling homesick.

Have these women and men successfully created a familial environment? Barth
states if members maintain their boundaries when interacting with others than people will
be excluded from the group. The MGL boundary becomes more permeable when
members of the BSU or ACS want to partake in a club meeting. Does the same happen for every single person on the F&M campus. Anglo students may come to meetings, but as I have detailed there is a certain amount of awkwardness when they do come to meetings. If MGL was truly trying to be a perfect family, then everyone needs to be included rather than included. In the case of MGL, boundaries are maintained and these boundaries help members keep strangers out and maintain a sexually comfortable environment.
Chapter 5- Conclusion

At the center of MGL lies their shared views of family. From these shared views, MGL members are able to spin their own webs of meaning, which has aided them in creating what MGL is today. MGL is a thriving cultural club that tries to represent Latin American culture in a way that teaches the greater F&M campus about it, but more importantly it strives to be a home away from home for those students who need it. However, as this ethnography has demonstrated MGL may have elastic borders but they are not entirely penetrable. Borders that relate to their interpretation of class and expressions of gender clearly demonstrate this idea.

Ethnicity, Family and MGL

After interviewing the various members of MGL, reading a number of articles and works by at least three theorists on the topic of ethnicity, I believe ethnicity to be ultimately defined by one’s origins. Meaning you are what you are because of your ancestry. With that being said, what is the difference between terms like Latin American, Latino or Hispanic? I believe the difference between all the terms mentioned lies with usage. Latin American is the most general, and in my opinion, the most politically correct term to use when labeling people from South and Central America and some of the Caribbean. Latino/Hispanic is the racial label American society gives to people of this region. The way people from Latin America use terms like Latino and/or Hispanic imply two distinct histories. One, Hispanic, which indicates a colonial history, while the other, Latino, indicates an indigenous and colonial history. Once they cross the border into the U.S., their race is defined as Latino or Hispanic.
It is hard to conclude that the students who choose to be a part of MGL are united by a common ethnicity. The members have a difficult time coming to an agreement on how to classify themselves and each other with the labels "Latino" or "Hispanic" that the U.S. government and many others use to refer to people of Latin American ancestry, who live in the United States. There are so many possibilities to choose from, that it is very possible that one member might believe he or she is a Latino while another member might believe he or she is a Hispanic or even interpret them in different manners. After speaking to many of the members of MGL and observing them, it maybe a common ethnicity that brings these students together, but it is not what keeps them together. Their shared views or family and siblingship hold these students together. MGL is not simply a product of segregating and labeling those who appear to be Latinos or Hispanics to those who do not have Latin American ancestry. To describe that sense of common ethnicity, I turned to gender, sexuality and family.

Barth stated in his lengthy definition of ethnic group that within the group they share common cultural values. I cannot deny that this statement is true for MGL as a whole. They do share many cultural characteristics ranging from the Spanish language to food. As Cohen and the Comaroff’s state, context is always changing, which means at any given moment a member can be black, white, Latino or Hispanic, which begs the question to be asked, could someone ever be defined one way?

**Gender, Family and MGL:**

It is because of the women that MGL has been able to grow in size and in strength. These women are not only incredibly outgoing, friendly and caring they are
also, according to themselves and others, the carriers of their Latin/Central American heritage. They teach others about who they are and they also teach each other about their culture. It was a fellow MGL member who taught all the other members and guests how to make empanadas. There were no special guests or cooks, it was a fellow member who did all the prep work and teaching. They are not just teachers. They are sisters, they are mother-like figures and they are conservative women. Where do these family values come from? It is my understanding from what I have observed and heard that they have obtained these values from their families, in particular their mothers. They were obviously raised with a strong sense of family, which has carried over into MGL and into their treatment of others. Their families have also instilled in them a sense of modesty, which one can see from the section in chapter four titled *The Vagina Monologues* on sexual comportment. Without their families teaching them all these things, who knows what MGL would be like. The families of the MGL members have inadvertently contributed to the creation of a sustainable culture within MGL because of what they have taught their children regarding family and overall moral values.

On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that shared beliefs about morality and sexuality found a border between MGL and everyone else. They are not the same people they are outside of MGL.

**Class, Family and MGL:**

There is a very clear division between U.S born members, non-U.S born members and rich U.S born members. It all comes does to where they were raised and what kind of class values their parents have instilled in them. Diego very clearly states that Mexico is a
classist society. The class he is a part of has carried over into his interactions with other Mexicans on the F&M campus. The rich Mexican girl, Mercedes, will not talk to him or members of MGL. Meanwhile he gets along perfectly well with the other Mexicans in MGL members, because they are in a similar class. For those who are born in the U.S., it is not just what their parents taught them about class that has shaped MGL membership it is also the environment they all grew up in. As I said in chapter 3, U.S born members have become used to living in an environment where they live with other minority groups working in the service industry. The notion that ones class dictates what ones future will entail (service industry etc) is the reason there are divisions among members. There are the members who are trying to break away from their pre-determined job future by getting a better education and working hard to pay for it. They are constantly competing against class expectations, meanwhile the other two groups of students have not had to do that. One could almost assume that the makeup of MGL is a literal re-enactment of what home would look like if they were there.

**Final Conclusions:**

Ethnicity brings together students of Latin/Central American decent under one roof. They are united by common cultural characteristics as well as an understanding that they do not need to have a standard definition of who they are, because it does not matter. The women keep the club growing and stable. They make sure that the family is healthy and happy. They are solid in their moral and family beliefs, which helps create the stable and friendly atmosphere members are accustomed to. Finally, class beliefs help the members recreate, in some ways, the home atmosphere. Each element works together to create a culture, sustain a culture and unite students who are more alike than different.
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