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“Who Says Lowriders Are Only For Men?”: Lowriders In Las Vegas, Nevada

Alejandra Herrera

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“WHO SAYS LOWRIDERS ARE ONLY FOR MEN?”: LOWRIDERS IN LAS VEGAS,
NEVADA

By

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Bachelor of Arts – Political Science and History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts – History

Department of History
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Abstract

Since its creation, Las Vegas, Nevada, has been associated with casinos, nightlife, drinking, and neon lights. Las Vegas is not associated with Lowriders. Historically, lowrider vehicles are associated with crime, gangs, and *male* drivers. When lowriding comes to mind, Lowriders are associated with major cities in California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. Lowriders are not usually visualized as having female participants or as being present in Las Vegas. This thesis highlights members of the Lowrider community (especially Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco, and Juanita Salazar) through the use of oral interviews and personal correspondence. The Lowriders interviewed for this thesis are a local, Las Vegas Lowriders. Women in the lowriding scene provide critical contributions to the local lowriding community through their advocacy of uplifting other women and their autonomy as women. Seldomly are Lowrider women mentioned in the Lowrider scholarship. Thus, the roles of Leyva, Franco, and Salazar should not be disregarded because they provide insight into a gap within Lowrider scholarship by the Lowriders being *women* who reside in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Introduction

In the 1990s, Alejandra Gonzalez was living her best life in Los Angeles as a young woman who loved to cruise around in her car during her free time with her friends or romantic partners. Gonzalez exemplified many women in lowriding in the 1990s, specifically Mexican women in their early twenties who participated in a Chicano leisure activity. By the 1990s, lowriding was not unfamiliar in the United States through the depictions of lowriders in mass media. Mexican Americans practiced lowriding as the leisure venture was very much an activity for working-class communities as it involved planned monetary investment and time. For working-class people, time *is* as valuable as money. Gonzalez spent her hard-earned money on a car, even though the upkeep and the investment of a lowrider was not a cheap endeavor. Despite the cost and questioning from outsiders who could not understand *why* Gonzalez would continue spending her money on an *old* car, it was a leisure activity Gonzalez enjoyed. Lowriding provided her with self-autonomy, freedom, and *fun* as a young woman; however, Gonzalez fell out of the lowrider car scene once she started to have kids. Even though Gonzalez no longer had her '65 *cherry* red mustang with its velvet interior, chrome rims, and chrome engine, she constantly regaled her children about her lowriding past. Gonzalez's stories and memories bestowed one of her children, *me*, to think about and inquire about the history of lowriders, lowrider social spaces, and women. Most importantly, like my mother, women loved their lowrider life.

To begin this study, we have to ask: why should women be included in a discussion about lowriders? Well, why not? Why should men only be associated with lowriders? Women have *always* been a part of lowriding in one fashion or another. Five women active in the lowrider scene in Las Vegas, Nevada, participated in interviews for this study to show the different ways women have participated in lowrider culture. The four women are Nichol Zamora, Christal Leyva, Ivelys

Franco, and Juanita Salazar. The majority of studies and public interest in lowriding focuses on California, New Mexico, and Texas, but there is *nothing* in the academy about lowriders in Southern Nevada.¹ Even less has been written about Lowrider women, especially in academia. (For the purposes of this study, Lowrider with a capital “L” will be used to describe Lowrider drivers and builders. Lowriders with a lowercase “l” will be used to describe a lowrider vehicle). Lowrider women are present in literature about lowriders, but their voices are not at the forefront of those narratives. This thesis is about Lowrider women speaking for themselves while also providing historical, social and cultural context to their voices and their lived experiences.

In discussions around lowriding, male voices are necessary. The male informants for this study are Beto Mendoza, Hector Leyva, and Marcos Gaitan. Male voices are in this study as lowriding is a male-dominated field, and it would be amiss not to include male voices. However, women have had different experiences and are perceived differently from men within and outside the lowriding community. The voices of Nichol Zamora, Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco and Juanita Salazar show how these different women dedicate their leisure lives to this car culture. Their experiences reveal the complexity and diversity within women in lowriding culture. Nichol Zamora is a community organizer who advocates for Autism and raises funds for community endeavors, such as providing school supplies for children and individuals subject to domestic violence. Zamora is not necessarily a Lowrider herself, but she is heavily involved in the car culture. She is a community organizer, but Zamora also takes her children to the community events

¹ The absence of Latino representation in public history in Nevada is striking as 30% of the Nevada population were Latinos at the end of 2018. Latinos make up more than half of the United States population. However, Latinas give birth more than any other ethnic group, and about 80% of Latinas live with their families with their children. See Karen Castro’s “A Booming Hispanic Population in Las Vegas” (KRQE News 13, September 11, 2018) and Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda’s *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*. *Advances in Immigrant Family Research* (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013), 10.

she organizes. Zamora does not hide her lowrider adjacent lifestyle as she grows into her career and is relatively open about how lowriding fits her life. On the other hand, Christal Leyva is a Lowrider, lowrider wife, and a mother. Christal, and her husband Hector, actively participate in lowrider culture with their children. Christal is not a part of a car club, but Hector is an active member of *Lifestyle Car Club*.² (It should be noted that initially *Lifestyle Car Club* was “non-family oriented” and all *male* car club.³) Ivelys Franco started as a lowrider wife and became a mother. Franco did not become a Lowrider until her children grew up. Juanita Salazar was also introduced to cars by her father; like many Lowriders, car culture is a family affair. Salazar, the president of the Las Vegas chapter of *Techniques* car club, built her first lowrider at sixteen. Lowriding has been a constant in her life for as far as she can remember. (It should also be noted *Techniques* did not allow female membership until about a decade ago. Salazar has been a part of *Techniques* for eight years.⁴)

Even if the women are part of the same culture, the voices of Lowrider women are different and have not been historically present, but they need to be. The ways women in this car culture view themselves, their families, and their positionality serve as a better understanding of the complexities of lowrider culture, meaning more and being *more* than a niche culture about cars. This study focuses on their experiences from the 1980s to contemporary lowriding in Southern Nevada through oral histories. Implementing oral histories is necessary for this study as it would be disrespectful and inappropriate to discuss female Lowriders without *their* voices. Without their oral histories, no one outside of lowrider culture would be able to see how Lowriders deal with

² Hector Leyva. Instagram message to Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, March 7 2022.

³ Charles M. Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show* (Greenwood, 2011), 160.

⁴ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

criminalization and gender in a male-dominated social space. The methodology of oral histories is instrumental to understanding lowrider communities as Lowriders are activists, parents, working-class community members, and individuals rooted in car culture and community. Zamora, the Leyvas, Franco, and Salazar participated in voluntary conversations where they all discussed their lives, how they became involved with lowriders, how lowriding fits into their lives, and how they navigate negative stereotypes about Lowriders in their daily lives. Leyva, Franco, and Salazar all discuss gender in lowriding and their experiences in the car culture. Salazar and Franco specify how women in lowriding culture are often viewed as accessories to men's lives and how the oversexualization has impacted their lives and positionality.

Lowriders *in* and *out* of scholarship

Surveying the written literature about lowriding reveals a pattern that within academia, it is the cultural anthropologist who has mainly investigated lowriders. Why have historians been late and even ignored the topic of lowriders? Only a handful of scholars wrote about lowrider culture in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ Janice Marie Allard Holtz (1975), a trained anthropologist, discussed and described popular representations of lowrider youth in East Los Angeles to better understand the youth "sub-culture".⁶ Anthropologists Peggy Beck (1980) and Luis F. B. Plascencia (1983) wrote about lowriders as symbols for Latino identity as a part of Latino culture. Brenda

⁵ There were three journalists who wrote about lowriders and they were Wayne King (1981), Calvin Trillin and Edward Koren (1978) and Ted West (1976). See Wayne King, "Low Riders Are Becoming Legion among Chicanos." *New York Times* (1981); Calvin Trillin and Edward Koren, "Low and Slow, Mean and Clean." *New Yorker*. July 10, 70-74. (1978); Ted West, "Scenes from a Revolution: Low and Slow." *Car and Driver*. August, 47- 51; Willis, Paul. 1978. *Profane Culture*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1976)

⁶ JaniceMarie Allard Holtz, "The "LOW-RIDERS": Portrait Of An Urban Youth Subculture," (*Youth & Society* 6, no. 4, 1975); Brends Jo Bright, "STYLE AND IDENTITY: HOUSTON LOW RIDERS (TEXAS)." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1986; Brenda Jo. Bright, "Mexican-American Low Riders: An Anthropological Approach to Popular Culture", 1994; William Calvo, "Lowriders: Storytellers of the Chicano Experience." MA thesis, Arizona State University, 2003.

Bright, a cultural anthropologist, wrote about lowriders from the late 1980s to the late 1990s in Texas and New Mexico.⁷ Her studies highlight the importance of place signaling how significant New Mexico was to lowriding in that specific cultural place. In her early work, Bright briefly mentioned the connections between lowriders and gang affiliations and asserted lowriding as a form of community socialization through car modifications rather than gangbanging. Bright also briefly mentions the complicated depictions of women at car shows.⁸ On the other hand, James Griffith (1989), also a cultural anthropologist, published four essays describing lowriders as folk art in San Antonio, Texas because of the impact of Latino art in car customizations.⁹ These scholars were white and outsiders; is there any difference in how Latinx scholars discuss lowriding?

Unfortunately, the scholarship is also scarce within Latinx scholarship. Historian William Gradante (1982, 1985) wrote about the lowriding scene as a form for Mexican-American/Latino representation of self through visibility and ownership of identity.¹⁰ Gradante also discussed car competitions, community socialization, the regulations of some lowrider car clubs, and briefly

⁷ Peggy Beck, “The Low Riders: Folk Art and Emergent Nationalism.” (*Native Arts/West* 4 , 1980) 25-27; Luis F. B. Plascencia, “Low Riding in the Southwest: Cultural Symbols in the Mexican Community.” In *History, Culture, and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*, 141– 175. Ypsilanti, Mich.: Bilingual Press. (1983).

⁸ Brenda Jo Bright, “STYLE AND IDENTITY: HOUSTON LOW RIDERS (TEXAS).” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1986

⁹ James Griffith, “Mexican American Folk Art.” In *From the Inside Out*, edited by Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Joyce M. Bishop, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, 52– 59. San Francisco: Mexican Museum. (1989)

¹⁰ I will not be using the term Hispanic. I will be using Latina, Latino, Latinx or Chicana/o. If the lowriders refer to the term “hispanic”, their words will not be changed. Other than those instances, I will *not* be using Hispanic as it is a term created by corporations and the United States government to easily combine Spanish-speaking populations. In the 1970s and 1980s, beer companies started using the term Hispanic as a marketing tool to combine Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Latin American populations into one term. The use of “Hispanic” serves as an example of Latin American communities being commodified through the usability of a singular term. For more information see Rodolfo Acuña’s *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (5th ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004).

discussed the stereotypes of zoot-suiters and *cholos*.¹¹ James Diego Vigil (1988), an anthropologist, wrote about lowriding but not as a focal point. Vigil primarily focused on gangs, mass violence, poverty, and ethnic populations.¹² The vast majority of scholars researching lowriders are anthropologists, and little attention is given to lowriders by historians.¹³ It was not until the 1990s and the early 2000s that other scholars started to write about Latino leisure spaces focusing on automobiles.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Denise Sandoval's photography book *Arte y Estilo: The Lowriding Tradition* was part of Latinx scholars' efforts to take over ownership of narratives directed at lowriders. Sandoval, a Cultural Studies scholar, created an exhibition to present Lowriders as critical cultural markers not necessarily associated with criminality.¹⁴ Sandoval is one of the leading scholars on lowriders, if not *the* leading scholar. She worked with the Petersen Automotive Museum, in Los Angeles, California, as a guest curator for the exhibition *Arte y Estilo* in 2000. For this exhibition, lowrider community members were introduced to the behind-the-scenes work as they were employed to work alongside museum personnel. In addition

¹¹ William Gradante, "Low and Slow, Mean and Clean." *Natural History* 91, no. 4: 28-39; "Art among the Low Riders." In *Folk Art in Texas* edited by F. E. Abernathy, 70–77. Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press (1985).

¹² James Diego Vigil, *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press 1988)

¹³ For books on American car culture see, M. M. Musselman, *Get a Horse! : The Story of the Automobile in America* ([1st ed.]. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950); Automobile Manufacturers Association. *Automobiles of America* ([2d, rev. ed.]. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968); Stephen W. Sears, *The American Heritage History of the Automobile in America* (New York: American Heritage Pub. Co.: book trade distribution by Simon and Schuster, 1977); James J. Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970); Richard P. Scharchburg, *Carriages Without Horses : J. Frank Duryea and the Birth of the American Automobile Industry* (Warrendale, PA: Society of Automotive Engineers, 1993); Chappell, *Lowrider Space*, 207n1. For car histories with a gendered lens see, Jennifer Elizabeth Berkley, "Women at the Motor Wheel: Gender and Car Culture in the United States of America, 1920-1930." (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996); Sue Macy, *Motor Girls : How Women Took the Wheel and Drove Boldly into the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Partners, 2017).

¹⁴ Denise Sandoval, *Arte y Estilo: The Lowriding Tradition* (Petersen Automotive Museum, 2000)

to professional community members hired to help with the exhibition, a “community advisory group” was created to serve as a “review team.”¹⁵ *Arte y Estilo* was the first instance where the Petersen Automotive Museum employed relevant community members to serve as experts about *their* communities, as individuals familiar and active in lowriding culture.

Sandoval’s *Arte y Estilo* did not focus on women, but women were present in her exhibition. Even if women were not the sole focus of *Arte y Estilo*, the exhibition was remarkable as it was the first time the Petersen Automotive Museum held an exhibition created with Latinos in mind. The lack of significant museum interest in Latinos is not surprising. The first time a major museum exhibition was created and focused on displaying Chicano art did not occur until the early 1990s, almost a decade before *Arte y Estilo*.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sandoval, *Arte y Estilo: The Lowriding Tradition*, 5

¹⁶ This first major showing of Chicano/a art was *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*. To find out more about this exhibition see Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Chicano Art: Inside-Outside the Master’s House: Cultural Politics and the Cara Exhibition* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 2003). To learn more about Latinos and Latino representation in museums see editors Antonio Ríos-Bustamante and Christine Marin’s *Latinos in Museums: Heritage reclaimed* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1998). It is not a big book but it is important for anyone interested in an analysis of Latino contribution in museums and public history spaces. This book focuses on 4 main parts, such as scholarly research, relevant case studies regarding Latino representation, a training session for up-and-coming academics and, lastly, activities and events created as results of Latino involvement in public history. The book discusses Latino public history programs from the 1970s until the 1990s. The 1980s and the 1990s were the eras discussed in the first chapter as actively attempting to create representation in public history for Latino populations. The editors make it clear that around the time of the book’s publication, non-Latinos dominated the field of public history programs. The individuals in charge of conducting public history programs were also non-Latino scholars and academics who produced work about Latino communities. The first chapter ends with a call to public historians, museum employees, and professionals involved in public history to actively work towards Latino representation and recognition. The second chapter focuses on attempting to get rid of the notion of Latinos being monolithic and it focuses on diversity, Latino identity, and the ways Latinos are viewed in museums in Southern Florida. The third chapter focuses on the issues of object display and how museum guests bring their own interpretations and personal experiences when viewing art in museums. This book, as helpful as it is, is not without its faults. *Latinos in Museums* is well-intended but about half of the book focuses on California. Latinos do not only reside in California; Latinos are all over the United States.

The images provided in the book about *Arte y Estilo* provided historical information for readers unfamiliar with lowrider culture to understand the cultural context regarding lowriders and lowriding. Sandoval paid homage to lowriders and community actors who allowed her to show their customizable cars through *their* eyes and explained how lowriding fit into her life.¹⁷ Lowrider vehicles are more than mere automobiles as lowriders *are* active participants in creating and imbuing meaning through this specific material culture. Material culture emphasizes the importance of physical objects' on "everyday life and the material circumstances of ordinary people".¹⁸ The focus on working-class/ordinary people shows the importance of lowriding to working-class communities, such as the individuals interviewed in Ben Chappell's *Lowrider Space Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars* in 2012.¹⁹

Chappell's *Lowrider Space Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars* is one of the newer books to come out of the twenty-first century.²⁰ Chappell, a trained anthropologist, received his insider information about lowriders from a car club in Austin, Texas. Being surrounded and inspired by customized cars, Chappell decides to build his own customized car. As Chappell tried to build this car, he felt the physical, financial, and time-consuming work

¹⁷ Sandoval, *Arte y Estilo*, 7

¹⁸ Leora Auslander, Amy Bentley, Leor Halevi, H. Otto Sibum, and Christopher Witmore. "AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture." *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1355.

¹⁹ Ben Chappell, *Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars*. 1st. ed. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012.

²⁰ Almost a decade prior to Chappell's *Lowrider Space*, William Calvo's MA thesis "Lowriders: Storytellers of the Chicano Experience." MA thesis (2003) and Denise Michelle Sandoval's Ph.D. dissertation *Bajito Y Suavecito/low and Slow: Cruising through Lowrider Culture* (2003) are noteworthy to mention. Calvo's thesis and Sandoval's dissertation were published in the same year and at the turn of the century. Calvo also published *Lowriders: Cruising the Color Line*, his dissertation from Arizona State University in 2011. Calvo's *Lowriders: Cruising the Color Line* focuses on the use of *color* on lowriders and why Lowriders choose the color that they do for their cars. Calvo implemented interviews, photographs, and open discussions with Lowriders to discuss the cultural and political aspects of *color* and lowriding in the lives of Lowriders.

required to build a car. Discussions regarding the amount of *labor* a lowrider requires is not unknown to lowriders, as lowriders are well aware their cars will take effort, time, and money. Outsiders to the lowriding culture only see what is above the surface and not the work that is put into cars or how the culture matters to the individuals who dedicate their leisure lives to lowriding. Lowriding is not an activity that is cheap. Monetary resources and the lack of free time with everyday responsibilities has an impact on whether a person is likely to participate in the lowrider culture for leisure.

Nonetheless, Chappell's book is a well-intended, thoroughly researched study. The book does an outstanding job of presenting lowriders in a primarily positive light by trying his best to move lowriders away from negative stereotypes. Chappell argues lowriding is a political statement in which lowriders are simply existing. He is absolutely correct. Nonetheless, *Lowrider Space* is still a product of a white male in academia studying lowriders. As Chappell said in an interview,

“I called the book ‘lowrider space’ because in effect they create... an environment where conversation happens... this sort of community space may be especially attractive because discrimination in the prevailing culture has denied them access to other common spaces.”²¹

Lowriding is a community space, but it is more than that. Lowriding truly is a *lifestyle*. However, the interests of an Anglo-anthropologist looking at ethnic communities says a lot about how white scholars have historically conducted scholarly research about ethnic leisure activities because they are interested in these activities due to the activities being *different* or *exotic*.²²

²¹ Phil Patton, “Lowriding: This Culture Is About More Than Cars”, *The New York Times*. December 04, 2012

²² Another instance of outside interest by scholars on lowriders would be Martin Høyem's dissertation “I Want My Car to Look Like a Whore: Lowriding and the Poetics of Outlaw Aesthetics” from the University of Oslo in 2007. Høyem received his insider information about lowriders from *Lifestyle Car Club*, Hector Leyva's car club. Høyem's dissertation is from the perspective of a Norwegian social anthropologist implementing fieldwork and interviews with Lowriders. Høyem writes and discusses

For this study, Sandoval and Chappell explain *who* and *what* a lowrider is and how a lowrider does not solely refer to men as women can also be lowriders. A Lowrider can be the person who rides a lowrider car or the car's name; the two uses of the term can be interchangeable. The fundamental qualification of a lowrider car is that the frame of the car is close to the floor. Thus, the term *lowrider* refers to the *low* aesthetic of the automobile.²³ In order to be close to the ground, the automobile must have certain tires, namely wire wheels. In addition to being close to the ground, most lowriders have hydraulic systems which allow the car to move without the car frame or car parts touching the ground.²⁴ Hydraulic systems also allow lowriders to hop, "bounce", or "dance" for spectators.²⁵ Since the mid-twentieth century, Lowriders tend to choose Cadillacs and Monte Carlos as their vehicles of choice. Monte Carlos have easily identifiable long bodies with partly-covered wheels. The image of a Monte Carlo's frame close to the floor makes for a more aesthetically pleasing *lowered* image. Cadillacs (especially the 1984 Coupe Deville) typically have low bodies.²⁶ The *low*-ness of the cars made them attractive to lowriders. Chevy Impalas were sought for lowriders, especially in the 1960s, because the car's body offered painters a bigger canvas for personalized cultural art of girlfriends, mothers, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and so much more.²⁷

lowriders for the consumption of non-Lowriders. "I Want My Car to Look Like a Whore" is for outsiders looking *into* lowriding. However, Høyem does discuss Lowriders through his argument of positioning Lowrider through socio-economic and social standings rather than lowriding being about ethnicity and gendered expressions of self.

²³ Robert Con Davis-Undiano, *Mestizos Come Home! Making and Claiming Mexican American Identity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 128

²⁴ Before using hydraulics in lowriders, lowered cars did not have the title 'lowrider.' The term lowrider came into fruition after hydraulics made their debut in cars. There is speculation that the term lowrider did gain traction until the mid-sixties; Charles M. Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show* (Greenwood, 2011), 11

²⁵ Davis-Undiano, *Mestizos Come Home!*, 130

²⁶ Phil Patton, "Lowriding: This Culture Is About More Than Cars", (The New York Times. December 04, 2012).

²⁷ Ibid.

Many lowriders have eye-catching paint-jobs with bright colors on their exteriors. Gonzalez's car did not have any of the *typical* imagery associated with lowriders, as she had a mustang because she simply thought a *cherry* red mustang looked cool. Even if Gonzalez's mustang did not depict a quintessential lowrider from her car's exterior, her car *did* have velvet interiors. Lowrider interiors are known to display velvet upholstery with big and cozy front seats to show the "appearance of luxury" and style.²⁸ Due to the extensive customization of lowriders through art and other visual indicators of identity, it would not be amiss to say that lowriders embody Latino experiences and are a way for lowriders to express their identity.²⁹ The aesthetics of lowriders have caught scholars' attention and photographers like Kristin Bedford.³⁰

Bedford's *Cruise Night* (2020) is a photography book with a little over seventy long pages portraying the aesthetics of Lowriders, their vehicles, neon signs, and other images related to lowrider culture. Bedford's interest in lowrider culture began when she went to her *first* lowriding cruising event in 2014. According to the photographer, she "wanted to photograph and understand how transforming a car was integral to being seen and heard."³¹ In her "Artist's Reflection" on Duke University's Art website, Bedford detailed her work on *Cruise Night*

"How did I come to have this large collection of archival lowrider photos? For the last five years I have been working on a photography book, *Cruise Night*, about the Mexican American lowrider community in Los Angeles. While publishers urged me to have a prestigious academic or an art-world celebrity write my book essay, I knew that the only text I wanted in the book were the voices of the lowriders. I

²⁸ Brenda Bright, "Heart like a Car": Hispano/Chicano Culture in Northern New Mexico" (*American Ethnologist*. January 07, 2008), 587.

²⁹ Chappell, *Lowrider Space*, 7

³⁰ Kristin Bedford, *Cruise Night* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani, 2020).

³¹ Nicole Kaack, "Kristin Bedford's *Cruise Night*," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 1, 2021, https://brooklynrail.org/2021/10/art_books/Kristin-Bedfords-Cruise-Night.

spent over a hundred hours driving all over Los Angeles County recording oral histories of the elder lowriders, people who were the pioneers of this movement.”³²

In later interviews about her book, Bedford emphasizes how her publishers wanted her to use a scholar for the dialogue of *Cruise Night*, but she pushed for Lowriders to have their own voices heard in the book. Should Bedford be praised for her inclusion of Lowrider voices? No. Absolutely not. The inclusion of Lowrider voices is the *bare minimum* scholars and outside observers should include. It is the bare minimum *anyone*, academic or not, should do when looking at ethnic leisure communities as outsiders. The curiosity of anyone looking into ethnic leisure spaces should consider questions or concerns about how outsiders approach the communities of interest.

Christal and Hector Leyva are familiar with Bedford’s book as contemporary Lowriders. Christal embodies feminine, pin-up girl style. With his *Raiders* long-sleeve t-shirt, long beard, and big rings, Hector resembles some of my male family members. Speaking about their life experiences and opinions with the couple felt as comfortable as intimate family conversations. They were welcoming, *honest* and genuine. During our interview, the couple brought up *Cruise Night* and asked if I had read it. The couple felt the same way I did about the book. Christal explained her thoughts saying she understood Bedford was accepted and invited by lowrider communities,

“... but it is an outsider’s viewpoint... We’re excited to share our culture but when you commercialize our history... you’re either telling a story to exploit a culture or you’re telling a story to uplift a culture. There was a clear self-driven, self-profit result and motivation, in my opinion... I found her narrative... I found it condescending and patronizing... You can tell when a story, narrative is being directed towards uplifting a culture and when you’ve just put us in a Petri dish and given us your observations about us... It was putting us in a Petri dish, taking it back to her world to profit, to look like she has given a window to this culture, right? And I just have an issue with that... You could live it but you can also visit

³² Kristin Bedford, “Kristin Bedford: Cruise Night,” Duke Arts, n.d., <https://arts.duke.edu/kristin-bedford-cruise-night/>.

it... that hurts because we work so hard and we sacrifice family vacations to be lowriders.”³³

Christal went on to clarify,

“I don’t want to be told what my life looks like from a visitor’s standpoint who’s never going to come back. Or when they do come back, they’re gonna come back because they wanna make money off of us. There is no authenticity and that’s my problem with it... There (Kristin Bedford’s book) is no giveback. Because we want to support anything lowrider. Anything that is going to uplift the community. Um, had it been an homage to the community as opposed to a peeping Tom perspective... There was no, like... Domino effect that was going to benefit our culture or the storytelling of it. It really was... an outsider’s perspective.”³⁴

Bedford’s interest in lowriding is the same as Chappell’s, outsiders interested in a niche car culture.

As well-intended as both authors aim their works to be, as much as they are accepted and invited by lowriding communities to shed light on the beauty of lowriders, they are still *outsiders* looking into lowriding culture. Bedford’s *Cruise Night* has received positive reviews, and she makes a significant contribution by Bedford showing women lowriders with their cars and highlighting their voices. In her interview with *The Brooklyn Rail*, Bedford also stated, “Lowriding is an oral history. It was never fully documented.”³⁵ Even though Bedford aimed to present what she believed to be missing in the visibility of lowriders, I believe there is more to examine with Lowriders.

Bedford mentions that lowriding has not been “*fully* documented”, what does she mean by “fully documented”? If Bedford refers to Latino photographers or street photographers, she would be wrong. Lowriders have taken pictures of themselves and their cars, albeit the photographs are not as mainstream as *Cruise Night*. Bedford said her project used “archival photos, ranging from

³³ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva. Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Nicole Kaack, “Kristin Bedford’s Cruise Night,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 1, 2021, https://brooklynrail.org/2021/10/art_books/Kristin-Bedfords-Cruise-Night.

the 1940s to 1980s, of Mexican American lowriders in Los Angeles.”³⁶ Bedford is saying Lowriders have documented themselves and their lives for decades. Personal photographs and intimate photography collections are as valid as photographs in museums or published in books. If the photographer admits Lowrider photos exist, what does she refer to when she said lowriding has not been “fully documented”? Just because Lowriders have private photos and private documentation about lowriding does not mean Lowriders and lowriding is not “fully documented”; the documentation of Lowriders are simply not readily available to outsiders. Even then, the phrasing of a *lack* of Lowrider documentation is false. Since the end of 2014, Hector Leyva, one example of a lowrider photographer, has highlighted lowriders on his Instagram page. I followed Leyva’s Instagram page *because* he extensively posted and shared lowrider content. If Bedford refers to attention to women in lowrider culture in academia, she would be correct but false if she refers to the lack of lowrider women in media and art. Images of women and lowriding have been synonymous since the beginning of lowriding. In the *very* first edition of *Lowrider* magazine, a woman is on the front cover.³⁷ In 2010, *Lowrider* magazine published an article on the *Lady Bugs*, an all-woman lowrider club active throughout the 1970s but regrettably disbanded in the late 1970s. *Lady Bugs* shows how women have had to fight for their positionality in male-dominated fields since the beginnings of lowriding. Just because the images of lowrider women are not mainstream does not mean that women are entirely invisible.³⁸

³⁶ Kristin Bedford, “Kristin Bedford: Cruise Night,” Duke Arts, n.d., <https://arts.duke.edu/kristin-bedford-cruise-night/>.

³⁷ “Lowrider Magazine #1 Original First Edition 1977 Reprint 1st Issue,” eBay, July 21, 2021.

³⁸ In 2013, anthropologist Jazmin Ontiveros filmed *Lowcura: The Creation of Family in Chicano Lowrider Car Clubs*. *Lowcura* is a 20-minute short film discussing the Padrinos Car Club and people Ontiveros knows in lowrider culture. Although *Lowcura* solely interviewed men, the film’s director is a woman influenced by lowrider culture through her family members, who showed her lowriding means much more than *just* a car. In 2018, We Are Mitu, an online platform focusing on Latina empowerment, wrote an article about a female lowrider club formed in the early 2000s to get away from *machismo* (toxic masculinity) in lowrider culture. See, Lucy Guanuna’s “After Being Turned Away from Macho Car Clubs,

Women have been a part of lowrider culture as community organizers, support systems, wives, and mothers who “hold down the home” to allow their boyfriends/husbands to contribute to lowriding or being Lowriders themselves.³⁹ My work centers on the experiences of Lowriders in diverse positions in the lowriding community. Historians have discussed lowriders in connection to diverting criminalization, and there are good reasons for that singular lens on lowriding. When viewing the scholarship of Lowriders, California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado are the states where scholars have positioned Lowriders.⁴⁰ Thus, the majority of scholarship on Lowriders focuses on the five states. This thesis adds to the scholarship of Lowriders by adding Las Vegas, Nevada to the available literature, as well as including women in the conversation of lowriding. Not only does this thesis add Las Vegas and women to the Lowrider scholarship, but the members of the Lowrider community also fight against criminalization. They fight negative perceptions of Lowriders and the women make their marks in lowriding by doing what *they* want because lowriding is a big part of *their* lives. Whether women build the cars themselves or provide emotional and financial support for car modification, I argue the role of women as active participants in lowriding should not be disregarded or ignored. Thus, in the first chapter, I argue against Lowrider criminalization through Lowriders’ social and cultural resistance to white-American-dominated social spaces. In the second chapter, I argue how the voices of Lowriders show how lowriding has evolved in Las Vegas and how it continues to grow through the advocacy of women like Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco, and Juanita Salazar.

These Latinas Are Creating Their Own Spaces in the Lowrider Scene” (Fierce MITU, April 16, 2018) and Jazmin Ontiveros, Center for Visual Anthropology, Production Company, and Alexander Street Press. *Lowcura: The Creation of Family in Chicano Lowrider Car Clubs*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, 2013.

³⁹ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva. Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

⁴⁰ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 22-25

Lowrider Vilification

Inarguably, lowriding began in Los Angeles, California, in the sixties.⁴¹ At the end of the seventies, the *Lowrider* magazine started publications and became incredibly popular.⁴² The popularity of *Lowrider* magazine is conceivably one of the reasons why lowriding expanded outside of Los Angeles.⁴³ Lowriders began to make their mark in different places outside of California, such as Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado.⁴⁴ At the end of the late seventies and early eighties, lowrider car clubs started to establish themselves in major cities in Texas.⁴⁵ In Española, New Mexico, locals dubbed the city “the Lowrider Capital of the World” due to the local belief in massive Lowrider popularity in the city.⁴⁶ The title of Española is contested as there is documentation of lowriders cruising around Phoenix, Arizona as early as the sixties. Police and Lowrider relationships in Phoenix were as rocky as they were in Los Angeles. In terms of Lowrider community efforts, in 1979, the Arizona Lowriders Association came together to speak out against the harassment of law enforcement on lowriders regarding their cruising activities. In this instance of Lowrider activism, lowrider community members destroyed efforts to “ban hydraulics and altered suspensions during its 1982 session”.⁴⁷ In Denver, Colorado, similar to major cities in California and Arizona, Denver Lowriders also fought against legislation in the sixties banning cruising. Denver Lowriders fought against connotations of criminality with their car clubs. In one instance in September of 1980, police officers in Denver detained over one-hundred Lowriders on

⁴¹ Charles M. Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show* (Greenwood, 2011), 17

⁴² The magazine was available in print form from 1977 to 2019.

⁴³ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 20

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-25

⁴⁵ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 22-23

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24

charges related to cruising. The charges on the lowriders later resulted in dismissal charges. Thus, lowriders in Denver continued to resist opposition to lowrider culture and fight against lowriders' image of being criminals.⁴⁸

In the opening scene of the Netflix show *On My Block*, a lowrider turns the corner and parks in front of a house where a party is happening. Three men emerge from the car and enter the house party. The *men* depict stereotypical Latino gang-members dressed in *cholo* attire and with head/neck tattoos.⁴⁹ Within minutes of entering the party, gunshots ring out from inside the house.⁵⁰ The audience is left to assume the lowriders were responsible for the crime and violence. This scene solely depicts male Lowriders but the persona of crime is evident from the first few minutes of *On My Block*. The first episode of this show illustrates the lives of Black and Brown youth in a fictional neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. The television show succumbs to the historical tendency of associating lowriders with gangs. For example, Spooky, the head of the gang *Santos*, is often depicted with his lowrider, either alone or with *his* homies. These images of Spooky and his gang add to the popular stereotypes of Chicanos/Mexican American Lowriders being part of *pandillas* or perpetrators of crime and violence.⁵¹ Lowriding is so often associated with *men* and with crime, this chapter will highlight how lowriding is less about crime and more about resisting white American-dominated social spaces.

It should be noted male voices are more prominent than females voices in discussions around criminality because male voices are more readily accessible in newspapers, contemporary

⁴⁸ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 25

⁴⁹ *Cholo* = gang member. In this scenario, *cholo* attire is defined as over-sized black and white t-shirts, khaki knee-length shorts, long white socks and white shoes.

⁵⁰ *On My Block*. Directed by Lauren Iungerich. By Jeremy Haft, Eddie Gonzalez, and Lauren Iungerich. Season 1, Episode 1. United States: Netflix, 2018.

⁵¹ *Pandillas* is Spanish for gangs.

documentaries, and available literature. The overabundance of male voices should not distract from the presence of women. Female Lowriders have not been a part of the narrative regarding the criminality of Lowriders but they are still subject to stereotypes and presumptions of vilification by non-Lowriders. Thus, in understanding how criminality fits with lowriding, this chapter adds to the sparse literature by looking at how popular media narratives have historically associated lowriders with violence and gangs and how those within lowrider culture resist this characterization. Lowriders instead define their narratives as seeing themselves as centered around community and niche cultural interests. This chapter delves into how Latinx folks have refused ‘criminal’ characterization by looking at how lowriders depict themselves through the personal interviews of Beto Mendoza, Marcos Gaitan, Nichol Zamora, Juanita Salazar, and Hector and Christal Leyva. The research for this project ranges from newspaper articles, personal interviews, and secondary sources focusing on ethnicity, crime, and policing.

Ethnic enclaves and criminality

Since the early nineteenth century, stereotyping of Latinos has been a part of American society. Stereotyping Latinos in America can be traced back to the Mexican-American War of 1846 to 1848 and even earlier. The early negative perceptions of Latinos and Mexicans bled into the twentieth century. The unfavorable ideas dominated Latinos as being undocumented, not speaking proper English, and focusing solely on “unskilled labor” for employment. Mexicans were connected with “petty crime and gang violence” due to the inability to communicate in English and with cultural differences effectively; Mexicans became connected with “petty crime and gang violence.” White Americans’ preconceived notions of Latinos perpetuated an already established

fear of crime by undocumented immigration and fueled the fear of the disappearance of white American majority status.⁵²

Historically, to keep majority status, white Americans have promoted ideas of assimilation to immigrant and Indigenous communities.⁵³ Americans often characterize groups who resist assimilation and remain visible or hyper-visible as being deviant. White Americans have also associated criminality with communities who retain ethno-racial identities. These ethno-racial groups have highlighted the general public's fear of losing their livelihood and of being overrun by ethnically and culturally different groups.⁵⁴ These fears caused white Americans to perpetuate stereotypes of Black and Brown folks as criminals.⁵⁵ The criminalization of ethnic communities relates to lowriding as Lowriders make socio-political statements simply by *existing*. Popular stereotypes of criminality arise when ethnic and minority groups are more authentic to themselves, are overly proud of their cultural backgrounds, and do not assimilate. Lowriders do not assimilate as they dress differently, have certain aesthetics, and exist for *themselves*. With increased cultural visibility and diverse presences of ethnic groups, their noticeable existence is a threat to white American majority spaces.⁵⁶

To counter the media stereotypes, readers need to understand how lowrider community social space is akin to an ethnic enclave. English professor Yoonmee Chang defined an ethnic enclave as a “rosier picture of racial spatial segregation” where communities willingly separate

⁵² Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 627-628

⁵³ Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers : A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6

⁵⁴ Pamela Irving Jackson, *Minority Group Threat, Crime, and Policing: Social Context and Social Control* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 25

⁵⁵ Jackson, *Minority Group Threat*, 44

⁵⁶ Jackson, *Minority Group Threat*, 48

themselves from other communities.⁵⁷ Chang understands ethnic enclaves as a form of oppositional culture. Oppositional cultures refer to community socializations that step away from mainstream culture to survive racial, cultural and ethnic oppression by the majority of society. Many stereotypes are durable and rarely change over decades, as the beliefs of non-white communities through institutional racism and discrimination do not go away easily.⁵⁸ Enclaves are groups of individuals who share a common “life-style”, economic and cultural standing, such as the overwhelmingly LGBT+ populated Castro District in San Francisco.⁵⁹ For this chapter, oppositional culture is used interchangeably with ethnic enclaves.⁶⁰ Being ethnic enclaves, like lowrider communities, tend to be “othered” by mainstream America.⁶¹ Therefore, ethnic enclaves reflect racial and class prejudices prevalent in the United States.⁶² Although Chang’s study focused on Asian American communities, her discussions of police tensions and class inequality also applies to Black and Latinx communities.⁶³

Communities form enclaves to protect themselves. However, as sociologist Milton Gordon pointed out, in *Assimilation in American Life*, when communities stray away from the status quo,

⁵⁷ Yoonmee Chang, *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 2.

⁵⁸ Carl L. Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America* (Pasadena, Calif.: Salem Press, 2000), 791-793 and 806; Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 540

⁵⁹ Mark Abrahamson, *Urban Enclaves: Identity and Place in America* (Contemporary Social Issues (New York, N.Y.). New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 2.

⁶⁰ Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 745.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 747

⁶² In the encyclopedia *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, ethnic enclaves are defined as communities intentionally separated from the majority population who focus on distinct customs and attributes. The encyclopedia separates ethnic enclaves and enclave economies, while Chang combined the two. Enclave economies were defined as the monetary and proprietary ways minority communities achieve “economic mobility outside of the mainstream economy.” Chang’s definition of an ethnic enclave distinctly marked economic standings as important for ethnic enclaves. Many communities of color and minority communities tend to face economic hardships and/or be a part of multi-generational, economically contributing households; Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 540; Chang, *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave*, 10.

⁶³ Chang, *Writing the Ghetto*, 10.

their separation is often tarnished with clashes from majority populations through violence.⁶⁴ A pattern of national discourse about ethnic communities is rife with “perceptions, assumptions, fantasies, fears and half-truths.”⁶⁵ Historically, mainstream media has influenced the general public’s view of ethnic enclaves through publications covering ethnic and minority communities.⁶⁶ Popular representations of ethnic enclaves are typically full of ideas about criminality and stereotypes of communities of color. The vilification of Black and Brown communities has been happening for decades. Sociologists and criminologists have been at the forefront of academia regarding criminalization and policing of ethnic communities. The studies of Latinos with Chicanos/Mexican Americans and Puerto Rican populations gained traction in the nineteen-seventies, around the same time as academic interest in Black communities and criminalization increased.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Bankston, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, 383-384.

⁶⁵ Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 25

⁶⁶ R. Weitzer., and C. Kubrin. “Breaking news: How local TV news and real-world conditions affect fear of crime”, (*Justice Quarterly* 21.3, 2004), 497–520.

⁶⁷ The interest by scholars in the 1960s and 1970s surrounding Black communities, Latino and marginalized communities towards their oppositions to the status quo can be credited to activism efforts at the grassroots level caused a “historiographical whirlwind” in the historical profession, as labeled by historian Michael G. Kammen in *The Past before Us : Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). The “historiographical whirlwind” refers to the ways scholars, but particularly historians, started looking at everyday peoples and their normal lives as areas of research. From the 1980s to the 1990s, there was a shift in how scholars focused on crime, race and policing. Police-based-crime on communities of color are examined by sociologist Jerome H. Skolnick and criminologist James J. Fyfe in their book collaboration *Above the law: Police and Excessive Use of Force* (New York: Free Press, 1993) centers on analyzing the police brutality used on Rodney King as the scholars present issues of police force, police violence on civilians, police culture and police accountability. For more information on an analysis on police-based-crime, see legal scholar Paul Chevigny’s *Edge of the knife: Police violence in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995) who presents an overview of lethal force and police brutality in an international study of the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean exploring the socio-political factors influencing public resentment or support of violent police use of force. For more information on the connection of criminality and media, see *Crime News and the Public* (New York: Praeger, 1980) by on political scientist Doris A. Graber. For an anthology on the influential and fundamental collection of studies focusing on the role of crime and media, see *Media, Process, and the Social Construction of Crime: Studies in Newsmaking Criminology* (New York: Garland, 1995) who remarks the perceptions of crime and criminality are impacted by the voices of politicians, the news

However, studies on Latinx communities and police violence are less developed as analyses did not emerge until the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (within the disciplines of criminology, sociology, and anthropology). Regarding studies on Latino youth and criminality, the focus on Mexican Americans came late in the twentieth century. However, historians lead scholarly research focusing on Zoot Suits (or zooters) and criminality. Zoot Suits morphed into the birth to lowriding through opposition to American-dominated culture for Latinos. To fully understand how zooters impact lowriding, examining the scholarship of Zoot Suits with crime and lack of analysis on gender is necessary.

Zoot Suits

When researching how crime and race are connected, an analysis of police interactions and ordinary communities needs to be detailed, especially concerning Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and zooters (individuals who wore Zoot Suits). The California Zoot Suit Riots occurred in June 1943, where Mexican American youth were subject to violence by race riots led by American servicemen.⁶⁸ Zoot Suits were seen as dangerous because they seemed connected to mischief. Inside of society's traditional expectations of the 1940s, pachucos (a term often used interchangeably with zooters) had the depictions of being ill-mannered, obscene, and all-around bad influences to decent people, Mexican and American alike.⁶⁹ A month after the riots, novelist

coverage of certain crimes, and the beliefs presented by other criminologists in their publications. Barak also discusses criminality as a product of power conflicts and strategies of social control. Going into the 1990s, significantly influenced by brutality against Black communities, scholars began to shift the ways they focused on marginalized and minority communities concerning crime, police, and criminality. Different perspectives can come from scholars looking at marginalized groups, communities of color, and minority communities through the lenses of the issues impacting their social, economic, and political livelihoods with race and criminality.

⁶⁸ Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1984.

⁶⁹ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 37

Chester B. Himes' "Zoot Riots Are Race Riots" (1943) went against the pronouncement of city officials who claimed the riots were *not* a product of racial tensions. Himes' explained that he viewed blatant examples of racial hostility towards the Mexican-American male youth in the weeks leading up to the riot.⁷⁰

Novelist Guy S. Endore (and illustrator Giacomo Patri) created the booklet, *The Sleepy Lagoon Mystery* (1943). Endore argued the attacks on zooters came to fruition by the direction of William Randolph Hearst, a businessman and newspaper publisher. The latter had a personal vendetta against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, according to Endore.⁷¹ Historian Solomon James Jones furthers the idea of racial tensions but focuses on service members as the causes for the riots in *The Government Riots of Los Angeles, June 1943* (1973).⁷² Many Americans and inhabitants of Los Angeles, California, grouped young Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and zooters as menaces to society. Thus, Jones views the riots through the lenses of race by implementing primary sources to focus on the alienation of zooters.

The isolation and violence directed at Mexican youth are expanded by historian Mauricio Mazón in his foundational study *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (1984).⁷³ Discussing the physical violence inflicted on Mexican and Mexican American youth during the riots is essential to understand its historical impact. However, Mazón does not solely focus on physical violence as he emphasizes the psychological elements leading up to the riots. Mazón analyzes the riots through a psycho-historical avenue as he examines the negative and

⁷⁰ Chester B. Himes, "Zoot Riots Are Race Riots," *The Crisis* 50.7, (1943): 200-201

⁷¹ Guy S. Endore, *The Sleepy Lagoon Mystery*. Los Angeles, CA: Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, 1944.

⁷² Solomon James Jones, *The Government Riots of Los Angeles, June 1943*. San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1973.

⁷³ Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1984.

disapproving imagery associated with young Mexican men, as well as how Americans contested ideas of patriotism towards Mexican youth prior to the riots.

Mazón argues that the sailors who attacked the Zoot Suits participated in toxic masculinity by establishing their male authority as service-men justified and perpetuated violence on zooters.⁷⁴ The stereotypes of Mexican Americans connected to crime and violence continued with the visibility of pachucos. The terms pachuco and zooter became synonymous with one another as the two were responses to counterculture through the embodiment of subcultures with young Mexican Americans. Pachucos and zooters not only went against societal expectations of their traditional Mexican parents but also white-America as many Americans believed Latino youth to be deviant. The labeling of vilification of Latino youth permeated itself into Lowriders. The criminalization of communities of color is not a new phenomenon. The portrayals of Mexican American youth (and Latino youth) as delinquents have bled into the ways non-Lowriders have widely perceived Lowriders. Like Mexican youth wearing Zoot Suits, Lowriders resist traditional Mexican culture and American culture by being hyper-visible and *proud* of who they are.

Eduardo Obregón Pagán's *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (2003) focused on the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial in 1942, which resulted in the conviction of seventeen Mexican American young men for the homicide of José Díaz. Five months after the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial, the Zoot Suit Riots began. While detailing the events prior to and during the trial, Pagán explores how mass vilification, dress style of pachucos, vernacular, and anti-Mexican youth beliefs contributed to the tensions between white Americans and Mexican Americans rising in the nineteen-thirties and forties. Aforementioned, the terms pachucos and

⁷⁴ Ibid.

zooters are often used as synonyms. However, the two terms are similar but *not* the same. Initially, a pachuco/a was the term used for “working class Mexican-Americans” who resided in urban areas in “the Southwest during the late 1930s to the 1950s”.⁷⁵ Not *all* working-class Mexican youth identified as a pachuca/o but pachuca/o became a name for Mexican-American youth to use as self-identifiers to separate themselves from white-Americans.⁷⁶

The notion of Mexican American youth to differentiate themselves into their own social group influenced white America to believe pachuca/os and zooters were criminals. However, the rascality associated with pachuco could be attributed to how Mexican and Mexican American youth grouped together in reaction to discrimination from “anti-Mexican sentiments”.⁷⁷ The youth were seen as criminals for uniting with “pachuca/o clubs” in order to provide each other with community refuge, as well as “group solidarity and self-protection” from discrimination and prejudice.⁷⁸ Pagán identified a pachuco as a Mexican American individual who went against the political and societal expectations of “what a ‘proper’ or ‘self respecting’ Mexican was supposed to be.”⁷⁹ A pachuco/a was someone who did not fit the status quo; a pachuco/a was seen as *different*.

Thus, the zoot suits worn by pachucos were viewed as disrespectful by white Americans due to the exaggerated shapes. Zoot suits looked like any regular suit a man would wear in the 1940s, except the suits were more prominent in size, which made the male upper-body larger with an accentuated waist. Pagán explained that the attire of pachucos seemed to be a mockery of the

⁷⁵ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 30

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 30

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 30

⁷⁸ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 31

⁷⁹ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 37

shortage of materials prevalent during World War II, which added to the tensions between Mexican Americans and white Americans.⁸⁰ Young Mexican Americans were frustrated by the exclusion they faced in America, and they sought social spaces for their own fulfillment.⁸¹ Not all pachucos were Mexican Americans, but the association of Mexican Americans as pachucos blew up due to the tensions between Mexican Americans and white Americans. The tensions rose, especially in Los Angeles, where the city became painted as a place filled with crime and violence attributed to Black and Brown youth and immigrants, especially during the Zoot Suits Riots of 1943.⁸²

In “The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare” (1984), historian Stuart Cosgrove argues the alienation of Black and Latino zooters as having connections to their physical appearances, notably their clothing.⁸³ The appearance of the pachuco suits were physical representations of adversarial youth towards the status quo. Cosgrove’s article primarily focuses on clothing but deviates from previous scholarship by briefly referencing *female* zooters and their perceived compliance in criminal activities. Cosgrove references two “female gangs” who embodied zooter style, especially the “Black Widows” who wore “black zoot-suit jackets, short black skirts and black fish-net stockings.”⁸⁴ Cosgrove mentions studies on drug trafficking, which suggested female zooters would hide drugs on their person and in their clothes as women were “less likely to be closely searched by male members of the law enforcement agencies.”⁸⁵ Nonetheless, female zooters were vilified and criminalized in newspapers for their opposition to *traditional* standards of femininity

⁸⁰ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 37; Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Gender and Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 2011),

⁸¹ Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!*, 45.

⁸² Denise M. Sandoval, “The Politics of Low and Slow/Bajito y Suavecito: Black and Chicano Lowriders in Los Angeles, from the 1960s through the 1970s.” In *Black and Brown in Los Angeles*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 3.

⁸³ Stuart Cosgrove, “The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare.” *History Workshop Journal* 18, no. 1 (1984): 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/18.1.77>.

⁸⁴ Cosgrove, “The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare”, 84

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 85

and sexuality by their outward appearances. The women were perceived as not sufficiently contributing to war efforts, which is similar to the backlash male zooters would receive regarding their *suits*.⁸⁶ Zoot suits and pachucos, with race and crime, have perceptively been linked together. The studies on race and crime, especially in the twentieth century and with zoot suits, primarily focused on men and *not* women. The focus on women and zoot suits did not enter the Zoot Suit scholarship until Catherine S. Ramirez's *The Woman In The Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (2009) and Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo's *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (2013).

Catherine Sue Ramirez adds to the established literature on the Zoot Suit Riots. However, she expands upon Cosgrove's brief mentions of women in Zoot Suit culture in *The Woman In The Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (2009).⁸⁷ Instead of the small references of women in Cosgrove's article, Ramirez examines the gendered violence and life experiences of pachucas (women in their zoot suits). The pachucas responded to traditional Mexican ideas of being feminine through their attire (arguably seen as immodest of the time) by wearing zoot suits, fishnets and dark makeup, as was mentioned by Cosgrove. In contrast to Cosgrove's study, women zooters take center stage as Ramirez diverges from previous scholarship by showing how pachucas became forerunners for Chicana feminism in the nineteen-seventies. Implementing interviews of pachucas, Ramirez displays how female zooters challenged the heteropatriarchy by deviating from social norms.

⁸⁶ Cosgrove, "The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare", 84; Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 37

⁸⁷ Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit : Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009

Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo's *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (2013) expands upon the idea of pachucas by focusing on their role in wartime labor and economy.⁸⁸ Escobedo also examines the vilification of pachucas and gendered violence on Mexican women throughout the Second World War. The gendered aspect of criminality by Escobedo falls within the accepted ideas of law enforcement towards Mexican Americans. Similar to Ramirez, Escobedo discusses criminality and vilification in reference to *women*. Law enforcement proclaimed that Mexican Americans were "biologically inclined towards criminality and that law enforcement authorities needed to use harsh measures to keep the youth under control."⁸⁹ Through the use of force by law enforcement, many Mexican Americans deeply felt that police often disregarded their rights. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were more likely to face harassment and misconduct in their run-ins with law enforcement.

After World War II, the relationships between police, minorities, and ethnic communities became worse due to institutionalized beliefs that non-whites were more inclined to partake in criminal activities.⁹⁰ Like social scientists operating under the mantle of 'objectivity,' even the academic community proliferated ideas that Mexicans were genetically inclined to participate in criminal acts. Though not all Americans believed Mexicans were genetically more likely to be criminals, the negative perception was institutionally embedded and stuck.⁹¹

Criminality and interaction with police

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits : the Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

⁸⁹ Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*, 3

⁹⁰ Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 3

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 113

In the experiences of Latinx communities, criminality imposed on Latinos results in the increased racial profiling of their communities and their social spaces.⁹² Racial profiling “is no more than the codification of racial prejudice” that serves as a measure for police justification in surveilling certain ethnic groups. Prejudice and discrimination can often be legitimized as a form of acceptable police conduct through officers “simply doing their job”. This is harmful when ethnic communities are criminally implicated as an extension of racial profiling to justify law enforcement’s actions.⁹³ Black and Brown folks, especially men, are harassed by law enforcement more than other populations because society views them as criminals.⁹⁴ Beliefs of criminality against minorities groups are not only focused on Black folks as the vilification impacts any population going against the status quo.⁹⁵ Latino lowriders, being individuals who go against assimilation, have felt singled out by law enforcement via police officers giving lowriders citations regarding parking violations and tickets for being out past curfew.⁹⁶

In *The San Francisco Examiner*, Reporter Mireya Navarro wrote about police harassment of lowriders from the perspectives of folks unaffiliated with the cops, such as non-Lowriders hanging out with their lowriders.⁹⁷ Navarro rode along with Joseph Roque, also known as “Big Joe”, a Lowrider in San Francisco. During a car-meet, Big Joe told Navarro, “Now, watch, if I

⁹² Violence in communities of color and minority communities can be attributed to socio-economic conditions, see Dutch criminologist Willem Adriaan Bongers’ *Criminality and Economic Conditions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969). Bongers also argued criminal actions are *not* outcomes of racial and biological factors. Due to lack of studies on his claims, Bongers did note studies on connections between biology and crime should be explored in the future but his connections are reflective of disagreeing with other scholars who held racist ideas about biological traits being fundamental to racial differences through crime. Bongers claims insinuating race and crime as variables to find blame with racial differences are without merit because social and living conditions are ultimately the factors influencing criminality. Studies on criminality have primarily focused on adults.

⁹³ Jones-Brown et. al., *Policing and Minority Communities*, 27.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33

⁹⁵ Jones-Brown et. al., *Policing and Minority Communities*, 33

⁹⁶ "August 4, 1980 (Page 1 of 64)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Aug 04, 1980.

⁹⁷ "October 21, 1979 (Page 1 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

park here, and stay in my car I guarantee you there will not even be half an hour before they (police) come and get me out of here.”⁹⁸ Navarro did not see anyone “hopping” their cars and inquired about lack of car movement. Big Joe clarifies no one is “hopping” their cars in order to not attract unwanted attention from police officers.⁹⁹ Big Joe’s sentiment of attempting to avoid law enforcement attention can be considered a form of self-policing as response to police surveillance.

In Big Joe’s instance, he *did* attract the attention of a police officer. Towards the end of the newspaper article, Big Joe is confronted with an officer telling him to move his car. The conversation with Big Joe and the officer started with tensions,

“Officer: Move your car along. You don’t wanna move your car?

Big Joe: How come?

Officer: How come? Let’s start with hydraulics.

Big Joe: Am I doing something wrong?

Officer: Your car is in violation of the vehicle code.

Big Joe: What vehicle code?

Officer: Hydraulics... Tires are not the right size.

Big Joe: Yes, they are, you check them out.

Officer: I write the ticket, the court checks them out...”¹⁰⁰

The exchange between the officer and Big Joe expresses Big Joe’s resistance against an authority figure. Big Joe’s knowledge of his rights and the vehicle code lead to the knowledge lowriders must have in order to respond against over-policing to protect themselves. After more dialogue, Big Joe did not end up with a ticket because the officer recognized Big Joe from the *Low Creations* car club.¹⁰¹ *Low Creations*, amongst other car clubs, have strict regulations regarding car

⁹⁸ A car-meet is an event, formal or informal, where car aficionados meet in a designated location focused on socialization between car lovers and like-minded individuals.

⁹⁹ "October 21, 1979 (Page 8 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

¹⁰⁰ "October 21, 1979 (Page 8 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

qualifications and hold their members to certain social behaviors.¹⁰² At the end of the police-lowrider encounter, the officer told Big Joe “he did not want any problems...”¹⁰³ In order to avoid further conflict, Big Joe moved his vehicle. After Big Joe’s experience with the officer, the page ended with Big Joe stating “It will get better.”¹⁰⁴

In Hector Leyva’s instance, his voice was the dominant voice in relaying *his* interactions with crime and police as he *was* involved in gang life, while his wife was not. Hector clarified through our interview that their interactions with law enforcement are not the same as they *used* to be.¹⁰⁵ That is not to say lowriders are not subject to discrimination or do not have negative experiences with law enforcement but interactions, from the eyes of the contemporary Lowriders, are not the same. Christal Leyva exclaims in terms of vilification and fighting criminality,

“No one is going to risk a \$60,000 car, where your child is sitting in the back of!!”¹⁰⁶

After Christal’s statement, Hector explained that he was the epitome of the stereotype of Mexican-gang-member-Lowriders when he was younger. However, today, the Leyvas continuously fight to change the imagery of vilification because Hector explained that he was *not* a Lowrider when he was “messing” with the “wrong” crowds.¹⁰⁷ Hector explained that his lowriding culture participation had brought him discipline, especially in car clubs. He often recited how community formation and support from the lowriding scene had saved his life as he mentioned his criminal past. The ability to think about lowrider culture as the threshold for criminality is the opposite for Hector. Car clubs are known for their rules and regulations and how strict they can be

¹⁰² "October 21, 1979 (Page 9 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

¹⁰³ "October 21, 1979 (Page 8 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

for their members. The sense of stability and structure provided Hector with a means to not continue criminal activity;

“Times have changed. I remember being in my 20s and doing those things (illegal activities) and there’s a difference in how I was treated then and how I’m treated now. I can’t tell you the last time I got pulled over because of my car. *Now*. Back then, I was pulled over because I was doing things I wasn’t supposed to be doing... As a matter a fact, now I remember, the last time I was pulled over, the cop said ‘You’re good to go. I just wanted to check out your car.’ That was it... Now, I’ve been put down on the hot pavement, handcuffed but that was when I was doing those things... *in that life*... Since then, nothing but good experiences. But I am one of the lucky ones”¹⁰⁸

Christal adds to Hector’s points,

“... Just recently, there was a large cruise planned. March 2020. This (car) cruise ended up blowing up as people were ready for quarantine to end. To get out of California and Arizona.... Their narrative was non-locals coming in our town, taking over Vegas... When we organize things, we have communication with community outreach with Metro, right? We usually give them a heads up... because lots of people. Whenever there is a large group of people... tensions are high... We weren’t really involved with the planning (of the event)...”¹⁰⁹

Christal continues explaining,

“It (the event) became less about Vegas and more about other people coming to our town... and making a mess... It’s common knowledge in our town, in our lowrider community here in Vegas that we don’t tear up the Strip. We don’t break laws. We don’t roll up on curbs. We don’t stop traffic because this is *our* town, ya know? There wasn’t that consensus (in the event)... It was a huge. It was chaotic... The intention was not meant to be shitty- the relationship we had built with the city and with Metro was torn down in a night. Completely torn down... After that event... They (the visitors) get to go home. They go home and leave the mess they created and we’ve been trying to clean that up. For the past year, we’ve been trying to repair the reputation and relationships we worked so hard to build. In one night, it got torn down... We’ve been trying to rebuild... (Hector says in the background ‘The lowrider community, in general’), but it’s been hard...”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

In discussing how this particular lowrider event demolished contemporary relationships with the lowrider community and Las Vegas organizations and agencies, Hector adds to Christal's point about outsiders coming in to Las Vegas,

“The people who created a mess... They're usually not lowriders, but fans... My experience with law enforcement has been positive but that changed from when I was young, ya know? When I was being a criminal, of course that (negative interactions with police) would happen. Times change. I changed. I became a businessman, business owner. It's different. I drive around with my cars but I don't have bad interactions with police... Times have changed... We still have criminals but not as much as the '90s 'cause the people who were doing that back then- they're older... In the Superbowl, we were advertised. It made me so pumped up. I wanna go a cruise! The production value... Lowriders were advertised. Granted, it was commercialized. It's now being commercialized, but a lowrider at the Superbowl- that just tells you where we are at. But now, it's changed dramatically. Granted, the officers, the police- they still see criminals. They still see that. They're going to 'cause that's what's been imbedded in them. That's the only way it's been represented. We've been represented. Any media you see, it's the *cholo* driving the car because that is the only way we have been perceived because that's what some of us were...”¹¹¹

Similar to Hector Leyva, Nichol Zamora specifies as she was a part of the gang life for a while due to the connections with youth and survival while being separated from relatives, as is her experience “growing up in the streets”,

“With the gang life, comes lowrider culture and the bike scene. It is more of a lifestyle to me, the music, the energy... Lowrider culture is kind of adjacent to gang life. It depends on which group you are around. Um, it's more of a lifestyle for a lot of people so sometimes, it does go hand-in-hand with gangs. And you know, people get older, once they leave the gang scene so it is a little bit of both... Gangs are not always connected to lowriders. Definitely not always. Ya know, a lot of people turn to gangs because they don't have a family lifestyle at home. And then, when they get older and develop their own family, they tend to... leave the gang scene.”¹¹²

In talking about criminality and vilification, Zamora explains

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Nichol Zamora, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 18 2022.

“...when I started my career working with the Autism foundation- um, I actually started with them as a truck driver and as I moved my way up, my relationship with the car club- culture was getting stronger and I was trying to keep them separate for some reason. Mostly, probably because of the stigma... that people tend to have... Um, once I became the community outreach director, I didn't see a reason to keep them separate anymore... It is who I am, I am very proud of it... A lot of people do tend to judge a lot of- from tattoos, eye makeup, to the way you dress... it doesn't define who you are... I am who I am. My social medias is for the public and for personal, so clearly shows I have nothing to hide about who I am... Yes, I am a very successful person in the community but I also still have *my* culture behind me.”¹¹³

However, the community organizer recalls how individuals not associated with lowriding have negative views of Lowriders and Lowrider gatherings.

“... I went to do my turkey drive this year at a bar and when I had told him (the bar owner) that I wanted to do a lowrider show, he immediately shut it down. And I was extremely... at first, he shut it (the idea) down right away. He said he did not want the customers to see all the vehicles and they might feel discouraged from coming in and I just- I was lost for words. I said, 'Oh, I appreciate your time' and walked away. Later on, probably about a week later, I was like 'Listen, I think you really have the wrong image of what I am trying to do here.' And he, ultimately, let me do the show. And he was amazed with how it wasn't gangs. How it wasn't kids trying to make trouble in his parking lot. Wasn't a drunk scene. Was more family-oriented. There were vendors, people were coming and giving back- he was really shocked. He did ask me to come back and do future shows with him but I do think some people do, just like any other, discrimination.”¹¹⁴

Lowriding culture is predicated on cruising around and creating a space for the socializations for lowriders and their communities for themselves. However, those images of leisure and community has been distorted through stereotypes, racial profiling and negative depictions of lowriders in mass media. When asked about the perceived perceptions of lowriders and crime, Beto Mendoza explained,

¹¹³ Nichol Zamora, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 18 2022.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

“The people who think of us as gangbangers don’t know us... *Cholos* would put rims on their cars but only putting rims on a car does not make a lowrider... It takes a lot of money and time...”¹¹⁵

Mendoza made it clear throughout his interview that a lowrider and potential lowrider must have financially stable incomes. He stressed the importance of stable employment as tools and parts for car modification will be expensive. In discussing the financial aspect needed for car customization, Mendoza remarked lowriding as a cultural aspect of Latino leisure that means so much more than meets the eye, especially when non-lowriders peek into the lowrider world.

Although the lowrider culture began with Mexican Americans and Chicanos, Mendoza clarified the lowrider culture is multi-ethnic, about the inclusion of different cultures and peoples who appreciate cars. Mendoza’s plethora of knowledge regarding lowrider culture and car fanatic communities is attributed to his upbringing and employment. Mendoza (who identifies as Mexican) has been involved in the car scene since he was young and he was a freelancer for *Lowrider* magazine for two years before working full time for the magazine for almost a decade.¹¹⁶ Currently, Mendoza is the Editor-In-Chief of *Lowrider Centerfoldz* print magazine.¹¹⁷ Through Mendoza’s personal and professional connections, he introduced me to Marcos Gaitan.

Gaitan (who identifies as Chicano) provided insightful information on lowrider culture from the nineteen-seventies to the nineteen-nineties.¹¹⁸ Gaitan has been a part of lowriding since the beginning of *Lowrider* magazine. Gaitan went to San Jose State which is the same college as

¹¹⁵ Beto Mendoza, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, March 18 2021.

¹¹⁶ Beto Mendoza, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, March 18 2021; Beto Mendoza, Instagram private message to Alejandra Herrera, April 25 2021.

¹¹⁷ Beto Mendoza, Instagram private message to Alejandra Herrera, March 20 2021.

¹¹⁸ Marcos Gaitan, Text Message to Alejandra Herrera, April 25 2021.

the founders (Larry Gonzalez, David Nuñez and Sonny Madrid) of *Lowrider* magazine. In our conversations regarding vilification and criminality of lowriders, Gaitan explained,

“Lowriders have been seen as criminals because in the ‘70s and ‘80s, we were all teenagers and young adults. Yeah, we were called delinquents but we were young... weren’t bad... just young men who hung out and followed the girls wherever they went... Lowriders went where the girls went, and since there were a lot of girls, then, the guys were all around the girls.”¹¹⁹

When Gaitan discussed more about the socialization aspect of lowriding, he disputed the belief that lowriding is family oriented, but he did view lowriding as a part of *community* more than family. Gaitan’s sentiments aligned with Zamora’s objectives for lowrider and community relations. The community organizer stated,

“I’ve done probably over- easily over 40 shows in Las Vegas and 90% of them for the community, give back. So, I’m able to bring that (lowrider culture) in my career because the lowrider scene- they do get judged very often but they’re all still family people. Mother, fathers, brothers, sisters, children- and they do have hearts and they are just everyday people. I never have a problem with any events for families and to give back to the community with the lowrider scene.”¹²⁰

Salazar also mentioned how community fosters good relationship with Lowrider and law enforcement but also community,

“And, you gotta be responsible. You can’t get in your vehicle if you’re partying and everything like that. And I don’t think, sometimes when people see that they’re like ‘Oh, there’s those lowriders, their music is loud. All they do is party’, when in all reality, it’s not like that. There’s some people, you know, that do that. But, in all reality the majority of the older of us, you know we go out, we have a good time. We cruise, we respect the neighborhood. We respect the spot we’re in, you know, we support, you know, each other, we support our neighborhoods. If we... have people that are in need, we try to, you know- we do a water drive, do a food drive, do, you know, whatever we can for the neighborhood.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Marcos Gaitan, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, March 31 2021

¹²⁰ Nichol Zamora, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 18 2022.

¹²¹ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

Though Latinos created their own social space to express themselves, the media depictions of lowrider communities do not reflect self-expression but rather show Latinos as gangbangers and perpetrators of violence. Aforementioned, Big Joe told the reporter “It will get better.”¹²² To Big Joe’s point, on a discussion regarding criminality and lowriders, Christal affirms the changing of time and differences in interactions with law enforcement,

“Now, we’re *the* admiration. They pull us over to *admire* our cars. We drive by cops and they admire our cars. During the Black Lives Matter protests, we were downtown- we were doing a car cruise and we had SWAT pull up, because it was a gathering of people, but they didn’t stop because of *us*. So different the criminality aspect of it. *We* haven’t experienced negative interactions with police in recent years... We receive way more admiration from police here... they (police) have to do their due diligence whenever there is a group of people... and we’re loud... Our cruises have loud music... You know, there’s call for attention but all they (police) need to do, at this point, with the community we have created, is ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ And he’ll (Hector) be the first one they talk to. ‘Talk to Hector’, ya know? He’ll walk up and ‘How can I help you? We’re just cruising our cars’... It’s not the extreme prejudice that I grew up in. Not the same prejudice inflicted upon me about lowriders... And, it’s been great- I would not have brought my children around it (lowrider culture) if it was that same community.”¹²³

Hector elaborated on Christal’s point about lowrider culture in Las Vegas in the nineteen-nineties to explain how lowrider culture is not the same as it had been,

“The shows are different now, too. Back then, it ended with a fight, a drive by- it was the norm, it was expected. That was part of it (in Los Angeles). Now, here, I can’t tell you when that happened. Wait, those things still happen but you get all those guys together. Alcohol is involved but times have changed.” Christal adds to Hector’s point about violence in the background, “There’s more violence at a concert than there is at lowrider events.” Then, they both say together, “More violence at a football game!!”¹²⁴

¹²² "October 21, 1979 (Page 8 of 494)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Oct 21, 1979.

¹²³ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Juanita Salazar also mentioned how lowriding was a space for young adults and Lowriders to hang out, but also young adult mischief caused issues with confronting authority figures. Salazar did not grow up in California, but she felt targeted by police in the state she grew up in, Colorado.

“Yeah, it (interactions with the police) wasn’t always the positive, but there were those that had friends who had family members that were police... So, we called our area the South side of Denver, the south side. And, so, we knew a lot of the police officers there because the high school was two, three blocks from the police station. So, those ones on our side knew us, but when we would, we called it the north side, to go cruise over there- that’s where we would get our tickets and stuff like that. But, yeah, I’d have to say my interactions with the police wasn’t very, very good. Yeah, it wasn’t very good at all...”¹²⁵

Salazar clarified,

“Back in those days, you know, you think you’re hot- ‘Okay, yeah, I’m not gonna get a ticket. I’m gonna do this right in front of the cop.’ Now, you’re older and mature and you know- and if, you know, you hit your switches in front of a cop and you get a ticket you know why, you know. You’re gonna get a ticket. But, um, yeah, these days now- I got a flat tire the other day, just right over here off of Paradise (here in Las Vegas). And um, I already had it pretty much taken care of and Metro PD came behind me... in my lowrider, and he (the cop) was like ‘Hey, nothing’s wrong. I just wanted to check out your car.’ And, I was like ‘Fine’, and we probably talked for 30 minutes... about the car, about the lifestyle, about what we were doing here, and everything. And it was nice, yeah.”¹²⁶

The interactions with police have changed with Salazar and other Lowriders as they have matured in age. This shift in attitude shows that despite individual relationships with police, Lowriders are still subject to stereotypes as criminals by outsiders (or non-Lowriders) because Lowriders do not conform to white-American social spaces. The majority of the Lowriders interviewed for this study became a part of the car culture in their youth. The Lowriders found a sense of community with people who understood their lives and backgrounds. Lowriders’ cultural,

¹²⁵ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

social, and economic understanding assists in their community building because their chosen kin recognize their adversities.

This examination of criminality, discrimination, prejudice, racial profiling and stereotypes highlight the difficulties of ethnic enclaves, people of color and minorities in the United States, particularly the lowrider community. In discussing how stereotypes have an impact on minorities in their interactions with police and the general public, there should also be a discussion of how stereotyping and racial profiling impact education professionals, especially in education. The article, “Devils or Angels: literary and Discourse in Lowrider culture” in the anthology *What They Don't Learn in School: Literacy in the Lives of Urban Youth*, brought up scholarly discourse over lowrider culture.¹²⁷ The purpose of “Devils or Angels” was for the author, Peter Cowen, to identify the ways lowrider culture had literary and artistic forms of communication that were not truly understood by mainstream America. Cowen also conducted his studies to feed his curiosity about lowrider culture. As informative as the research was to Cowen, the article began with an *interesting* anecdote that demonstrated Cowen’s own complicity in the criminalization Latino youth and lowriders.

Cowen, a high school teacher with a white-middle class upbringing, had believed negative perceptions about lowrider and Latinx communities until his beliefs were questioned when he saw the *Lowrider* magazine at a gas station.¹²⁸ It is implied Cowen’s thoughts regarding lowriding did not change through interactions with his Latinx students but through the magazine which “challenged the negative associations I acquired growing up, and it began an important part of my

¹²⁷ Peter Cowen, “Devils or Angels: literary and Discourse in Lowrider culture.” In *What They Don't Learn in School: Literacy in the Lives of Urban Youth*, edited by Jabari Mahiri, 47-74. New York: P. Lang, 2004.

¹²⁸ Cowen, “Devils or Angels: literary and Discourse in Lowrider culture”, 48.

education of Latino adolescents.”¹²⁹ Cowen’s change of perspective goes along with the idea of liking lowriding in a consumable form (like *Lowrider* magazine) but not necessarily liking the people who created it. A glossy magazine can be considered “less dangerous” of an experience, as well.¹³⁰ The implication of Cowen changing his mind because of a piece of literature and not his interactions with his students actively contributes to the problem of educators and general populations subconsciously criminalizing Black and Brown youth.

The vilification of lowrider culture is not simply in response to cars or gangs but of vilification as a result of institutional failures of educators and people in power who do not question stereotypes. These institutional failures perpetuate vilification of the lowrider community and of other communities of color. The oral interviews of the Lowrider community members present how these community members fight vilification by focusing on their communities and themselves. The fight for self-expression through rivaling against criminal characterizations, vilification, and resistance to over-policing is present in the experiences of lowriders like Beto Mendoza, Marcos Gaitan, Hector, and Christal Leyva, Nichol Zamora and Juanita Salazar.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Cowen’s interest in lowriding is similar to that of anthropologist Ben Chappell and photographer Kristin Bedford who are outsiders looking *into* lowriders because lowrider culture is different and niche.

Women Lowriders: *Their* voices

Although this study focuses on women who identify as Latina, it would be remiss not to mention other studies on women and leisure, such as Kathy Lee Peiss' *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*. In *Cheap Amusements*, Historian Peiss argues women expressed autonomy over their lives through female navigations of leisure, social interactions and “cultural transformation” of American culture.¹³¹ Ultimately, Peiss shows how women were able to take control of their lives, in the midst of social and economic difficulties, through entertainment and relaxation. The purpose of Peiss' book demonstrates a bottom-up approach of “young white women” maneuvering dance halls, movie theaters and other aspects of leisure activities from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.¹³²

Cheap Amusements was published around the time when Women's Histories were attempting to establish themselves as legitimate forms of historical analysis.¹³³ In the introductory chapter, Peiss lets readers know her study will focus on “white workingclass women in Manhattan”.¹³⁴ Peiss' analysis of focusing on white women seems to be on-par with the bulk of women's studies at the time of publication. The majority of scholarship on women of color and minority women were vastly understudied until the mid-nineteen-eighties.¹³⁵ The majority of nineteenth-century studies on women focused on the lives and roles of white women. Thus, Peiss contributes to the already established scholarship of women at this time. However, Peiss does

¹³¹ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, 16

¹³² Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*, 9-13

¹³³ Lillian Schlissel, Viki L. Ruíz, and Monk, Janice J. *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*. 1st ed. Latino Literature (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 5.

¹³⁴ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 18 and 16

¹³⁵ Schlissel, Ruíz and Monk, *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, 5.

deviate from the established scholarship by inserting immigrant experiences, specifically “oral testimony of immigrant women” with the “embodiment of American urban culture” to study women.¹³⁶ Throughout the book, Peiss continuously presents the importance of everyday women as agents of autonomy, sexuality, kinships and socializations with peer groups and leisure activities. The lives of women are explained through “relationships of power”, as Joan W. Scott writes in “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”.¹³⁷ Scott asserts gender studies are best explained as “gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated”.¹³⁸ Peiss presents the experiences of working-class white women as being examined in opposition to power imbalances of working-class men through “sexual divisions that structured work” and other aspects of “participation in public life” in New York City.¹³⁹ The views of single working-class women are also compared to married women (who were held in different lights) and affluent women.¹⁴⁰ This book should be mentioned in a study about Latina leisure as *Cheap Amusements* looks at how culture impacts leisure (and labor), “white” working-class female experiences.

The vast majority of the scholarship on leisure activities and leisure studies have been products out of sociology. The field of sociology has generally found that leisure-based activities have different meanings for men they do for women. Sociology studies on the evolution of leisure for women and men came out of the United Kingdom in the late nineteen-seventies and eighties. Even though these studies are not focused on Latinas in the United States, the work of the

¹³⁶ Schlissel, Ruíz and Monk, *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, 5.

¹³⁷ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, (*The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 1986), 1067.

¹³⁸ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, 1068.

¹³⁹ Schlissel, Ruíz and Monk, *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, 72-73

¹⁴⁰ Schlissel, Ruíz and Monk, *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, 5.

sociologists still provide insight into the differences in leisure importance of men and women based on income, gender, and ethnic backgrounds.¹⁴¹ Particularly sociologists focusing on feminist research have shown that women's lives are influenced by their social and cultural conditions and their economic conditions, as their economic conditions can alter the activities they can pursue within their financial means. Not only are leisure activities based on economic conditions, but sociologists have found that leisure activities also have to do with choice—the choice to be able to contribute to leisure activities based on social, cultural, and economic conditions of women.¹⁴²

Going into the twenty-first century, sociologists started to look at leisure through the lens of working-class women and their social and cultural responsibilities to their respective gender roles.¹⁴³ Women's multifaceted identities and complexities are an aspect of leisure studies to form out of recent sociologist scholarship. Within the last ten years, sociologists' perspective books on leisure have been interested in the long-term contribution of leisure to the well-being of adults. There are also discussions in leisure studies on how leisure activities provide fulfillment for older generations who search for purpose and joy outside of parenthood (if they are parents) and marriage (if they are married). Thus, Chicano car culture is embedded in a social collective understanding of identity and culture. In academia, Latino labor has been one of the main facets used to identify Latinx contribution to American society. Latinx labor is important when describing Latinx experiences but leisure is *just* as vital when comprehending the complexities of

¹⁴¹ Rosemary Deem, *All Work and No Play?: A Study of Women and Leisure* (Open University Press, 1986).

¹⁴² Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron, and Diana Woodward, *Women's Leisure, What Leisure?* (London: Macmillan Education UK : Imprint: Palgrave, 1990); Karla A. Henderson, *Both Gains and Gaps: Feminist Perspectives on Women's Leisure* (State College, PA: Venture Pub., 1996)

¹⁴³ Cara Aitchison, *Gender and Leisure : Social and Cultural Perspectives* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003); Peter A. Witt and Linda L Caldwell, *Recreation and Youth Development* (State College, PA: Venture Publishing 2005)

Latinx recreational activities, especially while focusing on how women have contributed to Chicano car culture.¹⁴⁴ Analyzing Chicano/as through the social areas they create for themselves will emphasize how lowriding encompasses more than automobiles but also how women fit in lowriding with their gender roles and criminality.

At the end of the nineteen-fifties, lowriders began to be targeted by police officers in and around Los Angeles. The surveillance around Lowriders began with their cars catching the attention of police officers for cruising their cars “too low” to the street pavement. Law enforcement believed the lowering of vehicles tarnished “city streets.”¹⁴⁵ For example, the vehicle code cited against Big Joe, in the previous chapter, by the police officer was probably about a California vehicle law, colloquially known as the “lowrider law” of nineteen-fifty-nine. Essentially, the “lowrider law” stated a car could have modifications to the vehicle’s original frame, other than the wheels.¹⁴⁶ The tensions between non-Lowriders and Lowriders grew in the mid-twentieth century because media outlets suggested that any Mexican-American youth who cruised Los Angeles streets were gang members or criminals.

¹⁴⁴ However, it should be noted that within the last twenty years, there have been small studies focusing on Latinas and their contribution to sports, particularly soccer. The minimal studies focusing on Latinas and soccer center on how women contribute to soccer through athleticism and athletes’ support. The studies of Latinas in soccer are mostly positioned outside of the United States, but these studies show the importance of female contribution to a major sport. See, Colleen Keller, and Julie Fleury. “Factors Related to Physical Activity in Hispanic Women.” *The Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing* 21, no. 2 (2006): 142–45. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005082-200603000-00012>; Jorge Knijnik, “Femininities and Masculinities in Brazilian Women's Football: Resistance and Compliance.” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 54–70; Brenda Elsey, “Fútbol Feminista.” *NACLA Report on the Americas* (1993) 50, no. 4 (2018): 423–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2018.1551466>; Brenda Elsey, and Joshua H. Nadel. *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America*. First edition.. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Charles M. Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show* (Greenwood, 2011), 11

¹⁴⁶ Vehicle Code. Division 12. Equipment of Vehicles [24000 - 28160], Chapter 1. General Provisions [24000 - 24019] § 24008 (1959).

The vilification by non-Lowriders towards Lowriders resulted in the California law that made it illegal for cars to be lowered “below the rim base.”¹⁴⁷ This particular traffic law resulted in the adaptation of lowriders implementing hydraulics into their vehicles. Hydraulics on vehicles allowed lowriders to lower and raise their cars at their discretion.¹⁴⁸ Tensions with police officers over parking/vehicle tickets, hydraulics, overwhelming police presence in areas of kick-backs or car meets are not issues unknown to Lowriders.¹⁴⁹ Spokespeople for police agencies and police officers have claimed Lowriders are not why cops become suspicious of ethnic communities coming together. However, law enforcement seems to be wary of “youth” coming together because “large crowds of youth... have caused a dramatic increase in crime.”¹⁵⁰

The bureaucratic language used by law enforcement can be considered coded language expressing the need for officers to keep an eye out for certain people, such as Latino lowriders. Lowriders *have* felt the presence of law enforcement in places of their socialization and hostility from non-lowriders. The reasoning for outsider displeasure in visible Lowrider presences correlates with Pagán’s findings which identified people of color as reminders of “social and behavioral characteristics deemed antithetical” to mainstream ideologies and beliefs of white Americans.¹⁵¹ The visibility and attitudes about the views towards Big Joe and other Lowriders is relevant as the voices of Lowriders from the nineteen-seventies to the nineteen-nineties primarily showcase *male* perspectives. The overwhelming focus of male perspective is vital to comprehend as female voices are difficult to find in newspaper articles from the seventies to the nineties.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 11-12

¹⁴⁹ A kick-back is a colloquial term to describe a social gathering that is not as formal as a party but it is a time where small group of friends hang out and *kick back* in their seats while they enjoy food, drinks and company. It is a small get-together.

¹⁵⁰ "August 4, 1980 (Page 1 of 64)." *The San Francisco Examiner* (1902-2007), Aug 04, 1980.

¹⁵¹ Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 43

However, voices like Big Joe's are easier to find. Male voices are not the only voices involved in lowriding, but men's voices *are* the dominant voices in discussing lowriders and criminality because their voices are easy to find in archives. The *most* documented instances of male Lowriders should *not* distract from female presences in lowriding. Their voices have not been as documented as men in the lowriding scene. However, the historical absence of female Lowriders in literature does not equate to women being *invisible* or as 'not being around'. Women have been a part of lowriding as supportive wives and mothers and as individual women who are *more* than their domestic roles.

Discussing women as being more than their domestic, gendered roles is present in female presence in Zoot Suits historiography. However, Zoot Suits historiography *is* on par with how female Lowriders are mentioned in lowrider historiography, in the sense that there is an apparent absence of female voices. Other than the centralized instance of Catherine Sue Ramirez's *The Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (2009) and Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo's *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (2013) for zooters, and Denise Sandoval's Ph.D. dissertation *Bajito Y Suavecito/low and Slow: Cruising through Lowrider Culture* (2003), women in Mexican American leisure spaces seldomly have their voices as focal points.¹⁵²

Sandoval is the first scholar to examine *Lowrider* magazine in its entirety. Sandoval's dissertation brings up valuable discussions on *cholo* aesthetics and criminality. However, the

¹⁵² Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit : Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009; Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits : the Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013; Denise Michelle Sandoval, "Bajito y Suavecito/low and Slow: Cruising through Lowrider Culture." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003.

strengths in “Cruising through Low Rider Culture” lie in Sandoval’s ability to showcase women as active readers of the magazine and examines the gender inequality of female visibility in the magazine. The inquiry into *Lowrider* magazine displays how lowriding as a visual aid contributed to the profitability of culture. The magazine’s financial gain also promotes and advanced community formation with various lowriders across the nation and the world. As much as Sandoval discusses community, the scholar scrutinizes how female models are objectified. Sandoval’s critique presents how the sexualization of women benefited male empowerment through car culture, but at the expense of the objectification of women.¹⁵³

This chapter builds on Sandoval’s argument; women Lowriders should not be viewed as lowriding accessories. Women are not accessories but they are seen as accessories because of their perceived contributions to family commitments. In examining women with their familial contribution in the lowrider scene, it should be noted that this inquiry is *not* claiming there is no empowerment or agency in motherhood and traditional gendered roles of Latina women. This is *not* a critique on motherhood. Motherhood *is* powerful and there is autonomy in being a mother; however, by historically establishing Latinx households, the dynamics and expectations of women bleed into the expectations of Lowrider women as all the women interviewed for this project identify as Latina women and *are* mothers. Whether women build the cars themselves or provide emotional and financial support for car modification, women in Lowrider culture have always been around but are not seen as *the* image of a Lowrider.

Christal Leyva is a Lowrider, lowrider wife, and a mother but she is also a business owner. Ivelys Franco evolved into a Lowrider as her family responsibilities decreased as her children

¹⁵³ Denise Michelle Sandoval, “Bajito y Suavecito/low and Slow: Cruising through Lowrider Culture.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003.

became older. For Juanita Salazar, lowriding has been a constant in her life and will continue to be a constant as she continues her life. Female Lowriders are mothers and wives, but they are also individuals and *women* outside of their gender roles.

The contributions of female Lowriders to their families should not make them invisible. They are *visible*. Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco and Juanita Salazar are present in their lives in their commitments to their family units, but they are also living *their* lives because they are not only mothers. Women are not positioned as active members of Mexican American social spaces but as *additions*. Women are seen as objects rather than *participants* who contribute to leisure culture differently. Thus, the women interviewed for this project were incredibly happy and transparent to help shed light on their different experiences as women who contribute to lowriding because their voices and experiences matter. *They matter*.

Gender Dynamics and the Lowriders

In the studies on family structures, it is important to note gendered roles (household duties, parental involvement in children's lives, etc.) adds to the multilayered focus on Latinx families. In Latino families, the males in the family have been seen to be the ones to work manual labor jobs and act as household authorities; while women have been seen to take care of domestic duties, such as child-care and cooking. Latinas have been generally considered to act as submissive towards the father figure of the household.¹⁵⁴ When it comes to gender family dynamics, the maternal figures of the household have been considered to have better communication than the paternal figures in the household. In studies regarding communication, many Latino children and adolescents described the conversations they had with their mothers as distinct from the

¹⁵⁴ Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*, 85-86

conversations they had with fathers. This is an aspect of family formation relevant to Lowrider Franco and her husband. Franco's husband was not always present with family responsibilities due to his position and membership in the lowrider car club, *USO* (now known as *UCE* car club, which has multi-cultural and multi-ethnic club membership).¹⁵⁵ Latinas in Latinx households in the United States are not expected to move far away from their homes or be too far away from their parents.

Meanwhile, Latinos are expected to leave their homes and become more independent. The expectations from Latino parents to their children is not monolithic; not all Latino families expect their daughters to stay close to home and their sons to leave home but generally, the different gendered prepositions are widely anticipated.¹⁵⁶ The socialization of Latinos and nothing else is centered around family because family is very important to Latinx families. Stereotypically, maternal figures are expected to take care of the children and to take care of the household. However, both mothers and fathers in Latino families are the authority figures who make big decisions and tackle responsibilities together as is the case with Lowrider Franco and her husband.

In gender dynamics, boys in Latino households tend to have more freedom than their female counterparts. In many first-generation Latino households, parents are typically more restrictive of their daughters' behaviors and freedoms, but the boys in the family have more leeway when it comes to social interactions outside of family institutions.¹⁵⁷ The dynamics of family and perceived gender roles is important to understand that women, in and out of lowrider culture, are

¹⁵⁵ Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*, 91; Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022; Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 22-25 and 163

¹⁵⁶ Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*, 141-142

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 84

historically pushed to the sidelines. However, not all of the Lowriders interviewed for this project are married women. Juanita Salazar is a fiercely independent woman who has been a part of the lowriding world since she was a teenager in Denver, Colorado. Salazar's impression of lowriding has evolved as she has grown as a woman and person. Lowriding to Salazar means freedom, self-autonomy and joy with oneself. The leisure activity is conduit for self-expression and independence. Salazar explained her roots and her introduction to lowrider culture,

“Back in the 80s, when I turned 16 my parents, and this is kind of where I took a little detour, my parents said ‘Do you want a car? Or do you want us to use this money for college?’ and of course, I wanted a car. And I found this ‘77 Cutlass supreme with t tops- everything I wanted because I was gonna make it a lowrider. And that’s- so yeah that’s kind of what happened and then, you know the guys in the school they cruise their lowriders, you know in the parking lot. We had a street called Federal, we go up and down and cruise in Federal (in Denver, Colorado). And, so um, that’s kind of how it started. It was just seeing the first car, and then after that, it was getting *Lowrider* magazines back then- getting *Lowrider* magazines. My friends were all into lowriders, some of them were dating the lowrider guys in clubs. We go to the park and hang out, we listen to the music. You know, everything we could do, we became a family, is what it was. We all had the same interests. And so, I built me a lowrider when I was in high school.”¹⁵⁸

Salazar became involved in lowriding through her father and has viewed lowriding as a way to bond with her father. Through the importance of the modified cars to their identities, Salazar described the car culture as a hobby that became a part of her personality. Lowriding shows modifying a car takes time, money and effort. Latinos involved in car culture are grounded in their lives by having some sort of financial stability. When lowriding is an activity carried out with members of an immediate family, the familial leisure activity illuminates the notion of bringing people together, like Salazar and her dad. The individuals involved in the Latino car culture are grounded in their lives by human interactions, families, cars and money. Salazar detailed how her father helped her learn about cars,

¹⁵⁸ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

“And then he’s (her father) the one who taught us how to work on cars, but since we were little- we would go out there and hand him the tools, hold the flashlights, do everything we needed to do, and then, in addition... As we got older, you know, he had a truck an old Chevy truck and the same thing ‘Hey, come over here help me with the truck’, he would put gas in and, you know they had the big steering wheels, and you know there were no seatbelts back then so I would lean over in the driver seat and he’d be pumping gas I’d be right there, inhaling the fumes, and that’s still one of my favorite memories.”¹⁵⁹

Salazar’s father introduced her to car culture but the female Lowrider created her *own* community and her own clique by her personal interactions with lowriders,

“... my mom would even tell me that uh, she wouldn’t even let me- high school ditch days, ditch to go to Cinco de Mayo parade or anything. She was like ‘You’re going to school, you’re going to learn’. She was really, um, strict. My mom was real strict. My dad was easy-going and, yeah, funny, yeah stuff like that. But, yeah, I learned a lot (from mom and dad). So, I got that first car and started building it, and then my cousin got a car, and then she built hers. And we started driving together, cruising together and everything.”¹⁶⁰

Salazar clarified more about her clique,

“... And we started cruising together. And then a couple of my friends, my friend Gina, she lives here now- she got her ‘76, ‘77 Monte Carlo, too, And we would all cruise together. We would all meet at, um, they used to call it 38th avenue, out there, 38th avenue and Federal (in Denver, Colorado). And that’s where everybody would cruise up and down. Back in those days, we would cruise up and down, and if you had a crush on a guy or a girl, they would take stuffed animals... Yeah, it’s funny what we used to do back then. But again, you know back then, the cops used to look at us as hooligans, they looked at us as troublemakers. They looked at us as parking in, you know, parking in private parking areas. And, they would cite us. They would give us tickets. So, we were getting tickets for loitering- since I was 18 years old.”¹⁶¹

Salazar continues telling the story of female un-comfortability, as well as female solidarity in lowrider culture,

“When I left Colorado, she (her niece) started building cars, too. So, JL (her niece) knows everything there is to know about cars, too. She’s under there. She gets her

¹⁵⁹ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

hands dirty. But, yeah, she's a hustler and she's real petite. And that just made me feel so good, giving it to her (one of Salazar's lowriders), and I'm not rich by no means. I don't own it all. I'm not rich, I'm just- you know, if it makes her happy, I do it. My first ex-husband told me 'You are never going to have anything in life because you give everything away.' But I can't take it with me, I can't drive two cars at one time, you know. I might as well give it to somebody whose been there for me, and appreciates me and I love her and that's why I did what I did for her. And she's really good, she's going to school now too... She's going to school now too, she's going to nursing school, she's got her lowrider, she's got a lowrider bike. She dresses the part- she does some modeling. But, she gets in there, in her mom's car- you know, one time a bearing went out. Whenever she's in there, she opens the garage and she has everything in there when they pull in. I mean, *everything* is ready."

Salazar mentions her nieces in her discussion about her experiences as a Lowrider because Salazar does all that she can to promote the younger generation's involvement in lowriding. She promotes more women in contributing to the lowriding scene as Salazar has witnessed how non-inviting and sexist lowrider culture can be. By promoting younger generations to be involved in lowrider culture, Salazar can bring in a newer generation of women to become involved in such a male-dominated space.

The sense of community and space for women is also channeled by Christal Leyva with her clothing brand and social media page. Leyva is in charge of t-shirt brand *The Queen of Hearts LV*.¹⁶² Leyva, an entrepreneur and social media advocate, also has an Instagram page under the same name as her t-shirt brand. The Instagram account promoted Leyva's brand, but the social media page also allowed Leyva to create community. The page allowed Leyva to openly publicize events relevant to the lowrider scene here in Las Vegas because,

¹⁶² *The Queen of Hearts LV* is registered as a DBA with Clark County, Nevada. A DBA is an acronym for "doing business as...". Christal Leyva specified *The Queen of Hearts LV*'s DBA is a formal registration designed to guarantee no one in Clark County can use the same name for business purposes; Christal Leyva. Text message to Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, May 12 2022.

“...the t-shirt brand was a way to unite, uplift, and offer a community for the women of Lowriding...”¹⁶³

During our interview, Leyva made it clear that her platform *is* a way for her and other Lowrider wives to feel seen,

“men had their place in the lowrider world, the models had their place in the lowrider world, and I just got tired of seeing the women in chairs along the wall... *watching.*”¹⁶⁴

The Queen of Hearts LV was a way for Christal to give women, who are support systems, a place to feel *welcomed* as the lowrider wives are women “who equally sacrifice, who equally travel, and yet they don’t have a place- a seat at the table.”¹⁶⁵ Her brand focuses on women involved in lowriding who are not necessarily lowriders (such as active lowrider or lowrider models) but as the women who *support* their lowrider partners in order for their partners to be involved in the lowrider car scene actively. Her clothing brand and her social media brand focus on the female lowrider community, on female solidarity and support for Lowrider wives.¹⁶⁶

As Christal explained *her* positionality in lowriding, Christal also talked about the machismo she experiences in lowriding. However, she made a point to say the *machismo* (toxic masculinity) she encounters is not solely limited to lowriding. Christal describes *machismo* as an aspect of her life living as a Latina. Christal also described the support of her husband, Hector, as *not* being *machista*. Christal continuously said Hector gave her the space to grow as a participant of lowriding, as a woman, and as a person. Even if Hector and Christal support one another in their

¹⁶³ Christal Leyva. Text message to Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, May 12 2022.

¹⁶⁴ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

solo contribution to lowriding, that is not to say the couple does not butt heads when it comes to their cars. Christal specified,

“...He (Hector) and I have a beef when it comes to my car because he gave it to me. But, because I know less about cars there was this inherent mentality, ‘I’m gonna make the decisions about the car,’ and I finally told him... ‘Stop telling people to tag me on that car’ (on social media) ‘cause the pictures of my car get posted a lot. People love the car. It’s shared all over the world... and I’m always getting tagged. And I told him, I was like ‘I’mma start tagging you. If it’s your car, if you’re gonna make the decisions on the car, then it’s your car. And it’s just a facade.’ And he was like ‘Okay, no.’ He literally switched his gears, supported the changes I needed to be made on that car, and it’s not because he’s *machista*... but it’s inherent in the culture that the men know about the cars so the men make the calls...”¹⁶⁷

Machismo can be defined as the Latino male gendered phenomenon to describe excessive masculinity or Latino men who are “... controlling, possessive, sexist and dominant, and often is associated with violence against women... as well as a man’s responsibility is to provide for, protect, and defend his family.”¹⁶⁸ The concept of *machismo* is multilayered as many gender roles in Latino households can be traced back to collective viewpoints on religion and societal mindsets.¹⁶⁹

Much of the literature on *machismo* paints the gendered phenomenon as toxic masculinity because *machismo* is connected with negative stereotypes regarding interactions between Latino men and Latino women.¹⁷⁰ In gendered interactions with males and females in Latino households, *machismo* is attributed to toxic masculinity but to many Latino men, *machismo* can be connected

¹⁶⁷ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Marie L. Miville, *Multicultural Gender Roles: Applications for Mental Health and Education* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013), 98

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

to fierce work ethics and ability to take responsibility over situations when situations warrant men to take perceived ownership.¹⁷¹

Hector chimed in on his thoughts on the toxic masculinity of lowrider culture,

“... I knew- I knew times were changing when models were taken away from the magazine (*Lowrider* magazine)... It just- overnight, no more models (modeling in front of the cars)... Times have been changing over the last 10 years... But the day that the models went away, I knew it was over. Over as far as *that*, the way it is viewed ‘cause- me capturing it for the last 10+ years, it was always odd to me that I would capture- have the guy who drove his car, ya know, sacrifice his whole family. Top ramen *all* week long to be able to buy *that* part you needed. Then, all of a sudden, here I am to capture this beautiful car that his family made (*‘sacrificed’* Christal exclaimed in the background) only to put some half-naked girl on it.”¹⁷²

In a discussion regarding models and “half-naked” women, Ivelys Franco’s voice seems the strongest in talking about well-known lowrider models, Instagram models, and sexuality and the insecurities lowrider of wives, especially at car shows.¹⁷³ Sexuality with lowrider models and expectations of lowrider wives bring forth the conversation of family dynamics, as well as sacrificing as much, if not *more*, than lowrider partners. As Lowrider parents, women (especially in Latino and Filipino families) have been put in gendered roles, such as being in charge of the household through domestic duties such as child care and cooking.¹⁷⁴ This sense of gendered roles applies to lowrider culture. Ivelys Franco started off as a lowrider wife, who later became a lowrider. Franco recalled how she would accompany her husband to *USO* lowrider club meetings and she was not allowed to speak as women,

“did not not have a say in anything. It was almost like a by-law... Yeah. Women were definitely on the sidelines. So back then, there wasn’t a lot of women known to be active members in a car club. There was active wives, but then again, it was

¹⁷¹ Arredondo et al., *Culturally Responsive Counseling with Latinas/os*, 25

¹⁷² Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁷³ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*, 85-86

very much almost like a by-law if not a by-law. Women don't— your significant other doesn't have a say if they're not a member.”¹⁷⁵

Franco explained how women were allowed to be car club members *if* they owned cars but wives and girlfriends did not have much say in anything car club related. Franco often (if not always) felt the aura of ““Don't you dare chime in anything club related”” by *USO* car club members.¹⁷⁶ The feeling of exclusion did not and does not only apply to Lowrider wives but also to car club members, like Salazar. Even though Salazar is currently in *Techniques* car club, she has felt the exclusion of women since she has been involved in car culture.

“...it is very difficult (to find female Lowriders) because there's few and far. I mean- It's- Women like us are rare, lowrider women are rare, especially those that have their own car. A lot of us now are doing our own maintenance, doing our own building, doing a lot of stuff on our own, um and it is really hard to find that selective few that would be willing to interview. Especially here in Las Vegas because I mean the lowrider scene here, it's not real big, but we're a close-knit community here, and a lot of us know each other. But the same thing, like the women here, a lot of us, you know, we do support each other, we go to each other's events, we support the kids, we do a lot of that stuff. But again, it's rare, yeah. It is- it's (the lowriding scene) very male-dominated and in fact, when I was growing up, women weren't even allowed in car clubs.”¹⁷⁷

Salazar is a club member of *Techniques*, a car club that did not allow women members until about a decade ago.¹⁷⁸ The female Lowrider also holds a position of power within the hierarchy of club chapters available throughout the United States because she *is* President of the Las Vegas club chapter. When Salazar became the president of the Las Vegas chapter of *the Techniques* car club, she received much pushback,

“I don't have issues with the men *anymore*... I did have problems, especially being president here. The guys in my (car club) chapter were undermining me. Undermining me left and right. Left and right. Undermining me left and right. I would say 'Hey, we got a show. I need you in your club colors, let's go.' And they

¹⁷⁵ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

would go late or they wouldn't be in their shirts. I would be having issues left and right just because they were fighting me because I was female. Because I was a woman. So, I ended up cleaning house. I cleaned house and I got rid of problems. That's why we're small here now. We're starting to build now. So, clean house, we had COVID, the pandemic happened- so... Yeah, I had to clean house. I didn't get push-back from the mother chapter but I got push-back from my guys. They just weren't- they just weren't having a female here. They didn't want a woman to be in charge of the chapter... They didn't want to follow the rules, didn't want to listen to me, so I said 'Bye'..."¹⁷⁹

During the beginnings of lowrider car clubs in the fifties and sixties, the car clubs were led by men who directly and indirectly banned women enrollment in their organizations. One of the reasons why men are more associated with lowriders can be traced to the clubs actively and inactively prohibiting women enrollment and participation.¹⁸⁰ Towards the end of seventies, some car clubs started to accept female members. Women Lowriders also started their own car club as a result of being banned from certain car clubs. However, some women started their own car clubs to be surrounded by like-minded individuals; there were Lowriders in women car clubs who were in romantic relationships with men in only-male car clubs.¹⁸¹

In justification for isolation of women in car clubs, Marcos Gaitan personally comprehended lowriding as a way for men to be around their friends as family life can be stressful. He explained his beliefs on lowrider culture being male-dominated not in response to misogyny but on the basis of protection. Gaitan clarified that not everyone who is involved in lowriding is going to get along because everyone has "different flavors and sometimes people don't mix well."¹⁸² Gaitan highlighted an instance when a fellow member of a car club was messing with his wife.

¹⁷⁹ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 138

¹⁸¹ Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano Culture*, 140-142

¹⁸² Marcos Gaitan, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, March 31 2021

“This guy was messing with my wife. I didn’t like it and she didn’t like it... I punched him for messing with my wife. That’s why I think women weren’t really welcomed in those days... Relationships can make meetings messy... Things can go down...”¹⁸³

Gaitan reiterated the lack of women in car clubs can be attributed to the protection of women in the male-dominated field as a way to protect women. However, Gaitan did mention his wife and other women in the nineteen-seventies and eighties would cruise around to socialize with other female lowriders. To Gaitan, lowriding went out of style “for a while” but picked back up in the nineteen-nineties.¹⁸⁴

Hector, a lowrider photographer who has worked for *Lowrider* magazine as a freelance photographer, is aware of many behind-the-scenes practices. Thus, Hector chimes in to add to Christal’s point to say the images of women as sex symbols were *always* present but the objectification of women in magazines was not always published. After Hector made the point, Christal goes on to say,

“It (objectification) wasn’t as- it evolved. It wasn’t... There are beautiful women, who are probably not owners of the car, right- but also not needing to the *accessory* to the car. There is something to be said- probably could be tracked to the publishers... when we talk about girls and we talk about how women are shown; the narrative is directed by the magazines.”¹⁸⁵

As her husband worked behind the scenes to capture lowriders on film, Christal did want to praise Hector on his ability to show the beauty of the lowriders but to also incorporate the voices of Lowrider in his published work,

“For as long as I have known him (Hector), for these photoshoots that *Lowrider* tasked him to do, he would let the car owner direct the narrative. Their own stories. And if they didn’t have a narrative and let him do what he wanted, Hector, at the

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

very least, would try to understand the car owners, get to know them and write about them that way cause... The world doesn't need another story coming from different eyes other than their own. So, that one thing I gave to give him credit for. Every article he would write was focused on the car owners."¹⁸⁶

Even though Hector is a male informant in this study of the lowriders, Hector is an example of a Lowrider who does all he can to contribute to the different narratives of lowriding. He understands his position as a *man* in the leisure scene, and he raises women voices by creating a comfortable space to women to speak their minds based on *their* experiences. Hector understands that his experiences may differ from those of women because men and women have different gendered and societal expectations.

In presenting how men and women have different experiences, women's voices like Salazar come to mind. Salazar is very open and transparent about how the lowrider scene is not kind and not always welcoming to women, especially if they are new lowriders. In promoting female support, Salazar exclaimed,

“And it's good, you know, seeing the females, and supporting the females. It's really good. But, going back to the community out there, the lowrider community out here is, it's not very big but, you know we all support each other. The hard part is women, sometimes you know- you'll go to an event and people will come up to you and say 'Hey, is that your man's car? Is that your, you know, you got that car because of this man, that man, or whatever.' And they do not realize that... we're not just a decoration, we're not, you know... we're not accessories. We're not there to just model in front of the car, you know. We push papers, we help them with, you know (car) club stuff, and you know, dues, stuff like that, paperwork and things. But, there's so much more than what they (men) know. And, the women out here in Vegas- now are getting credited for what they do. It's nice because a lot of the places I go, the women are there, and all of us women, you know, we stick together.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

Salazar is a proponent of female solidarity and female empowerment in Lowrider culture. Like Christal, Salazar is also an advocate for female solidarity, female empowerment and a proponent for creating a welcoming space for women. Salazar trademarked and created an LLC (Limited Liability compact) called *Ladies of Lowriding Worldwide LLC*. The creation of *Ladies of Lowriding Worldwide LLC* is not the first time Salazar has been involved in the business world. (Salazar said “I’ve always done a little bit of that stuff”, the ‘stuff’ relating to businesses. When she lived in Colorado, Salazar owned a limousine company, a small clothing line *and* she is licensed with a CDL [Commercial Driver’s License].)¹⁸⁸ Salazar set out to create a welcoming space for women as she has experienced how some male Lowriders can be unwelcoming and, often, rude to women interested in cars;

“I tell everyone on the page ‘This is a safe spot. There’s not gonna be bullying, not gonna be hate.’ There can be difference in opinion but that’s it. No drama. And let me tell you- the responses I have gotten about the page being so positive. We share educational videos about car, promote women businesses, lowriding community... One girl dm’d me... she said she went on an Impala (Facebook) page to ask a question about information on how to fix her car and, ya know, they (the men) basically treated her like crap. And on our side, it wasn’t like that. And if we don’t know an answer to a question, we’ll ask around... We don’t know it all. *I* don’t know it all but I wanted to provide a page us women could go to- to look at one another, to empower one another, to help, to learn, and grow, and be stronger together.”¹⁸⁹

Salazar explained how social gatherings tend to play out when Lowriders come together for social events,

“The girls still gather with the girls. The guys still gather with the guys. And, that’s how they migrate... The wives are over here and I usually hang out with the wives. Or, I’ll go walk around, ya know, if the guys be looking at the car, I’ll go with the guys and look and tell them what’s going on. But most of the time, I’ll hang out

¹⁸⁸ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁸⁹ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

with the girls- with the women and we talk about everything. Yeah, I do it (socialize) that way...”¹⁹⁰

In her experiences in the lowriding scene, Salazar often had to prove herself to male members of the lowrider scene. Thus, the Lowrider created the Facebook page *Ladies of Lowriding Worldwide LLC* as a way to create a platform for women to openly discuss lowriding. As she became tired of men's toxic masculinity and judgment towards women, Salazar created a space focused for women *by* women in lowriding.

“... That’s how it is, but I’ll tell you- I gained a lot of men’s respect when they see when the car breaks down on the side of the road and they see me under it. In fact, there was, same instance over here. I broke down when the police officer was there and a couple of guys drive by and go ‘I saw you’, and I go ‘Why didn't you stop?’ And they go ‘We knew you had it taken care of’ and I go ‘Well, what if I wouldn’t have had it taken care of?’ And they’re like ‘We know you, you know, we know you’. And you know, and the same thing you know, some of these same guys will call me at one in the morning; ‘Hey Juanita, my car broke down, can you bring your trailer and come get me?’. And I’m like ‘Alright, I’ll be right there’, and I do it, you know, and that’s just how I am. But it’s- it is way different because sometimes I feel like when I’m around the men, I feel like sometimes I lose my femininity, but I don’t... Because I feel like, because I don’t have my nails done, or my hands are rough. Or I walk up and I’m like, you know, I’m not the model figure... have to be one of the boys.”¹⁹¹

However, Salazar is not always seen as “one of the boys”. When Salazar became the president of the Las Vegas chapter of *Techniques* car club, she received a lot of push-back.

“It’s been hard... It’s a male dominant world in lowriding. And the guys are like ‘That’s her boyfriend’s car.’ I’m not kidding you... They’ll be like ‘Is that your man’s car?’ when they see get up from under the car! ‘No, it’s not! You see me coming out from under the car... If I had a man, I would make him do the hard stuff. I don’t so I’m doing it. It’s *my* car.’ You still get that... No matter where you’re at, you get that *all* the time. When I was married to the second husband, he would say ‘I built that (the car) for you.’ And I would say ‘*No*, you didn’t. No, you didn’t.’ They (men) wanna take the credit. Or they don’t wanna give you the

¹⁹⁰ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

recognition you deserve building that piece of art... That's why... the more people I can get involved, without judgement- that's good, *especially* women.”¹⁹²

Even Salazar, as an established Lowrider, feels pressure to care more about her appearance when interacting and working with male Lowriders.

“When I'm around the guys, usually, I go how I feel. So, if I feel like, hey, if it's a cruise night, big cruise night, I'll get dressed up and stuff. I won't do my nails but I'll do my hair and makeup. If I'm going out and if I'm working on the car and we just go out quick, I'll go out like I am. Yeah, so, I really don't- and I think that's part of it too, because some of the guys, they see me as their friend, which is fine, 'cause I don't want anything else.”¹⁹³

Although Salazar is very grateful to be a part of the culture that she is a part of, that does not mean that she does not have difficulty with her positionality in the field when dealing with men; she also has difficulty financially. Her financial stability depends on her livelihood as an independent woman with a full-time job. However, her responsibilities focus on paying her bills, staying afloat financially, and being a Lowrider who participates in a car club.¹⁹⁴ Franco also dealt with issues regarding financial security with lowriding. Franco stated she had issues with financial responsibilities with car club commitments, even when she was not a club member (unlike Salazar, a lowrider car club member). Franco was not a Lowrider when she was first introduced to the lowrider scene, but she was well-versed with club politics as her husband had been involved in car clubs for many years.¹⁹⁵ When she would accompany her husband to car club meetings, Franco often felt that she was not contributing to lowriding the same way as her husband. Franco felt alienation despite putting in the same effort as her husband by going to car club meetings and letting her husband explore lowriding financially.

¹⁹² Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁹³ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁹⁴ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

¹⁹⁵ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

“You could, but it was kind of like... like the members would sit closer to each other so they can hear each other talk, or you know like back then they would meet at Taco Bell, they would meet at Wendy’s, they would meet in parking lots of fast food places. So... if it was in a parking lot, then they kind of huddle together. If it was in a restaurant, like fast food setting, then it would be like, ‘Okay, you could sit,’ but then it was just almost no like, ‘Hey, let the members kind of like sit closer together so they can get to talk.’ It wasn’t like you’re not allowed to sit next to them, it was almost just out of courtesy like ‘Hey, I know I’m not a member. I’m just here with you, so I’m gonna chill back here,’ but you’re still in hearing (range)... Yeah, so that’s how it was for many years. There was even arguments about wives having too much say. It was very much known that if you don’t have a car, you don’t have a say. Obviously, back then most of the women that were even around were girlfriends or wives, so of course we didn’t have cars because we’re with our boyfriends or husbands, you know? Up until probably... within the past ten years is when I actually started to notice women having their own cars.”¹⁹⁶

Research, primarily in sociology and anthropology, has shown that male and female youth in many Latinx households have different expectations of what they can accomplish within the bounds of their households. Stereotypically, the positionality of Latinas in family constructs has given males more autonomy than women.¹⁹⁷ Even though Franco and her husband had been married and were parents, much of the family responsibilities fell on Franco’s shoulders as a wife and mother.

Throughout our interview, Franco often expressed resentment of lowriding regarding her husband’s contribution to their family and their marriage. Even if Franco was not a lowrider from the beginning, she contributed to lowriding as much as her husband (if not more than her husband through mental and emotional labor) *because* she was in charge of the household. Franco allowed her husband to participate in the lowriding scene by letting him have the space to participate in ‘fun activities’ while she was in charge of their children. All of the responsibilities with childrearing and being a parent were under Franco’s domain, often on her own. Franco expressed that she often felt isolated and alone when accompanying her husband to car shows and car club

¹⁹⁶ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, *Gender Roles in Immigrant Families*, 91

meetings because she had to focus on her children. In contrast, her husband focused on lowriding more than family,

“The majority of the shows I’ve been to... I did not go with him to Japan, I did not go with him to Chicago or to Texas, or to Miami... because I was at home with kids. Once the kids came into the picture... because I would go to shows with him and we’d walk around, and we’d take pictures, and we’d see what’s going on or whatever. We were active. Once the kids came in, it was almost like- since I had two, you know and they were toddlers and they wanna walk and wanna whatever, I got to take care of them. So, I would go to a show with him, but then he would disappear because he’s his own public relations guy, he was just like out there shaking hands and kissing the babies. I would have to stay with the kids, so I would get left alone a lot and it’s almost like you know how... when you go to a new school it’s just like ‘Yeah, you can make friends,’ but at the same time it’s awkward. So, even though we were in this club— and the club is huge and had over 300 members —and a lot of them would bring their wives and girlfriends to the show, but we never like got an opportunity for the women to actually like get together and connect, so I was never that involved with other wives because if they came from California, then they had their own clique.”¹⁹⁸

Franco further explains,

“So then of course when they come to Vegas, they’re gonna hang out with their own clique. Yeah, we’re all gonna be together... but they’re gonna hang out with their own clique. And back then, I was very much introverted. I wasn’t the one to just go out, I would’ve never said, ‘Yes, I will have an interview with you. I will see you whenever,’ and actually show up. It was like that back then. Uhm, so I didn’t really hang out with a lot of the women or get to know a lot of the women. You pretty much got to know them because you saw some of them so many times throughout the years that you just like, ‘Oh, I know who she is, I know who she’s dating, I know who she’s with, I know her name’ but we never actually like got to know each other. So, I felt... I don’t know if outcasted is the right word to use, but I didn’t feel included.”¹⁹⁹

Through the interactions of *machismo* and hyper-masculinity, comprehending how Latinas fit into family structures and gender roles provides awareness of the actors that influence Latina identity within their family constructs. Women have societal expectations to do more and be more

¹⁹⁸ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

as wives and mothers. Inquiries trying to understand how white women have been viewed in scholarship and leisure activities will be able to assist in attempting to comprehend the experiences of female lowriders. Lowriding is predicated on leisure, but it is also an activity that is also focused on labor as the activity is expensive. The different women in this study all have day jobs to afford their lifestyles, their families, and their cars.

A brief discussion of labor is essential in understanding women because female Lowriders, who are mothers, have at least two jobs. The two jobs are a wife and a mother, a full-time employee, and another job to take care of themselves. As crucial as their responsibilities to their families and work life, their self-care should also be necessary. Their self-care goes into how they present themselves and the hobbies that they enjoy doing, such as participating in culture through their cars. For example, Franco often felt alone and resentful toward lowriding because her husband focused more on leisure activity than his responsibilities to being a father, husband, and member of the family they had created. Franco's feelings towards lowriding are not only singular to her as she had instances throughout her years in lowriding culture where she witnessed how women were pushed aside. Franco had difficulty finding her space in the lowrider culture while participating as a lowrider wife. The current Lowrider also had difficulty finding community formation with other women while she was having difficulty being a mom. It would be false to say Franco was *completely* without the support of her husband, but in the early years of her marriage, her husband did not assist her with child-rearing or family formation.

Franco's husband was not always around for family events as his lowrider position weighed more. Franco did mention throughout our interview that in order to be able to sustain their finances, she and her husband had separate bank accounts. They would each pay their respective bills, but in the instance of Franco's husband, the money he had left over from paying bills- her husband

would use that money for his lowriders. For Franco, the money Franco had left over after paying the bills, she would use on her children. Franco did recount that she had to pick up part-time jobs to pay for more stuff for the children as her husband had dedicated non-essential finances to his cars.

“I definitely did not feel I was number one. So, you know how they say— they tell you that it should be God, family, [then] everything else. It was lowriding, maybe his mom, maybe God, and then me and the kids. So, it was definitely at the forefront, so yeah there was some resentment, but—... there was definitely resentment there, there was definitely uhm—I didn’t understand, it didn’t make sense to me because back then I saw it as a hobby. I was like, ‘we’re married, we got kids to raise, we’re trying to get better jobs, we’re trying to better our future, and you’re stuck on these cars, you’re stuck on this club.’ He got so deep into that club that he became the regional manager—I don’t want to say manager, but it was kind of like [he was up in the hierarchy]. Like, this club originated out of California and he was the regional guy living in Vegas, handling a chapter of over 300 people. They had chapters in Italy, they had chapters in uhh... all over the place, different countries: Alaska, they had it in—one of the guys that comes out there’s Australia, there’s Japan, like everywhere. There’s chapters everywhere, and he was like one of the big guys in it, right?”²⁰⁰

In explaining her firsthand accounts of how women were treated in the lowrider scene, Franco also felt the absence of a supportive partner because her husband gave tremendous weight to his contributions to his Lowrider car club responsibilities,

“He was constantly gone, he was constantly—like if he wasn’t at work, it was something car-related or something car club-related. If there was a show in town, we had people stay in at our house. He was leaving at odd hours at night to go help people out if they broke down. So yeah, there was probably definitely a lot of resentment on my side because I didn’t understand such the commitment and love that he was giving to these other people, but at the same time I didn’t want him to have resentment towards me, so I didn’t prevent him from doing it. Because I was like, ‘you’re not gonna use me as the like—you’re not gonna blame me for not accomplishing what you want to accomplish’ type of thing. Now, I can understand that. Life has helped me understand that. But in the time, your perspective on things is very narrow. Your life experience is very limited, so it wasn’t fun for me anymore. The women that were there, they were there for the attention, not for the

²⁰⁰ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

progress of anything. They were just there for their own attention. They were basically just—they'll go to the car shows to find a man.”²⁰¹

Franco had seen how women would go to the car shows with their husbands, have lawn chairs, sit on the sidelines waiting for their significant others to do their duties to car clubs, and be active lowriding members. This examination does not critique a woman's devotion to significant others, nor does this examination aim to discount valuable gendered contributions to the family. Franco's contributions and feelings are valid as she was indirectly *and* directly involved in her husband's lowriding participation. She may not have been the person building the cars initially, nor the person who knew everything about the car her husband built. However, she had been a part of the process of her husband's lowriders through almost every step.

Franco's indirect contributions to her husband's lowriders are significant because Franco provided sufficient support for her husband to explore lowriding (often in competition with family duties). Franco is also an excellent example of not just a woman but as an individual who resented lowriding but then used lowriding as a form of autonomy and empowerment for oneself through leisure. Similar to Salazar, Franco has seen and experienced the progression of the lowriding scene in Las Vegas; the lowrider has been involved in the Vegas lowriding scene for about twenty years. Franco's involvement may not have been as active as her husband's, but her lowriding contribution is as significant and valid as a *traditional* lowrider. The different voices of Lowriders show how lowriding has evolved in Las Vegas and how it continues to grow through the advocacy of these women.

Throughout our conversations regarding lowriders in Las Vegas, Franco did mention a particular female lowrider, Paula, who was involved in lowriding about fifteen years ago. Franco

²⁰¹ Ibid.

did not create a strong kinship with Paula, but Franco was able to see how a woman who outwardly worked on her car and knew her car— was still isolated and in her husband’s car club. The car club, significantly more than a decade ago, was dominated by men. As much as these women advocate for inclusivity and female solidarity, they are still women who have backlash. The backlash from men is not always blatant or forthcoming, as Franco elaborated,

“... and that’s another that was kind of like a little frustrating is that if there’s a female with the car, it’s almost like... it’s almost known that it’s not her car, it’s his. Because they’re married, she wouldn’t go get that car on her own, she’s not gonna build that car on her own... Up until probably today, that’s very much the assumption—that if there’s a woman, she got introduced to it because of her husband, or her boyfriend, or her friends, or her family... but it’s not because of her, it’s because of someone else. And, that’s honestly even up until myself today. Yes, I finally have a car that is registered to me... but people will see it as it’s your husband’s car.”²⁰²

Franco, a woman involved in the Lowrider scene for a large portion of her life, has experienced how *machista* lowriding can be;

“Now, they’re trying to be respectful and nice and be like, ‘oh yeah, Ive’s car, Ive’s car, Ive’s car,’ but we all know—underlying, at home, behind the closed doors, you know that’s Cisco’s (Franco’s husband) car. And it’s like whatever, I get it. So... I’m sure she (Paula) has her own struggles. But yes, they (Paula and her husband) ended up leaving, and that was the first time I personally acknowledged a female driving her own car. And then let’s say from there, it wasn’t up until probably within the past ten years when I can probably count with one hand how many people I know with their own cars that are female. That’s pathetic... that’s pathetic. But then at the same time, there’s probably more women out there, but then it’s still the whole there’s just—I don’t know, I think it’s just the representation isn’t just there.... it’s a man’s world... one hundred percent. One hundred percent.”²⁰³

Thus, there is this assumption in lowrider culture that women can be lowriders. However, they are not seen as *actual* lowriders. Franco clarified,

“... If you are a female and you have a car and you wanna be vocal, or just *in* the community, you are accepted... But, um- but I will say there is some shit talking

²⁰² Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

²⁰³ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

on the side. Ya know? If a woman will post a flyer or whatever, and say ‘Hey, I am supporting so and so’- yes. There will be guys saying ‘Who the hell does she think she is? Why does *she* think she can participate?’ The men can see it, kind of like, women invading their territory... They (the men) will usually not say it to their face but they are saying it behind their backs. So, it wouldn’t be outright hostile but the reactions would be- talking smack on the side, behind closed doors... It is almost like they (the men) are acting jealous because the person did nothing to them. The person is not going to mess up their day in any way, shape or form. They’re just trying to show support, but they (the men) have this need to say ‘Hey, this is *our* game. Not *yours*’.”²⁰⁴

Franco described the change in attitude she has personally seen by male Lowriders to woman Lowriders and/or women interested in cars,

“At first, they (the men) might say ‘Oh, thank you for your opinion. Thanks for sharing. Oh, yeah, thank you for the heads up.’ But, then, if that person were to *actually* show up and post up, like mingle and talk to people- then you can see the attitude change. The attitude would change to be condescending, like, ‘Mmmm, do you know who you are, sweetie?’ And, that’s where it comes in. The men still see women as ‘Go sit next to your husband. Go talk to only your boyfriend’... A lot of the men have an old school mentality. And even though, it is slight changing because there are more women in lowriding. There are still people who will say ‘She’s trying to hard’. And it’s ‘No, we’re not trying.’ We wanna have fun, too. Who says the cars are only for guys? Who says the cars are only for men? Who says the lowriders are only for men? But, because it is such an overwhelming men’s hobby, it... it’s still viewed by some men as only being relevant to other men.”²⁰⁵

Franco’s experiences show that even though she was not traditionally involved in lowriding, she understood the steps, financial responsibilities, and logistics revolved around car culture. Franco did not become a lowrider until later in her life, but that does not invalidate her knowledge nor her experiences as a woman in lowrider culture in Las Vegas. As Franco has grown up in Las Vegas, she has seen how women can be overly sexualized and not accepted into social spaces dominated by men.

“Very *machista*, very male-dominated... Like all three of the cars that we own...yeah, my husband drives them. Yes, my husband maintains them. Yes, my husband has put most of the effort in building them. But I also contributed in the sense of support, money, time. Sometimes, I wasn’t there at all, but I didn’t prevent him from doing it, you know? So the whole thought that like ‘that’s his car, that’s

²⁰⁴ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

²⁰⁵ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

my car,' like no, it's *our* car. I was there for the build of the cutlass, I was there for the build of the Impala, I was there for the build of the '48; I was there for all three of them. I'm enjoying the '48 now because the cutlass and the Impala attracted the attention that men want, but women don't want."²⁰⁶

Although the term and phenomenon need to be more studied, Franco's descriptions of her husband's car fall within the *male gaze* concept. The *male gaze* is any form of media, objects, and presentations of oneself created with men in mind as primary consumers. While her husband's car seems to be structured for the *male gaze*, Franco's car is positioned for the *female gaze*. Franco specifically chose a car that would attract female attention and be in the interest of women, rather than the other cars that her husband catered to men's attention. Ultimately, the aesthetics of Franco's '48 lowrider catered to her aesthetics and what she believed to be proper for herself and *her* car. Again, the *male* and *female gaze* needs to be studied more as they are newer phenomena presented to general audiences. It is interesting to note how Franco and her husband display their cars for different audiences.

As Franco and her husband position their cars differently, Franco also has rules for her car. She does not allow female models to model with her lowrider,

"In a sense of... the '48, my whole thing with it is that there's going to be no female models with that car. It's not going to be tainted with women on that car. Whereas the '84, it's a very flashy car and back in that time, too, there was a lot of people that were doing videos, like VHS type videos, and it would be very sexual with women and cars... oversexualization of women. One hundred percent... it was for men. One hundred percent for men... In a sense of like me being a female owning a car, I'm all for it. I can promote that, I can influence, I can be supportive, engaging, one hundred percent. But the moment you take it and say, 'no, I want this girl to model for the car'... it's taken away from the car because you're sexualizing the female now because it's not just a cute little picture, no, it's very risqué pictures."²⁰⁷

Salazar added her opinions about "risqué" photos,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

“Sometimes it seems they (models posing suggestively) are doing it for the *photographer*... I don’t know if there is any agreeance with the photographer, I just don’t know but... Ya know, I- I keep my opinions to myself. I still smile and I say ‘Hi’. The oversexualization... They’ll treat us as just sex objects. It’s what it is. Just sex objects. And, there are lots of women who might have the body for it but then they’re wearing nothing. Their (the models’) likes on Facebook and Instagram- they’re getting it- when they’re posed like that- it’s not about the car, it’s because she is half naked. There is nothing wrong with showing off nice bodies... Ya know, everyone is going to judge you, regardless. Anything you do, especially the Lowrider community out here, *especially* being female, you’re being watched. You got *all eyes* on you.”²⁰⁸

Franco expressed the similar sentiments and concerns of Salazar in reference to the harmfulness of oversexualization of women in Lowrider culture,

“There’s this model... Her name is Star. Star is a big Instagram model. She is beautiful. She is a model. She’s works on her own car. She drives her own. *She* gets respect. But why does she get respect? She shows a lot of tits and ass. She does. Men see that she shares provocative photos and she works on cars and the men think ‘Oh, you’re a pretty chick *and* you work on your car? That’s hot. Why can’t all women be hot *and* know stuff about their cars?’. There is a lot of pretty privilege in the lowrider culture when it comes to the mindset of guys. One hundred percent. The girls that the men talk shit about- they- the women are not seen *as* cute. If you’re pretty, if you’re- if we are strictly talking about lowriding females, if they are pretty, they get respect easily. They are seen as respectable by the men. If they’re not pretty, the women are allowed but they have to work harder to gain the respect of the men. The women will be allowed but the men are still going to talk their shit. Because when I said earlier, that the men say ‘Who do you think you are?’ The men really think ‘You’re not cute so sit down over there.’ Or if you are cute but you are a wife, they expect you to just stand there and look pretty... If the women dress *extra* feminine or show skin, they are accepted more... You will see that Star- yeah, everyone has haters, but Star gets a lot of respect from guys. I’m not saying she’s not capable with her car but her looks are more important than her ability when compared to Lowrider women who are not as pretty... There is definitely pretty privilege.”²⁰⁹

Leyva also discussed female sexuality and representation in car clubs and social spaces directed by Lowriders,

“In *my* research when I was trying to learn the history, the style, the fashion, *me* owning a clothing brand, the fashion of it all- when you look at the first covers of

²⁰⁸ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

²⁰⁹ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

Lowrider magazine, the women are fully clothed!! The nudity- the representation of women evolved from fully clothed, you go into the '90s, ya know- so it's not- it (the nudity) wasn't inherent in the culture until- the objectification of women didn't become a huge thing until the '90s, really."²¹⁰

Women in the lowrider scene often have to choose whether to be “one of the boys” or separate and distinguish themselves as women who look feminine. However, femininity can be blurred with objectification and over-sexualization in lowrider culture, depending on the image protected by photographers and by car models.

In Franco's lived experiences, the Lowrider saw the over-sexualization of women, especially with models, and she did not want the aspects of sexualization and objectification connected to a car. In terms of femininity and presentation of self, Salazar often questions how she is viewed by other men, even though she has already established herself as a Lowrider,

“But, um, sometimes I wonder, you know, how they (men in lowrider culture) really think of me that way... When they're not with me, yeah. Like 'look at her nails, she can't even wash her hands', you know stuff like that... But, my main thing is- I'm having fun doing what I'm doing, I love doing what I'm doing... But, ya know, I think a lot of time, men just see women as sex objects... I think sometimes the men don't see me as a woman when I am *not* in makeup... I feel like going out- *I'm* going out but I'll go out how *I* want to.”²¹¹

Throughout our interviews, Christal constantly discussed how she created her platforms and focused her clothing brand on uplifting and supporting women she had seen how lowrider wives and lowrider girlfriends “did not have a seat at the table”. Christal wanted to change that. Her Instagram for her brand is filled with media promoting female empowerment and solidarity to make sure that women do not feel alone. The rating is a social space but it is not always inviting

²¹⁰ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

²¹¹ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

to women as the interviews of Christal, Salazar, Franco show. The experiences of Christal, Salazar and Franco *are not* the same experience as those of Nichol Zamora. As Zamora describes,

“There was a little stigma (being a woman). A lot of people think it is a man’s world to, ya know, be in that culture but *I’ve* never felt like I wasn’t welcome... When I am organizing shows and getting things together, *they* (Lowrider men) tend to think a man is behind the organization. So, when I show up or when I do a phone call, it’s like ‘Oh, okay. It’s a woman.’ But it’s not an unwelcoming feeling. So, it’s still very respectful I am respected by a lot of the car club presidents. They’re very open to helping me with whatever I have going on with the community. So... I don’t feel like they wouldn’t want to give back to their community.”²¹²

The community organizer elaborates,

“There’s a lot of car clubs that have been based on men. Now, there’s plenty of women who have the same interests- are starting their own clubs and it’s still the same culture. There’s just been- it’s 2022... So, the lowrider culture has come a long way as long as that’s (female presences) concerned. Women do it just as good as men do... As time goes on, I think there is gonna be more- a lot of women go with their husband and enjoy the culture with their husband and their family. But, then, they (the women) start getting their own lowriders and their friends- and... As time grow, there is gonna be more female lowriders than there is right now.”²¹³

Zamora does not believe women are overly sexualized in the lowrider scene, but she has seen how representations of women have changed. She attests the visibility of women and their voices in the lowrider scene have changed perceptions of how women *have been* perceived and how they *are* perceived. Those sentiments are based on *her* experiences.

“(being viewed as feminine) it definitely helps (with community outreach), lowrider culture- they spend a lot of money on making their vehicles look the way they do- a lot of time. So... when a person... looks presentable a lot, it helps with the presentation (of oneself).”²¹⁴

Zamora is *not* a Lowrider but her contribution to the Lowrider community in Las Vegas is important. However, her experiences do reflect what Franco, Leyva, and Salazar have encountered.

²¹² Nichol Zamora, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 18 2022.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Nichol Zamora, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 18 2022.

Thus, all of the interviews in the study show that women's experiences in lowrider culture are not a monolith. Three out of the four women have faced discrimination and prejudice as women. Zamora explained her experiences as a small part of her being a member of lowrider-adjacent culture (as she is a community organizer). In contrast, Salazar's experiences differ significantly from Zamora's as Salazar consistently proves herself to male members outside of her clique. Salazar mentioned how she sold *Raiders* tickets to a couple from California. The couple traveled from California to Nevada to pick up the tickets. When the couple went to Salazar's home, the male Lowrider was surprised to find out a *female* Lowrider was selling the tickets. No matter how much she knows (throughout the interview, Salazar said she "doesn't know it all"), Salazar has to deal with the consistent disregard of her knowledge and legitimacy as a female Lowrider with men.²¹⁵ When Salazar has gone to car shows, she has experienced mocking by men who discover she *is* a Lowrider,

"If we go to a show or we're cruising and we park at a parking lot or something, a stranger or a random I don't know will come up and ask 'Hey, is that your man's car?' And I will say 'No, it's mine.' Then, often, you can hear them mimicking to their friends saying 'Oh, I bet it is' or stuff like that, and I just let it go but just because I let it go doesn't mean I didn't hear it. Ya know? They don't know. They don't even know. Yep, that's how it is. And if I'm with one of the guys I know real good or one of the girls, they'll be like 'Show them your hands. Show 'em your hands. Show them *this*.' And I say 'Alright' and I show 'em but I don't have to prove myself to *them*. If they wanna mimic me or mock me or whatever, that's fine but 'Show me *your* car. Where's your car? Show me your car. Show me what *you* do for *our* community. You're here to look at cars but what else do you do? What is the positive impact do you have?' And, that's how I see it but I learned a lot from reacting to how I react to things. In the beginning, I would say loudly 'Yeah, that's *my* car!' Now, I'm more humble. 'Yeah, that's my car.'... that pride that you have that this is your sweat, money and tears- you know what you have and anyone else's opinions- it doesn't matter anymore. It's how you react. Why waste energy? Negative energy? Is it gonna matter tomorrow? No. I'm probably never going to see them again, so why bother?"²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

²¹⁶ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

Salazar touches on vital points about standing her ground and being proud of her work as a Lowrider, but she also chooses to keep *her* peace of mind. Salazar's mental and emotional energy is valuable, and the Lowrider chooses to focus her energy on things she *can* control rather than on things she cannot control. Thus, in discussions around Lowrider wives and women providing support, Salazar mentioned,

“(Lowrider wives) they’re the shot-gun riders. They’re the ones—they’re the ones, more than likely, if you’re in an old-fashioned relationship, ya know, with a lot of them are (women in Lowrider culture)... Ya know, you put your money together. The women pay the bills. So, a lot of time with that (when the men say) ‘Hey, I want a car.’ In a lot of situations, the women are taking care of the house. ‘I’m taking care of this. I’m taking care of that. I’m getting insurance on the car. What else do you need? Let’s budget this all.’ And the women are there for support, like in her (Ivelys’) situation. She’s always out there for support... When she talked around the time she was just learning to drive Edward (Ivelys’ lowrider), their ‘48... And I told her- I even sent her a video that shows how to drive it (Ivelys’ car), but she did learn how... I said ‘Don’t give up.’”²¹⁷

Salazar used Franco's individual situation to explain how the women in the lowriding scene, here in Las Vegas, constantly attempt to support and uplift each other,

“And that’s how I am with other women. I don’t get jealous or anything, ya know, ‘Go for it. The more that you know, the better.’ And that’s for everyone. And I always tell our women on our page (*Ladies of Lowriding Worldwide LLC*), ‘We’re stronger together!’ And it’s not that we’re bashing men because that’s not what we wanna do. We just wanna make a name for ourselves and say ‘Hey, we can do this too!’”²¹⁸

In discussing female empowerment and solidarity, Leyva is an example of a female entrepreneur who created her brand (and an Instagram page) for female solidarity because she saw how women were pushed to the sidelines. As much as Franco is at peace with who she is as a lowrider and as a woman, her peace should not distract from the fact that she does face prejudice as a woman, as some Lowriders do not believe Franco is capable of creating a Lowrider for herself. The female

²¹⁷ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

²¹⁸ Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

Lowriders are moms and spouses, but they are *people* and women who are *more* than just mothers and wives. Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco, and Juanita Salazar are *more* than lowriding accessories. Through their oral interviews, the ladies shed light on their distinctive encounters as women who contribute to lowriding through their various involvements in the Las Vegas Lowrider scene. Women like Leyva, Franco, and Salazar have not been highlighted in the Lowrider scholarship. This inquiry into their experiences is not the end-all-be-all, but it is an essential step in generating conversation regarding female members in Lowrider communities.

Conclusion

Due to lowriding's association with gangs and criminality, lowrider cars are seen as products of criminal behavior. The imagery of Latinos being associated with crime has been documented in Hollywood, in Netflix original shows such as *On My Block*, and in other forms of media with racist and discriminatory imagery. The manner in which mass media has presented Latinos as dangerous and being involved with criminality has allowed justification for over-policing and vigorous monitoring by non-Latinos and non-lowriders. By not challenging harmful stereotypes, mainstream media shapes the realities of Latinos and lowriders as it teaches society to view these groups as *things* to be dealt with, as opposed to *people*. Examinations into the different roles of women in lowriding, stereotypes, and self-autonomy highlight the troubles of Latinos in the United States in relation to lowrider communities.

The introduction chapter sets the stage for the thesis by presenting the literature that has been available within the Lowrider scholarship. The chapter also critiques inquiries into lowriding by non-Lowriders interested in the niche car culture. The first chapter provides insight as to how criminal behavior is associated with lowriding. The interviews of Beto Mendoza, Marcos Gaitan, Nichol Zamora, Juanita Salazar, and Hector and Christal Leyva show how lowrider culture often refutes descriptions of criminality and instead defines themselves as being centered around community and cultural interests. The female voices of Nichol Zamora, Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco, and Juanita Salazar show how their different experiences have shaped them as women and help to actively contribute differently to lowriding culture in *their* own ways. Their voices are used to talk about themselves *for* themselves and *by* themselves. As Christal Leyva pointed out,

“I don't want to be told what my life looks like from a visitor's standpoint who's never going to come back. Or when they do come back, they're gonna come back

because they wanna make money off of us. There is no authenticity and that's my problem..."²¹⁹

The voices of all the Lowriders assist the narrative of uplifting and empowering lowriders when possible. Even if the women are part of the same culture, the voices of Lowrider women are different and have not been historically present, but they need to be. The ways women in this car culture view themselves, their families, and their positionality serve as a better understanding of the complexities of lowrider culture, meaning more and being *more* than a niche culture about cars.

Aforementioned in previous chapters, the *most* documented instances of male Lowriders should *not* distract from female presences in lowriding. The lack of female lowriders in archives or historical analysis in the twentieth century should not diminish the importance of Lowrider women and women in Lowrider communities. In chapter one, the inquiry into the connections between criminality and lowriding adds to the literature by looking at how media narratives have influenced ideas about violence and gangs with lowrider culture. The first chapter argues that lowriders resist this characterization through their advocacy and persistence to change ideas about Lowriders being criminals. The different oral interviews of members of the lowrider community allow their different experiences to shed light on the development of lowriding with the last twenty years.

Without the oral histories of the female Lowriders, this project would not have been possible. This examination into woman Lowriders in Las Vegas show the importance of primary accounts, and the significance of *listening* to different voices. The voices of all the Lowriders assist

²¹⁹ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva. Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

in changing the narrative of women solely being “wallflowers” by uplifting and empowering female Lowriders whenever possible.²²⁰ The idea of not positioning women as “wallflowers” is evident in chapter two. The second chapter focuses on the open and honest experiences of the Lowrider women.

Aforementioned, the experiences of the Lowriders are not universal truths, but their individual experiences could resonate with other women in the lowrider scene. The different oral histories have shown that women in different lowrider scene positions have specific expectations. Franco might not have started as a lowrider. However, Franco’s contribution to the local lowriding scene is unparalleled because she allowed her husband to participate in the local Lowrider culture. It should be noted that if Franco had stopped her husband from being involved in the Vegas Lowrider scene, she felt her husband would blame her for not letting him not grow within lowrider culture.²²¹

In the case of Christal and Hector Leyva, the couple has been involved in lowriding in different ways. No matter their different contributions, the parents introduced and shared their lowrider life with their children, making them more engaged with the lowrider scene compared to Franco’s children. Franco’s children do not like lowriders because lowriding activities often took Franco's husband away from family activities and responsibilities. The difference in how Franco’s children and the Leyvas see lowriding is predicated upon how open the parents were about lowriding. For Salazar, her sons are not interested in lowriding, but Salazar gives her children a choice to participate or not participate in lowriding.²²² The difference in family acceptance of

²²⁰ Christal Leyva and Hector Leyva. Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

²²¹ Ivelys Franco, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, January 20 2022.

²²² Juanita Salazar, Interview by Alejandra Herrera, Las Vegas, NV, February 17 2022.

lowriding is one example of why Lowrider communities in the United States are not monolithic, but the niche car communities are heavily focused on kinship, understanding, and effort.

Members of the local lowriding scene tend to focus on community engagement and fighting criminalization. However, there is little to no scholarship focusing on female Lowriders, in general. There is *no* scholarship for women Lowriders in Las Vegas, Nevada. This thesis highlights the experiences of members of the local lowriding scenes, but especially spotlights the experiences of Christal Leyva, Ivelys Franco, and Juanita Salazar. Voices like theirs have not been historically present in the archives or in the majority of Lowrider scholarship. The female members of Lowrider communities provide important insight into their roles as members of the workforce, as members of Latinx family units, and most importantly, as *women* in a male-dominated scene.

The gendered roles and community contributions of Leyva, Franco, and Salazar should not be ignored because they all show different perspectives on women in the lowriding scene in a city most associated with gambling and partying. The women contribute to lowriding culture by their mere presence in the leisure space. As Latinas, Leyva, Franco, and Salazar have faced gendered discrimination by other men. However, they have also found empowerment and *their* people within community building as *women*. Lowriders, generally, fight against Lowrider criminalization through their Lowriders' social spaces. Lowriding became a cultural resistance to white-American-dominated social spaces because the Lowriders sought to create a social space for their benefit. The voices of female Lowriders show how lowriding has evolved in Las Vegas as the women have lived in Vegas long enough to understand and navigate the social spaces. Their advocacy for female empowerment in lowriding shows that these women are not invisible, but they are *invincible* when they all work together.

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Curriculum Vitae
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Education

M.A., 2022. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. History.

Thesis: “Who says lowriders are only for men?”: Lowriders in Las Vegas, Nevada

B.A., 2018. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. History & Political Science.

Senior Capstone Project: “Identity: Hot-rods, Pachucos, and Lowriders”

Public History Experience / Relevant Employment

Teaching Assistant, History 100, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022.

Led discussion for readings.

Graded weekly assignments, exams, and papers.

Engaged with undergraduate students with required readings.

Intern, Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, Summer 2021.

Engaged in conversation regarding Latinx representations in museums, ranging from online, archival, and on-site research provided by the museum institution.

Researched and created lists regarding talks/lectures/guest lectures, exhibitions, and film/video screenings of AAPI, Black, and Indigenous artists/speakers.

Ambassador & Interpreter, Neon Museum, 2018 to 2020

Engaged in the conservation of historic objects through active correspondence reports with the Conservation Department.

Effectively interacted with the public on multiple levels as part of the service and tourism industry.

Provided guests with an immersive, historic tour of Las Vegas’ fallen neon and popular culture.

Educated and engaged with a wide variety of guests, ranging from elementary school students to Americans of various ages, to international visitors.

Used a large base of knowledge to create a flexible, engaging experience tailored to the guests.

Honors and Awards

Graduate & Professional Student Association Student Researcher Award, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2021-2022.

Robert Trennert and Peter Iverson Conference Scholarship Award, Western History Association, 2021.
Graduate Student Prize, Western History Association, 2021.
Elli H. Cooper & LauraLee Ledbetter Endowment for Public History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2021.
Graduate Student Prize, Western History Association, 2020.
Dean's Honor List, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2018.
Phi Alpha Theta, inducted 2018.
Dean's Honor List, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2017.
Summer Undergraduate Research Funding Recipient, Office of Undergraduate Research, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2017.

Conference presentations

“Hot-rods, Pachucos, and Lowriders: Forming Chicano Identity,” Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference, Dixie State University, March 30, 2019.
“Oil & Property: The Impact on Mexican Indigenous Communities,” Fall Undergraduate Research Showcase, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, November 15, 2017.
“The Mexican Oil Industry and Underrepresented Communities,” Summer Undergraduate Research Showcase, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, August 9, 2017.
“Mexico & the United States: Pipelines, Land Seizure, and Indigenous Communities,” Spring Undergraduate Research Showcase, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, April 21, 2017.

Languages

Spanish: proficient reader and speaker

Academic Service

Secretary, Phi Alpha Theta, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2021-2022.
Member, Phi Alpha Theta, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2018.