"IT'S PART OF MY CULTURE": A STUDY ON LOWRIDER CARS AS AN AESTHETIC IDENTITY FOR CHICANA/O COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

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This exploratory study examines the construct of the lowrider car as part of a barrio aesthetic of U.S. Chicanas and Chicanos, and this material component of the culture is equally part of the social identity of this cultural community of United States. Within Chicana/o communities, lowrider cars are built and designed as symbolic meaning [systems] within the sub-populations of U.S. Chicana/o citizens. This is especially true for those who participate in the ritual of displaying their vehicle creations. In order to participate in the ritual of riding in cars or bicycles that have been re-configured to conform to lowriding culture and ridden in appropriate public events and locations, requires full knowledge of particulars and parameters of Chicano/a culture and the lowriding component thereof. Nevertheless, not everyone subscribes to this expressive cultural behavior as not everyone engages in the lowriding ritual and/or embraced this type of modified car as a symbol of Chicana/o culture. This paper reports on some ten (10) individual interviews conducted with Chicanas/os who have built lowriding cars. In addition, this research included systematic observations of two car shows and a content analysis of popular media. The research findings suggest three appropriate and salient themes: A Socialized Practice, an Aesthetic Identity, and Representation of Aesthetics. I give these the respective names; "I Just Grew-Up with It," "It's Part of My Culture," and "I'm Mexicano Regardless."

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends, thank you for your support and encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

For more than eighty years, one of the more persistent means of cultural expression within urban, low-income communities of Southwest United States Chicana/o populations has been the presence and display of lowrider vehicles. These locations, called *barrios*, have been consistent sites of general public display of these "art on wheels," as described in Michael C. Stone's (1990, 7) article, "*Bajito y Suavecito* [Low and Slow]: Lowriding and the 'Class' of Class." The basic description that makes the lowrider vehicle, automobile or bicycle unique -for example- is the modification to the suspension to be lower than the average vehicle stance of its category. The majority of these cars are expensively painted and mechanical hydraulic systems are installed to allow the driver to raise and lower the vehicle as desire. Nevertheless, the term "lowrider" also refers to an individual associated with such vehicles and/or the display activities that surround them (Stone 1990). The entirety of participants, materials, and behavioral activities equal a cultural expressive style that is directly associated with US Chicana/o cultural aesthetic.

Lowriders have been the subject of several researchers and many have proposed that this expressive social group has become a symbolic style within Chicana/o culture (Plascencia 1983; Stone 1990; Vigil 1991; Bright 1998; Sandoval 2003). At the same time, lowrider vehicles are designed to display a cultural expressive identity for the individual Chicana/o that crafted the car and participates in the customs of low riding. These individuals, for example, embellish their lowriders with symbols and/or images that represent Mexican culture to emphasize their Mexican heritage. Brenda Bright (1997) observed that images such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and Aztec Warriors, in which are identified as Mexican cultural symbols, are images that are painted on lowriders. In the article, "Nightmares in the New Metropolis: The Cinematic Poetics of

Lowriders," Bright (1997) continued to describe the symbols and images as part of Chicana/o cultural nationalism as they convey that cultural identity.

In making these assertions, Bright (1998, 603) also acknowledged that several "Chicano forms of ethno-cultural expression tend to overlap" within activities of the Mexican community. For instance, the public display of lowriders can coincide with Cinco de Mayo celebrations. Stone (1990, 86), who also studied this Chicana/o cultural practice, indicated that lowriding is "considered as a public enactment of a renegotiated sense of Mexican American identity." Similarly, Luis Plascencia (1983) acknowledged that lowrider vehicles are a way for Chicanos to express their cultural identity to a general public audience. However, these public activities, such as cruising and the display of cultural images on the vehicle, were an opportunity for those in the Chicana/o cultural community, as well as those outside of it, to assign the practice of lowriding labels that were often "fluid, multiple, and often conflictive meanings" (Stone 1990, 86). In this occasion, having Mexican imagery on the lowrider vehicle to give the presence of the Chicana/o link to their proud heritage. In other occasions, the link to other images may create a negative perception of lowrider practice to the community.

For instance, Plascencia (1983) stated that it is through the amalgamation of images that people are lead to construct different meanings for their experience. His analytical study of early issues of the *Lowrider Magazine* suggests that there is a fusion of aesthetics of Chicana/o cultural expressions of the pachuco, zoot suiter, cholo, and lowriders. He also suggests that as a consequence of the fusion presented in the magazine, there were inaccurate perceptions that the social groups and their expression of the culture were interchangeable (Plascencia 1983).

Plascencia concludes that the *Lowrider Magazine's* fusion of the cultural expression of this aesthetic reality became a commodity for consumption by a wider Mexican and Mexican

descendant population. In the US Chicano population, there was an acceptance of the materials and images "as objects that reinforce cultural pride or solidify cultural identity" (Plascencia 1983, 171) and their integration as part of the community's cultural aesthetic. The *Lowrider Magazine* was first published in 1977 out in the city of San Jose, California and, according to Brenda Bright (1992) and Denise Sandoval (2003); the magazine encourages many to appreciate the lowrider as a form of Chicana/o cultural practice. The mass coverage and mass appeal of the magazine made lowriders an intricate part of the popular expression of Chicana/o culture.

Amy Best (2006, 4), author of *Fast Cars, Cool Rides: The Accelerating World of Youth and Their Cars*, asserted that "driving a particular kind of car has the power to transform how we feel about ourselves as individuals and as members of a specific group." Nevertheless, lowriders have been transitioning from an individual assertion of cultural identity for those Chicanas/os who practice the tradition (Bright 1994) to a symbol of representation of Chicana/o culture. Images of lowriders can be observed in the popular media and in works of art that depict the Chicana/o culture; it has also gained acceptance as a symbol of cultural identity by Chicanas/os who do not practice the tradition of lowriding. The practice of lowriding, however, has extended to other cultural/racial/ethnic groups thereby not making it solely a Chicana/o practice.

This paper analyzes how lowriders become to be perceived as a symbolic image for Chicana/o cultural aesthetic identity and sense of acceptance and pride surrounding this practice by Chicanas/os. Three themes are introduced in the findings that illustrate the process in which lowriders are recognized and associated to Chicana/o culture from an individual standpoint. The first theme, "I just grew-up with it": A Socialized Practice analyzes how the individual becomes introduced to the concept of lowriders through different forms of interaction in their social space and place. Secondly, "I'm *Mexicano* regardless": Representation of Aesthetics is an observation

of how the use of particular Mexican objects and images with lowriders allows the individual to construct a reality through their experience of images. Lastly, "It's Part of my Culture": An Aesthetic Identity demonstrates the end result of the process where individuals recognize the lowrider practice as part of "their" and/or "our" Chicana/o cultural aesthetic identity.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

George J. McCall (2006, 1) described symbolic interaction as a "theory of human nature," a study of social life and human behavior (Blumer 1969). Furthermore, it is applied to examine how people use and interpret symbols to communicate with one another while simultaneously creating and maintaining an identity (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969). Symbolic Interaction serves as an umbrella for a collection of theories and concepts dealing with human behavior. However, in this situation it is appropriate to concentrate on an identity conceptual framework.

According to Allan G. Johnson (1995, 250), "an individual's self is socially constructed in the sense that it is shaped through interaction with other people and it is developed from social materials in the form of cultural imagery and ideas." George Herbert Mead (1934) was interested in how the identity of the self of an individual is formed and functions in relation to others. He developed concepts such as the "I" and "Me," which are used to explain how individuals construct an identity through a social interaction. Mead argued that the "Me" represents an identity that is created and modified through the interaction and perception of others. It is in this stage of the identity process that the individual changes their behavior and attitudes to accommodate the social situations. The concept of the "I" represents the response to the behavior and attitudes of the "Me" (Mead 1934). It is the behavior that is being presented in the moment of interaction. These concepts are helpful in understanding how an individual develops a personal identity through social interaction, either in an in- or out-group setting.

As an individual is developing a personal identity, they are also experiencing the effects of social group identification. Michael A. Hogg (2006, 115) described a social group as individuals who "identify and evaluate themselves in the same way and have the same definition of who they are, what attributes they have, and how they relate to and differ from people who are not in their

group or who are in specific out-groups." In other words, these individuals undergo a process of social identity formation by comparing similarities and differences between themselves and other members of society. It is through this process of comparing and contrasting that the individuals construct, as Hogg's conceptualized, a group membership as "we" and "us" (in-group) versus "them" (out-group) (Hogg 2006).

Every group within society contains symbols constructed to have a unique signification to them (Berger and Luckman 1966; Hall 2003). Stuart Hall (2003), in "The Works of Representation," states that a system of representation takes place in order for people to recognize and interpret cultural objects as being associated to particular groups. The system of representation is divided into two processes. The first process describe by Hall is consider the "mental representation;" people have already been introduced to objects and events in which they can recall out of memory. It is in this process that culture can be established because people have shared meanings for objects and events. Language is the second method of constructing meaning (Hall 2003). Hall (2003) states, "Our shared conceptual map must be translated into a common language, so that we can correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, spoken sounds or visual images" (18). This process provides evidence that things do not give themselves meaning, but it is people who construct meaning for things. However, the constructed meanings need to be interacted or communicated to other individuals to become part of the overall language system.

These concepts lead to the understating of how people use materials and images to distinguish themselves from the "other" (Hall 2003). According to William G. Roy (2002) these materials establish boundaries between social groups, as to which he coined as "aesthetic identity." The concept of aesthetic identity, as Roy articulates, is the "cultural alignment of artistic genres to

social groups by which groups come to feel that genres represent ‘our’ or ‘their’ art, music, and literature” (459). However, he clearly states that this idea does not signify that every member of the group embraces the aesthetic identity associated to the group (Roy 2002).

METHODS

Design

A triangulation data-gathering technique was used for this study. "Triangulation is the use of multiple data-gathering techniques to investigate the same phenomenon" (Berg 2004, 5). This form of technique allows for validation of findings. For this particular study the data-gathering techniques include participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis.

Participant observations were conducted at two lowrider car shows in the state of Michigan. One site was in the city of Lansing and the other was in South Haven. Each site had a different socio-environment, but both were considered car shows. The car shows provided information that engaged the social constructs of race, gender, and family. As a typical participant, I walked around the car shows taking photographs and introducing myself to prospective interviewees. A professional style camera was used to take photographs of the events and the participants. Having the camera gave an impression to participants that I was a reporter or someone involved with a local magazine taking images for a publication and this helped to gain access to the participants that were displaying their lowriders in the events. After introducing myself and the research I was conducting with the lowrider community, they were willing to participate in the research. The participants began to enthusiastically give me detailed explanations on how they modified and decorated their lowrider vehicles, and they were more willing to pose for photographs in front of their lowrider vehicles and their families. Once the first group of participants were interviewed, they recommended other people to be interviewed for the research causing a snowball method to recruit other potential interviewees. Another form of rapport that I demonstrated was that of an insider of the group being a Chicano male from Los Angeles who is familiar with cars and the lowriding practices. Although, I was introduced to the practice of lowriding at a young age through

the same mediums as the participants, I did not participate in the cultural practice by owning a lowrider vehicle. Nevertheless, I embrace the lowrider practice as symbol of Chicana/o aesthetic cultural identity.

The photographs provide visual information and documentation in regards to the modified material components (cars and bikes) used by the individuals. For example, lowrider cars and bikes are displayed in ways that allow individuals to independently express their identity. Each photograph allows me to revisit that display and analyze the context. The pictures also serve as illustrative devices in explaining some interactions experienced at the event (Becker 1974). The photographs are mainly snapshots of the car show events in Michigan, but, photographs of individuals posing for the camera were asked to sign a consent form granting permission to publish the picture, if needed. In the case of minors in the frame of the photograph for this paper they are intentionally unrecognizable, as they are distant and beyond the camera's depth of field (Gold 1991). However, it is the acknowledgement of their presence that is important, not their identity.

The content analysis consists of magazines, web sites, and films that deal with or feature the lowrider community. These materials hold both a historical and contemporary view of the lowrider phenomenon. The historical portion is important to the understanding of the creation and development of the lowrider collective. These materials also demonstrate how the lowrider community itself has evolved throughout the years. Besides the historical contents, these materials also serve to analyze how the media portrays certain images to influence people's perception.

The interviews serve as the key principle element for this project. The purpose of the interviews was to give each individual the opportunity to unabashedly share their experience about lowrider cars. A total of 10 interviews have been conducted with the participant ages ranging from 20 to 40. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes and an unstructured interview

method was used. Both women and men were interviewed to respectfully gain a gender perspective. At the beginning of the research, my attempt was merely to focus on Chicana/o experiences. However, that aim changed after interviewing bi-racial and multi-racial participants. Pseudonyms were given to the interview participants for confidentiality purposes. This research followed guidelines of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sampling

Two forms of sampling were used to recruit participants for this study; snowball and purposive sampling. According to Bruce L. Berg (2004, 36), "snowballing is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study." In this particular study using a snowball technique posed no difficulty to seek participants. This technique was mainly used to recruit participants at the car shows. The majority of the interviewees were part of car clubs; therefore, a club member would introduce me to other club members. Purposing sampling is a type of sample that relies on "individuals or persons displaying certain attributes" (Berg 2004, 36). Participants that were recruited through this form of sampling had to be familiar with the practice of lowriding, not necessarily contribute or practice it.

FINDINGS

"I Just Grew-Up with It": A Socialized Practice

We asked participants to share their introductory experience to the lowrider community. Many shared how they were exposed to this experience at young age. Freddy and Oscar, natives of South Texas who now reside in mid-Michigan, commented on how family members, friends, and neighbors introduced them and inducted them into the oral and visual aspects of lowriding.

Freddy: I can't say when was the first time I heard about lowriders, kind of just grew-up with it. The neighborhood that I grew up in… It was something that my friends did; my neighbors had a lowrider. So ever since I was born, I kind of came into the culture, seeing lowriders and seeing how people just put their imagination into their vehicles.

Oscar: when I was 11 years old, one of my friends introduced me to lowriding. Because in Holland during that time there was a lot of lowriders, there were a lot people building [car] interior and building lowrider bikes. It was in a migrant camp, so that's where a lot of lowriders got introduced. Because a lot of them came from California, Florida, and Texas, so they brought that culture to the migrant camp.

Similarly, Eric, who around the age of 15 or 16 started by buying Lowrider Magazine, commented: "it opened my eyes and you know it was something that I liked and still like it." Eric continued on and shared, "lowriding is part of my life, man. I grew up with it. My first car at the age of 16 was a 64' Impala with hydraulics and it's been a way of life ever since."

To understand the relationship between the place and lowrider aesthetics, Gieryn's (2000, 475) approach of place as a sensitive sociological concept helps us to frame the position of the barrio as a nurturing and socializing resource. We found the Mexican barrios of South Texas and Mid-Michigan to be interconnected places of distinctive geographical locations with fluid

boundaries. Shaped by racial and ethnic components, both places, however, have delimited the social space of interaction between Anglos and Mexicans, thus, alienating Chicana/os from mainstream society. Lowriders' aesthetics, however, represent a vital resource to cope with institutional exclusion. And, in spite of the larger pressure to position lowrider art on the margins of society, young adults – as Freddy, Oscar, and Eric – embrace these artistic expressions as alternative sources of community stability, social support, inspiration, and structure to children.

Other participants, who were not "born into the culture," provided different forms of introduction to lowrider cars and bikes. Stephanie, who did not have access to lowrider knowledge, became aware of it through other social forms. Stephanie first learned of lowriding when she attended high school, "informally, I would notice them in my high school and around town." Stephanie also mentioned, "I would like seeing Latinos that would have those kinds of cars, those really shiny, beautifully painted, dropped old fashion cars." Stephanie's argument is that many Mexican-origin participants, who enjoy an exceptional social position, are much less exposed to the lowriding world. Multiple factors affect the familiarity of these young adults with the concept of lowriding – e.g. residence in a white neighborhood, higher income, etc. For that reason, an ignorant view of lowriders' aesthetic expressions is created making it difficult for these young adults to establish a connection with Chicana/o artists from the barrio. Note, however, that Anzaldúa reflects upon the oppressive experience of many Mexicans whose life has been shaped by negating their heritage: "la negación sistemática de la cultura mexicana-chicana en los Estados Unidos impide su desarrollo haciéndolo este un acto de colonización" (the systematic rejection of the mexican-chicana culture in the United States restricts its development making it an act of colonization) (1998, 163). Anzaldúa also writes about the marginalization of Chicana/o art from the center: "As a people who have been stripped of our history, language, identity and pride we

attempt again and again to find what we have lost by imaginatively digging into our cultural roots and making art out of our findings" (163).

Our research project findings show that social space also becomes a factor in shaping lowriding practices. While a few participants resided in an area where lowriders were present, others were introduced to the lowrider community outside of their living environment.

"I'm Mexicano Regardless": Representation of Aesthetics

Due to the emblematic nature of the lowriders' aesthetics and its association with the Chicana/o community, a sense of ownership appears to derive from Mexican cultural artifacts being presented alongside the vehicles. The merger of Mexican cultural images and the lowrider practices was evident in our fieldwork. As we see in figure one, many participants displayed various Mexican images along with their lowrider cars and bikes. One of the interviewees, Eric, shared why he displayed Mexican images alongside his car, "I'm *Mexicano* regardless, originated from down there, that's where our *Raza* is from."

Because people become aware of the art of lowriding through car shows, these events are more likely to take place in Latino communities. The first issues of the *Lowrider Magazine*, for instance, show how lowrider vehicles participated in parades that celebrated Mexican heritage. Today, similar traditions of having lowrider cars present in parades are evident. As we can see in figure two, not only does this public space become a place of cultural awareness for all generations, but an opportunity for an introduction of the lowrider practice to the community.

Figure 1: Photograph: I'm Mexicano. South Haven Lowrider Car Show. South Haven, Michigan, 2006. Photograph by Alejandro Gradilla.

Figure 2: Photograph: Embracing Lowrider Art. Lansing Car Show. Lansing, Michigan, 2006. Photograph by Alejandro Gradilla.

Another form of public display is "cruising." In this particular practice, people, mostly youth, drive on the main street of the community in a form of a parade at a low speed to socialize.

It also serves as an exhibition space for lowrider enthusiasts. Cruising is an opportunity to display an object that represents ethnicity to fellow Chicanas/os. This form of public display also serves as an invitation for other cultures to admire this particular side of the Chicana/o community. Stephanie, who was raised in a white neighborhood, shared her experience from a cruising event,

> One time when I went, I think we were in a regular brown Honda or whatever you want to say. It's the most generic car in the world, but I saw a lot of lowriders and people of color. I think I was with a group of white friends at that point. I don't think I had any friends of color that were taking me out to this event or that kind of outing. They looked like they were in some sort of dialog between cars…a unique type of interaction. And we weren't involved or anything, just curious kind of. I never associated lowrider cars with the white students or white youth in my city.

Cruising – in terms of lowriding display – is not common in many areas. In this study, people of color, mostly Chicanas/os and African Americans dominated. In order to appreciate and understand lowriding as an artistic expression of the Latino community, outsiders need to visit areas largely populated by Chicanas/os and see cruising as an artistic *passerella*.

In a racialized society such as the U.S., in which whites dominate majority-minority relations, Chicana/o visibility has been virtually nonexistent. Race, as an organizing principle of social life, dictates the type and level of exposure of Mexican visibility. A U.S. nativistic public discourse led by scholars like Huntington (2004), for example, has made Chicana/o and, thus, lowriders visible. However, as Martinez (1994) suggests, this particular Mexican visibility is constructed around images that emphasize criminality. The lack of control by Chicanas/os over larger institutions produces and reproduces, according to Bender (2003), stereotypes and generalizations that promote false images of the Mexican community. Mirandé, who formalized this position back in the 1980s, is particularly clear: "since Chicanos lack power over the schools, media, and other agents of socialization, most prevalent images of them are externally induced"

(1985, 72). Our argument is that lowrider aesthetics is an attempt to contest the marginalization of Chicana/o art by mainstream society. By nurturing the political consciousness of many young adults, it also acts as a mechanism of resistance against social exclusion.

"It's Part of My Culture": An Aesthetic Identity

As mentioned above, the practice of lowriding has already crossed social and ethnic boundaries. Participants shared how they admire the practice of lowriding because it represents an aesthetic manifestation of culture in Chicana/o communities – outside of mainstream boundaries. David, a Chicano who resides in Michigan, shared: "it was part of my identity, part of my culture and I would see it everywhere." Amador, another Chicano who resides in the west part of Michigan, also shared his experience:

> I show pride in my work on [lowrider] cars. People come up to you and they tell you that you have a beautiful car; it's a sense of pride. You being able to put something out there for *La Raza* to look at and as well as the other cultures, you know what I'm saying. So it's more like, *sabes que*, this is our culture we want to invite you to see what we can do that is positive, not negative.

In general terms, according to Eitzen, Baca Zinn, and Smith, culture is defined as the "…knowledge that members of a society or other social organization share…" (2010, 107). The purpose of culture is to socialize individuals – the process of learning the knowledge of a society – to immerse them into a homogeneous belief system. In many societies, culture also works as a boundary-maintaining system. This implies that individuals who do not embrace the dominant value system – e.g. manifestations of art – are many times considered culturally deficient. Historically, conventional research has framed Chicana/o community life along these lines (see Huntington 2004). In addition, a pervasive image of disorganization and poverty dominates the popular media thus feeding the practice of lowriding as a clear example of a cultural anomaly.

What mainstream culture fails to recognize, though, is that lowriding aesthetics facilitate Chicanas/os ability to connect with young adults from different social environments. Along these lines, the interview with Stephanie is a prime example:

> Interviewer: You mentioned that you did not have any association with the lowrider community or had any friends that were part of the lowrider community. Why not?
> Stephanie: I wasn't trained to feel like I belong to Latino people or Latino culture. So, I did not hang out with those people in high school and I did not have any Latinos in most of my classes. I was trained to be culturally respectful, but I never felt that culture was me, like I was part of that culture, like that culture was mine. It was always theirs and to be respectful of it.

Stephanie's comments advance our argument that lowrider aesthetics can be used as a tool to bridge both Chicana/o and mainstream cultures. Moreover, a better understanding of the Mexican community – its social, political, and economic conditions – can be achieved if mainstream culture cultivates the ability to connect with young lowriders. The following narratives reflect the willingness and openness of many lowrider enthusiastic to welcome more people from outside the community. Freddy commented on his experience:

> I don't anymore [practice lowriding] for a lot of reasons, money being one of them and time. But it is something that I always had a special place for it. I think it requires a lot of talent in it. And it's something about our culture that really influences lowriding. I mean, when you go to lowrider shows you see a lot of Chicanos and not only that but you're getting a diverse group of people who are also beginning to introduce lowriders into their cultures.

Similarly, Oscar, a native of Holland and lowrider enthusiast, told us:

> *Pues* it's kind of good because even though it started like con Latinos, *con Mexicanos*, and Chicanos. It is something that is spreading and so a lot of individuals are getting involved with the same passion. I am kind of excited because it started

> *con* Chicanos…Latinos, but now it's extending globally. That is good because they are celebrating our culture that we created.

The implications of the willingness of many lowrider artists to bridge with mainstream culture are important because they have brought visibility to the space occupied by Chicana/o culture. As we see in figure three, although lowrider practices have achieved some understanding from the mainstream, they are far from being tolerated and even accepted in many events. Unlike other car shows, lowrider events are overtly policed and zealously regulated. According to Chappell (2006, 58), this type of institutional control exemplifies a racially marked repression associated to "spatial profiling" against anything related to lowriding – vehicles, people, practices. Moreover, in the process of regulating public space, larger institutions dehumanize and criminalize people who deviate from mainstream boundaries. Still, to think of lowrider art as part of mainstream society is to imply a reciprocal relationship. Although the inclusion of many Chicana/o artists in mainstream' cultural events is a reality, the idea of lowrider aesthetic as a cultural anomaly still is pervasive in the U.S. society.

Figure 3: Photograph: Policing. South Haven Lowrider Car Show. South Haven, Michigan, 2006. Photograph by Alejandro Gradilla.

DISCUSSION

The three themes that are addressed in this paper are critical to understanding the process in which the lowrider car is recognized as a Chicana/o cultural symbol. The symbolic interaction framework provides a foundation for conceptualizing and understanding the influence of social interaction that people experience every day.

For instance, in the first theme it is displayed how Chicana/o youth become inspired to participate in the practice of lowriding. In some accounts they are introduced to the concept through family or friends. Others become aware of the practice through popular media. However, the media's portrayal and representation of the lowrider image that encourages Chicanas/os to become interested in the practice.

The merging of images, such as Mexican images and lowrider cars, contributes to the idea that lowriders are a representation of Chicana/o culture, as presented in the third theme. These images allow for Chicanas/os and non-Chicanas/os to construct an image as they experience it. In this particular case, the fusion of Mexican images with lowriders creates the image that of Chicana/o cultural symbols.

Nevertheless, the combination of experiencing the merging of these images and being aware that the people in your space that practice lowriding are Chicanas/os, then the idea of aesthetic identity is developed. It is in this process that ownership of the practice takes place. Chicanas/os recognize the practice of lowriding as being part of "our" culture, while non-Chicanas/os recognize it as part of "their" culture (Roy 2002).

LIMITATIONS

This study was only limited to 10 interview participants. Although there were enough participants that offer similar experiences, future studies should include a larger sample size. Furthermore, this study was conducted in Michigan and should include other regions of the United Sates as they may potentially have different experiences.

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