

*"Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá":*

**An Exploration of Voice, Visibility, And Latinx Communities on Reddit**

BY

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to Maurilio Garcia and Apollo. Your unconditional support made this possible.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

API	Application Programming Interface
ERGM	Exponential Random Graph Model
NCS	Not Country Specific
NEP	Not Enough Provided

## SUMMARY

Rooted in voice, visibility, and community, this thesis explores the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice. Specifically, this study examines the extent to which Reddit's Latinx community can establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public. In the digital sphere, online collective identities materialize at the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture. Previous research captures the white hegemonic norms enlaced and embedded in the internet's materiality. The history of race and ethnicity in online communities reveals how Web 2.0 application affords users the ability to navigate a fluid relationship to these white hegemonic norms. In other words, racial and ethnic minorities can establish collective identities that are not within but in relation to whiteness.

Using networked gatekeeping as its main methodological lens and digital-race assemblages as its main analytical lens, this thesis identifies the relation to whiteness that frames Latinx identity on Reddit. Together, these frameworks register how race and ethnicity online emerge from digital networks, their interaction with the platform's sociotechnical architecture and affordances, and their relationships to whiteness.

The findings of this thesis reveal how the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx community navigate not only the internet's white hegemonic norms but the norms of Reddit's participatory culture and those that are central to Latinx identity. Accordingly, this thesis captures the liminal nature of Latinx identity, which Latinx people commonly express as "*ni de aquí, ni de allá*".

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of social networking, voice equates to visibility. To give an account of oneself (Butler, 2005) is not only an issue of efficacy but a metric of being seen. As networked ecologies produce a long tail of unlimited shelf space (Anderson, 2006), visibility becomes commodified in the exchange of likes, retweets, and upvotes. Therefore, producing virtual markets whose competition incites a capitalistic exchange of being heard (Goldhaber, 1997; Leavitt, 2016; Simon, 1971)— a reality contradicting these technologies' designed promise.

Like many communication technologies before them, social networking platforms were once thought to democratize the diffusion of information (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Dahlgren, 2001; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Nakamura, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002). And like many other communication technologies, Web 2.0 applications have become sites of spreading hate speech, propaganda, and stereotypes, thus propagating the very ills that prevent us from realizing their “true” democratic potential (boyd, 2009; Butler, 1993; Haraway, 1991; Nakamura, 2002; Phillips & Millner, 2018). This arrested development elevates those already in power and further marginalizes the traditionally disenfranchised, who continually struggle to be heard -- at least seemingly so. Moments of civil unrest and crisis events have witnessed the use of social media platforms to unite dissenting publics while simultaneously dismantling traditional hierarchies of information diffusion. In these moments, Web 2.0 technologies transcend geographical bounds, transform consumers into producers, and incite fluid power dynamics, thus unveiling their potential to grant *The People* a voice (Hermida, 2010; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveria, 2012).

*So are these just isolated moments that highlight their evanescent democratic potential to empower the marginalized? Or are there structural, technological, and societal elements preventing us from seeing our collective voice magnified in their use?* While there are conflicting perspectives on this debate, this project aims to push our understanding of new media technologies forward by exploring the spaces maintained by the commonly unheard. To understand the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice, this investigation conducted a case study on an increasingly popular yet contentious platform, Reddit, regarding media's most underrepresented racial and ethnic minority group, the Latinx community. Specifically, the study explores the extent to which Reddit's Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote their own networked public on Reddit.

### 1.1 **What's A Reddit?**

Self-proclaimed as the "front page of the internet", Reddit exists as a network of interconnected community forums called subreddits. Initially, it was developed as a social bookmarking-site operated by collective filtering to aggregate the "best" online content into a single home page, Reddit's front page (Adams, 2005, December 8). As a link-sharing site, its networked ecology is entirely dependent on its community members, who are also known as Redditors. These users maintain the site by anonymously posting links, text, and comments to individual discussion forums that possess "distinct memberships, rules, content, and social norms" (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017, p. 4). Although connective features that enable users to migrate their offline communities online are absent on Reddit, these subreddits, their sociotechnical affordances, and their content organize Redditors into distinct and diverse networked publics based on their shared identities and interests

(Kienzla, 2016; Leavitt, 2016; Papacharissi, 2009). Reddit's architecture and affordances delineate unique characteristics that have increasingly become the subject of inquiry in relation to community (Massanari, 2015a), participatory culture (Massanari, 2015 b; Meraz, 2012), and visibility (Leavitt, 2016; Leavitt & Robinson, 2017) in the age of social networking.

Even though these inquiries have recently gained traction, compared to most used Web 2.0 platforms Reddit exists in most scholars' peripheral view. Such neglect, however, contradicts its popularity and investigative value. Despite launching as an offshoot of niche online communities, like Slashdot, it continues to attract users from all over the world (Leavitt, 2016). Reddit currently ranks as the 4<sup>th</sup> most visited site in the United States and 6<sup>th</sup> in the world, with more than 330 million unique monthly visitors and more than 1.1 million community forums (Adams, 2005, December 8; Alexa, 2018; Hauser, 2017, October 26; Statista, 2017). While only recording about 12,000 monthly visitors in its formative years, Reddit's aggregating techniques were foreseen to become the "Google of news" thus drawing the attention of investors (Adams, 2005, para. 5). A year after its initial release, it was acquired by Condè Nast publications, and in 2011 it became a direct subsidiary of Condè Nast's parent company, Advanced Publications (Massanari, 2015b). Today, Reddit operates as an independent entity that remains boundless in terms of content and user base.

True to its designed purpose, Reddit continues to serve as a news source. According to the Pew Research Center (2016), the platform functions as the main source of news for 70% of Redditors. Although posts frequently link to traditional news organizations (Tsou, 2016; Wasike, 2011), the introduction of user-created subreddits in 2008 (Singer, Flock,

Meinhart, Zeitfogel, Strohmaier, 2014) transformed the site into a central hub for user-generated/remixed content (Massanari, 2015 b; Newell, Jurgens, Saleem, Vala, Sassine, Armstrong, Ruths, 2016). Whereas submissions were once limited to the subject and restrictions of admin-established subreddits, Redditors were now free to create and manage their own communities. Presently, its interface samples a myriad of subjects and community interests ranging from forums dedicated to cute animal pictures (/r/aww, /r/huskies, /r/babyelephantgifs) to those focused on discussing the latest technological advancements (/r/science, /r/technology, /r/space) (Burgess & Green, 2009; Leavitt, 2016; Massanary, 2015b). Without restrictions on content and interests, Reddit “bridges communities and individuals with ideas, the latest digital trends, and breaking news” (Reddit.com).

Like other Web 2.0 applications, visibility on Reddit is hierarchically structured. Links, text, and comments are ranked by karma points, which are the algorithmically calculated net worth of upvotes and downvotes each submission receives. While the platform’s most visible actors rise to the site’s front page, the heavily downvoted material falls into the abyss of seemingly worthless and forgotten content (Salihefendic, 2010). In hierarchically structuring visibility the application’s sociotechnical architecture and affordances produce a scarcity of being seen, therefore commodifying voice (Goldhaber, 1997; Leavitt, 2016; Simon, 1971).

Unlike social network sites (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ellison & boyd, 2013), Reddit’s sociotechnical architecture, affordances, and participatory culture construct relational networks that facilitate interactions centered on conversations about a given link or topic (Kienzle 2016, Massanari, 2015a). Even though individual subreddits are structurally

interconnected via hyperlinks to other topic-related subreddits and their shared moderators, users customize their experience by subscribing to specific communities to curate an individual front page that reflects their own interests. Since friending and following features are absent on Reddit<sup>1</sup>, shared interests and identities amongst users manifest via the site's anti-doxxing (broadcasting personal information) regulations, voting, and commenting features (Kienzla 2016; Leavitt, 2016). Reddit's architectural design, therefore, allows connections outside of pre-existing offline social networks to be arranged into distinct networked publics (boyd, 2008; Kienzle 2016; Leavitt, 2015; Massanari, 2015b).

Despite Reddit's diversity of community interests, expanding user base, and complex relational networks (connections built and maintained via a site's shared content), it has developed a reputation for hosting a hostile and uncontrollable niche of users. A brand generated in part by the mass media attention it acquired due to users spreading sexist and racist content and behavior (Chandrasekharan, Pavalanathan, Srinivasan, Glynn, Eisenstein, Gilbert, 2017; Massanari, 2015b). Ultimately, this media attention unveiled pockets of toxicity. Reddit, however, maintains its brand as a technology that harbors community and encourages the exploration of self via the permissions of anonymity.

## 1.2 **Reddit's Toxic Publics: Mr. Hyde's Dr. Jekyll**

Anonymity is frequently positioned as an instigator of hate speech and online harassment (Banks, 2010; Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017), Redditors, however, celebrate it as a

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<sup>1</sup> Since I started working on this project the platform has undergone some changes. It now allows users to follow/friend each other. Now users' front pages include content of the subreddits they subscribe to and the users they follow. Content that is produced by the user's friends are aggregated in their own r/friend page. [https://www.reddit.com/r/help/comments/ba986l/difference\\_between\\_follow\\_and\\_add\\_friend\\_and\\_why/](https://www.reddit.com/r/help/comments/ba986l/difference_between_follow_and_add_friend_and_why/)

utopia of self-expression. For instance, sexual abuse victim-survivors employ subreddits like /r/rapecounseling as a source of support, community, advice, and storytelling (O’Neill, 2018). Moderators, in their ability to establish and enforce restrictions, supply users with varying levels of anonymity, as seen in the following subreddits: /r/traumatoolbox, /r/rapecounseling, and /r/survivorsofabuse. Investigations of these forums indicate that increased anonymity encourages victim-survivors to seek additional support (Andalibi, Haimson, Choudry, Forte, 2016). These findings unveil the motives of individuals like Hillary Adams, who was physically abused by her father, a Texas judge, and sought out Reddit as a safe space to break the silence of her suffering (Bell, 2011, December 4). Embraced by the support of fellow Redditors, Adams’ story eventually gained mainstream media attention, which highlighted the platform as “an amazing community of strangers that help and support each other” (As cited by, Bell, 2011, para. 9). This, however, was a description of Reddit “[at] its best” (As cited by, Bell, 2011, para. 9). “At its worst” Reddit was painted as a “seedy community that harbors people of questionable moral fiber” (As cited by, Bell, 2011, para. 9) thus, unveiling a kind of split personality that frequently follows Reddit’s mention in mainstream media, academia, and even itself.

Massanari (2015b), in her digital ethnography on Reddit explains, “I was pleased to find a group of witty, interesting, like-minded individuals (and some jerks, of course)” — acknowledging that this duality not only exists but is expected (p. 1). This awareness is also apparent amongst its own community members and evident in the one hundred thousand-plus community members currently subscribing to /r/Shitredditsays-- a subreddit that calls “bigoted, creepy, misogynistic, transphobic, racist, homophobic” posts and comments “reeking of unexamined, toxic privilege” into question (Reddit.com/r/Shitredditsays).

Massanari (2015b) reminds us that /r/Shitredditsays is “often under attack by various groups, both inside and outside reddit” (p. 144). The existence and popularity of /r/Shitredditsays attests the site’s polarizing culture; a culture that challenges and condemns the site’s problematic content, but also attacks and ridicules users denouncing Reddit’s toxicity. Over the years, the latter has garnered extensive mainstream media coverage for its controversial content, ranging from non-consenting sexualized images of women (/r/jailbait, /r/creepershot, /r/thefappening) to racist subreddits (/r/coontown, /r/niggers, /r/GreatApes) to neo-Nazi propaganda advocating violent behavior (Chen, 2012; Hauser, 2017, October 26; Massanri, 2015a, 2015b). Such exposure has painted the site as a network that willingly invites sexual harassment, sexism, racism, and hostility, thus dubbing it a “safe haven for internet trolls, cyberbullies, and Nazi and white supremacist groups” (Lartey, 2017, September 27). Reddit, then, enables the marginalized to have a voice, as illustrated by the domestic violence and sexual abuse victim-survivors; however, unsavory clusters of questionable moral fiber demonstrate a keen ability to commanding the site’s most visible content.

Online harassment campaigns have been repeatedly witnessed on Reddit. In August of 2014, Reddit was the public face of #GamerGate and “The Fappening” -- two large-scale organized sexist attacks that transpired across multiple platforms. #GamerGate was a digital campaign that targeted several women in the video game and tech industry. The internet’s toxic publics were mobilized by a disparaging blog post written by independent game developer Zoë Quinn’s ex-boyfriend. In response, #GamerGate users accused Quinn of having an unethical relationship with journalist Nathan Grayson. (Chatzakou, Kourtellis, Blackburn, Cristofaro, Stringhini, & Vakali, 2017). Although these accusations were false,

many in the gaming community believed them to be true. These attacks against Quinn eventually populated 4chan's channels and evolved into a polarizing debate concerning video game journalism, ethics, sexism, and feminism (Massanari, 2015a). #GamerGate sympathizers incited vindictive and violent actions to denigrate and delegitimize women in the gaming and tech community. Consequently, several women in this industry and their advocates became targets of doxxing, rape, and death threats (Chatzakou et al., 2017; Massanari, 2015a). Reddit's /r/KotakuInAction -- a subreddit with a reputable anti-feminist bent inspired by a blogsite centered on video game culture--was the public face of this networked violence (Massanari, 2015a).

A few weeks later, Reddit witnessed its fastest growing subreddit, /r/thefapping, "a portmanteau of 'The Happening' and 'fap,' an internet slang term for masturbation" (Marwick, 2017, p. 177). A collection of hacked photographs that included private and intimate selfies of well-known celebrities, such as actress Jennifer Lawrence, were posted on 4chan. /r/thefapping was created on Reddit as a channel to organize, distribute, and discuss the stolen images. Despite Lawrence expressing that this was a sexual violation and sex crime, many Redditors expressed rejoice (Marwick, 2017). The site's front page was doused in these images and comments such as "'This is the best day of my life" and "This...This is just beyond our wildest dreams"' (As cited by Marwick, 2017, p. 178; Massanari, 2015a). Reddit administrators were eventually forced to remove /r/thefapping and ban these images not because they were seen as a violation or sex crime, but because of the legal pressures of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and child pornography laws. Several of the circulated photographs were of celebrities who were under 18 (Marwick, 2017). #GamerGate and "The Fapping" elevated the visibility of the

site's toxic public, which painted Reddit as an environment celebrating hostility, harassment, and violence against women.

To attract potential investors and establish itself amongst Silicon Valley giants Reddit Inc. attempted to rebrand itself as an open-minded and accepting community in 2014 (Isaac, 2014, November 14). Overseeing these efforts was the newly hired CEO, Ellen Pao. In an attempt to reform the site's anti-harassment policy, Pao removed several hostile subreddits (Marwick, 2017; Matias, 2016). Pao's assignment was a formulated toxic cleanse aimed at minimizing the application's morally questionable content (Centivany & Glushko, 2016). Enraged by such changes, Redditors stirred a community uprising that climaxed at the dismissal of Victoria Taylor, an administrator and coordinator of the platform's most popular subreddits: "I AM A" /r/IAMA, "Ask Me Anything"/r/ama, and "Ask Reddit"/r/askreddit (Centivany & Glushko, 2016; Matias, 2016, p. 1138; Newell et al., 2016). While many moderators attempted a community-wide blackout by shutting down several popular subreddits (Centivany & Glushko, 2016; Matias, 2016) and migrating to other link-sharing sites (Newell et. al. 2015), others manipulated the site's ranking algorithms to populate the front page with sexist and racist anti-Pao propaganda (Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2015a; Matias, 2016). As a perceived threat to the platform's participatory culture, Pao became the target of online violence, harassment, and hate. In the end, Pao claimed that the internet trolls had won and resigned (Ekjp, 2015).

Following Pao's departure, Steve Huffman, co-founder and newly appointed CEO, announced that the recent modifications would remain and proposed additional regulations prohibiting anything inciting "harm or violence against an individual or group of people" (Spez, 2015). Although findings suggest such changes effectively reduced

incidents of hate speech (Chandrasekharan et. al., 2017), the platform's toxic networked publics continued to demonstrate a knee aptitude for commanding the site's visibility. Massanari (2015a) explains that seasoned Redditors are notorious for gaming the site's features to elevate specific content (Massanari, 2015b), which at times facilitates networked violence (Marwick, 2017; Matias, 2016). This form of sociotechnical hijacking is not only responsible for visibly promoting violence against women, but also for streamlining pro-Trump and alt-right networked publics.

In 2016, tensions between Reddit's polarizing publics caused the platform to blossom into a digital utopia for pro-Trump and alt-right networked publics. In an attempt to troll Reddit's liberal and progressive community members like /r/Shitredditsays, a few prominent Redditors gamed the system so that the site's most visible links were populated with pro-Trump material (Mills, 2017). The elevation of content that "glorifies and incites" violence against women and people of color was seen as invitation to neo-Nazi and white supremacists networked publics. Today, Reddit exists as a central hub for Pro-Trump, neo-Nazi, and ALTRight publics.

In each of these events, Reddit's sociotechnical architecture, affordances, and participatory culture facilitated the networked harassment of women and people of color (Gillespie, 2010; Massanari, 2015b). #Gamergate, "The Fapping", Reddit's revolt, and the white nationalist networked publics demonstrates how "properties of social media that facilitate activism and cultural participation" can also "enable networked abuse and targeted intimidation" (Marwick, 2017, p. 180). While non-toxic communities do exist on Reddit, these digital campaigns of violence demonstrate how the site's toxic networked publics are able to command Reddit's visibility. In an environment in which voice equates

to visibility, the elevation of violent and problematic content actively suppresses traditionally marginalized communities. In sum, #Gamergate, “The Fappening”, Reddit’s revolt, and the rise of white nationalist publics reminds us that Web 2.0 applications are sociotechnical systems that are in service to their usage. Consequently, the intersection of Reddit’s design, features, and participatory culture enables the hostile treatment of women and people of color. *So then, how are minorities able to establish, maintain, and promote their own voice on Reddit when sexist and racist publics actively command the platform’s most visible content?*

### 1.3. **That’s god awful, so what now?**

The rise of toxic online spaces, like the ones outlined above, has renewed research interests in online harassment, alt-right networks, and toxic geek masculinity (Daniels, 2018; Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2015,). These critical technoculture studies register how white hegemonic norms are embedded in the design and features of Web 2.0 applications. While these studies are invaluable in understanding how toxic publics leverage the internet’s default whiteness to promote their own voice, their focus is centered on white internet users. How the hegemonic norms embedded in these system’s architecture and affordances affect racial and ethnic minority users is vital to understanding the extent to which Web 2.0 technologies afford people of color a voice. Critical race and technoculture scholars have explored race and ethnicity in an online context since the commercialization of the internet (Byrne, 2007; Eglash & Bleecker, 2001; Nakamura, 2008; Nobel, 2018; Steele, 2017). Investigations by Black feminist scholars such as Kishonna Gray (2014, 2020), networked gatekeeping and framing studies on the Black Lives Matter Movement (Stewart et al., 2017), and Brock’s (2012) work on Black Twitter demonstrates how

minority users are able to establish, maintain, and promote a collective voice that decentralizes the internet's default whiteness. Together, these works have provided a foundational understanding of the white hegemonic norms embedded in the design and application of communication technologies.

Situated within a sociotechnical approach--the understanding that society and technology influence each other on a continuum--this project builds off these works to develop a case study on Reddit's Latinx community. Like Reddit, the Latinx community and its online spaces remain in the peripheral view of most scholars. This project chose this population to not only expand our understanding of Latinx identity formation, but to explore heterophily (relationships bred from difference) as an organizing principle. As explained in the following chapter, many scholars regard homophily (relationships bred from similarity) as an axiom of organizing principles. Informed by homophily, the whiteness embedded in Web 2.0 applications sociotechnical architecture and affordances encourages connections to be forged through whiteness. Most Latinx networked publics emerge as isolated and disconnected clusters, because the heterophilous connections that tie the Latinx community together are not able to materialize on platforms that actively promote homophily. For a Latinx networked public to emerge, the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture must enable the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. Central to these negotiations is the ability to navigate homophilous and heterophilous connections. Unfortunately, most platforms do not allow users to navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) relationships.

Unlike most Web 2.0 applications, Reddit does allow users to navigate both homophilous and heterophilous connections. However, as demonstrated above, its participatory culture is rooted in toxic geek masculinity and actively suppresses minority communities. This project conducted a case study on Reddit's Latinx identity to examine the extent to which the site affords marginalized communities a voice. The following presents a critical race, ethnicity, and technoculture study that is guided by networked gatekeeping and digital-race assemblage. Networked gatekeeping, as the main methodological lens, identifies the actors that shape Reddit's Latinx identity. Digital-race assemblage, as the main analytical lens, explores the relationships to whiteness that frame Reddit's Latinx identity. Together, these frameworks guide this project in exploring the following research questions:

*RQ1: How do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit?*

*RQ2: To what extent do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) connections on Reddit?*

*RQ 3: What can we learn about how Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed through the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationships?*

These research questions were developed to understand the extent to which the Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public.

Networked publics on Reddit emerge from the connections moderators forge between and among the site's subreddits. Moderators establish connections among the site's discussion forms by listing related subreddits in their form's sidebar or wiki page. To locate Reddit's

Latinx community this thesis scraped the platform's application programming interface (API) on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to collect a complete list of subreddit with at least 100 subscribers. The site's API was then queried to obtain an edge list of each subreddit's connections. /r/LatinoAmerica's recommended Reddit communities and their associated subreddits were extracted from the edge list of subreddit connections. Since early observation reveals reciprocal connections between /r/LatinoAmerica and messaging boards that represent specific Latin American countries, /r/LatinoAmerica was used as a port of entry to locate the platform's Latinx community. This process captured a networked public made up of 1,811 unique subreddits. These subreddits and their connections provided the sample from which this thesis's findings are derived.

To frame this analysis, chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature that grounds this project. The literature review first explains the theoretical context through which this thesis is situated. After outlining digital-race assemblage's theoretical background, the chapter then traces the history of race and ethnicity in online communities to demonstrate how Web 2.0 applications afford users the ability to navigate a fluid relationship to whiteness. This is followed by the theoretical overview of the second framework that ground this study, which was developed to capture the fluid power dynamics that these applications enable. The application of networked gatekeeping on crowd-centered environment reveals how these systems' design and features allow user to negotiate community boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. The ability to establish these boundaries enables the emergence of networked public that represent a group of internet actors that share a specific set of relationships to whiteness. Since very little research exist on Latinx online communities, this project provides a brief overview of Black online community and

Black cyberculture to demonstrate how minority users can leverage the platform's design and features to afford themselves agency over the digital construction of their collective identity. This chapter then outlines the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity to demonstrate how the intersection of most platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture produces Latin networked publics that are highly disconnected and isolated. The end of chapter 2 explains why Reddit was the main platform used in the study and presents the research questions that guided this thesis's analysis.

Chapter 3 details the methodologies used to answer these research questions. Using networked gatekeeping, this project identifies the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public. As the networked gatekeepers of the captured network, these actors play the most central role in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity. Understanding who these actors are and the norms, values, and beliefs they represent reveals how Latinx identity's demographic and ideological diversity is negotiated on Reddit. RQ2 explored the homophilous and heterophilous nature of the prominent actors' connections. The nature of their connections reveals the extent to which Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances enable Latinx users to navigate intra-nation and cross-nation relationships. As narrated in chapter two, the ability to navigate these relationships is central to the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. Lastly, the chapter outlines how digital-race assemblage is used to examine the results produced from RQ1 and RQ2 to understand the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity.

The results of these methodologies are presented in chapter 4. These results provide further evidence that a Latinx networked public is present on Reddit. They also reveal the negotiation processes that played a central role in shaping Reddit's Latinx

identity. Additionally, RQ2's results demonstrate the extent to which the networked gatekeepers were able to establish astatically significant homophilous and heterophilous and which actors drove homophilous and heterophilous ties. These findings reveal the affordances and limitations of Reddit's design and features. Lastly, RQ3 presents the analysis of RQ1 and RQ2 results via a digital-race assemblage lens. This analysis is rooted in historical, political, and genealogical understanding of Latinx identity to provide a critical understanding of Reddit's Latinx identity.

The last chapter provides an overview of the entire study and its main findings. Chapter 5 also present the implications of these results in relation to commutations technologies and the theories that guided this study. These implications aim to extend our understanding of how the white hegemonic norms embedded in the sociotechnical architecture and affordance of Web 2.0 applications affect how online minority space are established. Suggestions for future research are also presented in this chapter. The implications drawn from this study and the suggested areas for future research provide a path for a deeper understanding of the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice.

To ground our understanding of race, ethnicity, and identity formation in the digital sphere, the following chapter presents this thesis's literature review.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rooted in the themes of voice, visibility, and community, this project aims to explore the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford racial and ethnic minorities a voice. As illustrated in chapter 1, the internet is not an egalitarian space. Instead, it is a networked environment enlaced with white hegemonic norms. #Gamergate, The “Fappening”, and the rise of neo-nazi and white supremacist communities evidence how toxic white publics leverage these norms to galvanize digital campaigns of hate. At the center of each of these events is Reddit, a Web 2.0 platform infamous for its racist, sexist, and pedophilic publics. However, describing Reddit as a toxic platform is inaccurate. As chapter 1 illustrates, subreddits such as /r/traumatoolbox, /r/rapecounseling, and /r/survivorsofabuse afford sexual and domestic abuse victim-survivors a space to safely exist. Other pages like /r/parentingautism, a subreddit for parents of autistic children, serve as a community to help users with specific needs. Some subreddits like /r/NatureIsFuckingLit and /r/AnimalsBeingJerks reflect the internet’s genuine silliness and nerdiness. A space such as /r/ShitRedditSays actively combats Reddit’s toxicity, while one like /r/Wholesomememes attempts to capture the internet’s virtue. *Does Reddit empower white toxic publics? Or does Reddit afford minority communities a voice?*

That is the central concern this investigation aims to explore. It does so by conducting a case study that examines the way the collective identity of a specific minority group is constructed on Reddit. Specifically, this project investigates the extent to which Reddit’s Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public. This project actively acknowledges the whiteness through which Reddit, like all other communication technologies, is designed and produced. Additionally, this thesis also

recognizes the ideologies of race and ethnicity and their relationships to whiteness users bring with them as they engage with and on these systems. Ultimately, this thesis argues that these relationships to whiteness frame the relation that minority users construct their collective voice online. To forge a critical understanding of how race and ethnicity function in the digital sphere, this case study applies Sharma's (2013) digital-race assemblage as its main analytical lens. To capture the dynamic nature of these assemblages, this study employs networked gatekeeping as its methodological framework. Together, these theoretical frameworks register how race and ethnicity online emerge from digital networks, their interactions with the platform's sociotechnical architecture and affordances, and the relationships they form in relation to the whiteness embedded in the application's design and features.

## 2.1 **The interconnectedness of online identity formation & sociotechnical systems**

In the digital sphere, collective identities manifest at the intersection of user engagement, a platform's architecture and affordances, and digital networks (Jenkins, Ford, Green, et al., 2013; Massanari, 2015a, 2015b; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). To construct collective identities, users collectively engage in identity practice via the affordances Web 2.0 applications enable. Placing politically motivated hashtags in a Twitter bio (Stewart et. al., 2017), accepting a Facebook friend request (Boyd & Ellison, 2008), and liking a post on Instagram (Podhovník, 2018) are examples of affordances Web 2.0 applications enable that can also produce collective identities online. Like "the architecture of physical spaces," a platform's design suggests and enables "particular modes of interaction" (Ballantyne, 2002, p. 25; Papacharissi, 2009, p. 200). These modes of interactions are the affordances Web 2.0 technologies enable. To simplify, affordances are all the possibilities a technology enables

in its utilization (Gibson, 1977). In their ability to enable interactions, Web 2.0 applications are social. In their ability to enable affordances, they are technical (Gibson, 1977; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). Therefore, Web 2.0 applications are sociotechnical systems.

In enabling modes of interaction, Web 2.0 applications produce multidimensional (Castells, 2011) digital networks. These multidimensional digital networks are made up of internet users, non-human actors like algorithms, digital artifacts like blog posts, platforms like Facebook, and software processes like ping. The ways in which users engage with Web 2.0 affordances produce sociotechnical elements and processes that are used to interact with other users, non-human actors, digital artifacts, platforms, and software processes (Jenkins, Ford, Green, et al., 2013; Sharma, 2013). By enabling modes of interaction, these affordances forge connections and produce digital networks between and among users, non-human actors, digital artifacts, platforms and software processes. Ultimately, Web 2.0 applications are sociotechnical systems situated within multidimensional networks (Castells, 2011) of internet users, non-human actors, digital artifacts, platforms, and software processes. Collective identities emerge at the intersection of these multidimensional digital networks (Brock 2012; Jenkins, Ford, Green, et al., 201; Nakamura, 2002; Sharma 2013). The connections between and among internet actors and the sociotechnical elements and processes that are produced from the interactions with these multidimensional digital networks is the process in which collective identities are assembled online.

## 2.2 **Digital-Race Assemblage**

Situated within this sociotechnical framing of online identity formation, this thesis employs Sharma's (2013) digital-race assemblage to understand how race and ethnicity

function in online spaces. Previous critical race and ethnicity scholars have acknowledged that when it comes to online spaces, race and ethnicity functions as a *digital medium*. Stated otherwise, race and ethnicity online function as “a distinctive set of informatic codes, networked mediated narratives, maps, images, and visualizations that index identity” (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2012, p. 5). Race and ethnicity online emerge from the very fabric of the internet. It is a digital material in and of itself-- one that is not just consumed but performed (Brock, 2012, Nakamura, 2002). As internet actors perform and interact with performances of race and ethnicity, they also bring with them their own ideologies of race and ethnicity, which become intertwined and entangled in the performances they enact and in the ones, they consume (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2012; Nakamura, 2002). The very code that users depend on to upload stories to Instagram, to share BuzzFeed quiz results, and to transform crisis events into online political movements executes race. In other words, online race and ethnicity emerge at the intersection of a platform’s architecture, affordances, and participatory culture and digital networks.

Previous web studies conceptualized race and ethnicity as a social construct. Digital-race assemblage, however, conceives it as an *assemblage*, “[exploring] the processes by which heterogeneous elements are arranged and brought together in particular sets of relations, relations that constitute forms of territory and expression” (Sharma, 2013, p. 54; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Assemblages are dynamic in nature, constantly changing and connecting to other assemblages. Whereas a social construct focuses on how race and ethnicity function ideologically, assemblage allows us to explore the materiality of race and ethnicity. The sociotechnical elements and processes that emerge from our interactions with Web 2.0 applications and their digital networks are the heterogeneous elements that

are brought together to assemble race and ethnicity digitally. The relationships between and among these heterogeneous elements are what allow assemblages to emerge. From this perspective, this analytical framework encounters race and ethnicity “as an emergent force in digital media vis-a-vis its networked connections, information flows and affects” (Sharma, 2013, p. 48). Ultimately, digital-race assemblage argues that race and ethnicity in online spaces materialize from the relationships forged between and among digital networks, communication technologies, and identity practices.

As a relational theory of online identity formation, this framework actively acknowledges the roles that non-human actors (i.e., algorithms and chat bots) and technological processes play in the emergence of digital race and ethnicity (Sharma, 2013). Digital-race assemblage claims that racial and ethnic identities online manifest as actors engage with a system’s sociotechnical features. This means that the ways in which race and ethnicity emerge online are limited to the performative functions Web 2.0 applications enable. Additionally, the visibility of digital assemblages is hierarchically structured and algorithmically produced (Leavitt, 2016; Leavitt & Robinson, 2017; Massanari, 2015b; Marwick, 2017). As explained in chapter one, voice equates to visibility. Digital assemblages embody performances of race and ethnicity online, and their visibility is a measure of how racial and ethnic minorities are given a voice. To frame this differently, the way racial and ethnic identities are assembled in relation to the internet’s digital materiality is a metric for understanding the extent to which they afford minorities a voice. To illustrate how race and ethnicity functions in the digital sphere and the extent to which Web 2.0 technologies have afforded marginalized communities a voice, the following

section traces the history of race and ethnicity in online communities via a digital-race assemblage lens.

### 2.2.1 **Race & Ethnicity and Online Communities**

Born out of an era of naive colorblind rhetoric and empty democratic promises, the internet's commercialization established an environment in which digital assemblages of race and ethnicity were limited to familiar stereotypes (Nakamura, 2002). Like in offline spaces, whiteness was the default, and its hegemony stemmed from its ability to function invisibly (Omi & Winant, 1994; Dryer, 1997). Before Web 2.0 applications, the internet's default whiteness was mainly uncontested. This was in part because socioeconomic inequalities at the time led to a population of internet users mainly made up of white men (Hoffman & Novak, 2000). However, critical race and ethnicity scholars more recently have noted that the internet was "absorbed into the texture of our everyday life" during a pivotal moment in which American politics was defined by neoliberalism and colorblind rhetoric (Shaviro, 2003, p.88; Omi & Winant, 1994; Nakamura, 2008). Unlike the 60s and 70s when conversations about race were critically charged and focused on addressing injustices and inequalities, the mid-90s "evaded a critique of the historical category of race altogether" (Lee, 1999, p.160). This colorblind discourse fit seamlessly into the popular belief that the World Wide Web was a discrimination-free space. Ironically, online discussions of race and ethnicity were deemed divisive and disruptive. Digital assemblages that challenged racial and ethnic stereotypes, or questioned the relationship and subjectivity of their whiteness, were suppressed in the "name of social harmony" (Nakamura, 2002, p.54). Ultimately, the history of race and ethnicity in online communities that follows illustrates how the

mediation of social processes did not transcend social ills. Instead, they restructured and magnified them (boyd, 2008; Nakamura, 2008; Chun, 2019; Gray, 2020).

### 2.2.1.1 **Web 1.0: When the Internet was V white**

Prior to status updates, likes, retweets, and upvotes, online communities were mainly constructed via support groups, role-playing games, and email listservs. In the late 90s and early 2000s, chat rooms served as a common interface to organize online support groups. Studies exploring the psychological well-being of internet users illustrate how users who suffer from stigmatized illnesses found solace in the internet's relative anonymity (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Davison, Pennebaker, & Dickerson, 2000; McKay, Glasgow, Feil, Boles & Barrera, 2002). This relative anonymity came from the fact that online chat rooms afforded users the ability to interact with one another without having to disclose their age, gender, race, or any other defining characteristics that may be tied to their physical appearance (Subrahmanyam, Smahel & Greenfield, 2006). Social anxieties that emerge during face-to-face conversations were absent in these virtual spaces, allowing stigmatized individuals to feel free to be themselves (Davison et. al, 2000). As a sociotechnical affordance, relative anonymity enabled users to assemble digital representations of themselves without being stigmatized. While liberating, this afforded anonymity created the illusion that the mind can exist separately from the body in online spaces. In other words, it prompted the notion that stigmas assigned to the body did not transfer nor were they experienced in online spaces.

This separation of mind and body perpetuated the notion that the digital sphere was free of race and ethnicity. Conceptually, race and ethnicity are social constructs tied to the body. Online interactions at the time remained a text-based affair. So how could

race and ethnicity exist in such a space? Wilbur (2013) reminds us “[w]ords are not simply tools...[t]hey come to us framed by specific histories of use and meaning, and are products of particular ideological struggles” (p. 46). These ideological struggles enable race to assert itself “in the language users employ, in the kinds of identities they construct, and in the way they depict themselves online, both through language and through graphic images” (Nakamura, 2002, p. 31). In other words, race and ethnicity is written in and part of the performance users enact when engaging in identity practices online. This can be found in Nakamura’s (2002) foundational work exploring race and ethnicity in role-playing sites such as LambdaMoo and Club Connect.

Popular role-playing sites of the mid-90s and early 2000s fell into one of two categories: those that were text-only and those that were graphics-based. Both allowed players to interact with one another via digital avatars, “the embodiment, in text and/or graphic images, of a user’s online presence in social spaces” (Nakamura, 2002, p. 31). In these spaces, race and ethnicity emerged from players assuming stereotypical representations of Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian people (Chesher, 1994; Foster, 1998; Nakamura, 2002; Punday, 2000). Nakamura (2002) describes this phenomenon as identity tourism. She explains, “[t]he choice to enact oneself as a samurai warrior in LambdaMoo constitutes identity tourism that allows a player to appropriate an Asian racial identity without any of the risks associated with being a racial minority in real life” (p. 40). She notes that these spaces could offer a “venue for non-Asian characters to see through the eyes of the other by performing themselves as Asian through online textual interactions” (p.40). However, this possibility was blocked when an overwhelming number of players were exploring race through familiar stereotypes.

Role-playing sites enabled “a vacation from fixed identities and locales” as they allowed players to “computer cross-dress” by representing themselves as a different age, gender, race and/or ethnicity (Stone, 1991, p. 84; Nakamura, 2002). However, the digital representations of racial and ethnic minorities that often emerged from these sites mirrored the sexist and racist stereotypes previously circulated by other communication channels like television (Chesher, 1994; Foster, 1998; Nakamura, 2002). Racist digital representations were so prevalent that minority players reported difficulty finding characters and digital avatars that looked or behaved like them (Everett, 2009). As digital forms of Black, Brown, and Yellow face went ignored, white hegemonic norms were rebuilt and restructured to take on their own digital form. Ultimately, these assemblages of race and ethnicity are symptomatic of the whiteness through which the sociotechnical architecture and features of these applications are produced and utilized.

The internet’s default whiteness was due in part to a new socioeconomic inequality that manifested in the digital age. During this time, internet studies began reporting a direct link between internet access and a user’s socioeconomic status (Hoffman & Novak, 2000). Essentially, these studies revealed a digital divide in which users tended to be wealthier, more educated, male, and white (Hoffman & Novak, 1998; Katz & Aspden, 1997; Sparrow & Vedantham, 1995). The lack of minority presence during the internet’s “crucial years” in which its “discursive landscape” was being established, further reinforced existing stereotypes (Nakamura, 2002, p.xii).

While this digital divide helps to explain the prevalence of racist and sexist digital assemblages in role-playing sites, scholars have recently noted that it does not fully capture the internet’s default whiteness and the racial inequalities it incites. As a

framework, the digital divide “proposes that computer access in and of itself is a meaningful measure of informational power and privilege” (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012, p. 10). However, as recent studies illustrate, facilitating internet access among minorities does not fix social and racial inequality -- in some instances, it produces new forms of inequality (Fouche, 2012; Galloway, 2012; Gandy, 2012; Everett, 2012; Sandvig, 2012). In sum, these studies reveal that the sociotechnical design and features of these platforms promote and instill a default whiteness that incites inequalities among racial and ethnic minorities.

While the design and features of many role-playing sites enabled users to assign their avatar a gender, technical features providing players the ability to disclose their race and/or ethnicity remained absent (Nakamura, 2002). People who wanted to disclose their race and/or ethnicity had to manually write in their avatar’s description. Due to the lack of racial and ethnic features, many racial minorities opted out of disclosing their race and were assumed white. Nakamura (2002) explains how players who described themselves “in racially ‘othered’ terms, as Asian, African American, or Latino” were “often seen as engaging in a form of hostile performance” (p. 36). These performances were deemed hostile because they made race visible in a space in which it was not supposed to exist (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012). By Othering themselves, these users made their race and/or ethnicity visible, and they made the whiteness of non-Othered players visible. This visibility of race and ethnicity was deemed divisive as it not only disrupted “the phantasmatic world of cybernetic textual interaction” but also the colorblind rhetoric that dominated racial and ethnic discourse at the time (Nakamura, 2002, p. 36; Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012). The internet’s default whiteness was further reinforced when

individuals who did disclose their race became targets of hate speech (Nakamura, 2002).

These sites' sociotechnical infrastructure and the treatment of players who elected to Other themselves illustrates how whiteness was the dominant frame for identity formation in the digital sphere.

Despite the white hegemonic norms embedded in these systems' sociotechnical design and features, racial and ethnic minorities were able to establish digital spaces in which they could negotiate their identity in relation to the dominant framing of whiteness. One particular platform that enabled this type of racial and ethnic discourse was email. Email allowed users to create listservs that remotely connected individuals to their existing social networks. As a platform, emails afforded users an environment in which they could produce and disseminate information to their peers, friends, and family. Emails proved to be "fertile territory for the formation of friendship and even close relationships because of the shared interests and values" of their specific networks (Bargh and McKenna, 2004, p. 582). Email listservs enabled all users to digitally produce and send content directly to their social networks. For racial and ethnic minorities specifically, email listservs allowed minorities to digitally produce and perform their own racial and ethnic discourse. Nakamura (2002) explains that email joke lists like "101 Ways to Tell if You're Japanese American" demonstrate "a kind of racial and ethnic identity grounded in lived practice but expressed at times as stereotypes while simultaneously challenging definitions of what it means to be Japanese American" (Nakamura, 2002, p. 128-129). This email joke list and the way digitally networked users interact and form relationships with it demonstrate how race and ethnicity in the digital sphere is able to break familiar stereotypes and produce new meanings of what it means to be Other. The

conversations this list incites demonstrate how digital-race assemblages emerge from digital networks and their interactions with a platform's architecture and affordances. Ultimately, email listservs provided a glimpse of what was to come in the era of Web 2.0 applications and increased minority presence.

#### 2.2.1.2 **Web 2.0: Whiteness amplified??**

At the turn of the century two technological catalysts altered the discursive landscape of the digital sphere: internet enabled cell phones and Web 2.0 applications. As previously mentioned, socioeconomic inequalities led to an absence of minorities in online spaces. The expensive cost of computers and internet services led to a population of internet users mainly made up of cis-gender white men. However, the widespread adoption of internet enabled phones brought down the cost of connection, thus facilitating the online presence of people of color (Hoffman & Novak, 2000). Internet demographic studies during the early 2000s showed that minorities were more likely to own and use internet-enabled cell phones to connect wirelessly (Hoffman & Novak, 2000; Horrigan, 2009). By 2010, nearly two-thirds of wireless internet users were Black and Latinx (Smith, 2010).

While mobile devices seemed to bridge the digital divide, the emergence of Web 2.0 platform signaled an era of active internet actors (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). Before sites offered friending, sharing, and liking features, internet participation was limited to consumption. Users would log onto online spaces as consumers and interact with admin produced content (Bruns, 2005). Social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and other Web 2.0 platforms reconstructed the digital landscape. By introducing participatory features, these applications allowed internet users to evolve from consumers to producers

(Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). As active participants, digitally connected actors were able to forge connections with other users, establish online networks with pre-existing ties, and produce and share their own content (Jenkins, 2006). Ultimately, Web 2.0 applications enabled new modes of identity practices. For white users, these technologies facilitated the ability to establish online communities. For people of color, these platforms afforded the ability to establish, maintain, and promote their own online spaces (boyd,2008). Like email listservs, these sociotechnical systems presented racial and ethnic minorities the ability to not only have a voice but to create digital-race assemblages that decentralized whiteness as the default.

Although internet enabled phones and Web 2.0 applications promoted the online presence and engagement of racial and ethnic minorities, white hegemonic norms were still thinly veiled throughout the emerging digital ecology. Again, this paper does not argue that the digital sphere is inherently racist, instead it aligns itself with other scholars who have illustrated how racist ideologies are embedded in the architecture and features of virtual platforms (Gillespie, 2010; Chun, 2019; Gray, 2020). As users engage in online identity practices, they are interacting with technical features that have been produced and shaped by the dominant ideology of whiteness. Additionally, as users engage in these practices, they bring with them their own ideologies of race and ethnicity (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2012; Nakamura, 2002). Users' ideologies of race and ethnicity in combination with the white norms through which these technical features are shaped influence the type of digital-race assemblages that emerge in the digital sphere. This is witnessed in the digital segregation that occurred between Myspace and Facebook users.

#### 2.2.1.2.1 **Once Upon A Digital Segregation**

Unlike Myspace's network of "subculturally identified teens", Facebook housed a network of college social life. While Myspace was described by teens as ghetto, "gaudy", 'tacky', and 'cluttered,'" Facebook was revered for its clean uniformed look (boyd, 2012, p. 214; Gajjala, 2007). Independently, these descriptions may be flagged as problematic, but coupled with the demographic differences between the platforms, they become the subject of racist rhetoric. Whereas Black, Latinx, and less financially privileged teens were more likely to be found on Myspace, white, Asian, and affluent teens tended to be on Facebook (boyd, 2012). This demographic divide was not only present among teens. Studies conducted around the same time on college-aged and adult internet users also illustrated a clear connection between race and ethnicity and a user's preferred social media platform (Hare, 2009, October 24; Hargaittari, 2007; Watkin, 2009). This racial and ethnic divide was witnessed across several different age groups. So, was Facebook actively discouraging Black and Latinx users to join the platform? Not exactly.

Myspace and Facebook, the most popular social networking sites of the aughts, were architecturally designed to mediate existing social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Their sociotechnical architecture and affordances were intentionally developed to mirror offline organizing principles, thus enabling the mediation of white hegemonic norms (Donath & boyd 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2005; boyd & Ellison, 2008). Although they meditated white social standards, these sociotechnical systems also afford users the ability to navigate a fluid relationship to whiteness on multiple dimensions. This is evidenced in the digital segregation that occurred between the two platforms.

The networks through which these technologies were adopted explains, in part, the divide between Myspace and Facebook users. Launched in Los Angeles as a

platform to follow bands and artists, Myspace quickly became associated with urban culture. As its adoption spread from the West to the East Coast, “urban teens joined before suburban or rural teens” (boyd, 2012, p. 206). Early teen adopters who were not into music were introduced to Myspace by older family members who were “active in late-night culture” (p. 205). Popular among 20-year-olds, Myspace was seen by teens as cool and it symbolically became intertwined with “maturity, status, and freedom in the manner espoused by urban late-night culture” (p. 206). Additionally, Myspace was publicly demonized by parents as news coverage exposed the potential dangers of teens participating in the same space as sexual predators. To put it simply, Myspace became synonymous with urban culture and risky teen behavior.

Contrastingly, Facebook developed a reputation for being elite and highbrow as it first restricted access to users with a @college.harvard.edu email address (boyd, 2012). Given the platform's success, Zuckerberg opened Facebook up to other Ivy League colleges, then to the rest of the college network, and finally to anyone over the age of 13. By the time Facebook became a teen sensation in 2006, it was the central hub for college social life— a hub of affluent white college social life that is. In 2004 when Facebook was first launched, 6.3% of Harvard’s student population was Black and 5.6% were Latinx (Harvard University Fact Book, 2004-2005). These numbers increase only slightly when applied to all US universities (11% Black and 13% Latinx) (Census Bureau, 2005). Intentionally or not, Zuckerberg effectively excluded racial and ethnic minorities by restricting access to college students when Facebook first launched.

Zuckerberg is not responsible for the racial and ethnic disparities of higher education. The U.S. education system has a long history of racial and ethnic inequality, and

the organizing norms that systems of segregation produce are still witnessed in public school cafeterias (Yosso, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; boyd, 2012). Zuckerberg is not responsible for the inequalities of the U.S. education system, but he is responsible for reenforcing the white hegemonic norms rooted in systems of segregation. By the time Facebook opened its doors to anyone of the age of 13, it had fostered a homophilous network of white college users. This encouraged college bound teens (who are typically white) to leave Myspace for Facebook (boyd, 2012). By restricting access to Facebook during its formative years and designing the platform to encourage users to mediate their existing social ties, Zuckerberg, intentionally or not, digitally recreated racial and ethnic segregation.

Differences between Myspace and Facebook users are not only rooted in the demographic networks they were launched, the two platforms also vary greatly in the identity practices they enable (boyd & Ellison, 2008). On Myspace expressions and performances of self emerge from the different ways users customize the site's features (Gajjala, 2007; boyd, 2012). Facebook, however, upholds a minimal and uniform aesthetic. As Guardian journalist Jenna McWilliams puts it, "With a few minor exceptions, a Facebook page is a Facebook page is a Facebook page" (2014, December 11, para. 8). While Facebook's interface has evolved over the years, it continues to offer little by the way of variation (Buck, 2011, September 22). Stylistic interface features such as fonts, backgrounds, and colors remain the same from one Facebook profile page to the next. Myspace and Facebook are both social networking sites that encourage users to engage in identity practices, but each platform is unique in the specific sociotechnical features they afford.

While Myspace is defined by its customizable features, Facebook is defined by its simplicity. While Myspace is seen as urban, Facebook is seen as elite. While Myspace's network of users is mainly Black and Latinx, Facebook's network of users is mainly white and Asian. In 2006, when Facebook opened its membership to anyone over the age of 13, teens across the nation faced a social dilemma. Myspace or Facebook?

In her ethnography of teens' social media use, boyd (2012) maps the migration of a subset of teens, meanwhile cataloging how they navigate race, ethnicity, and class in offline and online spaces. boyd (2012) notes, "[t]hose who adopted MySpace were from different backgrounds and had different norms and values than those who adopted Facebook" (p. 204). While divisions along racial and ethnic lines were blurry, she "observed that black and Latino teens appeared to preference MySpace while white and Asian teens seemed to privilege Facebook" (p. 207). Most students explained that their preferences were rooted in logistics, they simply used the platform that most of their friends were on. While this rationale is not intrinsically tied to race, ethnicity, and class, the language these teens used to describe the platforms is. As boyd explains:

In essence, the "*glitter*" produced by those who "*pimp out*" their MySpace's is seen by some in a positive light while others see it as "*gaudy*," "*tacky*," and "*cluttered*." While Facebook fans loved the site's aesthetic minimalism, others viewed this tone as "*boring*," "*lame*," and "*elitist*." Catalina, a white 15-year-old from Austin, told me that Facebook is better because

*Facebook just seems more clean to me. (Catalina)*

What Catalina sees as cleanliness, Indian-American 17-year-old Anindita from Los Angeles labels simplicity; she recognizes the value of simplicity, but she prefers the “bling” of MySpace because it allows her to express herself.

Whether positive or negative this language highlights how these teens’ ideologies of race and ethnicity intersect with the whiteness through which these platforms are designed and produced. White teens were more likely to view the digital-race assemblages that emerged from Myspace's customizable features as “gaudy,” “tacky,” and “cluttered”, whereas Black and Latinx teens viewed the assemblages that emerged from Facebook as “boring,” “lame,” and “elitist” (boyd, 2012, p. 214). The association of Facebook’s minimalist sociotechnical features to “boring,” “lame,” and “elitist” communicates a specific relationship to whiteness.

Whiteness and its hegemony stems from its ability to function invisibly (Dryer, 1997). In regard to skin color, whiteness is defined by its absence of color. Historians narrate how physical characteristics, cultural artifacts, tastes and aesthetics are not defined by their whiteness but the ways in which they are not white (Giroux, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1994; Morrison, 1993). Whiteness’s ability to function invisibly parallels Facebook’s minimalist sociotechnical architecture and affordances. In comparison to Myspace, Facebook mutes expressions of self. The ways in which race and ethnicity becomes re-coded and performed through the use of different colors, backgrounds, fonts etc., are muted on Facebook (Nakamura, 2002; Gajjala, 2007). Black and Latinx teens claim Facebook is “boring,” “lame,” and “elitist” because it does not allow them to express their identity to the extent that Myspace does. In rejecting Facebook, these Black and Latinx teens reject the specific relationship to whiteness that Facebook’s design and features enables.

Myspace does not escape white hegemonic norms either. Synonymous with urban culture, the different digital-race assemblages that emerge from Myspace's customizable features are not always seen as freedoms of expression but at times described as "gaudy," "tacky," and "cluttered". Myspace, however, does allow users to forge a different relationship to whiteness than Facebook does. These different relationships to whiteness evidence the dynamic nature of power relations that Web 2.0 applications enable.

Gajjala (2007) ethnography on undergraduate students assessing Myspace profiles pages further illustrates how these systems enable fluid relationships to whiteness. Gajjala, a college media studies professor, instructed a group of mainly white college students to examine Mexican-American teens' Myspace profile pages. Their findings were informed by in-depth interviews with these teens, their own interactions with Myspace and other similar platforms, and a textual analysis of the teens' Myspace profiles. During a group discussion of their analysis, these college students expressed disappointment and concern because they found that the teens they interviewed mainly presented themselves in a stereotypical fashion. One student notes, "...I really don't think the kids understand that they are perpetuating pre-existing stereotypes about themselves by the symbols they put on their Myspace accounts" (p. 9). After discussing their findings, Gajjala then instructed her students to perform a textual analysis on the Myspace profile pages of white teens. The following summarizes their results:

I agree., this is a very interesting concept. I found in my analysis of "white" teens on myspace that I did judge many of them from their pictures. I originally thought all of the "white" teens shared at least some things in common, but as I read their profile, I

found that there are so many subcultures within the "white" cultures that that assumption is a false one. In fact, there are many African American or Latino people who have more things in common with white teens than other whites. This is a really important concept to understand from our analysis of Myspace because it is a rare opportunity for us to see information about multiple people and to compare our findings. It allows us to identify our own stereotypes and understand how easy it is to make a prejudgement about a group of people. By reading the profiles of people from different ethnicities, we can correct our stereotypes and begin to get past them (LM).

In comparing Mexican American and white teen's Myspace profile pages, these students' relationship to whiteness shifts as they become salient of their own relationship to whiteness. Once they recognized the white norms, they were imposing on these teens' profile pages, these undergraduate researchers were able to acknowledge the different identity practices Myspace's architecture and affordances enable. Instead of perpetuating stereotypes, the student researchers recognized how the Mexican-American teens became the subject of stereotypes.

The juxtaposition between the students' readings of Mexican American versus white teens ultimately illustrates the multi-dimensional plane through which whiteness operates. The Mexican-American teens that participated in this study were low income residents of northwest Ohio. Throughout her report, Gajjala (2007) actively acknowledges the demographic and socioeconomic disparities between those conducting the study (white undergraduates) and those who were being studied (Mexican-American teens). Gajjala explains:

The student researchers' locations influence their reading of both the larger techno-social phenomenon and of myspace.com, as well as the sites produced there by the Mexican-American teens. Thus, stereotypical perceptions of low-income Mexican-American teens come into play but also, preconceptions based in television media reports and other social panic about Myspace play a role in the undergraduate researcher perceptions.

Therefore, as these undergraduate students were analyzing the digital assemblages of these Mexican-American teens, they were navigating not only their own ideologies of race and ethnicity in relation to Mexican-American teens but also to the platform itself.

Both boyd (2012) and Gajjala (2007) acknowledge the process through which Myspace became racialized via its reputation with urban culture and risky teen behavior. Most of Gajjala's students were apprehensive when asked to interact with Myspace because they saw it as unsafe. Myspace as an unsafe platform is rooted in its urban culture, which is a common euphemism to describe non-white culture (boyd, 2012). As these undergraduate researchers conducted their analysis, they navigated their relation to whiteness on multiple dimensions. First, is their own relationship to whiteness. Next, is their relationship to Mexican-American identity, which is framed within a stereotypical understanding given their socioeconomic and white background. Lastly, is the students' preconception of Myspace and how it operates in relation to white standards.

These multi-dimensional relationships to whiteness shaped the student's analysis. During their first reading, the students are not actively aware of their relationship to whiteness and how it shapes their perception of the Other. Therefore, they claim that the Mexican-American teens perpetuated stereotypes. However, after conducting the same

analysis on white teen Myspace profiles pages, the students' relation to whiteness becomes salient. It is at this point that the undergraduate researchers are able to not only acknowledge the nuances of the digital-race assemblages that emerge on Myspace, but they also recognize the platform's limitations. One student explains, "I missed a basic idea of where these teenagers on Myspace are actually from. Most of the time these kids don't show their actual place of residence" (p. 12). In recognizing how Myspace's design contributes very little to knowing a user's background, this student acknowledges how the design of the platform prompted them to conduct their readings of Mexican-American teens' Myspace profiles through the lens of the internet's default whiteness.

Ultimately, these ethnographies reveal that as users interact with Web 2.0 applications, they navigate multiple relationships to whiteness. The ability to navigate the ways in which they relate to whiteness enables users to forge new relationships to whiteness. Prior to Web 2.0 applications, a user's relation to whiteness was fixed *within* a framing of whiteness. The ability to produce and disseminate content to their digital networks enables users to forge a relation that is not *within* whiteness, but *in relation to* whiteness.

### **2.2.2 Web 2.0 & Whiteness: Not *Within* But *In Relation to***

The digital segregation that occurred between Myspace and Facebook users allows us to examine a specific point in time in which digital networks were localized on the basis of race and ethnicity. This localization allows us to understand how these application's sociotechnical features enable users to navigate their relationships to whiteness. This is evident in the rhetoric teens used to describe their social media preferences and in the different identity practices each platform enabled. The ability to

navigate these relationships to whiteness affords users the agency to forge different types of relationships to the whiteness, thus allowing digital-race assemblages that break familiar understandings of race and ethnicity to emerge. In sum, the digital segregation that occurred between Myspace and Facebook reveals a shift in the emergence of digital-race assemblages that are framed *within* whiteness to *in relation to* whiteness.

Racial and ethnic divides among internet users are no longer as clear or as present. Today, it is common practice to engage in many different social networking sites (Papacharissi, 2011). As a result, a variety of digital-race assemblies emerge on each platform. While each sociotechnical platform is unique and distinct in the specific sociotechnical features they afford, they become interconnected as users post images of Tweets on Instagram, Facebook posts to Twitter, Snaps to Facebook stories, et cetera. As the adoption of social media platforms has become more complex and interconnected, so has the way race and ethnicity functions in the digital sphere (Gajjala, 2007; boyd, 2012; Chun, 2019; Gray, 2020).

While racial and ethnic divides among internet users are no longer as visible, online communities in relation to race and ethnicity are still present. This is witnessed in recent networked gatekeeping studies. Networked gatekeeping is a theoretical framework that was developed to capture the fluid nature of power dynamics in the digital sphere. Studies exploring the ways in which Web 2.0 applications disrupt traditional forms of information flow reveal sociotechnical processes that afford users the ability to elevate non-elite actors to elite status and negotiate their community's boundaries of inclusion/ exclusion. To capture the dynamic nature of digital-race assemblages in the present-day digital landscape this thesis employs networked gatekeeping as its main methodological framework. The

following traces the theoretical background of networked gatekeeping to illustrate how the intersection of platform's design, affordances, and participatory culture frames the relation to whiteness that minority users construct their online collective voice.

### 2.3 **Networked Gatekeeping:**

Networked gatekeeping is defined as “a process through which actors are crowdsourced to prominence through the use of conversational, social practices that symbiotically connect elite and crowd in the determination of information relevancy” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015, p. 158). This framework exists as a flexible approach to information studies and blends traditional gatekeeping processes with social conventions that typically exist in networks. Barziali-Nahon (2008) first developed this theory as an interdisciplinary method to understand the “dynamic and contextual interpretation of gatekeeping” and to demonstrate how gatekeepers are “stakeholders who change their gatekeeping roles depending on the stakeholders with whom they interact and/or the context in which they are situated” (p. 1494).

Unlike prior top-down gatekeeping models, Barziali-Nahon's framework acknowledges the role of the gated—the entities subjected to gatekeeping—and explains that an actor's position within a network is dependent on “(a) their political power in relation to the gatekeeper, (b) their information production ability, (c) their relationship with the gatekeeper, and (d) their alternatives in the context of gatekeeping” (p. 1498). By acknowledging the role of the gated, networked gatekeeping captures the fluid power dynamics present in networked environments. Networked gatekeeping argues that the fluid nature of these power dynamics enables gated actors to be elevated to gatekeeper status. This framework emphasizes the nature of power in a networked context by

delineating the dynamic relationship between gatekeepers, the gated, and their different networked gatekeeping mechanisms. In the context of new media studies, networked gatekeeping reflects a shift from a linear information control model to an evolving networked structure of (human and non-human) actors as it captures the fluid power dynamics among the digital networks that constitute the new media ecology.

Building off Barzilai-Nahon's (2008) proposed framework, researchers such as Meraz and Papacharissi (2013; 2015) and Leavitt (2016) extended networked gatekeeping outside the purview of newsroom practices to explore how the formally gated audience can direct and influence the flow of information as crowd-centered platforms, like Reddit, promote open and fluid participation. In their application to crowd-centered environments they (1) find that networked gatekeeping practices afford non-elites the opportunity to become elevated to elite status, (2) outline the sociotechnical processes that enable them to do so, (3) explain how the structure and connective affordances determine the visibility of a community, (4) and illustrate how collective voices are bound to the limitations of a platform's architecture and affordances. The following sections outline these four conclusions in more detail to frame this thesis's methodological underpinnings.

### 2.3.1 **Social Media: A VOICE FOR THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE**

The application of networked gatekeeping on crowd-centered environments reveals how Web 2.0 applications enable sociotechnical processes that afford open and fluid participation among distributed publics. Specifically, moments of crisis and political unrest demonstrate these technologies' connective nature (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) and their ability to allow those who were previously subjected to the control of information (the gated) to mobilize and elevate non-elite members to gatekeeper status (Barzilai-Nahon,

2008; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). Ultimately, these networked gatekeeping studies portray how the utilization of Web 2.0 applications during moments of crisis and political unrest is able to disrupt the previous hierarchical and linear nature of information flow.

When millions protested in response to the fraudulent 2009 Iranian election, Twitter became the epicenter for disseminating critical information to dissenting publics as the state attempted to censor and limit access to other media coverage (Meraz & Papachariss, 2013). Through its ambient and affective news environment, Twitter enabled remote connectivity that broadcasted the united support of the resisting “diasporic publics” which led to Hosni Mubarak’s resignation as Egypt’s president (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, p. 139; Hermida, 2010; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveria, 2012). Similarly, Occupy’s coalition organized and informed their members about events using Facebook (Caren & Gaby, 2011), Twitter (Gleason, 2013; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Wang, Wang, Zhu, 2013), and YouTube (Thorson, Driscoll, Ekdale, Edgerly, Thompson, Schrock, Wells, 2013). More recently, Twitter became a central actor in confronting law enforcement’s lethal force against the Black community, which is now the Black Lives Matter Movement (Carney, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Lastly, Reddit afforded citizen journalists the ability to broadcast real-time updates during Hurricane Sandy (2012), the Aurora, Colorado shooting (2012), the Boston Marathon bombings (2013), and the Paris terrorist attacks (2015) (Leavitt, 2016; Leavitt & Clark 2014; Leavitt & Robinson, 2017a; Leavitt and Robinson, 2017b). By allowing individuals to circumvent traditional gatekeeping practices, these crowd-centered Web 2.0 applications enabled dissenting, underrepresented, and non-elite communities a voice in shaping their own narrative (Bruns, 2005; Hermida, 2013, 2012, 2010; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Stewart et. al., 2017).

In the context of information diffusion, these social movements and news events denote a shift in power between mainstream media conglomerates and the general public. Prior to Web 2.0 applications, information flow was a fixed linear structure in which news elites (gatekeepers) controlled what information the general public (the gated) received. Web 2.0 applications collapsed this structure by introducing a multidimensional networked communication process. The general public was no longer just an audience receiving information, instead they became active participants in the production, diffusion, and consumption of information. The moments of crisis and political unrest outlined above exist as specific points in time and space in which Web 2.0 affordances enabled peer-to-peer communication that mobilized online crowds. The mobilization of online crowds disrupted the traditional structure of information flow as non-elite actors were elevated to gatekeeper status. Ultimately, the adoption of Web 2.0 applications signaled a new media ecology in which power is not fixed but fluid.

### **2.3.2 Networking Gatekeeping and the Emergence of Network Publics**

In addition to disrupting traditional forms of information control, previous studies also illustrate how Web 2.0 applications signaled the emergence of networked gatekeeping mechanisms that allow users to negotiate and establish community boundaries. Hashtags, hyperlinks, upvotes, down votes et cetera prove to be mechanisms that afford users the ability to navigate boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, thus enabling networked publics to surface. Networked publics “are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (boyd, 2010, p. 39). Similar to offline publics, networked publics “allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes

and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family” (boyd, 2010, p. 39). In applying networked gatekeeping to crowd centered environments, these studies denote the sociotechnical processes that enable networked publics to emerge (boyd, 2012; Gajjala, 2007).

New media studies reveal how hashtags and hyperlinks yield homophilous effects. Homophily is an organizing principle that describes the tendency to form relationships among like-minded individuals (McPhearson et al., 2001; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). Studies on group formation suggest that communities are bred from homophily (McPhearson et al., 2001; Chun, 2019). On Twitter users navigate homophilous bonds via hashtags. Hashtags are sociotechnical affordances that allow users to collate and organize online conversations. When developed organically, hashtags can “attain characteristics of spontaneous interpersonal conversations or social awareness streams” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, p. 140). During the 2011 Egyptian uprising, 1.5 million tweets used #Egypt to broadcast the united support of dispersed publics. Meanwhile non-elites were elected as #Egypt’s networked gatekeepers, the most visible tweets emerged from the Middle East, thus revealing geographic homophily alongside the formation of #Egypt’s mediated networked public (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012).

Additionally, co-occurring hashtag studies demonstrate how homophilous networked publics organized themselves around broader conversations (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). During the 2016 US Presidential election, #immigration was used in association with identity hashtags allowing pro-Trump (#Trump), Pro-Hillary (#Hillary), and Latinx (#USLatino) communities to negotiate partisan and ethnic community borders. Similar

effects were also witnessed during the Black Lives Matter movement (Carney, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017). Researchers investigating this movement reported users placing #BLM in their bios as a method of “virtual ‘armbanding’” to disclose their allegiance. Stewart et al. (2017) explain that at the individual level these hashtags expressed political and ideological allegiances, but at the collective level they manifested “group identities and enabl[ed] group ties and organization by making members visible to others, internally and externally” (p. 96:19). Hashtags, then, are networked gatekeeping mechanisms that promote homophily and enable networked publics to come into being.

Previous studies also suggest that hyperlinks enable homophilic bonds (Dimitrova, Connolly-Ahern, Williams, Kaid, & Reid, 2003). Political blog networks demonstrate a tendency to link to other blogs that share ideological positions (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Meraz, 2009). Additionally, the #immigration study mentioned above revealed a clear division of URLs shared by progressive and conservative publics. While progressive networked publics were responsible for spreading sources that expressed a sympathetic sentiment toward legal and undocumented immigrants, the conservative communities spread sources that expressed negative sentiments (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). Although actors are more likely to link to sources that express similar ideologies, this does not mean that these users agree with the opinions these sources present. Xu & Feng (2014) found that citizens were more likely to engage with journalists of the same ideological camp, but the feedback was more negative than positive, indicating that users are not blindly following or supporting their opinions. Overall, these studies exhibit selective exposure practices that are driven by homophilic bonds as users “utilize

networked gatekeeping strategies embedded within social media applications to promote ideological consonance” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015, p. 103; Nahon & Hemsley, 2014).

The studies illustrate how hashtags and hyperlinks are used as networked gatekeeping mechanisms that allow networked publics to surface. Their ability to cross-link and facilitate connections amongst dispersed like-minded actors enables “channeling mechanisms” that function as “gateway stations designed to attract the attention of the gated and convey or direct them into or through their channels” (Barzilai-Nahon, 200, p.1498). In other words, hashtags and hyperlinks are sociotechnical affordances that allow users to curate boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. The open participation and fluid nature of power dynamics suggests that these boundaries are not static, but instead influence each other “on a continuum” (Gray, 2020, p. 21). As internet actors negotiate these boundaries using the site’s technical features a localization of homophilous norms, values, and beliefs in the form of networked publics emerges. These norms, values, and beliefs shape the networked publics’ collective identities and the digital-race assemblages they produced.

The networked gatekeeping studies outlined above are political in nature, and thus display how specific sets of political ideologies become localized in the digital sphere. This research is foundational in understanding the dynamic nature of power relations as they demonstrate not only how non-elites can be elevated to gatekeeper status but also how networked publics emerge. Although very little studies have explored Latinx online communities, research on Black cyberculture and Black online communities demonstrate how Web 2.0 applications enable the localization of a shared set of relationships to whiteness. To illustrate how the localization of a shared set of relationships to whiteness

enables minority users to establish their own online spaces, this thesis turns its attention to Black cyberculture and Black online communities.

### 2.3.2.1 **Black cyberculture: Agency Reclaimed**

Despite the pervasiveness of the internet's default whiteness, Black cyberculture demonstrates a "natural affinity" for constructing digital-race assemblages that challenge mainstream white framings of Black identity (Brock, 2020, p. 5). These digital-race assemblages reflect how Black users leverage Web 2.0's sociotechnical architecture and affordances to afford themselves agency over their collective identity and decentralizes "whiteness as the default internet identity" (Brock, 2020, p. 5). Since the inception of the internet to currently trending Black Twitter hashtags, Black cyberculture and online Black communities have demonstrated a keen aptitude for mobilizing connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The ability to forge connections among distributed populations and collectively organize has enabled "a proclamation of reclaiming narratives and identities across media and platforms" (Gray, 2020, p. 18). Ultimately, Black cyberculture and Black online communities are a testament of the empowerment that comes from the ability to digitally navigate a relationship that is not within whiteness, but in relation to whiteness.

The following is a brief overview of Black Identity, Black cyberculture, and Black online communities as it relates to the boundaries of this thesis. For a more comprehensive understanding Black Identity, Black cyberculture, and Black Online communities please refer to the foundational and conical works cited below.

#### 2.3.2.1.1 **A Very brief overview of Black Identity**

As members of a society that was built on the backs of their enslaved ancestors, braving white hegemonic norms is the fabric of Black identity (Morrison,

1993). Although not the sum of Black identity, “African-descended people existed within slavery’s complicated visual culture and were consistent forces in its maintenance and deconstruction” (Cobb, 2015, p. 10). In other words, the portrait that is Black identity is incomplete without understanding how “Black people re-presented themselves apart from bondage” (Cobb, 2015, p. 10). From the 15th to the 19th century bondage, rape, and pillage were mechanisms of whiteness that were utilized to dehumanize Black people to the point of objecthood (Fanon, 1963). As a technology of systematic oppression, whiteness sutured itself into the legacies that is Black identity (Chun, 2012; Gray, 2020; Fanon, 1963). As author Ibi Zoboi explains, “there can be no Black without white. No racism without race” (Zoboi, 2019 p. xi)

Represented as “a universal marker for being civilized”, whiteness is posited as the dominant race (Giroux, 1996, p. 75). It anchors itself by defining what it is not white, Othering everyone else, and solidifying its power by constructing the image of non-whites “within the language of pathology, fear, madness, and degeneration” (p. 75). In the digital sphere, “whiteness is itself signified as a universal, raceless, technoculture identity” (Brock, 2020, p. 1). This is illustrated in early online role-playing games in which the sociotechnical features did not afford users to communicate their race and were thus assumed white or became targets of hate speech (Nakamura, 2002). Whiteness, then, “is what technology does to the Other, not the technology users themselves” (Brock, 2020, p. 1). Although not fixed, whiteness is harnessed within the digital-race assemblages produced by non-white users. Situated within whiteness, representations of the Other are singular, flattened, one dimensional, and linear (Hall, 2018a; McEwan, 2021). Framed within whiteness, the

narratives of the Other withers into familiar stereotypical representations. To put it into networked gatekeeping terms, when whiteness is the *gatekeeper*, the Other is the *gated*.

Situated within a white hegemonic framing, “American identity is bounded and extended by negative stereotypes of Black identity” (Brock, 2012, p. 532; Morrison, 1993). Historically dehumanized, objectified, and treated as property, mainstream representations of Black people “are impregnated with unconscious racism because they are all predicated on the unstated and unrecognized assumption that blacks are the source of the problem” (Hall, 2018b, p.98). Realizing the hegemony of whiteness philosopher-psychiatrist Franz Fanon (1968) eloquently reflects, “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” (p. 109). While Fanon describes himself as “sealed into that crushing objecthood”, Baldwin, in a letter to his nephew explains, “Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar” (1962, p. 9). In 1971 Malcom X addresses how “No matter how old you get, or how bold you get, or how wise you get, or how rich you get, or how educated you get, the white man still calls you what? Boy! Why, you are a child in his eyesight!” And you *are* a child” (p. 37). Whiteness when situated as *the* gatekeeper of Black Identity is fixed, arrested, and “deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you” (Baldwin, 1962, p. 8).

To free Blackness from the grips of white supremacy, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) acknowledges how the Black soul exists in a state of “double consciousness”:

“this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One

ever feels just twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength along keeps it from being torn asunder.”

Du Bois’s (1903) canonical work brings to light the trauma of slavery, which illustrates how the Black soul is split--forever existing in multiple realities. The notion of double consciousness acknowledges that what it means to be Black differs from those who are Black and those who assert a white framing of Black Identity. This multiplicity of self parallels the dynamic relationship between the gatekeeper/gated. In the context of networked gatekeeping, Du Bois is acknowledging that Black people are both the gatekeepers and the gated of their own identity. When the Black community is positioned as the gated to their own collective identity, the representation of Black identity is framed within an oppressive fixed lens rooted in white supremacy. However, when the Black community is positioned as the gatekeeper of their own identity, representations of Black identity are framed not within but in relation to whiteness. In *Breaking the Chain* (Hall, 2018a) narratives that were once invisible suddenly become visible to the mainstream eye such as Black joy, “catharsis about being Black”, “mundanity, banality, and the celebration of making it through another day” (Joseph, July, 29, 2020; Brock, 2020, p.10). Du Bois, in bringing to light the Black soul’s state of double consciousness, effectively breaks the chain of white supremacy. Ultimately, double consciousness recognizes the Black community’s agency and thus their ability to be the gatekeepers of their own collective identity.

The notion of double consciousness--navigating your identity not just in your own eyes, or in the eyes of others like you, but in the eyes of the ruling class- as it intersects with technology is witnessed in early conceptualizations of Black Freedom. In her work,

Communication Scholar Jasmine Nichole Cobb (2015) traces the contrasting visual histories of Black Freedom as framed by white and Black people “between the years of gradual emancipation laws emerging in 1780 and the Fugitive Slave Laws of 1850” (p. 6). White caricaturists, like Edward Clay Williams, often displayed “free Blacks engaged in ridiculous forms of civic and domestic life” (p.4). Cobb explains, “even in freedom Black people remained too connected to slavery and low socioeconomic standing” (p.4). From the onset of emancipation, representation of Black identity as framed within whiteness worked “to portray Black freedom as ridiculous or implausible” (p. 4). Contrasting Clay’s racist propaganda are archives of miniature Black self-making daguerreotypes. Cobb explains, “Black people appearing in early daguerreotypes used this new media form to picture freedom, to image and imagine people of African descent as self-possessed and divorced from slavery” (p.3). Daguerreotypes, which can be thought of as 19th century profile pictures, allowed Black people to “display ownership of the self as distinct from slavery” (p.3). The ability to pose for a Black photographer afforded the Black community agency over their representation of self, thus creating an environment in which they were the gatekeepers of their collective voice. Cobb explains how Black women used clothing, jewelry, and books as gatekeeping mechanisms to stage “intelligence and literacy” (p. 2). The contrasting images of Black Freedom not only illustrate the notion of double consciousness, but a history in which Black people engage with technologies to afford themselves agency. Today, the digital-race assemblages that emerge from Black cyberculture continue this legacy as they effectively decentralize the internet’s default whiteness and produce new meanings of what it means to be Other.

#### 2.3.2.1.2 **What is Black Cyberculture**

As critical race and technoculture scholar Brock (2020) explains, “Black cyberculture can be understood as the protean nature of Black identity as mediated by various digital artifacts, services, and practices both individually and in concert” (p. 5). Black cyberculture represents the intersection of Black identity and the digital as “a transformative cultural philosophy of representation, technoculture, politics, and everyday life” (p. 6) Black cyberculture is not a fixed digital ecology, it is intersectional and transmediative— existing both on and offline across platforms and media simultaneously (Gray, 2020). Black cyberculture differs from research on Black online culture in that it “interrogates an ontological perspective of what Blackness means for technology use and, occasionally, design” (Brock, 2020, p. 6). In the context of online communities, Black cyberculture represents a specific set of negotiations of norms, values, and beliefs that have a shared set of relationships to the internet’s default whiteness. As illustrated above, this shared set of relations to whiteness is rooted in white supremacy given the U.S.’s history of enslaving, oppressing, and dehumanizing Black people. Whereas Black identity framed within whiteness operates by “sustaining stereotypical narratives of blackness,” Black cyberculture moves “away from the deficit model of having to justify black experiences through white acceptance and justification” (Gray, 2020, p. 19). This thesis provides a brief overview of Black cyberculture and Black online communities to demonstrate the ways in which Black users have effectively utilized Web 2.0 applications to afford themselves agency in and out of the digital sphere. Again, the following is only a brief overview as it relates to the boundaries of this thesis. For a more comprehensive understanding, please refer to the works cited above and in the following paragraphs.

As previously mentioned, early role-playing sites such as LambdaMoo did not offer users the ability to disclose their race and/or ethnicity. At the turn of the century, a new role-playing platform emerged that allowed users to create characters of color: SIMs (2000). Although SIMs provided racial and ethnic identity features, these affordances were limited. Wallace Mack Jr., host of the Reply All podcast, explains how SIMs' defaults were "white as hell" and reflected "what white people think all black people look like" (2018). At its default, SIMs' sociotechnical architecture and affordances were constructed within a white framing of Black identity. Frustrated with the game's limited features, a group of Black users created the website The Black Simmer—a forum designed to submit and disseminate custom game modifications that were made with the Black player in mind (The Nod, 2018). When creating avatars in the default version of SIMs, Black users were limited to the skin tones and hairstyles the game developers provided. When modified, SIMs enabled users to choose from various skin tones and hairstyles, larger details like churches, and even small cultural artifacts like Country Crock butter containers that were filled with everything but butter (The Nod, 2018). The Black Simmer transformed SIMs discursive landscape as it afforded Black users the ability to digitally rebuild their own cultural experiences and norms. The ability to modify the platform's default feature enabled Black users to decentralize the internet's default whiteness. In decentralizing the internet's default whiteness, these users manipulated the site's architecture and affordance to produce a diversity of digital-race assemblages that are specific to their community. The Black Simmer is an example of Black users engaging with the open and inclusive logic of Web 2.0 applications to afford themselves agency over the construction of their community's identity.

Unlike LambdaMoo, SIMs and The Black Simmer are examples of Web 2.0 applications. As previously mentioned, Web 2.0 marked a new era in which users were not just consumers. Instead, users could create and produce content, thus becoming active participants in the dissemination of information. The ability to modify SIMS's default features demonstrates the open and inclusive logic of Web 2.0 systems. The ability to manipulate the site's architecture and affordance to produce digital-race assemblages that are specific to the Black community illustrates the fluid gatekeeper/gated relationship that Web 2.0 platforms enable. The ability to decentralize the internet's default whiteness by engaging with the application to afford oneself agency over their avatar's racial and/or ethnic identity evinces the ability to navigate and localize a specific and shared set of relationships to whiteness. Ultimately, SIMs and The Black Simmer website highlight the sociotechnical processes that afford minority users the ability to produce digital-race assemblages that are not framed *within* whiteness but instead *in relation to* whiteness.

Like the digital-race assemblages that emerge from The Black Simmer website, #BlackLivesMatter also narrates a reclaiming of agency. The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) can be traced back to 2013 when "community organizers Alicia Garza and Patrice Cullors used #BlackLivesMatter in Facebook posts in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin" (Stewart et al., 2017, p. 2). The hashtag (which at times is shortened to #BLM) spread virally on social media and became a symbol and organizing channel for unveiling the truth about the law enforcement's lethal force against the Black community (Carney, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Over the past 8 years the movement has experienced several waves, each coinciding with the unjust death of a Black person at the hands of law enforcement. Most recently in 2020 the movement reached a

new height when #BlackLivesMatter was tweeted roughly 47.8 million times and 15 to 26 million Americans took to the streets in response to George Floyd's death. Today, BLM is recognized as one of the largest movements in US history (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel, 2020). BLM uprisings have also been witnessed in Nigeria, Brazil, and all over the Caribbean (Adelakun, 2019; Telles, 2017; Noel, July 2020). By connecting dissenting and dispersed public, Web 2.0 applications enabled BLM networked publics to forge Black identity across the globe. BLM is a coalition of a broad array of people and organizations from all over the world that expands across media and platforms. In the context of this study, BLM demonstrates how networked public represent a localization of a specific set of relationships to whiteness that are not only shared but diverse.

#BlackLiveMatter and #BLM have also been central in illustrating the disruption of top-down information flow and the ability to elevate non-elite actors to gatekeeper status (Carney, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017). As Gray (2020) explains “The aftermath of Mike Brown’s death in 2014, for instance, revealed the power of this innovative engagement: the once-invisible could now actively engage, participate, and produce content in hyper visible ways” (p. 17). This innovative engagement that Web 2.0 applications afford users allowed for issues that are central to the Black community that were once invisible to become visible. Therefore, “[i]n the context of #BlackLivesMatter, the combination of the textual and the visual ignited not only a movement but also a proclamation of reclaiming narratives and identities across media and platforms—from #BlackLivesMatter to Black-ish to The Breakfast Club” (p. 17).

In addition to tweeting #BlackLiveMatter, scholars have found that users place #BLM and #BlackLiveMatter in their bios as a form of “virtual ‘armbanding’”. As

previously mentioned above, Stewart et al. (2017) explain that at the individual level these hashtags express political and ideological allegiances, but at the collective level they manifest “group identities and [enabled] group ties and organization by making members visible to others, internally and externally” (p. 96:19). Therefore, #BlackLivesMatter and #BLM has not only disrupted traditional forms of power dynamics, but these hashtags have also been known to function as gatekeeping mechanisms that establish community boundaries. In the context of online identity formation, these hashtags demonstrate how diverse and shared sets of relationships to whiteness become localized in the digital sphere.

This localization effect implemented through the use of hashtags is also witnessed in the digital-race assemblages that emerge from Black Twitter and other online Black communities. In addition to dismantling traditional forms of power and information flow, Web 2.0 applications allow users to construct and organize virtual communities through shared content (Kienzle, 2016). Via sociotechnical features such as hashtags, these systems enable “a measure of autonomy in the creation and facilitation of space for online community” (Steele, 2017, p. 122). In doing so, users are able to negotiate the boundaries that define and assemble their community within the virtual sphere. For the Black community, this means that “public discussions among Black folk that were once limited to Black-owned barbershops and beauty salons” were able to be recreated in the digital social sphere, thus enabling them to carve out an environment in which “conversations about being Black in America” were bound to mediated connections among Black users (Brock, 2012, p. 32). Since the late 1980’s, sites such as The Drum (launched in 1988), Melanet (launched in 1989), NetNoir (launched in 1995), and Blackplanet (launched

in 1999) have evinced this community's success in establishing, maintaining, and promoting their own online communities (Byrne, 2007; Eglash & Bleecker, 2001). Today, trending Black Twitter hashtags and the Black Lives Matter movement are markers that signify their continued ability to do so.

#### 2.3.2.1.3 **It Is Not All About the Technology**

While the ability to establish online communities might seem like a virtue of Web 2.0 applications, history reminds us that since the inception of Black social clubs and organizations, networking among the Black community has been utilized as a mechanism to strengthen community ties (Byrne, 2007). To combat white hegemonic norms, Black Americans deliberately created networks as a “coping mechanism and as a means of providing each other with access to social resources that would otherwise be unavailable to them” (Byrne, 2007, p. 321; Herd & Grube, 1996; Lee, Campbell, & Miller, 1991). While Web 2.0 systems demonstrate a potential “to be used by marginalized communities to challenge, extend, and refashion already existent resistant communication practices”, these network-based applications amplify the Black community's ability to strengthen in-group ties, thus revealing how they “leverage the artifacts of a new communication medium to articulate a counter-hegemonic vision of Black identity” (Steele, 2017, p. 122; Brock, 2012, p.32). Ultimately, Black cyberculture and Black online communities demonstrate the ability to navigate and localize a specific set of relationships to whiteness by establishing, maintaining, and promoting a virtual space in which the traditionally gated are the gatekeepers. These spaces empower Black people to negotiate and define their collective identity in relation to whiteness, thus displaying how the digital-race assemblage of Black identity enables a state of “double consciousness” in the virtual sphere.

The representations of people of color in early role-playing games and the segregation between Myspace and Facebook suggest that Web 2.0 systems were not designed to challenge hegemonic norms or promote the voices of minorities. Despite the racist ideologies ingrained in the design and production of these systems, Black cyberculture and Black online communities demonstrate the ability to use these technologies as an instrument to counter hegemonic framings of Black identity. By challenging white hegemonic norms, Black cyberculture and Black online communities illustrate how the digital materiality of race and ethnicity is capable of transcending its oppressive state as a classification system. While the ability to transcend this oppressive state might seem like the virtue of these technological systems, history reminds us that the Black community has utilized communication technologies to afford themselves agency over their collective identity since daguerreotypes were the main style of profile pictures. Additionally, the history of Black social clubs and organizations reminds us that networking is (at the very least) a several centuries old mechanism utilized by the Black community to strengthen in-group ties. Therefore, for nearly 300 years the Black community has demonstrated a keen attitude in using communication and networking systems to actively counter white hegemonic framings of Black identity.

Overall, the digital-race assemblages that emerge from Black online communities and Black cyberculture have been foundational in providing new meanings of what it means to be Other. When framed within whiteness, Black identity is represented as a singular identity. By being the gatekeepers of their own collective identity, Black users have broken this singularity by providing diverse meanings of what it means to be Black. While Web 2.0 applications were central in producing these new meanings, they merely

magnify how the Black community have leveraged communication technologies to afford themselves agency over their collective identity. *But what happens when hegemonic norms incite intra-community conflict instead of strengthening in-group ties?*

Well, that is the story of Latinx identity, a collective identity imposed on a population that is racially and ethnically diverse. Instead of strengthening in-group ties, the Latinx community's shared relationship to whiteness incites intra-community conflict. The following sections present an overview of Latinx identity and Latinx online communities to illustrate why Latinx networked public struggle to become visible in the digital sphere.

### 2.3.2.2 **Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá: Latinx Identity and Latinx Online Communities**

For anyone who is racially ambiguous, being asked, "*What are you?*" evokes an internal negotiation process incited by struggles of power and equality (Alcoff, 2005; Hall, 1989). People who subscribe to Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, country of origin, or [country of origin]-American know this dance all too well. It is a struggle rooted in the liminal nature of Latinx identity. Positioned between race and ethnicity, Latinx identity is and exists liminally (Loveman, 2014). While white Latinx people exist, as a community they have never been accepted as white (Gomez, 2018). They are compared to other races, but they are not racialized in the same way as Black and Asian people (Bottcher, Hausberger, and Torres, 2011). The racial and ethnic diversity that defines Latinx identity positions them between race and ethnicity, hence the liminal nature of their collective identity (Gonzales, 2009). To be Latinx is to never fully fit into one racial category, but to still be Othered yet encouraged to achieve whiteness (Hernández, 2015).

Latinx identity's in-between nature is not only an internally lived experience, but also actively acknowledged by out-group members. Early 20th century sociologists defined

Mexicans as “partly colored” people and acknowledged how the U.S. “... has no technique for handling partly colored races. We have a place for the Negro and a place for the white man: the Mexican is not a Negro, and the white man refuses him equal status” (Handman, 1930, p. 609-610). The structure of race and ethnicity as erected by white American hegemony did not have a system for stratifying the “partly colored” (Omi & Winant, 1994). This systematic glitch incited homogenization and assimilation campaigns that aimed to group Latin America people on the axis of their white European ancestry. Consequently, an identity dissonance emerged between in-group and out-group members.

Out-group members generalize Latinx people as Hispanic or some variation of the term Latino. In-group members, however, grapple with the internal struggle of representing where they came from without erasing the political, historical, and genealogical meanings that unites them. Instead of uniting themselves under a single label, Latinx people fragment themselves as they navigate multiple racial and ethnic labels at once. A person born in the U.S. whose parents are Mexican is not just Latinx. They are Latinx, Latina, Hispanic, Chicana, Mexican, Mexican-American, and America individually and simultaneously. Ultimately, the process of simultaneously navigating multiple racial and ethnic labels, understanding the significance of their performance, negotiating their multiple meanings, and conforming to whichever one *best* represents you in the eyes of the white man is fundamentally Latinx (Alcoff, 2005).

#### 2.3.2.2.1 **One day the White Men Came...**

The political, historical, and genealogical meanings that constitute Latinx identity are the product of the multiple white hegemonic structures that attempted to homogenize people of African, Asian, Indigenous, and European descent (Alcoff, 2005). The

multiple racial and ethnic labels a Latinx person navigates has been uniquely sculpted by each of these white hegemonic powers. While the history of Latinx identity begins long before Columbus's arrival, Latinx's relationship to whiteness begins with the colonization of the Americas. Spain, Portugal, France, and Great Britain were among the first European countries to colonize Latin America (Seed, 2001; Martin, 2011) Each Crown had its own colonizing technique (slavery, missionaries, assimilation, genocide, et cetera,) that uniquely shaped Latinx identity. Spain, however, was the dominant force.

From the late 15th to early 19th century, the Spanish Crown conquered the territory of modern-day Canada, most of the Caribbean, all the way down to Cape Horn (Gibson, 1966). Second to Spain was Portugal, which shaped the foundation of whiteness in present day Brazil, Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bethell, 1984). As the dominant colonizing force, Spain's caste system established a foundational relationship to whiteness from which Latinx identity is still framed today (De Guzman, 2017; Guidotti-Hernández, 2017; Hernández, 2015; Torres, 2018; Alcoff, 2005). Unlike British America, relations with the Indigenous populations were not prohibited in New Spain. Instead, interracial relations and marriages were mechanisms of assimilation that produced a complex caste system in which in which skin color became "a central axis of social stratification" (Bethell, 1984; Twinam, 2002; Hernández, 2015, p. 684).

In New Spain, social status was intrinsically linked to the cleanliness of one's blood or "La Limpieza De Sangre" (Bottcher, Hausberger, and Torres, 2011). The more Indigenous, Asian, or African blood a person's skin tone presented, the more they were treated as Other (McAlister, 1963). This stratification of the Other was actively

acknowledged by in-group and out-group members. German explorer and scientist Alexander Von Humboldt (1803) notes:

In a country governed by whites, the families reputed to have the least mixture of Negro or mulatto blood are also naturally the most honored. In Spain it is almost a title of nobility to descend neither from Jews nor Moors. In America the greater or less degree of whiteness of skin decides the rank which man occupies in society. A white who rides barefooted on horseback thinks he belongs to the nobility of the country

The stratum of skin color established by New Spain's caste system cultivated a collective identity that was liminal in nature.

#### 2.3.2.2.2 **They say it's all about the bleached genes**

Today, skin tone/color continues to function as a central axis of social status in Latin America. This system of colorism is deeply anchored in phenotypical appearances.

Critical race theorist, Tanya K. Hernández (2015) explains:

skin color measures capture racial inequalities that solitary racial categories often miss. This is because racial fluidity in Latin America is based upon the premise that racial classifications are determined more closely by how one phenotypically appears to belong to one race rather than strictly by one's ancestors.

Latin America colorism, which is rooted in New Spain's caste system, establishes the foundation of Latinx identity's relationship to whiteness. Approximately one-third of Latin America's population is of African descent, yet approaching whiteness is still recognized as an "aspiration and possibility of transforming one's social status" (Hernández, 2015, p.

684). The ability to navigate in between skin tones in an attempt to latch oneself to the whitest one is the liminal dance that is fundamentally Latinx.

#### 2.3.2.2.3 **When rebel forces unite**

Although whiteness is recognized as an opportunity for social mobility among Latin Americans, history reminds us that not everyone in Latin America readily accepted this hegemonic system. Latin America has a long history of rebellions, revolutions, and wars of independence provoked by racial inequality (Ortiz, 2018). In Peru in 1780, Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui recruited “a massive army that included Indigenous Peruvians, mestizos, *libertos*, and slaves, in an effort to end European rule forever” (Ortiz, 2018, p.12: Castillo, 2013). In 1804, an insurrection led by slaves defeated European armies, which resulted in Haiti’s independence from France (Scott, 2018). In Mexico, Jose Maria Morelos, Miguel Hidalgo, and Vicente Guerrero--leaders of the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821)—recruited fighters “by invoking the ideals of ‘civil rights and racial equality’”(Ortiz, 2018, p. 34). Specifically, Morelos “seized every opportunity to publicly denounce slavery as well as caste repression against Indigenous people” (p. 34). In Cuba, Jose Marti united the island's diverse population and ignited a revolutionary war in the name of racial equality and justice. Together, slaves, mulattos, mestizos, and Indigenous people fought together and won their independence from Spain. (Chomsky, Carr, Pamela, and Smorkaloff, 2003).

All throughout Latin America’s history are pivotal moments in which non-white populations band together to fight off their white European oppressors (Leon-Portilla, 1959, Gonzales, 2009, Acosta, 2002, Ortiz, 2018, p.12: Castillo, 2013, Scott, 2018).

When these non-white Latin American people were successful in overthrowing the

government of their white oppressors, they replaced them with their own governments that deliberately moved towards racial equality. After Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, it abolished slavery in 1829 and became a safe haven for slaves seeking freedom in surrounding countries (Ortiz, 2018). Yes, Latin America has a history of inciting a white hegemonic system of norm centered on skin color, but it also has a history of non-white populations uniting in effort to dismantle it. Like New Spain's caste system, these forms of resistance have also shaped Latinx identity. The revolts, rebellions, revolutions, and wars of independence fought against the European powers by Latin America's non-white populations symbolize a collective resistance of white hegemonic norms. This resistance of white hegemonic norms, which echo today in the streets of East LA, California, Magnolia Park, Texas, Humboldt Park, Illinois, East Harlem, New York, and etc., further captures the Latinx identity's liminal nature.

#### 2.3.2.2.4 **Latinx identity in a U.S. Context part 1: U.S. Imperialism**

Whereas New Spain's caste system and the collective acts of resistance by non-white populations constructed the foundation of Latinx identity, U.S. imperialism and the U.S.'s attempt to homogenize Latinx people erected the architectural frame of Latinx identity in a U.S. context. U.S. imperialism, which is traced back to the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848), served as mechanism to preserve slavery, obtain access to raw materials, incept ideas of American exceptionalism, and ignite the rise of the U.S. as a world superpower (Spalding, 1998; Grandin, 2006; Gomes, 2018; Ortiz, 2018). U.S. imperialism set the stage for how Latinx identity became framed within a U.S. context. One of the first representations of Latinx identity in a U.S. context was circulated during the years leading up to the U.S. Mexican War. Historian Laura Gomez (2018) explains:

American ideas about the racial inferiority of its Mexican enemies had been in wide circulation during the debates leading up to the war and during the war itself...But they came to head in 1848, as the question of how much territory Mexico would cede to the United States became paramount. Debates in Washington, D.C., and in the nation's major newspapers reflected racist concerns about incorporating 'too many Mexicans', and the goal of ending the war became entangled with the goal of getting the most land from Mexico with the smallest number of Mexicans.

More than 115,000 Mexicans lived in the land that Mexico ceded to the U.S. in 1848. While some moved South of the newly established U.S.-Mexico border, most stayed (Gomez, 2018). Those that stayed were offered the option to retain their Mexican citizenship and those that did not retain their Mexican citizenship were considered U.S. citizens after one year. Although considered U.S. citizens, Gomez (2018) explains that the nature of their rights was "legally vague" as these Mexicans were only granted federal and not state citizenship (p. 45). While "[f]ederal citizenship extended the protection of the Constitution and provided 'a shield of nationality' abroad" it "did not convey political rights. Instead, political rights stemmed only from being a citizen of a *state*" (p. 45). From the onset, Latinx people in the U.S. were treated as second class citizens and Othered by their white leaders. Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Filipinos, and Chamorros faced a similar fate after the Spanish-U.S. War of 1898.

1898 was a pivotal year in molding U.S.-Latin American relations (Grandin 2006; Spalding, 1998). The 1898 Treaty of Paris ended what is commonly known as the Spanish-American War, but as scholars today explain, the Spanish-American war is a misnomer because it also involved the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guantanamo

bay (Spalding, 1998). The Treaty of Paris of 1898 relinquished all of Spain's claim of sovereignty and title to Cuba and ceded Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States (Spalding, 1998). By Fall of 1898 the "United States had occupied Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and parts of the Philippines" (Spalding, 1998, para. 7). While nearly all of Latin American was independent of Spain by 1920, it "had come under various amounts of control by the United States, either through annexation, colonization or a more diffuse but still very powerful control exerted through territorial treaties, military occupation, and neo-colonial relations of economic subordination" (Alcoff, 2005, p. 401). After establishing naval bases in Cuba and declaring Puerto Rico a 'US territory', the U.S. "engineered a coup to create Panama as a nation separate from Colombia...thus created a base of economic, political, and military operations by which it could oversee everything to the south; its base in Panama was named, again aptly, the 'Southern Command'." (Alcoff, 2005, p. 401). 1898 was a pivotal year because it symbolized a transfer of power. Spain's departure from the Western hemisphere allowed the U.S to insert its own white hegemonic norms into the lives of the ancestors and immigrants who would come to shape the U.S.'s Latinx community in the 20th and 21st century (Alcoff, 2005; Spalding, 1998; Gradin, 2006; Mignolo, 2012).

American exceptionalism is an ongoing propaganda campaign that justifies the U.S. as the white savior of underdeveloped countries and an ideal model of freedom and democracy (Ramrattan & Szenberg, 2017). Ideologically, it is rooted in "the superiority of the 'white Anglo-Saxon race' whose destiny was to civilize the world over the 'white Catholic Christians and Latins'" (Mignolo, 2012, p. 32-33). These notions of white supremacy can be traced back to U.S. political cartoons published in newspapers as early as

1898 (Martínez-Fernández, 1998). Latin American historian, John J. Johnson (2003) explains:

The cartoons reveal the awakening imperial pretensions of the United States following the defeat of Spain in 1898. Cuba and Cubans are portrayed as infants, carefree children, or rowdy, undisciplined youths, requiring the constant guidance and tutelage of the United States. Cubans are not only infantilized; they are frequently represented as blacks who are alternatively cheerful, irresponsible, lazy, dim, and grotesquely deformed-- reflecting stereotypes common in the United States in the period between the Civil War and World War I.

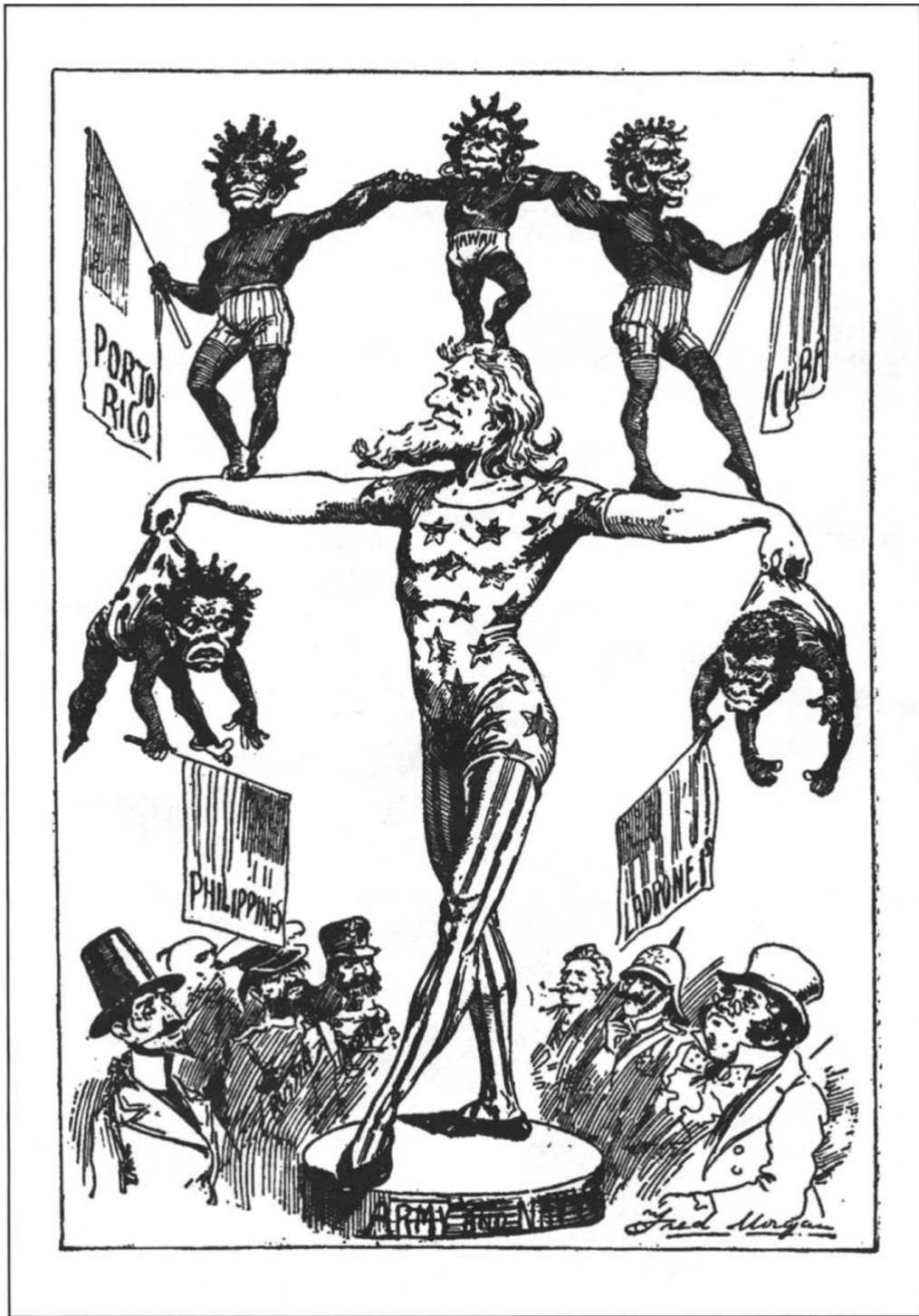
These comics were not only gatekeeping mechanisms that helped shape the U.S.'s superiority in the Western hemisphere (see Figure 1), but they were also some of the first representations of Latinx identity as framed within a U.S. context. By using stereotypical racist representations of Black people to depict Cubans Latinx identity becomes racialized. In sum, these comics further solidify the liminality of Latinx identity as Latinx people are sometimes racialized but always Othered.

Figure 1. Representations of Latinx Identity in U.S. Political Cartoons (1896-1905).



Cartoon 2. How Some Apprehensive People Picture Uncle Sam after the War. (*Detroit News*, 1898.)

Figure 1A. Example of political cartoon that appeared in the *Detroit News* in 1898.



Cartoon 3. JOHN BULL: "It's really most extraordinary what training will do. Why, only the other day I thought that man unable to support himself." (Fred Morgan, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1898.)

Figure 1B. Example of political cartoon that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1898.



Figure 1. Cartoon appeared in the *Chicago Inter Ocean* 1898.

#### 2.3.2.2.5 **Latinx identity in a U.S. Context part 2: white is right**

While U.S imperialism established one of the dimensions of whiteness that frames Latinx identity in a U.S. context, the official grouping of Latin American people did not occur until 1978. In 1978 the Federal Office of Management and Budget instituted Hispanic as the official appellation for anyone “whose ‘culture or origin’ is Spanish, ‘regardless of race’” (Toro, 1998, p. 53). The need to classify this population was in response to the millions of immigrants that came from Central and South America and the Caribbean after the 1965 immigration law lifted immigration quotas. Alcoff explains,

in order to be able to name and govern (in a Foucauldian sense) this burgeoning population, in 1978 the Federal Office of Management and Budget issued Directive No. 15 which instituted the name Hispanic, at the suggestion of the king of Spain(!), for all those ‘whose “culture or origin” is Spanish, “regardless of race”’.

From 1978 to 2010, every census and most government documents used the term Hispanic to designate Latin American people. Additionally, Directive No. 15 also defined Hispanic as a non-racialized ethnicity. In the context of achieving whiteness, being classified as a non-racialized ethnicity might seem like an advantage, but Lopez (1998) reminds us that this is not always the case. In the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Hernández vs. Texas*, the court ruled that the absence of Mexicans in Hernández’s jury was not discriminatory. The Court’s ruling determined that Mexicans (due to their Spanish ancestry) were white, and thus not protected under racial discrimination laws. Therefore, not only are Latinx people still Othered when defined as white but establishing Hispanic as a non-racialized ethnicity

washes away the population's multi-national history and their Black, Indigenous, and Asian roots.

Attempts to whitewash Latinx people are evidenced long before the U.S. government officiated the term. From the 1880's to the 1930's The Ford English school was an institution designed to Americanize immigrant workers and teach them English (Barrett, 1992). In 1931, we, California taught Spanish-speaking residents English and American civics (Sutro, October 2010). More recently critical race and ethnicity scholars have acknowledged how America's public education system functions as an institution that standardizes white hegemonic norms (Yosso, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dixson & Anderson 2017). Central to these Americanization efforts is the standardization of English and white American norms. The ability to speak white American English without an accent and adopt white America norms function as a metric of effective assimilation (Bleakley, 2007). This is not specific to Latinx people, but to all non-white people. Efforts to assimilate Latin American people to white American norms is not only evidenced in the U.S. but also abroad. From Mexico's road infrastructure to the popularization of Baseball in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the imitation of American standards and culture throughout Latin America was framed as a pathway toward modernization (Bess, 2014; Sotomayor, 2017). In other words, assimilation was and is a mechanism of modern colonization.

Despite the U.S. government's homogenization and assimilation efforts, recent polls reveal that first and second-generation Latin Americans prefer to identify by their country of origin, whereas third generation Latinx people tend to favor American (Cohn, 2012). These generational differences depict how a Latinx person's relationship to whiteness is situational and dependent on their immigrant roots (Cohn, Brown, and Lopez,

2021). Furthermore, these appellation preferences illustrate an intra-community resistance against pan-ethnic appellations. Despite being widely used, nearly two decades of research evidence shows that pan-ethnic labels are not “universally embraced by the community” (Cohn et. al, 2021; Lopez, Krogstad, Passel, 2021, para. 17). Refusing to embrace the pan-ethnic labels instituted by the U.S. government symbolizes the Latinx community’s active resistance toward homogenization. Consequently, this resistance produced a dissonance between what Latinx people identify as and what governing institutions call them.

This identity dissonance between in-group and out-group members has produced a social environment in which Latinx people subscribe to and navigate multiple racial and ethnic labels. The political, historical, and genealogical meaning of each of these identity markers is not static but socially variable. In fact, “it is a very common experience among many Latinos to have our ethnic labels change as we enter the United States or even simply as we change locations within it” (Alcoff, 2005, p. 397-398). Studies on Brazilian identity depict how many Brazilian immigrants view themselves as white, but Americans see them as Black (Martes, 2007). To be Latinx means to not only subscribe to many racial and/or ethnic labels at once, but to navigate all of their possible meanings. In the American Southwest, Latinx people, especially Republican Latinx people, are known to use Hispanic instead of Latino when identifying themselves in pan-ethnic terms, because Latino is commonly used by out-group members (Alcoff, 2005). Latinx liberals and academics, on the other hand, are known to promote variation of Latin@/x, because Hispanic negates the Indigenous, African, and Asian roots that define Latinx identity. Identity markers and their meaning are not only dependent on the socioeconomic status, ancestry, religion, political

affiliation, cultural ideologies, geographic location et cetera, of the person identifying themselves but also that of the person they are identifying themselves to. Ultimately, ideological and demographic diversity is central to the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity.

#### 2.3.2.2.6 **A community divided is never united: Hispanic vs. Latin@/x**

The U.S. government's homogenization and assimilation efforts attempt to wash away the ideological and demographic diversity that is central to Latinx identity. These modern colonization tactics have incited intra-community conflict regarding identity politics. In fact, "contestation over ethnic and cultural names, including the invention of new names and the reinterpretation of old names, has been an integral part of political movements among Latinos in the USA since the 1960s" (Acloff, 2005, p. 397). This contention is rooted in the community's ideological differences regarding how to navigate their multiple relationships to whiteness without erasing the different political, historical, and genealogical meanings that unites them. Their demographic and ideological diversity situates them between race and ethnicity. The liminal nature of their identity allows Latinx people to navigate the in-between spaces of the American racial stratification system. Historically, white hegemonic structures have instituted economic, political, and social infrastructures that actively encourage Latinx people to achieve whiteness. How to navigate this incentive to achieve whiteness while simultaneously remaining culturally, ideologically, and politically grounded in where you came from is the contention of their intra-community conflict. The debate surrounding Hispanic versus Latino demonstrates this intra-community conflict and reveals the fragmented nature of Latinx identity.

While the Latinx community has not embraced pan-ethnic labels, they have debated which one to use for over 60 years. The tension surrounding Hispanic vs Latino are rooted in the community's ideological difference regarding how to navigate their relationship to whiteness. Latinx people who identify as some variation of Latino (Latino, Latino/a, Latin@/ Latinx) argue that Hispanic de-nationalizes and de-links Latinx people from the "multi-national region of the world that represents their group history and, arguably, group interests" (Alcoff, 2005, p. 404). In other words, Hispanic

implicitly emphasizes the white European culture of Spain at the expense of the non-whites cultures that have profoundly shared the experiences of all Latin Americans. Hispania was the name the Romans gave to the Iberian Peninsula, most of which became Spain. There is nothing in the term that relates to any of the nonwhite indigenous cultures of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, which historically have produced multicultural and multiracial people in Latin America and the United States.

While the Hispanic centralizes the community's relationships to their white European ancestry, variations of Latino communicate a geographic connection to Latin American. Scholars like Jorge Garcia (2000) claim that Hispanic is a more accurate term in naming this population because it delineates the new people who were formed through the *encuentro* of 1492. However, as Alcoff acknowledges, the term Hispanic actively acknowledges Spain's colonization of the Americas while negating racialized and neo-colonial relations between the U.S. and Latin America. Unlike the term Hispanic, variations of Latin@/x invoke a salience of the U.S. imperialism in Latin America and its effect on today's political economy.

The debate regarding Hispanic vs some variation of Latino demonstrates how the pan-ethnic labels a Latinx people chooses is shaped by their relationships to whiteness. The correct label or the more accurate label is rooted in how they decide to navigate these relationships to whiteness. This is also evident in the different way Latinx people communicate their country of origin. Puerto Ricans living in the continental U.S. are known to favor Puerto Rican over Puerto Rican-American, whereas many Mexicans tend to identify as Mexican-American (Alcoff, 2005). While both of these reflect the country of origin, Mexican-American actively highlights a relationship to the U.S. Ultimately, the identity markers that a Latinx person uses communicates how said person navigates their multi-dimensional relationships to whiteness.

Overall, the systems of white hegemonic norms that have shaped Latinx identity have produced a fragmented community. As mentioned above, first and second generation Latin Americans are known to prefer labels that represent their country of origin. This response to the U.S. government's homogenization efforts has fragmented the Latinx community into sub-communities that represent specific Latin American countries. The identity dissonance that exists between in-group and out-group members forces Latinx people to navigate multiple racial and/or ethnic labels. While labels that reflect their country of origin signal their intra-nation relationships, pan-ethnic labels communicate their cross-nation connections. These intra-nation and cross-nation relationships further demonstrate the ideological and demographic diversity that is central to Latinx identity.

#### 2.3.2.2.7 **Pero why Latinx?**

Although research suggests that Latinx people typically reject pan-ethnic labels, post-9/11 immigration policies, rhetoric about "illegal immigrants," and Trump's

“build the wall” campaign have encouraged Latin American millennials to forge stronger in-group relations (Escobar, 2016; Muñoz, 2007). Recent studies reveal that these millennials are at the forefront of transforming Latinx collective identity. In using social media to disseminate and organize themselves under a new pan-ethnic label, Latinx millennials challenge hegemonic norms on multiple levels (De Guzman, 2017; Guidotti-Hernández, 2017; Hernández, 2015; Torres, 2018). This emerging ethnic name which unites individuals traditionally excluded because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and class is Latinx.

Unlike Hispanic and older variations of Latin@, the symbolism behind the emerging Latinx label aims to unite people on the basis of being excluded. Although this term was first used among Latinx millennials in the late 2000s, the “x” as a signifier for the traditionally disenfranchised dates back to the 60s. Instead of Chicano, many members of this student movement (Muñoz, 2007) began identifying as Xicano/a. In incorporating aspects of the Aztec language, Nahuatl, the “x” functioned as a “rallying cry to unify all oppressed peoples of this national origin” meanwhile distancing themselves from “the colonial structures of violence and racism against Indigenous peoples” (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017, p. 142; Guidotti-Hernández, 2011). In the ’70s, many Xicana artists appropriated the symbol to challenge the masculinity surrounding Chicano identity (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017). Today, the “x” is a symbol that challenges gender binary norms and affords visibility and racial equality to Latin America’s LGBTQ+ community (De Guzman, 2017; Torres, 2018). Unlike Hispanic, Latinx is “not about assimilation, but rather, a collective assertion of the very thing that has made them feel excluded”. Therefore, as a

common signifier of the excluded, the “x” aims to unite an inherently heterogeneous population. In other words, to be Latinx means to:

break out of the oppressive yoke of sexist, nationalist regionalism that clings to the social mores of harassment and whispered truths without consequence or the acknowledgement that trans, queer, Afro-Latinx use of Latinx provides a window to imagine something else besides gender normativity and repression.

While in-group and out-group negotiations over which pan-ethnic label is the most politically correct or representative are still on-going, this thesis uses the appellation Latinx because out of the currently available labels, the history of this term suggests it is the most inclusive. This study is situated within a U.S. context and thus bound to the U.S.’s racial classification system. While Latinx is used in this thesis to refer to people who have historical, political, cultural, genealogical et cetera ties to Latin America, it does not define who is Latinx. Instead, this thesis aimed to observe people who have ties to Latin America and understand the collective identity that emerges from their relationships to one another.

Despite attempts to unite the Latinx community, intra-community conflicts still persist, from contentions regarding who and what Latinx represents (Galvan, 2017; Hernández, 2015; Torres, 2018; Zentella, 2017), to older generations refusing to adopt pan-ethnic names (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017), to differing preferences based on demographic and ideological differences (Alcoff, 2005). Nonetheless, the fact remains that Latinx is a liminal, fractured, and ideologically and demographically diverse community, which today has become evident in the formation of Latinx online spaces.

### 2.3.2.3 **Pero donde? Latinx online communities**

Despite being the second largest minority group in the United States (with 40% of the population being under 21) Latinx online communities remain significantly understudied (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante, September 20, 2020; Krogstad & Lopez, 2014; Marchi, 2017). The few existing studies reveal that this academic negligence is not a consequence of insufficient Latin American online presence. On the contrary, Latinx, Black, and Asian youth spend more time on their mobile phones than white youth, and Latinx youths use social media at higher rates (80%) than white (70%) and Black youths (75%) (Lenhart, 2015; Marchi, 2017; Rouse, Kawashima-Ginsberg, Thrutchley, 2015; Wartella & Lauricella, 2011). Although the Latinx users are some of the most avid social media users, they struggle to establish visible networked publics.

This struggle was witnessed on Twitter during the 2016 US Presidential election. As Trump mobilized his “build the wall” campaign, immigration and the Latinx community became centerpieces of the presidential election (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). In response, Twitter users tweeted #immigration to debate the issue and establish networked publics via co-occurring hashtags. Whereas #immigration was used as an organizing mechanism to create a space within the platform to discuss immigration issues, co-occurring hashtags (meaning tweets that used more than one hashtag) were used as a gatekeeping mechanism that segregated Twitter users into pro-Trump (#Trump), Pro-Hillary (#Hillary), and Latinx (#USLatino) networked publics. A longitudinal analysis of these publics revealed that the Latinx networked public was a small separate group that remained disconnected from other prominent actors who shared similar sentiments (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). While the networked publics that shared sympathetic sentiments

toward legal and undocumented immigrants remained disconnected, pro-Trump and conservative publics bridged their networks by forging more connections among users who shared anti-immigration sentiments. This allowed pro-Trump and conservative publics to establish the dominate framing of #immigration during the 2016 US Presidential Election season (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). In remaining isolated from prominent actors that shared political ideologies, the Latinx networked public became a hum among the chatter that surrounded #immigration.

Whether or not Latinx members were using #immigration in association with other hashtags that signify one of the many ethnic labels they are known to subscribe to remains unknown. However, previous studies portray politically engaged Latinx users on Twitter and Facebook. Recent investigations show Latinx users mobilizing student movements in Chile and Mexico (Bacallo-Pino, 2015), actively challenging Mexican politicians, and voicing their concerns about Mexican politicians (Almanza & Valle-Cruz, 2016) and Brazilian presidential candidates (Ortiz, Harmin, Aggio, & Dalmonte, 2017). While these studies reflect niche groups within the larger Latinx community, they demonstrate a political engagement that does not shy away from challenging government officials and the mainstream media (Bacallo-Pino, 2015). Additionally, Latinx community issues situated in a U.S. context are becoming increasingly prominent in spaces like Twitter. According to Guidotti-Hernández (2017), “Twitter commentary is one of the main ways the critique of ethnic nationalism is replicated, debated, and shifted to Latinx, mostly by queer interlocutors”, explaining how members of Latin America’s LGBTQ+ community have utilized this platform to allow “22 Latin American countries, the space to speak their own

truths” (p. 153-153). Therefore, the struggle to establish a visible Latinx networked public is not due to lack of Latinx online presence or political engagement.

*So why do Latinx networked publics struggle to become visible in the digital sphere?* That is one of the central concerns this thesis aims to address as it explores the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice. The literature suggests that Latinx users are present online and that pockets of Latinx online communities are visible on platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Bacallo-Pino, 2015; Almanzan & Valle-Cruz, 2016; Ortiz, Harmin, Aggio, & Dalmonte, 2017). However, most of these studies explore Latinx communities that are structured around a specific racial and/or ethnic label such as country of origin (Mexican, Chulian, Brazialin, etc.). Studies that explore Latinx identity online from a pan ethnic perspective depict the Latinx networked public as an isolated network that does not forge connections with like-minded actors (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, studies that capture the way Latinx people navigate multiple racial and/or ethnic identities at once are either rare or non-existent. While institutional and systemic racism certainly play a role in the lack of online Latinx community scholarship, there is an underlying structural issue contributing to the invisibility of Latinx networked publics (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017; Yosso, 2006).

As outlined above, the history of race and ethnicity in online communities via a digital assemblage lens demonstrates how Web 2.0 applications enable users to navigate a fluid relationship to whiteness. Additionally, networked gatekeeping studies on crowd centered platforms reveal gatekeeping mechanisms, such as hashtags and hyperlink, that enable users to establish and negotiate their boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The ability to establish boundaries of inclusion/exclusion affords users the ability to build their

own communities (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013; Nahon, 2011). In applying both a networked gatekeeping and digital-race assemblage lens, these communities represent a localization of a specific and shared set of relationships to whiteness. This is evidence in online Black communities and Black cyberspace (Gray, 2020; Brock 2020; Sharma, 2013; Stewart et al., 2017). In their ability to navigate a relationship to whiteness that is in relation to whiteness rather than within whiteness, Black online communities and Black cyberspace represent “a proclamation of reclaiming narratives and identities across media and platforms” (Gray, 2020, p. 18). Therefore, the literature shows that Web 2.0 applications enable traditionally marginalized people (Black users) the ability to establish, maintain, and promote their own networked public in the digital sphere. However, as illustrated in the overview of Latinx identity, Latinx users have a different shared relationship to whiteness than Black users. While there is some overlap between the two communities (Afro-Latinos), their identity formation in relation to whiteness is distinct. In other words, the multidimensional relationships to whiteness that Latinx users navigate is different from the multidimensional relationships to whiteness that Black users navigate. The differences in these relationships to whiteness are rooted in each community’s response to the different white hegemonic structures that have historically oppressed them.

Whereas the Black community has a history of using networking as a mechanism to strengthen in-group ties, U.S imperialism and attempts to homogenize Latin American people has incited intra-community conflict that has fragmented the Latinx community. Instead of uniting under a single identity label, Latinx people navigate multiple racial and ethnic identities at once. The internal struggle of representing where they came

from without erasing the political, historical, and genealogical meanings that unites them has fractured the community. This fragmentation is mediated online in the form of disconnected and isolated clusters. Unfortunately, the homophilous nature of Web 2.0 platforms further magnifies the fragmented nature of Latinx identity.

As previously explained, platforms like Twitter and Facebook are designed to promote connections among like-minded individuals. Web 2.0 system's sociotechnical architecture and affordances are designed to prioritize homophilous connections. In the context of Latinx identity, homophilous ties represent intra-connections. Most platforms encourage Latinx users to establish intra-nation relationships over the cross-nation connections that thread the Latinx community together. Additionally, Web 2.0 applications do not allow people to navigate multiple racial and/or ethnic identities at once. In most online spaces, Latinx users have no choice but to digitally represent themselves by choosing one or a few of the appellations they subscribe to (Valdez, November 10, 2018). When forced to choose a single racial or ethnic label Latinx people are known to choose the one that reflects their country of origin (Cohn, 2012). Consequently, Latinx networked publics emerge as disconnected and isolated networked publics that represent the norms, values, and beliefs of specific Latin American countries. Latinx networked public struggle to become visible because the ideological and demographic diversity that constitutes Latinx identity is not able to properly materialize in the digital sphere.

Ultimately, for Latinx networked publics to emerge in the digital sphere the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture must enable Latinx users to navigate the negotiation that constitute Latinx identity. As demonstrated in the previous section, central to these negotiations is the ability to navigate the community's

ideological and demographic diversity that is liminal and fragmented in nature. The homophilous nature of most Web 2.0 applications influences Latinx users to produce digital-race assemblages that are largely disconnected and isolated, therefore rendering their collective voice nearly silent.

#### 2.3.2.4 **Reddit: The solution and the problem???**

Although most Web 2.0 applications are designed to promote homophily, Reddit is a popular platform that not only affords users the ability to navigate multiple identity labels at once, but its architectural structure also allows users to leverage homophilous and heterophilous connections. As mentioned in chapter one, Reddit exists as an interconnected network of subreddits. Architecturally, each subreddit is a unique URL (denoted by /r/"subreddit name") and specific page within the website that is Reddit (Massanari, 2015). Culturally, each subreddit constitutes a unique community within the platform that possess "distinct memberships, rules, content, and social norms" (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017, p. 4). Each community web page is centered on a specific topic or interest such as r/politics, a bulletin dedicated to "news and discussion about U.S. politics" (r/politics, 2007). Connections between and among subreddits are forged by their respective moderators. On Reddit, the term moderator refers to a specific type of Reddit user. Moderators are volunteer users that command "a great deal of power over the kind of content that appears in their subreddits" (Massanari, 2015, p. 10). Moderators are the users responsible for establishing the connections that allow networked publics to emerge on the site (Massanari, 2015).

In the interface that is referred to as "old" Reddit each subreddit presents a sidebar that includes information about the forum such as its description, rules, list of moderators, et cetera (Massanari, 2015). In addition to displaying this information, many

moderators often provide a list of related subreddits, which are other web pages within Reddit that discuss relevant topics and/or interests. For example, /r/funny links to subreddits such as /r/humor, /r/comics, and /r/lol, all of which are centered on humorous content. Moderators can also enable wiki pages for their subreddits to provide more in-depth information about their forum including links to the site's other subreddits (r/reddit.com). In providing hyperlinks to other subreddits, moderators forge connections between and among subreddits, thus allowing networked publics (in the form of related subreddits) to emerge on Reddit. As Stewart et. al. (2017) identified with hashtags on Twitter, listing a forum's related subreddits not only make group members visible, but it also outlines the structure of the larger networked public they belong to. The way users interact with these networked publics demonstrates how the platform enables users to navigate multiple facets of their identity while leveraging homophilous and heterophilous connections.

As previously stated, Reddit is structured differently from platforms like Facebook and Twitter. On Facebook and Twitter, interactions among users and the site's content are structured around the connection's user form with other users. Twitter feeds and Facebook news feeds are designed to aggregate the content that has been shared by the user's network. Therefore, the content users are exposed to is dependent on the connections they forge with other users on the platform (Caren & Gaby, 2011; Papacharissi, 2011; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). On Reddit, interactions among users and the site's content are structured around a user's interaction with the site's subreddits (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017). Users customize their experience by subscribing to specific subreddits to curate an individual front page that reflects their own interests. A user's front

page--Reddit's version of a news feed-- is an aggregated forum of the top posts of the subreddits they have subscribed to (Massanari, 2015). Users are able to navigate multiple facets of their identity by subscribing to the various community forums that relate to their specific interests or needs. Furthermore, Redditors' interactions with other users are centered around conversations about a certain link or topic (Kienzle, 2016). All conversations and interactions are organized through subreddits, which allows connections among users to emerge from their shared interests. Therefore, the network of Reddit users is "primarily corralled by shared interests, which result[s] in multiple groups and identities." (Kienzle, 2016, p. 22). As moderators forge connections between subreddits, the multiple groups and identities that arise within each subreddits become organized on the basis of their relevance to other subreddits (Leavitt, 2016). Reddit, therefore, is a relational interconnected network of subreddits (Kienzle, 2016).

Reddit's relational nature and the way it affords its users the ability to leverage homophilous and heterophilous connections is witnessed in this study's early observations of /r/LatinoAmerica. /r/LatinoAmerica links to larger discussion forms that function as identity markers for individual Latin American countries, including / r/Brasil and /r/Mexico. /r/LatinoAmerica connections to these country-specific subreddit illustrate how /r/LatinoAmerica functions as a cross-nation bridge that threads the Latin American country-specific subreddits together. The presence of /r/LatinoAmerica suggests that Redditors navigating Latinx identity do not have to choose between a label that communicates their country of origin or a pan-ethnic label. Instead, users can subscribe to and experience both. Furthermore, in providing a space that bridges the connections among these countries, Reddit users are able to navigate cross-nation connections. These

early observations also demonstrate how Latin American country-specific subreddits often link to other forms representing said country's states (/r/Aguescalients), cities (/r/BuenosAires), regional politics (/r/PoliticaDeMexico) and culture (/r/MusicArgentina), therefore, illustrating the intra-nation connections present on the platform. Furthermore, Latin American country-specific communities often list /r/LatinoAmerica as an associated subreddit. The reciprocal nature observed in these early observations suggests there is a loosely connected Latinx networked public on Reddit. Therefore, Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances provide a unique opportunity to examine a Latinx online community.

While early observations of Reddit suggest the presence of a Latinx networked public, the platform's toxic publics have demonstrated a keen aptitude for commanding the site's most visible content. As discussed in chapter 1, #Gamergate, "The Fappening", the revolt against Pao, and the rise of the r/The\_Donald subreddit, collectively illustrate "properties of social media that facilitate activism and cultural participation" that also "enable networked abuse and targeted intimidation" (Marwick, 2017, p. 180). Reddit's toxic networked publics are known to actively suppress the voices of women and people of color. While not representative of the entire platform, these publics have demonstrated a keen aptitude for commanding the site's most visible content. Like on most social media sites, visibility on Reddit equates to voice. The extent to which one is seen is the extent to which one is heard. While Reddit's design and feature enable a Latinx networked public to emerge, its most visible content is shaped by a participatory culture rooted in toxic geek masculinity (Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2015a, 2015b). As visibility functions as a proxy for voice on social media, understanding the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked

public is afforded a voice requires an understanding of the actors who shape the visibility of Reddit's Latinx networked public.

### 2.3.3 **Network Visibility**

Thus far this literature review has demonstrated how the application of networked gatekeeping on crowd-centered applications has revealed the fluid power dynamics these platforms enable and networked gatekeeping mechanisms that afford users the ability to establish their own networked publics (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). In the context of digital-race assemblages, these fluid power dynamics afford users the ability to navigate their multidimensional relationship to whiteness and establish networked publics that represent the localization of a specific set of relationships to whiteness (as illustrated in online Black communities and Black Cyberspace) (Gray, 2020; Brock 2020; Sharma, 2013; Stewart et al., 2017). In addition to enabling a fluid relationship to whiteness and establishing networked publics, the application of networked gatekeeping to Web 2.0 applications also illustrates how these systems enable users the ability to collectively decide which members of their network achieve networked gatekeeper status (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). As we, networked gatekeeping is defined as “a process through which actors are crowdsourced to prominence through the use of conversational, social practices that symbiotically connect elite and crowd in the determination of information relevancy” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015, p. 158). The actors that are crowdsourced to prominence are the elected gatekeepers of their networked public. Since prominence on these platforms equates to visibility, the actors that achieve networked gatekeeper status are the most visible actors of their networked public, thus shaping the visibility of the networked public that elevated them (Leavitt, 2016).

On social media platforms, visibility functions as a proxy for voice. Generally, the concept of visibility refers to “the means, methods, and opportunities for representation” (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003, p. 127). Without it an individual and the collective they represent are “invisible and remains unknown to others” (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003, p. 127; Leavitt & Robinson, 2017). An environment that produces vast amounts of information, like the digital sphere, “consumes the attention of its recipients” (Simon, 1971, p. 40). As the digital sphere creates a “wealth of information” it also creates “a poverty of attention” or in this case, a poverty of voices heard (Leavitt, 2016; Leavitt and Robinson, 2017; Simon, 1971, p. 40). Attention in the form of being seen (visibility) is then, a commodity of voice “as people vie for stardom, popularity, and accumulated metrics (Goldhaber, 1997)” (Leavitt, 2016, p. 246). Therefore, the process of electing networked gatekeepers and the extent to which they are visible not only within their own networked public but also within the platform’s entire network becomes a major concern for understanding the extent to which Reddit’s Latinx networked public is afforded a voice.

In the new media ecology, networked gatekeepers are not fixed, but instead “actors of transient empowerment and domination” (Nahon, 2011, p. 756). Scholars have found that networked gatekeepers “are promoted to eliteness through networked processes that aggregate crowd-centered recommendation metrics” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015, p. 101). Due to the open and inclusive logic of crowd-centered environments, users can filter and recommend content to and from their networks via structural features, such as sharing, linking, liking, retweeting, hashtagging, hyperlinking and voting (Leavitt, 2016; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). Ranking algorithms then record these collective actions to create

recommender systems that assist individuals in selecting content that aligns with their interests, further promoting the aggregated actions of the crowd and therefore elevating actors to prominence (Herlocker, Konstan, Terveen, 2004; Resnick & Varian, 1997).

Studies have shown that utilizing sociotechnical systems to broadcast social movements and crisis events decentralizes the distribution of elite influence and allows non-elites to achieve gatekeeper status. Meraz's & Papacharissi's (2013) analysis of #Egypt finds that individuals, activists, journalists and non-elite media supporters were all actors that were crowdsourced to prominence by users retweeting and mentioning them. Retweets allow users to endorse and raise the visibility of another actor's content by reposting verbatim or with additional commentary and mentioning enables users to directly interact with specific users to sustain connections and conversations among networked members (boyd, et. al., 2010; Honeycutt & Herring 2009). Within the Twittersphere, both affordances facilitated interactions among users and elevated specific members to networked gatekeeping status.

Despite the platform's structural barriers, Leavitt & Robinson (2017) reveal that elite and non-elite actors gained prominence on Reddit during crisis events such as Hurricane Sandy (2012), the Aurora, Colorado shooting (2012), and the Boston Marathon bombings (2013). Their findings reveal that a platform's design can function as a gatekeeping mechanism as Redditors struggled to provide visibility to these real time events. However, "In most cases, members of the reddit collective were able to work together to overcome barriers of visibility through coordinated voting and surfacing of information in response to new developments" (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017, p. 11). In sum, this study demonstrates how the collective actions of the crowd enabled networked

gatekeeping mechanisms that allowed the users to circumvent the barriers put in place by the platform's architecture.

Overall networked gatekeeping studies reveal that networked gatekeepers achieve prominence by winning the support and validation of the crowd (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015; Nahon, 2011). To paraphrase Nahon (2011), the collective behaviors of the crowd are responsible for elevating gatekeepers. Those leaders, in turn, are responsible for establishing gates that afford those being gated their preferred practices. In terms of crowd-centered environments, structural features afford dispersed publics the power to elevate actors to the prominence necessary to broadcast sentiments outside the purview of traditional media elites, therefore enabling marginalized communities to promote actors that represent their voice regardless of their offline status (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). In other words, network gatekeepers are "entities (people, collectives or institutions) who have the discretion to exercise gatekeeping through a gatekeeping mechanism in networks and can choose the extent to which this gatekeeping is exercised, contingent upon the standing of the gated" (Nahon, 2011, p. 757). Therefore, the sociotechnical architecture and affordances of these Web applications enable open and inclusive participation that allow the gated to elect network gatekeepers who are dependent on the crowd-- and hold ephemeral and transient power.

In relation to networked publics and marginalized voices, these processes indicate that both the networked gatekeepers and the gated make decisions that determine the actors who make up the networked public and the norms, values, ideologies, and beliefs that constitute their collective identity. Nahon (2011) explains that the aggregated actions of the crowd that select the networked gatekeepers constitute both the gates and the

gatekeeping mechanisms through which networked gatekeepers can exercise their gatekeeping roles. Furthermore, “[t]hese gates exercise rules of inclusion/exclusion according to the patterns created by the gated themselves and according to the structure of meaning that the [networked] gatekeepers (and to some extent, the gated) have promoted” (p. 756). These processes suggest that a networked public’s boundaries of inclusion/exclusion are the product of the negotiations that occur between and among the gated and the networked gatekeepers. In the context of identity, scholars have recognized this process of boundary work as one that establishes a collective’s identity. The aggregated actions of the gated and the networked gatekeepers they select are understood as an ongoing process of discursively negotiating the values, codes, and norms that not only determine the position of the actors within the network, but also the collective identity of the networked public itself (Butler, 1993; Castlefranci, 2001; Gray, 2009; Gross, 1998). The actors that are elevated to networked gatekeeper status are a product of digital networks assembling their group identity and thus reflect the norms, values, ideologies, and beliefs the networked public is establishing, maintaining, and promoting.

As previously mentioned, networked publics on Reddit emerge from the connections forged among the site’s subreddits by their respective moderators. To guide users to other related communities within the site, moderators often provide hyperlinks to other subreddits in their forum’s sidebar and/or wiki page. In providing these hyperlinks, moderators are not only forging relationships between the site’s subreddits they are also selectively elevating the visibility of specific discussion forums. The subreddits that are most visible are the forums that the moderators have elevated to networked gatekeeper status. As the most visible actors of their networked public, networked gatekeepers reflect

the norms, values, ideologies, and beliefs of the community that elevated them. To understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public, the subreddit's that have been elevated to networked gatekeeper status must reflect the negotiations of norms, values, ideologies, and beliefs that constitute Latinx identity. As previously, negotiating demographic and ideological diversity is central to the formation of Latinx identity. Therefore, to understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked public is afforded a voice, this thesis proposes the following research question:

*RQ1: How do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit?*

#### 2.3.4 **Sociotechnical Architecture and Affordances**

While the open and fluid participation of these technologies does allow users to play a significant role in electing gatekeepers, their actions are still mediated by the site's architecture and affordances. This means that the openness and fluidity of a platform's participation is bounded by its design and structural features. In attempting to understand the processes involved in establishing an actor's visibility, scholars have located two fundamental variables: 1) the structure of a networked public and 2) the connections prominent actors forge with other prominent actors (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Stewart et. al., 2017). In sum, their findings suggest that the structure of the networked public and the connections the prominent actors made influenced the visibility of the prominent frames of #Egypt (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), #BlackLivesMatter (Stewart et. al., 2017), #Immigration (Meraz & Garcia, 2017). While these variables certainly impact the visibility of these frames, another underlying factor that shapes their outcome is the platform's

design and structural features (Leavitt, 2016). As illustrated by the studies cited above, a system's architecture and affordances influence the kinds of connections users make; so much so that in times of crisis, users are forced to manipulate the site's structural features to elevate the necessary actors to prominence (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017). In the case of the internet's default whiteness (Nakamura, 2008), an application's design and features can function as a barrier for racial and ethnic minorities to accurately represent themselves, as demonstrated by the need to create the Black Simmer website. Understanding the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford minorities a voice requires knowing the types of connections a specific set of sociotechnical architecture and affordances promote, the barriers they can produce, and how users navigate these effects.

Although they vary in design and structural features, all of the applications discussed thus far are designed to facilitate homophilous connections. Facebook, for example, makes the connections already established among like-minded individuals visible online, thus encouraging users to make more homophilous connections (boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2008). Twitter, as a microblogging platform, organizes its users via hashtags and hyperlinks, two networked gatekeeping mechanisms known to endorse homophily (Dimitrova et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 2017). Lastly, Reddit's design organizes users based on their shared interests via topical subreddits and their connections to community forums that foster a process of establishing, maintaining, and promoting a networked public via sociotechnical affordances that advance homophily. In the digital sphere, homophily is both an affordance and a metric for understanding the extent to which a networked public is established and maintained. For underrepresented populations like the Black community, homophily-driven structural features offer the ability to create a digital-race assemblage

that “articulate[s] a counter-hegemonic vision of Black identity” (Brock, 2012, p.32; Byrne, 2007; Carney, 2016; Eglash & Bleecker, 2001; Steele, 2017; Stewart et. al., 2017). However, for minority communities that are dependent on heterophily, like the Latinx population, affordances that lend themselves toward homophily can function as a barrier.

As previously explained, the Latinx community is fragmented. While efforts to unite this collective on the basis of being excluded are growing, Latinx networked publics on platforms like Twitter remain fairly non-existent. As the designated platform to discuss social and political issues, Latinx users have demonstrated their participation by utilizing Twitter as a mechanism for civic engagement. However, the networked publics that emerged from these issues represented a specific Latin American country or were small collectives that remained disconnected from other prominent actors who shared similar sentiments (Meraz & Garcia 2017). The difficulty the Latinx community experiences in establishing a visible networked public on platforms like Twitter mirrors the struggles they face in uniting themselves under a single ethnic label. Latinx people face this challenge because communities are conceived on the basis of similarities and not differences.

Given that Web 2.0 platforms promote and encourage homophilous connections, it is not surprising that Latinx networks are segregated into communities representing different Latin American countries, which is (not so coincidentally) their preferred way of identifying themselves (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012). While some might argue that the small, disconnected online communities that represent specific Latin America countries are a product of this collective’s identity politics, this project claims that the white hegemonic norms embedded in the affordances and architecture of Web 2.0 platforms further encourage this collective to remain fragmented. Latinx people are

distinct, not only because they are inherently a heterophilous collective but also because the members of this community are accustomed to navigating multiple appellations and their different meanings at once. The ability to do so online is virtually non-existent. Networked publics on Twitter are mainly organized via hashtags. While co-occurring hashtags allow users to subscribe to multiple collectives at once, having to list every racial and/or ethnic name a Latinx person identifies as is not only inconvenient but counterintuitive to the micro-blogging nature of Twitter. On platforms like Twitter, a collective that is inherently heterophilous has no other option but to appear as a fragmented collective.

As a ubiquitous network effect, homophily has been employed as a central concept in network studies. Understood as the tendency to form connections on the basis of similarities, homophily has been a driving force in identifying communities (McPherson et al., 2001). At its core, homophily suggests that segregating ourselves into groups in which our neighbors look and think like us is natural. The earliest cited evidence of homophily originated from ethnographic studies centered on small groups in which all ties between members could easily be ascertained. Without controlling for the effects of slavery, segregation, and economic inequality, these small urban neighborhoods presented “substantial homophily” along demographic and psychographic characteristics (Almack, 1992; Bott, 1929; Loomis, 1946; McPherson et al, 2001; Richardson, 1940). In the 1970’s and 1980’s, network scientists expanded their mythological approach to include modern sample surveys. The ability to access networks in large systems prompted large-scale homophily studies capable of generalizing the results to a known population. As the focus shifted from informal social networks to those that arise in an organizational context,

evidence of homophily was found in every type of social interaction, including marriage, friendship, advice, and work (McPherson et al., 2001). This incited an era of research that assumes homophily along the dimensions of race and ethnicity, sex, and status as a grounding principle in organizing systems (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010).

However, recent scholars such as Wendy Chun (2019) have acknowledged how studies “proving” homophily obviate the historical, political, and systematic institutions of segregation that define our society. In negating the effects of hegemonic structures and norms, social network scientists have circulated the notion that community is bred from similarity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). Instead of criticizing, homophily validates current systems of segregation. Instead of diversity, homophily assumes the foundation of collectives, communities, and neighborhoods rests on commonality. Instead of being a “starting point for deeper questions,” homophily “cooks the endpoint it discovers” (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, p. 83; Chun, 2019, p.80).

Subjecting the Latinx community to this lens would produce results that depict a fractured and disconnected community, voiding the nuances that stem from inherently diverse collectives. To broaden our perspective on community development, this thesis proposes a case study on a collective attempting to unite its members on the basis of being excluded. In doing so, this investigation employs heterophily as a metric for determining the extent to which the Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote their own networked public on Reddit. As previously mentioned, navigating homophilous (intra-nation) and heterophilous (cross-nation) connections is central to the formation of Latinx identity. Platforms that are designed to promote homophily, like Twitter, do not allow for Latinx networked publics to emerge because the platforms architecture and affordances

does not allow for the cross-nation (heterophilous) connections that thread the Latinx community together to materialize. However, (as illustrated above) the process through which networked publics emerge on Reddit suggests that the platform does allow for homophilous *and* heterophilous connections to digitally materialize. To examine the extent to which Reddit's sociotechnical design and features afford its Latinx networked public a voice, this thesis proposes the following research question:

*RQ2: To what extent do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) connections on Reddit?*

#### 2.4 **Structure = Nature**

While this project is focusing on Reddit's Latinx networked public, the results of this study will not produce a general understanding of Latinx identity. Instead, the results of this project are designed to understand the Latinx identity that is constructed on Reddit. The aim of this project is to understand the extent to which the platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture frame the identity of a minority population. This project applies networked gatekeeping as its main methodological framework to identify the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public and the nature of their connections. In identifying the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public, this thesis identifies the subreddits that have been elevated to networked gatekeeper status. As the networked gatekeepers, the norms and values these subreddits represent are the most visible and thus shape the structure of Reddit's Latinx networked public. Therefore, RQ1 identifies the subreddits that have been elevated to networked gatekeeping status to identify the norms and values that ultimately shape Reddit's Latinx identity.

While identifying the networked public's most prominent actors will provide an understanding of the norms and values that shape Reddit's Latinx identity, examining the nature of their connections will reveal the extent to which the platform enables users the ability to navigate the negotiations that constitute the collective's identity. As outlined above, Latinx digital-race assemblages emerge in the digital sphere when the intersection of the platform's design, features, and participatory culture enables the ability to digitally recreate the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. For Latinx online identities to emerge a platform must afford users the ability to navigate homophilous (intra-nation) and heterophilous (cross-nation) connections. Although most platforms are designed to promote homophilous connections, the way networked publics emerge on Reddit suggests that users are able to navigate homophilous and heterophilous connections. Therefore, RQ2 examines the nature of the prominent actors' connections to identify the extent to which Reddit affords users the ability to negotiate the norms and values that constitute Latinx identity.

In addition to applying networked gatekeeping, this thesis also employs Sharma's (2013) digital-race assemblage framework as its main analytical lens. The results of RQ1 and RQ 2 will be examined via a digital-race assemblage lens to understand the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity. As previously discussed, digital-race assemblage is a framework designed to understand the way race and ethnicity function in online spaces as it "explores the processes by which heterogeneous elements are arranged and brought together in particular sets of relations, relations that constitute forms of territory and expression" (Sharma, 2013, p. 54). As digital networks interact with a platform's architecture and affordances, they form relationships between and among these heterogeneous elements,

thus allowing digital-race assemblages to emerge. On Reddit, digital networks and their interactions with the platform are organized by subreddits. Connections between subreddits are forged by their respective moderators, therefore, the digital-race assemblages that emerge on Reddit become connected to one another as moderators forge connections between subreddits. Ultimately, the moderators function as the architects of the networked publics that emerge on Reddit. As the architects, moderators establish the structure from which a networked public's collective identity is constructed. A networked public's structure establishes the foundation from which they establish, maintain, and promote their own voice (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Stewart et. al., 2017). Therefore, to understand the nature of Reddit's Latinx networked public, this project proposes the following question:

*RQ 3: What can we learn about how Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed through the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationships?*

The research questions outlined above were developed to understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote their own networked public. The following chapter presents the methodologies this thesis used to answer each of these questions.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 **Locating Reddit's Latinx Networked public**

To answer the research questions that ground this study, this thesis first located Reddit's Latinx networked public. On Reddit, networked publics emerge as moderators forge connections between and among subreddits. Moderators often provide a curated list of associated subreddits that are located in the subreddit's wiki page or on the forum's sidebar. In curating a list of associated subreddits, moderators construct an interconnected network of Reddit pages in which the subreddits are the nodes and the ties between them are the connections forged by moderators.

To locate Reddit's Latinx community, this project employed /r/LatinoAmerica as a port of entry. Early observations from this study reveal that /r/LatinoAmerica hyperlinks to larger subcommunities that represent specific Latin American countries such as /r/Brazil and /r/Mexico. In addition, several of these discussion forums also hyperlink to /r/LatinoAmerica and other subreddits that are demographically and ideologically tied to Latin America. The connections among these forums and their reciprocal nature indicates the presence of a Latinx community on Reddit.

To capture this networked public, this project scraped the site's API using PRAW on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to collect a complete list of subreddits with at least 100 subscribers. The site's API was then queried to obtain an edge list of the connections the moderators forged among the site's various subreddits. /r/LatinoAmerica's recommended Reddit communities and their associated subreddits were extracted from this edge list. The connections of any forums that hyperlinked /r/LatinoAmerica as a recommended Reddit page were also recorded. The results of this process are reported in the following chapter.

### 3.2 Locating Prominent Actors

*RQ1: How do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit?*

To understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked public is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own voice, RQ1 identifies the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx community and examines their ability to negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity. Networked gatekeepers are a network's most visible actors and represent the norm, values, and beliefs of the collective that elected them (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015; Nahon, 2011). Identifying the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx community illustrates the community negotiations that shape Reddit's Latinx identity and the extent to which its demographic and ideological diversity is negotiated. This project follows previous networked gatekeeping studies to identify the prominent subreddits of the networked public under investigation.

As an extension of social network theory, networked gatekeeping studies often employ social network science methodologies and principles (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Leavitt & Robinson, 2017; Leavitt, 2016). Social network science finds that power in networks is not evenly distributed. Instead, the top 20% of actors command an inordinate amount of power and attention (Barabasi et al., 2000; Barabasi & Albert, 1999; Drezner & Farrell, 2008; Nahon et al., 2011; Newman, 2003; Perline, 2005; Singh & Jain, 2010; Capocci et al., 2008). The top 20% of actors are referred to in this study as the network's **central actors**. Central actors occupy positions within the network that afford them power over the **gated**, the members that make up the other 80% of the network (Barzilai-Nahon,

2008). Although power within networks is not evenly distributed, an actor's position within a mediated network is not static, but transient (Nahon, 2011).

The open and inclusive logic of Web 2.0 systems enables fluid power dynamics that allow community members to elevate actors within their networked public (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2015). The actors that have been elevated to the most visible positions within the network are a specific type of central actor, defined in this study as the **networked gatekeepers** (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Research on crowd-centered environments reveals that the aggregated actions of the crowd determine which members make up the gated actors, the central actors, and the networked gatekeepers (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). At each level, the norms, values, and beliefs that constitute the collective's identity are negotiated. To understand how Latinx demographic and ideological diversity is negotiated on Reddit, this thesis conducts a 3-part content analysis to assess the norms, values, and beliefs that are negotiated throughout the entire network, the central actors, and the networked gatekeepers.

### 3.2.1 **RQ1 Part 1: Getting a Sense of Reddit's Latinx Networked Public**

This project first conducted a content analysis on the subreddits that make up the captured network to identify the norms, values, and beliefs that are negotiated among the members of Reddit's Latinx networked public and to provide an overview of how they shape Reddit's Latinx identity. Each subreddit in the captured Latinx networked public was examined to assess each forum's central topic, the country they represented, and whether or not they are representative of Latinx identity.

#### 3.2.1.1 **Coding the Subreddit Topic**

Each subreddit is centered around a central topic or interest and possesses “distinct memberships, rules, content, and social norms” (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017, p. 4). A subreddit’s name is typically indicative of its central theme. For example, /r/pics is a community form dedicated to posting pictures. The central topic of subreddits with abstract names can be determined by the subreddit’s description, which explains the forum’s purpose in more detail. Reddit’s API was scraped to obtain the names and descriptions of each of the captured subreddits. This data was used to identify each subreddit’s central topic. Subreddits that were banned or did not present enough information to be properly coded were documented as not enough provided (NEP).

#### 3.2.1.2 **Coding Country Representation**

Because Latinx people prefer to identify themselves by country of origin, early observations on Reddit reveal connections among subreddits that represent specific Latin American countries. Capturing a geographically oriented networked public was to be expected. The aforementioned extracted data was used to identify the country that each subreddit represents. Subreddits that represented multiple countries were classified as multiple, forums that did not represent a country were categorized as not country specific (NCS), and those that were banned or did not present enough information to be coded were filed as NEP.

#### 3.2.1.3 **Coding for Latinx Representation**

Each subreddit’s name, description, and front page were examined to assess whether or not they represented Latinx identity. Each forum was assigned a Latinx ID determined by the following guidelines: discussion forums dedicated to specific Latin American territories, countries, states, and cities were classified as Latinx; any Reddit page

that primarily communicated in Spanish, Portuguese, or Indigenous Latin American languages were labeled as Latinx; and subreddits centered on cultural interests and artifacts or rituals such as tacos, chanclas, and Día de los Muertos were also classified as Latinx. The community forums that did not meet at least one of the aforementioned criteria were not classified as Latinx.

### 3.2.1.4 **Validating the Coding Process**

The data captured for this content analysis was coded by three independent researchers. Intercoder reliability was conducted to minimize bias and establish validity among three trained coders. Table 1 presents these results of the intercoder reliability test. The outcome of the coding process is presented in the following chapter.

Table 1.

#### Intercoder Reliability Results

<b>Subreddit Topic</b>			
	coder 1	coder 2	coder 3
coder 1	1	0.97	0.99
coder 2	0.97	1	0.99
coder 3	0.99	0.99	1
<b>Subreddit Country</b>			
	coder 1	coder 2	coder 3
coder 1	1	0.83	0.82
coder 2	0.83	1	0.88
coder 3	0.82	0.88	1
<b>Subreddit Latinx ID</b>			
	coder 1	coder 2	coder 3
coder 1	1	0.82	0.91
coder 2	0.82	wwc1	0.87
coder 3	0.91	0.87	1

### 3.2.2 **RQ1 part 2: Identifying the Central Actors**

The content analysis reports the pool of norms, values, and beliefs present in the captured networked public. While these results provide a general understanding of what

constitutes Reddit's Latinx identity, they do not identify the subreddits that play a more central role in shaping the identity of the captured community. As stated above, power in networks is not evenly distributed; instead, the top 20% of actors command an inordinate amount of power and attention (Barabasi et al., 2000; Barabasi & Albert, 1999; Drezner & Farrell, 2008; Nahon et al., 2011; Newman, 2003; Perline, 2005; Singh & Jain, 2010; Capocci et al., 2008). In this investigation, the top 20% of actors are classified as the network's central actors. To identify the central actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public, this project employed social network science methodologies.

Social network scientists have developed a number of different metrics to identify an actor's position within the network (Castells, 2009; Newman, 2010; Borgatti et al., 2013). Each metric locates a different type of central actor based on the nature of their connections (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). The effects central actors have on shaping the network is dependent upon the type of central position they hold. To understand how Latinx demographic and ideological diversity is negotiated on Reddit, this thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the central actors of the captured network as defined by their degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality.

Degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality are three different types of centrality measures that calculate the extent to which each actor shapes the network based on their forged connections. Degree centrality is one of the most common centrality measures that captures the number of connections each actor forges (Newman, 2010). As the actors that forge the most connections, degree central actors represent the networked public's most popular members. Similar to degree centrality, eigenvector centrality calculates an actor's importance based on the number of connections they forge. However,

eigenvector centrality is considered a more accurate metric because it recognizes that not all connections in a network are equally important. Instead “a vertex’s importance in a network is increased by having connections to other vertices that are *themselves* important” (Newman, 2010, 169). Eigenvector centrality, therefore, maps each actor’s centrality based on their ability to forge connections to other well-connected actors. Betweenness centrality differs from the other two centrality measures, as it captures each actor’s ability to bridge connections (Borgatti et al., 2013). Actors with the highest betweenness centrality provide the shortest path between clusters of nodes. Betweenness central actors are significant to the overall structure of the network. If removed, the network collapses into smaller disconnected, isolated clusters. By bridging connections, betweenness central actors affect a network’s reach within the networked environment they occupy.

The effects central actors have in shaping the network is dependent on the type of central position they hold. Given that the top 20% of actors command an inordinate amount of power and attention, the central actors of Reddit’s Latinx networked public were identified as the actors with the top 20% degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality. Once the degree, eigenvector, and betweenness central actors were identified, a comparative content analysis was conducted. This analysis compared the topic breakdown, country representation, and LatinxID of the subreddits present in the entire network to those that were elevated to a degree, eigenvector, and betweenness central position. The analysis of the subreddits that hold central positions within the networked public compared to the gated actors reveal which norms, values, and beliefs have a greater impact on constructing Reddit’s Latinx identity.

### 3.2.3 **RQ1 Part 3: Locating the Networked Gatekeepers**

Following this comparative content analysis, this thesis identifies the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public. Compared to central actors, networked gatekeepers are the most visible actors and mediate connections between in group and out group members. While networked gatekeepers have the most power and influence in shaping their collective's voice, their elevated status is a product of the crowd (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). In other words, a networked gatekeeper's prominence is dependent on the actions of the networked public's gated and central actors (Nahon, 2011). In this study, these actions are not carried out by the network's actors (the subreddits) but instead the moderators of the captured forums. On Reddit, moderators are the users that elevate the visibility of subreddits via the connections they forge between and among them. The subreddits that are the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public come to prominence via the actions of the moderators that make up the entire captured networked public. Therefore, the norms, values, and beliefs present within the entire networked public and those elevated to central actor positions affect which subreddits the moderators elevate to networked gatekeeping status. To identify how the demographic and ideological diversity that constitutes Latinx identity is negotiated on Reddit, this thesis identifies the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx community.

Like central actors, networked gatekeepers are defined by their centrality. The subreddits that forge and bridge the most connections represent the forums that Latinx moderators have elevated to prominence. These subreddits have the most influence in shaping the structure of Reddit's Latinx identity. As previously explained, degree and eigenvector centrality both measure an actor's ability to forge connections, but past

network science studies indicate that eigenvector is more sensitive to the overall shape of the network (Li, He, Kloster, Bindel, and Hopcroft, 2018). Whereas degree centrality only measures the number of connections an actor forges, eigenvector centrality accounts for the importance of an actor's connection (Newman, 2010). To measure each actor's ability to bridge and forge connections, this thesis defines networked gatekeepers by their betweenness and eigenvector centrality. Therefore, the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public are identified as the actors with the top 20% betweenness and eigenvector centrality.

Once the networked gatekeepers were identified, this investigation conducted a second comparative content analysis across the entire network, the central actors, and the networked gatekeepers. Whereas the content analysis of the entire network reveals the norms, values, and beliefs that have been negotiated throughout Reddit's Latinx networked public, the content analysis of the central actors and networked gatekeepers illustrates the norms, values, and beliefs that play a more central role in defining the networked public's identity. Ultimately, this comparative content analysis shows the norms, values, and beliefs present among the gated, central actors, and networked gatekeepers. By comparing the subreddits occupying each position, this comparative analysis reveals which norms, values, and beliefs were elevated to prominence, thus revealing how networked gatekeepers negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit.

### 3.3 **Understanding the Nature of Connections**

*RQ2: To what extent do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) connections on Reddit?*

RQ2 examines the nature of the connections forged by the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx community. The nature of these connections informs the extent to which Reddit's sociotechnical architecture, affordances, and participatory culture shape the formation of Reddit's Latinx identity (Sharma, 2013; Stewart et al., 2017). In the digital sphere, Latinx networked public emerges when the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture provides users the ability to digitally recreate and navigate the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. The ability to subscribe to multiple racial and ethnic identities at once while navigating the cross-nation and intra-nation relationships that thread the Latinx community together is fundamental to the formation of Latinx identity. While the structure of Reddit's architecture and affordance suggests that the platform enables Latinx users the ability to navigate the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity, Reddit's participatory culture actively suppresses the voices of racial and ethnic minorities. However, examining the history of race and ethnicity in online spaces via a digital-race assemblage lens illustrates how Web 2.0 applications afford users the ability to navigate fluid relationships to whiteness (Nakamura, 2002; Gajjala, 2007; Sharma, 2013; boyd, 2012). These relationships to whiteness frame the relation that minority users construct their collective voice online. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the nature of the connections forged by the prominent actors of Reddit's networked public to understand the relation to whiteness in which Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed.

To examine the types of connections the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public forged, this study first extracted all the ties made to and from the 15 networked gatekeepers identified in RQ1. Extracting these ties produced a subnetwork that is referred to in this study as the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork. The recorded

geographic data from RQ1 was used to manually code each connection in the sub-network. Ties formed between two subreddits representing the same country were classified as homophilous, whereas those forged between actors representing two different countries were labeled as heterophilous. Any ties forged to or from a subreddit that did not represent a geographical location were classified as other. Additionally, connections forged to and from subreddits that did not provide enough information to properly code their geographic representation were marked NEP (not enough provided). Following this process, dyadic exponential random graph models (ERGMs) were conducted to test the statistical significance of these connections. These models reveal the extent to which the prominent actors navigated statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections.

In social network analysis, dyad-level ERGM models are used to determine the statistical significance of specific attributes within a network (Luke, 2015). These statistical models test how the attributes of the actors in the network affect the connections they forge. In other words, dyad-level ERGM models examine the relationship between existing ties and the defining characteristics of the actors who forged them. Examining this relationship allows researchers to identify characteristics that are predictive of tie formation. For example, if all the ties in a network were between individuals of the same age, then an actor's age would be a predictor of tie formation. Dyad-level ERGM models are designed to identify which actor characteristics are statistically significant predictors of tie formation. RQ2's underlying objective is to identify the extent to which the prominent actors are able to forge homophilous and heterophilous connections. Dyad-level ERGM models were conducted to assess if Reddit's Latinx prominent actors forged statistically significant homophilous and/or heterophilous connections.

Following the collective analysis of the ties forged by networked gatekeepers, this thesis examined each prominent actor's ego network. An ego network is a subnetwork of all the connections forged to and from a single actor (Newman, 2010). The ego networks of each networked gatekeeper were extracted to examine the extent to which the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public forged homophilous versus heterophilous connections and vice versa. Each tie in each ego network was coded following the same procedure outlined above. Ultimately, the analysis of the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork and each ego network reveals the nature of the connections forged by the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public.

### 3.4 **The Structure of Reddit's Latinx Identity**

*RQ 3: What can we learn about how Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed through the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationship?*

This methodological blueprint was developed to understand the Latinx identity that is constructed on Reddit. Whereas RQ1 identifies the norms, values, and beliefs that constitute Latinx identity, RQ2 examines the nature of the prominent actors' connections to identify the extent to which the platform's architecture and affordances allow users the ability to negotiate these norms and values. To understand the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity as shaped by the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationships, RQ3 examines the results from RQ1 and RQ2 via a digital-race assemblage lens. Digital-race assemblage is a theoretical framework developed to understand how race and ethnicity function in online spaces. Building off Deleuze's and Guattari's (1987) conceptualization of assemblages, digital-race assemblages "[explore] the processes by which heterogeneous elements are arranged and brought together in particular sets of

relations, relations that constitute forms of territory and expression” (Sharma, 2013, p. 54). As digital networks interact with an application's design and features, they form relationships between and among these heterogeneous elements, thus allowing digital-race assemblages to materialize.

In chapter 2, this thesis traces the history of race and ethnicity in online communities via a digital-race assemblage lens to illustrate how the affordances of Web 2.0 applications enable users to navigate their multidimensional relationships to whiteness. Previous studies reveal how white hegemonic norms are embedded in the design and features of communication technologies. In addition to these white norms, users bring with them their own relationships to whiteness as they engage with and on these systems. The open and inclusive logic of Web 2.0 architecture and affordances allows users to navigate these relationships to whiteness, and even forge different types of relationships to it. This agency allows racial and ethnic minority users to generate digital-race assemblages that are *in relation to* and *not within* whiteness. As illustrated in the history of race and ethnicity in online communities, digital-race assemblages that break stereotypical or familiar understandings of race and ethnicity emerge as digital networks are afforded the ability to navigate their *relation to* white hegemonic norms. A digital network's relationships to whiteness frames the relation that collective identities are constructed. To understand the relation to whiteness in which Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed, RQ 3 conducted a critical interpretive analysis of RQ 1's and RQ 2's results via a digital-race assemblage lens. This analysis is rooted in a critical, historical, and political understanding of Latinx identity formation to unveil the nature of Latinx identity on Reddit. Ultimately, the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity demonstrates the relationships to whiteness that frame the relation

that Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed, and the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked public is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own voice. The following chapter outlines the results of these methodologies.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 **R.Q.1. Results**

*RQ1: How do prominent Latinx networked gatekeepers negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit?*

To answer RQ1, this thesis first located Reddit's Latinx network via the shared connections forged among subreddits by the platform's moderators. This process was followed by a content analysis that provides an overview of the norms, values, and beliefs present in the networked public. This analysis reveals the pool of ideologies negotiated among the network's gated actors, central actors, and networked gatekeepers. To understand which of these norms and values are more central in constructing Reddit's Latinx voice, this thesis identified the networked public's central actors. Following this process was a second content analysis that compared the norms and values present in the entire network to those present among the central actors. This analysis provides an understanding of which norms and values were elevated to central positions in Reddit's Latinx networked public. While central actors have more influence in shaping the collective's identity, the networked gatekeepers are the most visible and mediate interactions among in and out group members. Therefore, the networked gatekeepers were also identified. To understand how these prominent actors negotiate demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity, a final content analysis was conducted to compare the norms and values present among the entire network, the central actors, and networked gatekeepers. The following sections present the results of these methods.

#### 4.1.1 **Locating the Network**

To locate Reddit's Latinx networked public, this project scraped the site's API on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to collect a complete list of subreddits with at least 100 subscribers. The site's API was then queried to obtain an edge list of the connections the moderators forged among the site's various subreddits. /r/LatinoAmerica's recommended Reddit communities and their associated subreddits were extracted from this edge list. The connections of any forums that hyperlinked to /r/LatinoAmerica as a recommended Reddit page were also recorded. This process captured a Latinx networked public made up of 1,811 unique actors (subreddits) (see Figure 2).

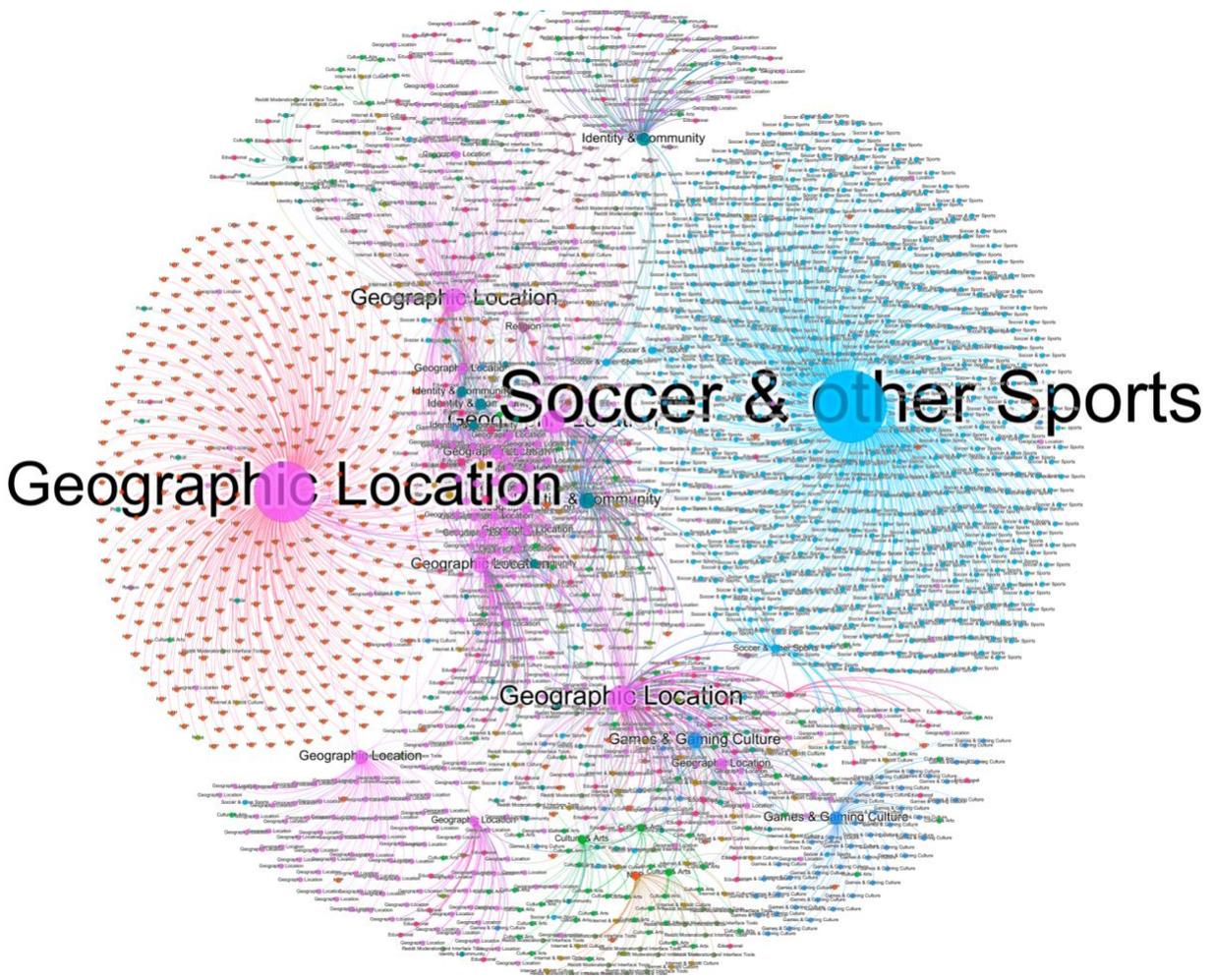


Figure 2. Reddit's Latinx Networked Public graph that displays nodes that are sized by the actor's degree centrality and color represents each actor's subreddit topic.

#### 4.1.2 **Content Analysis Results Part 1**

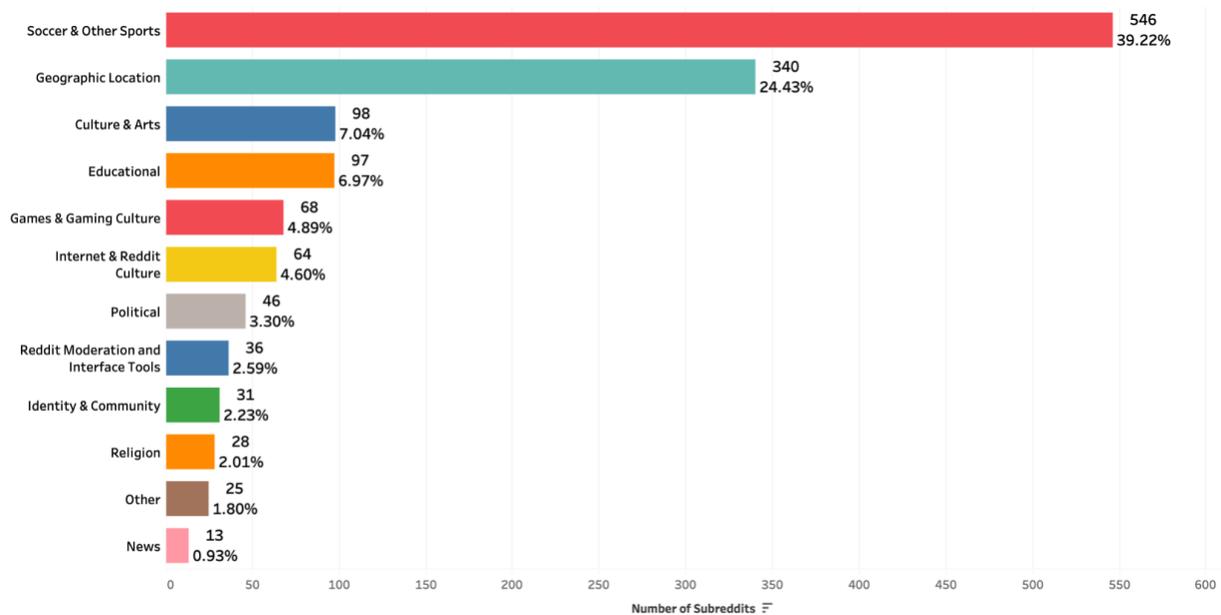
After locating the Latinx networked public, a content analysis was performed to provide an overview of the type of norms, values, and beliefs that play a role in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity. Each subreddit was examined and coded to identify their central topic, the country they represented, and whether or not the discussion forum was representative of the Latinx community and/or culture.

##### 4.1.2.1 **Subreddit Topic Breakdown**

Each forum captured during this study was coded to identify its central theme. As previously mentioned, subreddits possess "distinct memberships, rules, content, and social norms" and are centered around a central topic or interest (Leavitt & Robinson, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, categorizing the captured network by each subreddit's central theme reveals the pool of norms, values, and beliefs present among the gated, central actors, and networked gatekeepers. 23.14% of the captured network did not present enough information to be appropriately coded and was removed from this analysis. Among the remaining 1,392 actors, 13 broad topics were defined. Table 2 presents the topic breakdown of the captured networked public.

**Table 2.**

**Breakdown of Subreddit Topics Present in Reddit's Latinx Networked Public**



The top three topics defined among this network are soccer and other sports (39.22%), geographic location (24.43%), and culture & arts (7.04%). Of the subreddits that represented sport-related topics, 98.16% are community forums dedicated to soccer specifically. These soccer forums ranged from subreddits regarding general information about the sport to forums dedicated to regional teams. Among most Latinx and Latin American people, soccer is the most popular sport and thus its prevalence is not a surprise (Sotomayor, 2020). However, these soccer subreddits make up 38.72% of the entire Latinx network, which is quite substantial. A deeper investigation shows that 59.00% of the subreddits coded as soccer are Reddit pages dedicated to teams outside the U.S. and Latin America. 30.43% of these subreddits are for U.S. and Latin American teams. Soccer, as a cultural norm, seems to not only stitch Latin American countries together but countries and territories all over the world.

#### 4.1.2.2 **Country Representation Breakdown**

Capturing a geographically oriented networked public was to be expected, because Latinx people tend to identify themselves by country of origin. Therefore, each subreddit was coded to identify the country they represent. In addition to the 395 actors that did not present enough information to be properly coded, 288 of the subreddits captured in this network were classified as non-country specific, 51 were identified as language specific, 25 were centered around specific religions, and 77 represented multiple countries. Among the remaining 975 actors (53.83% of the entire network) 107 different countries and territories were identified. 38.76% were Latin American countries and territories and 61.23% represented locations outside of Latin America. Only 27 out of 48 Latin American countries were represented in the captured networked public. The top 3 geographic locations cited are Brasil, U.S., and Mexico. Figure 3 presents a world map to better illustrate the geographic breakdown captured in this network.



and those that do not. While these results do not convey which norms and values are more central in the captured network, it does reveal that the public's prominent actors navigate a fair amount of non-Latinx norms in addition to negotiating the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity. This is evidenced by the community forums that were neither country nor culture specific. Among these 247 subreddits were forums that account for the platform's most popular communities. /r/pics, /r/explainitlikeimfive, /r/art, and /r/sports are currently ranked as Reddit's 6th, 21st, 24th, and 28th most popular forums, respectively. The presence of these popular subreddits in the captured networked public suggests that popular norms on Reddit play a role in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity.

#### 4.1.3 **Central Actors Results**

Although the content analysis reveals who and what is present in the network, it says nothing about an actor's position within the network nor what effect it has on assembling Reddit's Latinx identity. As previously explained, past network science studies have revealed the ubiquitous presence of power laws in networks, which indicate that certain actors in the network hold more power and influence than others (Barabasi et al., 2000; Barabasi & Albert, 1999; Drezner & Farrell, 2008; Nahon et al., 2011; Newman, 2003). This thesis defines these actors as the network's central actors. The open and inclusive logic of crowd-centered environments allows the crowd to elevate certain actors to prominent positions within the networked public. On Reddit, moderators elevate subreddits by curating and displaying lists of associated discussion forums. While the network's central actors hold more power and influence, their position within the network is dependent on the gated. The fluid power dynamics of networked systems suggest that

minority groups, like Reddit's Latinx moderators, can elevate subreddits that are representative of Latinx norms and values to positions that have more influence in how the networked public's identity is constructed. While the networked public is made up of mostly non-Latinx subreddits, it doesn't mean that those forums have more influence in fabricating the collective's identity. Instead, it illustrates that the moderators of Latinx subreddits have to navigate not only Latinx norms and values when electing networked gatekeepers, but also those that are central to the platform's participatory culture. To examine the extent to which Reddit's Latinx users are able to elevate norms and values that are representative of Latinx culture, this thesis locates the captured networked public's central actors.

Central actors are the top 20% of network members who hold the network's most central positions. In developing metrics to measure an actor's centrality, network scientists have identified several types of central actors. Each metric locates a different type of central actor. The effects central actors have in constructing the networked public is dependent on the type of central position they hold. To understand how Latinx demographic and ideological diversity is negotiated on Reddit, this thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the central actors of the captured networked public as defined by their degree, eigenvector, and betweenness centrality. Table 3 presents the top 20 subreddits defined as central actors across the three different types of centrality. As seen in table 3, there is a significant amount of overlap and difference across the different positions. The degree of overlap and difference across the three positions is underscored in table 4, which displays the correlation result across the three different types of central actors. The similarities and differences across the three different types of central actors

evinced the negotiation of norms and values among the network's central actors. How these actors affect the network is dependent on their central position.

**Table 3.**

Top 20 Central Actors of Degree, Eigenvector, and Betweenness Centrality.

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Eigenvector</i>	<i>Betweenness</i>
1	/r/soccer	/r/brasil	/r/argentina
2	/r/uruguay	/r/mexico	/r/uruguay
3	/r/brasil	/r/argentina	/r/soccer
4	/r/argentina	/r/chile	/r/brasil
5	/r/mexico	/r/colombia	/r/mexico
6	/r/latinos	/r/peru	/r/futbol
7	/r/chile	/r/BOLIVIA	/r/futebol
8	/r/jogatina	/r/uruguay	/r/futbolmx
9	/r/fotosmexico	/r/vzla	/r/redditores
10	/r/germany	/r/redditores	/r/catolicismo
11	/r/rpg_brasil	/r/ecuador	/r/espanol
12	/r/latinoamerica	/r/es	/r/latinoamerica
13	/r/redditores	/r/Paraguay	/r/fotosmexico
14	/r/brasillivre	/r/latinoamerica	/r/germany
15	/r/vzla	/r/ElSalvador	/r/rpg_brasil
16	/r/ecuador	/r/puertorico	/r/chile
17	/r/es	/r/Dominican	/r/asklatinamerica
18	/r/spain	/r/MusicaEnEspanol	/r/latinos
19	/r/venezuela	/r/costa_rica	/r/southafrica
20	/r/catolicismo	/r/nicaragua	/r/spain

**Table 4.**

Correlation Results Across All Central Actors

	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Betweenness</i>	<i>Eigenvector</i>
Degree	1		
Betweenness	0.79666691	1	
Eigenvector	0.444696	0.447296198	1

4.1.3.1 **Degree Central Actors**

Actors with the highest degree centrality forge the most connections. Degree central actors represent the networked public's most popular members. Network effects such as preferential attachment suggest that newcomers tend to forge connections with the most connected actors. Therefore, degree central actors tend to mediate connections between the existing network and future members. In this project, 332 out of 1811 (18.33%) actors were identified as degree central actors. The top three are /r/soccer, /r/Uruguay, and /r/Brasil. These three subreddits have the most influence in mediating connections between Reddit's Latinx networked public and future members.

#### 4.1.3.2 **Eigenvector Central Actors**

Whereas degree centrality measures how many members an actor knows, eigenvector measures an actor's influence not only by how many members they know but who they know. Eigenvector central actors mediate connections among the networked public's most connected actors. These actors are not only highly connected themselves, but their connections are also highly connected. In the Latinx networked public, 358 out of 1811 (19.76%) actors were identified as eigenvector central actors. The top three subreddits are /r/Brasil, /r/Mexico, and /r/Argentina. These three geographically oriented actors shape the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion by mediating connections among the networked public's most popular actors.

#### 4.1.3.3 **Betweenness Central Actors**

Instead of measuring an actor's ability to forge connections, betweenness centrality measures an actor's ability to bridge connections. Without betweenness central actors, the network would collapse into several isolated clusters. By bridging connections, betweenness central actors affect a network's reach within the networked environment

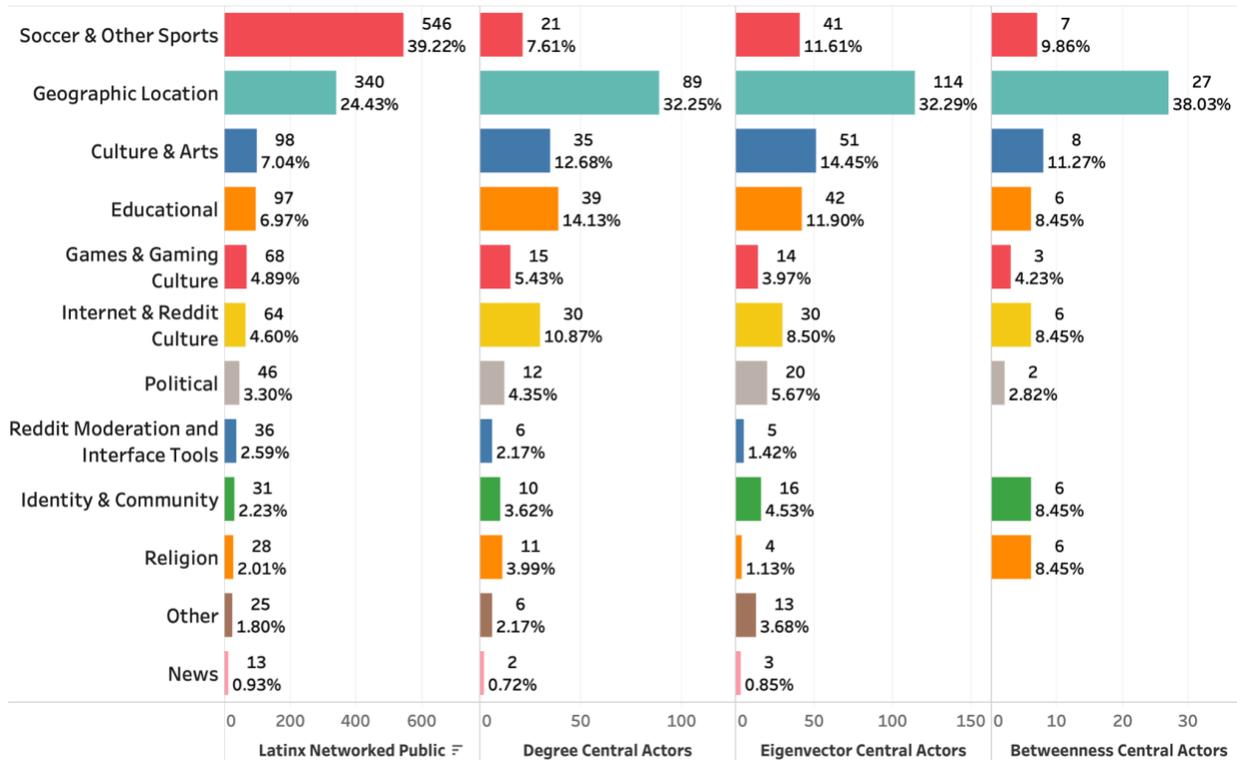
where they are located. In the captured networked public, 73 out of 1811 (4.03%) subreddits were identified as betweenness central actors. The top three are /r/Argentina, /r/Uruguay, and /r/soccer. These actors are most influential in affecting the Latinx networked public's reach within the larger Redditsphere.

#### 4.1.3.4 **Comparative Content Analysis**

To understand which norms and values present in the Latinx networked public are elevated to influential positions, this thesis conducted a comparative content analysis among the entire networked public, degree central actors, betweenness central actors, and eigenvector central actors. Table 5 compares the subreddit topic breakdown of the entire network to that of the central actors. The number of soccer and other sport subreddits is the most notable difference. Whereas soccer and other sports-related forums make up 39.22% of the entire network, they only make up 7.61% of degree central actors, 11.61% of eigenvector central actors, and 9.86% of betweenness central actors. This illustrates a weaker relationship between the network's central actors and subreddits related to soccer and other sports. Forums identified as geographic location, however, gain a stronger presence among the central actors. In the entire Latinx network, these communities make up 24.43% of the public, but among the central actors they make up 32.25% of degree central actors, 32.29% of eigenvector central actors, and 38.03% of betweenness central actors. These results suggest a stronger correlation between subreddits that are geographically oriented and those that are central actors. The results also show a stronger relationship between the central actors and the subreddits identified as culture & arts and education.

**Table 5.**

**Entire Network vs Central Actors Topic Breakdown**



The subreddit topic breakdown comparison between the entire network and its central actors reveals that the norms and values most popular in the network do not necessarily play a key role in assembling the collective’s identity. The subreddits identified as soccer and sports make up most of the network. 98.71% of those forums are specifically related to soccer. As a cultural norm, soccer functions as an intersection of norms popular on Reddit and in the Latinx community. The topic breakdown comparison reveals a much weaker relationship between soccer and the public’s central actors. This suggests that soccer is a popular cultural norm among the captured network but does not play a defining role in assembling Reddit’s Latinx identity. Although soccer is not key in shaping the captured network’s identity, these results reveal that subreddits defined as geographic

location, culture & arts, and education present norms and values central to Reddit’s Latinx identity. These findings serve as evidence that the moderators (the users responsible for forging connections among subreddits) are able to circumvent norms and values popular on the platform and elevate those that are central to their networked public. This suggests the presence of networked gatekeeping processes and fluid power dynamics. The country representation and Latinx ID comparison between the entire network and the central actors also reveal the elevation of Latinx norms and values and further support the presence of fluid power dynamics.

4.1.4 **Networked Gatekeeper Results**

So far, this thesis has located Reddit’s Latinx networked public, identified the norms and values present within the network, and revealed which of those norms and values play a more influential role in assembling Reddit’s Latinx identity. While this analysis provides evidence that demographic and ideological diversity are central to Latinx identity, it has yet to identify how the networked gatekeepers of Reddit’s Latinx networked public negotiate Latinx demographic and ideological diversity. Table 6 presents the networked gatekeepers of Reddit’s Latinx community.

**Table 6.**

Networked Gatekeepers of Reddit’s Latinx Networked Public

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Subreddit</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Eigenvector</i>	<i>Betweenness</i>
1	/r/brasil	176	0.26053611	0.07820009
2	/r/mexico	144	0.23617149	0.06375402
3	/r/argentina	146	0.21072791	0.17286407
4	/r/chile	83	0.17441505	0.00735556
5	/r/uruguay	447	0.16815711	0.15105988
6	/r/vzla	47	0.16167261	0.00315658

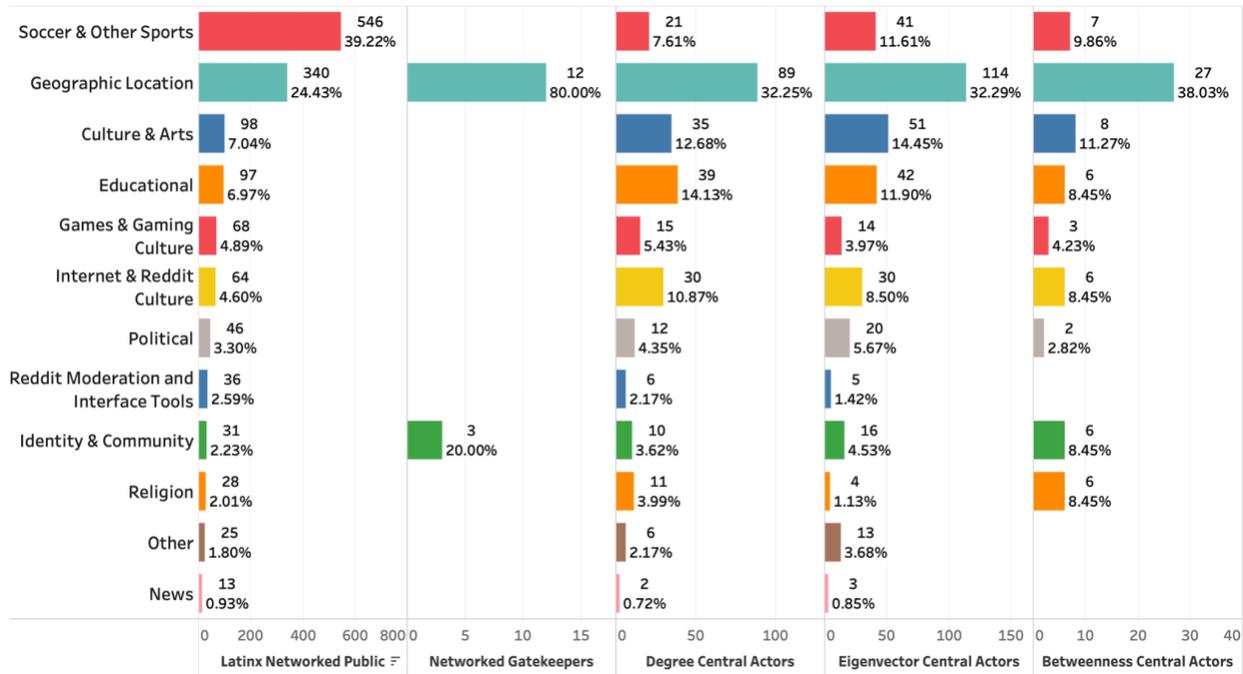
7	/r/redditores	53	0.15046971	0.02092854
8	/r/ecuador	47	0.14944389	0.00233793
9	/r/es	47	0.1472072	0.00163965
10	/r/latinoamerica	56	0.12417181	0.01506678
11	/r/costa_rica	32	0.09803135	0.00013897
12	/r/guatemala	27	0.08565563	1.98E-06
13	/r/espanol	37	0.08344106	0.01556149
14	/r/brasilivre	49	0.07739217	0.00334882
15	/r/cuba	31	0.07715632	0.00277701

Among the 1811 actors that make up Reddit’s Latinx networked public, 15 networked gatekeepers were identified. These networked gatekeepers represent the norms and values most central in shaping Reddit’s Latinx identity. To understand how the networked gatekeepers negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity, this thesis conducts a comparative content analysis among the entire network, the central actors, and the networked gatekeepers. The results of this comparative analysis further illustrate how geographic diversity is central to Latinx identity on Reddit. Table 7 compares the topic breakdown of the networked gatekeepers to the topic breakdown of all the subreddits in the network, as well as those elevated to central positions. Among the networked gatekeepers, 80% represent subreddits directly tied to geographic representation. Compared to 18.77% of the entire network and an average of 38.88% of the central actors, these results serve as further evidence that geographic diversity plays a central role in shaping Reddit’s Latinx identity. The other 20% of the networked gatekeepers were subreddits classified as identity & community, which provides evidence of how geographic diversity is used as a mechanism to assemble individual and shared spaces within Reddit’s Latinx community. Furthermore, the absence of soccer-related

forums among the networked gatekeepers, but their strong presence among the entire network, further supports the finding that soccer is a popular Latinx norm but does not define Reddit's Latinx identity.

**Table 7.**

**Networked Gatekeepers Topic Breakdown**



In addition to providing further evidence of how demographic diversity plays a central role in constructing Latinx identity, the results of this comparative content analysis also demonstrate the elevation of norms that are central to Latinx identity. Out of the 15 identified networked gatekeepers, 11 represent Latin American countries, 2 represent shared Latinx spaces, and 1 represents Spain. Therefore, all of the countries and spaces represented among the networked gatekeepers are directly tied to Latinx identity. In addition, 13 out of the 15 networked gatekeepers present inherently Latinx norms. These

results suggest that Latinx moderators are able to elevate subreddits that present norms and values central to how Latinx people identify themselves offline.

In attempting to determine how the networked gatekeepers of the captured networked public negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity, the results for RQ1 present 3 key findings: 1) A Latinx networked public exists on Reddit, 2) Latinx networked gatekeepers negotiate norms central to the Latinx community and those that are popular on Reddit, and 3) The Latinx networked public moderators were able to circumvent popular norms on Reddit and elevate those that are central to Latinx identity. The implications of these results are discussed in RQ3.

#### 4.2 **RQ2 Results**

*RQ2: To what extent do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) connections on Reddit?*

A platform's design and features influence the types of connections users forge. As shown in chapter 2, the whiteness through which Web 2.0 systems were created led to a digital sphere driven by homophilous connections. Black online communities and Black Cyberculture demonstrate the ability to carve out spaces that afford them agency over the framing of their collective identities. Their ability to do so evidences the fluid power dynamics that digitally networked systems enable. Although Black online communities and Black Cyberculture demonstrate the ability to frame racial and ethnic identities that are in relation to and not within whiteness, racially and ethnically heterophilous populations, like the Latinx community, struggle to do the same.

For the voice of a Latinx networked public to successfully emerge in the digital sphere, the intersection of a platform's design, features, and participatory culture must

allow users to mediate the identity practices that constitute Latinx identity. The homophilous nature of most Web 2.0 systems clashes with the heterophilous nature of Latinx identity. Most sociotechnical systems do not allow the cross-nation (heterophilous) connections that thread the Latinx community to materialize. Consequently, Latinx online communities emerge as isolated and disconnected clusters that reflect specific countries within Latin America. The homophilous nature of digitally networked platforms incited by white hegemonic norms renders the collective Latinx voice as nearly silent. The absence of affordances that enable users to navigate cross-nation ideologies, cultural values, and beliefs has led to the invisibility of Latinx online communities.

Unlike most platforms, Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances allow users to navigate multiple facets of their identity at once. Its interconnected network of subreddits affords Latinx users the opportunity to navigate their identity as it relates to their country of origin and the cross-nation ideologies, norms, and values central to Latinx identity. However, Reddit's toxic networked publics have historically commanded the platform's visibility. In addition to the white hegemonic norms embedded in the design of digital platforms, Reddit has cultivated a toxic geek masculinity culture that actively seeks to suppress the voices of marginalized communities. This thesis has conducted a case study to understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked public is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own voice.

While RQ1's findings suggest that a Latinx community is present on Reddit, being present does not equate to having a voice. In the digital sphere, visibility equates to voice. The extent to which a collective voice can be heard is dependent on the collective being seen. Networked gatekeeping studies have identified three variables that shape the metric

of a collective's visibility in online spaces: 1) the structure of the networked public, 2) the type of connections prominent actors forge, and 3) the platform's design and structural features. These variables informed the rationale behind RQ2.

To understand if the intersection of Reddit's participatory culture and architecture and affordances enables the ability to mediate the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity, this thesis conducted a three-part analysis on the homophilous/heterophilous nature of prominent actors' ties. While the prominent actors represent the norms, values, and beliefs that are most central in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity, the nature of their ties reveals the channels through which Reddit's Latinx identity is forged.

To examine the types of connections forged by the prominent actors of the captured networked public, this study extracted all the ties made to and from the 15 networked gatekeepers identified in RQ1. Extracting these ties produced the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork. Part one of RQ2's analysis examined the homophilous/heterophilous nature of the ties present in this subnetwork. The recorded geographic data from RQ1 was used to manually code each relationship. Ties formed between two subreddits representing the same country were labeled as homophilous, connections forged between actors representing two different countries were categorized as heterophilous, any relationship formed to a subreddit that did not represent a country was recorded as other, and any bond established to a message board that did not present enough information was coded as NEP. The second part of this analysis tested the statistical significance of the results produced in part one. Dyadic ERGM models were used to reveal the extent to which the prominent actors navigated statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections. Part three of this analysis examined the prominent actors' ego networks. This

analysis provided a better understanding of which prominent actors are responsible for driving homophilous connections versus heterophilous connections, and vice versa. The following presents the outcomes of this analysis.

**4.2.1 Part Uno: Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork Results**

Extracting the ties to and from the 15 networked gatekeepers produced a subnetwork made up of 871 unique subreddits. The moderators of these subreddits forged 1907 unique connections, which constitutes roughly half (48.09%) of the connections captured in the entire networked public. Table 8 illustrates how most of these connections (34.19%) occurred between subreddits representing different countries, while 20.45% were classified as homophilous connections. To assess whether Reddit’s sociotechnical architecture and affordances enable the prominent actors to forge intra-nation and cross nation ties, table 9 presents the breakdown of homophilous and heterophilous connections.

**Table 8.**

Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork Connection Breakdown

<i>Connection Type</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Heterophilous	652	34.19
Other	464	24.33
Not Enough Provided	401	21.03
Homophilous	390	20.45
Total	1907	

**Table 9.**

Homophilous vs. Heterophilous

	<i>Connection Type</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Homophilous	Non-Latin American Countries	19	1.14
	Latin American Countries	371	22.20
Heterophilous	Non-Latin American Countries	236	14.12
	Latin American Countries	416	24.90

95.13% of the homophilous ties captured in the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork were forged between subreddits representing the same Latin American country. These results suggest that the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public are more likely to forge intra-nation ties among subreddits representing the same Latin American country. Although this data does not explain whether these connections are statistically significant, it does convey that subreddits representing Latin American countries are driving the networked public's homophilous connections. A deeper investigation illustrates that subreddits representing Brasil (38.21%), Mexico (23.31%), and Argentina (15.65%) forged the most homophilous connections. These results suggest that intra-nation connections in Reddit's Latinx networked public are more likely to occur among subreddits representing Brazil, Mexico, or Argentina.

Among all the heterophilous connections captured in the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork, 63.80% occurred between two subreddits representing different Latin American countries. Subreddits representing Venezuela (11.35%), Argentina (5.83%), and Ecuador (5.67%) forged the most heterophilous connections. These findings indicate that despite Reddit's toxic dominant culture, minority users -- like the moderators of Reddit's Latinx community -- are able to forge heterophilous connections. These results suggest that Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances enable users to navigate homophilous and heterophilous connections.

#### 4.2.2 **Part Dos: But is it significant?**

To test whether the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public are forging statistically significant homophilous and/or heterophilous connections, this study

conducted dyadic level ERGM models. 2401 possible connections were identified in the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork. Only 389 connections presented non-infinite coefficients. In other words, only enough data was provided to draw conclusive statistical results on 16.21% of the connections. Among the connections for which enough data was presented, 52.1% reported statistically significant coefficients. Heterophilous connections accounted for 68.47% of the statistically significant connections, while only 5.91% of these connections were identified as homophilous (see Table 10). 11 out of the 12 of the statistically significant homophilous connections (91.66%) occurred between two subreddits representing the same Latin American country. 54.18% of the statistically significant heterophilous connections occurred between subreddits representing two different Latin American countries. Even though there were only enough data to measure the statistical significance of 16.21% of the connections, these results suggest that subreddits representing Latin American countries drove both statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections. These results suggest that the prominent actors of Reddit’s Latinx networked public forged statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections among subreddits representing Latin American countries.

**Table 10.**

Breakdown of Statistically Significant Ties

<i>Connection Type</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Heterophilous	139	68.47
Other	32	15.76
NEP	16	7.88
Homophilous	12	5.91
Total	199	

4.2.3 **Part Tres: Prominent Actors’ Ego Network Results**

The data outlined above suggests that Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances allow moderators to forge homophilous and heterophilous connections among subreddits. Whereas subreddits representing Brasil, Mexico, and Argentina forged most of the homophilous connections, subreddits representing Venezuela, Argentina, and Ecuador established the most heterophilous connections. To understand the extent to which the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public forged homophilous versus heterophilous connections and vice versa, this study examined the ego network of each individual networked gatekeeper. Unlike the data above, which collectively examines the ties forged by prominent actors, the following presents the geographic representation across each individual ego network. Table 11 provides the distributions of each type of tie forged by the individual prominent actor. Any ties forged to or from a subreddit that did not represent a geographic location were classified as other. Additionally, connections forged to and from subreddits that did not provide enough information to properly code their geographic representation were marked NEP. All prominent actors forged homophilous and heterophilous ties, and 13 out of the 15 networked gatekeepers forged mostly heterophilous ties, thus reinforcing the findings above. However, the prominent actors representing Brasil (/r/Brasil and /r/Brasilivre) forged more homophilous connections than heterophilous. This suggests a relationship between the Latin American country a subreddit represents and the likelihood of forging homophilous versus heterophilous connections and vice versa. The implications of these results as they relate to online Latinx identity is outlined in RQ3's results.

**Table 11.**

## Distribution of Connection Type Forged by Each Prominent Actor

Rank	Networked Gatekeeper	Homophilous	Heterophilous	Other	NEP
1	/r/brasil	34.95	24.31	37.73	3.01
2	/r/mexico	24.61	37.96	36.39	1.05
3	/r/argentina	13.59	55.05	29.44	1.92
4	/r/chile	8.95	54.74	34.74	1.58
5	/r/uruguay	3.47	20.97	12.65	62.91
6	/r/vzla	9.68	62.01	28.32	0.00
7	/r/redditores	4.56	48.72	42.45	4.27
8	/r/ecuador	4.00	63.75	32.25	0.00
9	/r/es	9.57	42.55	39.36	8.51
10	/r/latinoamerica	4.82	60.64	34.54	0.00
11	/r/costa_rica	6.34	70.42	23.24	0.00
12	/r/guatemala	4.86	70.14	25.00	0.00
13	/r/espanol	5.32	52.09	42.59	0.00
14	/r/brasillivre	56.76	9.91	31.53	1.80
15	/r/cuba	6.12	73.47	17.35	3.06

In addition to the prominent actors representing Brasil, /r/Uruguay forged

connections differently than most of the other networked gatekeepers. 62.91% of the connections /r/Uruguay forged were labeled as NEP. In other words, nearly two thirds of the connections forged by and to /r/Uruguay involved a subreddit that did not present enough information to be coded. /r/Uruguay shared a connection with 91.90% of subreddits coded as NEP in the entire Reddit Latinx networked public, which is quite substantial. A more in-depth analysis reveals that 97.78% of the subreddits classified as NEP and that forged a connection with /r/Uruguay are moderated by the same user. Most of /r/Uruguay's connections are to or from small subreddits that have little to no posts, little to no subscribers, and are moderated by the same user account. /r/Uruguay achieved networked gatekeeping status via these connections. These results align with previous studies that allude to these systems' vulnerability of being gamed. Massanari (2015a,

2015b) explains how Redditors are known to game the platform's algorithms to make specific content visible. Although the intention behind forging so many connections between /r/Uruguay and these small subreddits is unknown, this analysis reveals the impact of these connections, which is the representation of Uruguayan norms, values, and beliefs in Reddit's Latinx identity.

#### 4.3 **RQ3 Results**

*RQ3: What can we learn about how Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed through the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationship?*

To answer RQ3, this thesis examined the results of RQ1 and RQ2 via Sharma's (2013) digital-race assemblage lens. Digital-race assemblage is a framework developed to understand how race and ethnicity function in the digital ecology. Breaking away from race and ethnicity as a social construct, the digital-race assemblage framework applies a technoculture approach by conceptualizing race and ethnicity as assemblages that emerge from users' interactions with the internet's materiality. Within this framework, assemblages are understood as "heterogeneous elements... arranged and brought together in particular sets of relations, relations that constitute forms of territory and expression" (Sharma, 2013, p. 54; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Assemblages are dynamic in nature, and constantly change and connect to other assemblages.

Whereas a social construct understanding of race and ethnicity is framed within a logic of identity and representation, digital-race assemblage explores the ways in which race and ethnicity emerge from "*connections* between bodies, and other entities, and processes" (Sharma, 2013, p. 54). In other words, digital-race assemblages explore how race and ethnicity online emerge from the very fabric of the internet. These assemblages

are digital material in and of themselves, material that is not just consumed but performed (Brock, 2012, Nakamura, 2002). As users engage in performances of race and ethnicity online, they bring with them their own ideologies of race and ethnicity, which become intertwined and entangled with the performances they engage in and the ones they consume (Nakamura and Chow-White, 2012; Nakamura, 2002). Digital-race assemblage allows us to understand how users “make race do different things” by exploring the ways in which “digital networks are generative of race” (Sharma, 2012, p. 53). This thesis examines the results produced in RQ1 and RQ2 via a digital-race assemblage lens to understand the Latinx identity that emerges on Reddit from the networked connections between and among the site’s subreddits.

#### 4.3.1 **“Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá”**

“*Ni de aquí, ni de allá*” is a common phrase among Latinx people that expresses the sentiments and lived experiences that come from navigating an identity that exists in between different hegemonic structures (Perches, 1994; Lopez, 2020). In English, this phrase translates to “neither from here, nor from there.” But the odd grammatical structure of this translation obscures the profound meaning it captures. Edward James Olmos in the film *Selena* (1997) famously explains:

“Being Mexican American is tough. Anglos jump all over you if you don’t speak English perfectly. Mexicans jump all over you if you don’t speak Spanish perfectly. We gotta be twice as perfect as anybody else ... our family has been here for centuries, and yet they treat us as if we swam across the Rio Grande. I mean, we gotta know about John Wayne and Pedro Infante. We gotta know about Frank Sinatra and Agustín Lara. We gotta know about Oprah and Cristina. Anglo food is too

bland and yet when we go to Mexico we get the runs. Now that, to me, is embarrassing. Japanese Americans, Italian Americans, German Americans: their homeland is on the other side of the ocean. Ours is right next door, right over there. And we gotta prove to the Mexicans how Mexican we are and we gotta prove to the Americans how American we are. We gotta be more American than the Americans and more Mexican than the Mexicans. Both at the same time. It's exhausting!"

While only speaking to the Mexican-American experience, Olmos captures the emotional labor familiar to anyone who navigates a liminal identity. As explained in chapter 2, Latinx identity is liminal in nature. It is positioned between race and ethnicity, never fitting one racial or ethnic category but existing between them. Rooted in a historical and political understanding of Latinx identity, the following section explores the implications of RQ1's results via a digital-race assemblage lens to understand the liminal nature of Reddit's Latinx identity.

RQ1 explored the extent to which the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigated the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity. This inquiry's central aim was to examine the fluid relationship to whiteness that frames Reddit's Latinx networked public. The results of RQ 1 produced three main findings. The first confirmed the presence of a Latinx networked public on Reddit. The second identified how the networked gatekeepers of the captured networked public negotiated norms central to Latinx identity and those that are popular on Reddit. Third, RQ1's results revealed how the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public were able to circumvent the popular norms on Reddit and elevate those more central to Latinx identity.

#### 4.3.1.1 **¡SE LA PERDIÓ! Soccer Ghost of the Colonial Past**

Using /r/Latinoamerica as a port of entry, this study captured a networked public made up of 1811 unique subreddits. Although most of the subreddits represented non-Latin American countries, the networked public's central actors and networked gatekeepers (the core actors involved in assembling Reddit's Latinx identity) predominantly represented Latin America countries and Latinx norms and values. The presence of a Latinx networked public is significant given that the homophilous nature of most Web 2.0 applications bars Latinx online communities from emerging.

While the networked gatekeepers and central actors of the captured network confirm the presence of a Latinx networked public on Reddit, the channel through which the community is visible communicates the relation to whiteness that Reddit's Latinx identity is framed. At the network level, soccer and other sports is the captured network's most prominent subreddit topic. These message boards include forums dedicated to Latin American teams, but more than half (59.00%) were for non-Latin American teams. Soccer is the most popular sport among Latinx people and in Latin America, so its prevalence in this network is not surprising (Salas, February 2020). However, these subreddits related to soccer and other sports make up 39.22% of the entire Latinx network, which is quite substantial.

Soccer, as a cultural norm, seems to stitch together not only Latin American countries, but countries and territories all over the world. Still, the sheer number of subreddits dedicated to teams outside the U.S. and Latin America suggests that something is at play other than the community's general interest in the sport. The way Reddit's Latinx network interacts with the platform magnifies the community's relationship to soccer.

/r/Sports and /r/Soccer are some of Reddit's oldest and most popular forums, with more

than 17 million and 2 million subscribers, respectively (Reddit.com). This suggests that soccer and sports function as an intersection of interests between Redditors and Latinx users, but does not explain the magnitude of non-Latinx soccer forums present in the captured networked public.

Of the 546 subreddits labeled as soccer and other sports, 266 (48.71%) represented European countries. It is possible that Latinx users are fans of these European teams, but the relationships to these subreddits also communicate an underlying connection to white norms. Historically, soccer and modern sports in general have been used as a mechanism for colonization and imperialism (Césaire, 1955; Fanon, 1952; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1993; Bale and Cronin, 2003; Carrington, 2015). Modern sports emerged in the age of colonialism and were central to “the cultural project of Western imperialism” (Carrington, 2015, p. 110; Mangan, 1986; Guttmann, 1994). Since there was very little cross-cultural diffusion in the development of modern sports, they function as a mechanism for imposing white homophilous ideologies (Carrington, 2015). In Latin America, soccer reinforces “nationalistic, authoritarian, class-based, and gender-specific notions of identity and culture” (Bar-On, 1997). Throughout the twentieth century, soccer in Latin America operated as technology utilized to incite nationalist and ideological homophily. Disguised as a path to modernity, the practice of European sports in Latin America reinforced the colonial past as it solidified the population's relationship to white hegemonic norms (Arbena, 1993; Bravo, López de D’Amico, Parrish, 2016).

As mentioned in chapter 2, multiple hegemonic structures shaped the formation of Latinx identity. During the colonial era, Spain and Portugal were the dominant forces spawning white hegemonic norms throughout Latin America. Just before the

twentieth century, a new power came into the mix as the end of the Spanish-American War of 1898 resulted in the U.S. occupying Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and parts of the Philippines. U.S. imperialism and America's attempt to homogenize Latinx people erected the architectural frame of Latinx identity in a U.S. context. Historians have recently uncovered the role U.S sports played in creating this white hegemonic frame (Sotomayor, 2017; Gems, 2006). While soccer is the most popular sport among Latinx people, baseball is central to the livelihood of Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans (Sotomayor, 2017). Soccer is played in these Caribbean territories, but it takes a back seat to baseball, the sport commonly referred to as America's pastime (McGimpsey, 2000). In the Caribbean territories occupied by the U.S., American sports were utilized as cultural mechanisms to replace Eurocentric white norms. Sotomayor (2017) claims:

“When the United States took over Puerto Rico in 1898 it established a process of cultural hegemony and sought an Americanization plan that included English as the medium of instruction in schools, heralding U.S. patriots and Holidays, Protestant proselytization, and the introduction of U.S. sports. Baseball was joined by newcomers such as basketball, boxing, and volleyball. Soccer was not among the main sports in the United States, and as such, it was not part of the Americanization campaign.”

The negligible position of soccer in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic “is a result of a systematic imperial process to Americanize newly acquired colonial subjects through the extension of American institutions” (Sotomayor, 2017). While baseball and its cultural implications are different from soccer's, the popularization of

modern sports in Latin America narrates the ways in which modern sports function as a mechanism for promoting homophily and white hegemonic norms.

Although baseball-specific subreddits are not present in the captured networked public, 91 out of 546 of the soccer subreddits (16.67 %) were geographically tied to the U.S. Again, it is possible that Latinx users are fans of these sports teams. However, the presence and volume of U.S. and European soccer forums in Reddit's Latinx networked public parallels the ways in which sports have historically been utilized as mechanisms that promote white hegemonic norms. The connections forged to these American and Eurocentric message boards establish a dimension of the relationship to whiteness through which Reddit's Latinx identity is framed. While 39.22% of the captured network is made up of soccer subreddits, soccer-related forums only account for an average of 9.69% of the central actors and none of the networked gatekeepers. However, /r/brasil, /r/mexico , and /r/argentina are the most visible subreddits of the network and represent the countries where soccer is the most popular in the world. While soccer does not play a central role in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity, the presence and volume of soccer-related subreddits in the captured network magnifies the community's relationship to soccer. Soccer, as a cultural norm, functions as an intersection interest between Reddit's dominant culture and Latinx culture. Ultimately, soccer frames the relation to whiteness that Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed. Like the way Mexican-Americans feel the pressure to be more American than the Americans and more Mexican than the Mexicans, Reddit's Latinx community expresses a relationship to soccer that is more Redditor than the Redditors and more Latinx than the Latinx people.

#### 4.3.1.2 **Mechanisms of Demographic Diversity**

Soccer is not the only cultural norm affected by the relationship to whiteness that Reddit's Latinx identity is established. In the content analysis of the entire network, culture & art was the third most prevalent subreddit topic. These message boards cover a broad range of culture, such as literature, food, music, movies, and TV. The names of these subreddits show how geographic diversity is an organizing mechanism that delineates spaces within Reddit that are fundamentally Latinx and exist apart from the platform's mainstream culture.

Given that Reddit was developed as a link sharing site, Redditors commonly use the platform to share and distribute music. /r/music, the main music subreddit, ranks 7th amongst the most popular forums and hosts over 24 million subscribers. The message board's popularity suggests that music, as a cultural norm, is central to the platform's participatory culture. /r/musicanortena, /r/musicaargentina, and /r/musicaven are forums captured in the Latinx networked public that are also dedicated to sharing and consuming music. What differentiates these subreddits from /r/music and other music-related forums is the way they specify where the music is from. /r/musicanortena describes itself as a community for sharing music from northern Mexico. /r/musicaargentina and /r/musicaven identify themselves as spaces to distribute Argentinian and Venezuelan music. These subreddits represent spaces within Reddit that have been carved out by Latinx moderators to share and experience music made for and by Latinx people.

Additionally, their names display geographic markers, showing the diversity within the Latinx community. These names reveal how the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public utilize geographic identifiers to delineate individual spaces within an

inherently heterophilous community. While the connections among these Latinx music forums allow them to emerge as a heterophilous collective, the use of geographic signifiers allows each subreddit to define its own individual space within the larger Latinx networked public. It should be noted that the use of geographic markers is not a mechanism exclusively used by Latinx subreddits. /r/germanrap and /r/southafricanmusic were also captured in this network; geographic delineation is not a Latinx-specific tactic. Instead, RQ1's results suggest that non-white American Redditors use geographic identifiers to define their own spaces in relation to Reddit's toxic geek masculine culture.

In addition to using geographic markers to delineate individual spaces within the networked public, RQ1's results also disclose how language is used as a mechanism to define shared spaces within Reddit's Latinx community. /r/redditores was identified as one of the captured networked public's prominent actors. The subreddit's title reads "Redditores. Porque aquí también se habla español", which translates to "Redditores. Because Spanish is also spoken here." Its description reads "Subreddit general en español, punto en común de la comunidad de habla hispana", which in English means "General subreddit in Spanish, an intersection of the Spanish speaking community". The forum's name is the Spanish version of Redditors, the name Reddit users call themselves. The message board's name, title, and description structure it as a space within Reddit designed for the Spanish-speaking community on Reddit. The need to create a general subreddit for Reddit's Spanish-speaking users is a response to the white hegemonic norms through which the platform's architecture and affordances are designed. The title "Redditores. Because Spanish is also spoken here" directly acknowledges how English is the assumed language of the internet. The need to say Spanish is also spoken here addresses the need to

create a space in which Spanish is the assumed language. Figure 4 displays the record of /r/redditores associated subreddits as displayed in its sidebar. These subreddits are divided into two categories: “Comunidades amigas” and “Locales”. The title “Comunidades amigas” shows how the moderators are able to manipulate the platform’s interface to materially produce a digital-race assemblage in relation to, rather than within, whiteness. Furthermore, nearly all of the subreddits recorded under “Locales” represent countries in Latin America. This list of related subreddits displays the forum's connection to Latin America. In doing so, it forges a digital connection that is generative of a Latinx digital-race assemblage.

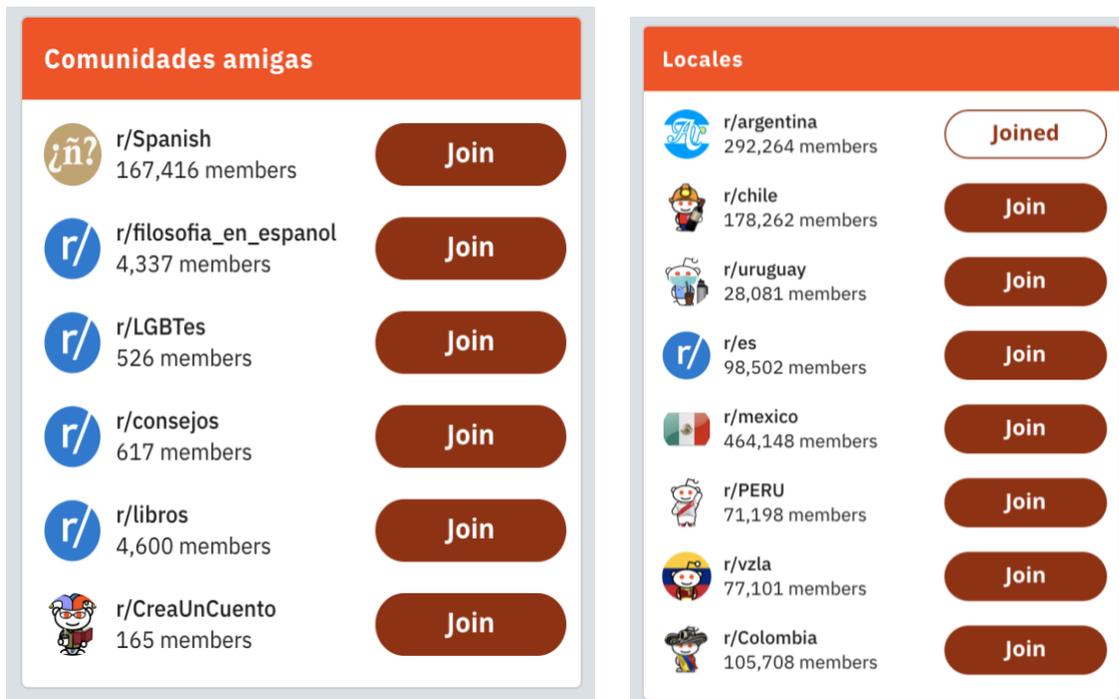


Figure 4. Picture of /r/redditores sidebar

In addition to /r/redditores, /r/musicaenespanol, /r/rapidinhapoetica, and /r/literaturahispana were also present in the network captured during this study.

r/musicaenespanol describes itself as a place to share music in Spanish. /r/rapidinhapoetic describes itself as a forum to share poetry in Portuguese. /r/literaturahispana describes itself as a message board for sharing Hispanic literature. Unlike the music forums listed above, these subreddits are not tied to specific geographic locations. Instead, these spaces organize themselves around another demographic element: shared language. These subreddits are centered on different cultural artifacts and norms but structuring themselves around a specific language lets them serve as common spaces for Latinx users. Spanish and Portuguese are the two most spoken languages across Latin America, and the phrase hispana describes a person that is Spanish speaking. The presence of these subreddits and their demonstrated need to identify themselves as the Spanish version of x or the Portuguese version of x is in direct response to the white hegemonic norms through which the platform was designed. The ability to create these spaces is further evidence that Web 2.0 systems afford users the ability to forge fluid relationships to whiteness.

Although the findings outlined above provide further evidence that platforms like Reddit allow users to navigate fluid relationships to whiteness, the ways in which shared spaces are structured within Reddit's Latinx networked public reveal how Latinx users establish commonality through a different structure of white hegemonic norms. The fact that Spanish and Portuguese are the main languages spoken in Latin America is a direct result of the white hegemonic systems that colonized these countries. As explained in chapter 2, achieving whiteness in Latin America is perceived as a mechanism for achieving social mobility. How to navigate one's relationship to their white ancestry remains a contentious debate among most Latinx people. This negotiation process is the point of stasis of the Hispanic versus Latin@/x debate. Leftists and academics tend to promote the

use of some variation of the term Latino (Latino/a, Latin@, Latinx) because Hispanic “implicitly emphasizes the white European culture of Spain at the expense of the non-white cultures that have profoundly shared the experiences of all Latin Americans” (Muñoz, 1989, p.22). In contrast, variations of the term Latino highlight the political, historical, and genealogical meanings tied to the geographic location this population is from. They also actively acknowledge the racialized colonial relations between the U.S. and Latin America while providing room to recognize and celebrate the Indigenous, Black, and Asian roots that shape Latinx identity (Alcoff, 2005; Muñoz, 2007). RQ1’s results suggest that the shared spaces within Reddit’s Latinx networked public demonstrate symptoms of colonization. Spanish and Portuguese function as organizing mechanisms that also emphasize the community’s relationship to a system of white European norms. Reddit’s Latinx community forges relations of commonality through its relationship to white hegemonic norms.

Reddit’s Latinx networked public further emphasizes its relationship to whiteness by the presences of /r/espanol and /r/es. These subreddits are not only present within the captured network, they were also identified as the public’s networked gatekeeper, meaning they are among the most visible within the networked public and have the most influence in shaping the collective’s identity. /r/espanol is a message board that describes itself as a “Subreddit para la comunidad hispanohablante de Reddit,” which translates to “A subreddit for the Spanish-speaking community on Reddit.” While hispanohablante is a term describing a Spanish speaker, the structure of the term actively acknowledges a relationship to Spain. /r/espanol’s description frames the identity of its community members within a relationship to whiteness. Additionally, /r/es is a forum for

Spain. Its description reads “Subreddit de España en español para comentar noticias, imágenes, temas de actualidad y otro contenido de interés en España, tanto para una persona viviendo en España como para los extranjeros que les interese lo que sucede en ella,” which in English reads “Subreddit of Spain in Spanish to comment on news, images, current affairs and other content of interest in Spain, as much for a person living in Spain as it is for foreigners who are interested in what happens here.” The presence of /r/es both in the captured networked public and as a networked gatekeeper further reveals how Reddit’s Latinx networked public highlights its relationship to white European norms. RQ1’s results demonstrate how the captured networked public navigates a fluid relationship to whiteness, but the community’s connections to its Indigenous, Black, and Asian roots are not emphasized in the same way as its white European roots.

#### 4.3.2 **¿Y Tu Quien Eres?**

Whereas RQ1 identified the prominent actors of Reddit’s Latinx networked public, RQ2 assessed the nature of the connections these actors forged. Specifically, RQ2 examined the extent to which the prominent actors established homophilous and heterophilous connections. In the context of Latinx identity, homophily is defined as intra-nation relationships and heterophily is operationalized as cross-nation ties. The extent to which the prominent actors were able to navigate homophilous and heterophilous ties was central to this investigation, because it reveals how online collective identities are bound to a platform’s sociotechnical architecture and affordances. Like “the architecture of physical spaces,” a platform’s design and features suggest and enable “particular modes of interaction” (Ballantyne, 2002, p. 25; Papacharissi, 2009, p. 200). Friending, following, subscribing, et cetera are all sociotechnical affordances that shape the types of connections

users forge. The design of most Web 2.0 affordances is informed by homophily. Among network scientists, homophily is regarded as an axiom that explains the tendency to form connections on the basis of similarity. In other words, birds of a feather flock together because they are birds of the same feather. However, recent scholars such as Wendy Chun (2019) have acknowledged how studies “proving” homophily obviate the historical, political, and systematic institutions of segregation that define our society. In ignoring the effects of hegemonic structures and norms, social network scientists have circulated the notion that community is bred from similarity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). Chun, in her essay *Queering Homophily*, invites her readers to reconceptualize networks as emerging from difference rather than similarity.

Chun’s (2019) invitation informed this investigation’s underlying research objectives and RQ2’s methodological blueprint. In using a Latinx networked public as a case study, this project framed heterophily—connections bred from difference— as a central variable. For a Latinx networked public to emerge in the digital sphere, the intersection of a platform’s architecture, affordances, and participatory culture must enable the ability to navigate the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. Central to these negotiations is the ability to navigate multiple racial and ethnic identities at once and the ability to forge homophilous *and* heterophilous connections. The white hegemonic norms embedded in the design and features of communication technologies have produced a digital sphere characterized by homophilous digital connections. The sociotechnical architecture and affordances of most Web 2.0 applications are informed by homophily, and thus do not allow networked publics centered on differences to emerge. On platforms like Twitter and Facebook, Latinx users are unable to navigate the cross-nation norms, values, and beliefs

that thread the Latinx community together. As a result, the Latinx networked public emerges as a fragmented collection of disconnected clusters, each representing a specific Latin American country, norm, and/or value. Ultimately, platforms whose design is centered on and informed by homophily further fragment a community that is already fragmented.

Reddit was selected as the main platform for this case study, because unlike most Web 2.0 systems, Reddit allows users to navigate relational networks. Whereas connections on most applications are centered on a user's relationship to the platform's other users, digital ties on Reddit are "primarily corralled by shared interests, which result in multiple groups and identities." (Kienzle, 2016, p. 22). The relational nature of connections on Reddit allows homophilous and heterophilous networked publics to emerge. This is evident in early observation of /r/LatinoAmerica, which displayed connections to and from subreddits that represented specific countries in Latin America. The reciprocal relationships among these subreddits suggested that Reddit's sociotechnical architecture and affordances enable users to navigate multiple ethnic labels at once while also navigating homophilous and heterophilous connections. However, the platform is also known for its toxic publics that tend to command the site's most visible content. Rooted in toxic geek masculinity, these networked publics are known to actively suppress the voices of the already disenfranchised. While Reddit's design and features create optimal conditions for a Latinx networked public to emerge, the platform's participatory culture is racially contentious.

RQ2 assessed the extent to which the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked gatekeepers were able to navigate homophilous and heterophilous connections to

understand how the intersection of Reddit’s design, features, and participatory culture shapes Reddit’s Latinx identity. Specifically, a three-part analysis was conducted to examine the nature of the channels through which Reddit’s Latinx identity is forged. RQ2 part one revealed that the prominent actors were responsible for driving homophilous and heterophilous ties among subreddits representing Latin American countries. RQ2 part two presented the statistical significance of the findings produced in part one. Lastly, RQ2 part three explored each individual ego network to determine which actors created more homophilous connections and which actors created more heterophilous connections. The implications of these results are discussed below.

#### 4.3.2.1 **Putting the “X” in Latinx**

The results for RQ2 part one reveal that subreddits representing Latin American countries drove the networked public’s homophilous and heterophilous connections. RQ2 part two tested the significance of these connections. While only a small portion of the connections forged by the prominent actors produced conclusive statistical results, these calculations divulge statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections—in other words, the networked gatekeepers of Reddit’s Latinx networked public established statistically significant intra-nation and cross-nation relationships. These outcomes further support the findings presented in RQ1, which demonstrate how the moderators of the captured network circumvented Reddit’s popular norms and instead elevated actors more representative of Latinx culture. Together, these findings portray how Reddit’s sociotechnical architecture and affordances enable users to navigate a fluid relationship to whiteness.

In this study, the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public forged statistically significant heterophilous connections. The presence of these relationships and their statistical significance is further evidence that Reddit's design and features enable users to navigate a fluid relationship to whiteness. The white hegemonic norms embedded in the design of most Web 2.0 applications has created a digital ecology characterized by homophilous relationships. Consequently, Latinx networked publics struggle to become visible because the platform's homophilous nature influences Latinx users to organize themselves into isolated and disconnected clusters. In these spaces, Latinx identity is framed a degree closer to whiteness. Reddit differs from most platforms because its sociotechnical architecture and affordances are centered around relational ties. The statistically significant heterophilous connections present in Reddit's Latinx networked public reveal how features that promote relational ties allow users to counter the digital sphere's homophilous nature. As a result, a Latinx networked public is able to become visible because the platform's design and features allow the heterophilous relationships that tie the Latinx community together to materialize.

Additionally, the statistically significant heterophilous connections further suggest that the moderators of the Latinx networked public are able to circumvent Reddit's toxic geek masculinity. As explained in chapter 2, Reddit's participatory culture is rooted in toxic geek masculinity. The site's toxic networked publics are known to game the site in order to actively suppress the voices of marginalized users. Despite their keen ability to command the site's visibility, prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public were able to forge statistically significant heterophilous ties. Furthermore, while most of the captured network consisted of soccer-related subreddits, the prominent actors

represented norms, values, and beliefs central to Latinx culture. The elevation of actors that represent Latinx community standards reveals how the moderators of the networked public were able to circumvent the site's toxic participatory culture. Together, these results illustrate a fluid relationship to the white norms that are specific to Reddit's participatory culture. Ultimately, the outcomes of this study demonstrate that Reddit's Latinx networked public is not framed within whiteness, but in relation to whiteness.

From a theoretical perspective, the outcomes of RQ2 part one and two allude to the value of sociotechnical architecture and affordances that enable heterophilous connections. The homophilous nature of most Web 2.0 applications inhibits the visibility of inherently diverse networked publics. This is evidenced by the lack of online Latinx communities on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Chun (2019) elegantly articulates how the digital sphere's homophilous nature promotes the emergence of echo chambers that mirror familiar forms of segregation and inequality. This study's results demonstrate how design and features that enable users to navigate relationships based on difference can serve to counter the formation of echo chambers. On Reddit, the ability to forge relational networks allows users to navigate the relationships between clusters that would likely be disconnected and isolated on applications driven by homophilous connections. The complicated nature of Latinx identity requires the ability to forge heterophilous connections for an inherently diverse networked public to emerge. Ultimately, the findings of RQ2 part one and part two reveal the value of exploring networks that are bred from difference.

#### 4.3.2.2 **It's spelled: B.R.A.S.I.L.**

Whereas RQ2 part one and part two examined and statistically tested the nature of the ties forged by the network's prominent actors, RQ2 part three explored each ego network independently. As previously explained, an ego network is the sub-network consisting of all the relationships made to and from a single actor. The ego networks of each networked gatekeeper were assessed to determine which subreddits were driving homophilous bonds and which were driving heterophilous connections. The results from RQ2 part three identified /r/brasil and /r/brasilivre as the only prominent actors to form more intra-nation ties than cross-nation connections. The following outlines the implications of these findings.

Out of all the networked gatekeepers, the two subreddits that represented Brasil were the only actors to forge more homophilous connections than heterophilous connections. 34.95% of the connections to and from /r/brasil were homophilous, whereas /r/brasilivre reported 56.76% homophilous ties and 9.91% heterophilous relationships. While both reported more homophilous ties, /r/brasilivre reported greater than five times more intra-nation ties than cross-nation relationships. The homophilous nature of /r/brasil's and /r/brasilivre's connections in comparison to the other networked gatekeepers mirrors the tension of an ongoing debate within the Latinx community regarding the terms Latino and Hispanic. To illustrate how these findings reflect this tension, the following provides background information to contextualize the implications.

Many out-group members, and even some in-group members, will use Hispanic and some variation of the term Latino interchangeably (Martes, 2007; Marrow, 2002). This is problematic because it "disguises the diversity that exists among Latinos" and "overemphasizes the Spanish and European aspects of South-Americas" (Hero, 1992, p.

53) In other words, equating Latino to Hispanic centralizes Latin America's relationship to Spain and actively excludes the community's Portuguese, African, Indigenous, and Asian roots. Brazilians have played a central role in dismantling the normalization of equating Latino to Hispanic. Sociologist Martes (2007) explains "that an affiliation to the label Hispanic excludes the possibility of affirming Brazilian identity; and, indeed, in many cases, being Brazilian stands precisely for emphasis on the negative statement: I am not Hispanic" (Martes, 2007, p. 231). While some Brazilians do identify as Hispanic, many actively reject the ethnic label because of its affiliation to Spain (Marrow, 2002; Beserra, 2005). Brazil was colonized by Portugal, not Spain. Brazil's main language is Portuguese, not Spanish. The term Hispanic homogenizes an inherently diverse population by negating the Latinx community's historical, political, and genealogical roots. Additionally, Brazilians are known to reject Hispanic categorization to escape the stigma typically associated with the Hispanic community. Marrow (2002) claims:

"Successful Americanization for Brazilians means not becoming part of a stigmatized Hispanic/Latino group associated with low socioeconomic status, racial discrimination and, on the heels of massive new immigration from Latin America, disempowered immigrant status – rather than becoming 'Hispanic/Latino' as part and parcel of becoming 'American'. Brazilian youth become Americans by resisting the 'foreign' Hispanic/Latino label, not by accepting it as a made-in-the-USA marker of American identity." (Marrow, 2002, p. 454)

In her interviews with 22 young Brazilians living in Boston, Marrow (2002) found they were not rejecting the relationship to whiteness tied to the term Hispanic but attempting to escape the social status and stigma associated with Latin American immigrants.

Compared to the U.S.'s racial classification systems, Brazilians are known to have a unique relationship to whiteness. In a U.S. context, whiteness is defined by what it is not, thus producing a racial and ethnic classification system framed by the white/Black dichotomy (Omi and Winant, 1986; Dryer, 1997). In Brazil, skin tone is the central axis of social stratification and achieving whiteness is seen as a pathway for social mobility. (Hernández, 2015). Martes (2007) notes that in her interviews with 200 Brazilians who reside in Boston, six claimed "that white is the most comprehensive and generic of the categories and that it stands for the mixture of all colors" (p. 238). Among these Brazilians, whiteness functions as a mechanism for homophily. According to this logic, all skin tones but Black are consumed under the umbrella of whiteness (Hernández, 2015). While some Brazilians consider themselves white, they are also aware that in the U.S. "people think that I'm black too" (Martes, 2007, p. 238). Therefore, not all Brazilians who categorize themselves as white are able to effectively pass as white. Brazilians who can pass as white are known to emphasize their whiteness to protect "themselves from the prejudice against blacks." Just as they reject the term Hispanic to avoid the stigmas associated with Latin Americans, Brazilians also emphasize their relationship to whiteness to avoid the prejudice that Black people experience. Studies show how, as a means of social mobility, Brazilians differentiate themselves from minority populations that are disenfranchised because of their own relationships to whiteness. Martes (2007) acknowledges how "Brazilian immigrants routinely use the term Hispanic to name a collective identity different from

their own” (p. 241). In other words, Brazilians navigate a relationship to whiteness that affirms Brazilian identity, thereby establishing a clear distinction between “us” and “them.”

How does this tie back to this thesis’s findings? Well, the results of RQ2 part three reveal the two subreddits representing Brazil were the only actors to forge more intra-nation ties than cross-nation ties (see Table 10). While /r/brasil only established 10.64% more homophilous than heterophilous connections, /r/brasilivre reported five times more homophilous and heterophilous connections. Understanding the nature of the relationships cast by the other Brazilian related subreddits in the captured networked public lies outside the boundaries of this study. However, the calculations reported above suggest that the moderators of /r/brasil and /r/brasilivre use homophily as a mechanism to affirm Brazilian identity on Reddit. Using homophily to establish in-group boundaries parallels the way Brazilian immigrants navigate their relationship to whiteness to affirm a collective identity different from Black and Hispanic people. The difference between /r/brasil’s and /r/brasilivre’s connections and the rest of the networked gatekeepers digitally recreates the distinction between “us” and “them.” Despite forging more homophilous than heterophilous connections, both /r/brasil and /r/brasilivre established cross-nation connections. The presence of their heterophilous connections and their position within the captured network unveils their strong relationship to Reddit’s Latinx community. The findings of this study suggest that Brazilian identity is a part of Reddit’s Latinx identity. Recognizing the nature of Brazilian identity on Reddit and how it relates to the platform’s Latinx identity is, again, outside the scope of this thesis. However, these results present a fruitful area for future research seeking to further understand the tension

surrounding the terms Hispanic and Latino and their intersection with Brazilian identity, in addition to the broader nuances that constitute Reddit's Latinx identity.

#### 4.3.2.3 **Los Otros Latinos**

Whereas /r/brasil and /r/brasillivre were responsible for forging the most intra-nation ties, the rest of the captured networked public's prominent actors established mostly heterophilous relationships. As explained above, the nature of the connections these actors formed is significant, because they frame the channels through which Reddit's Latinx identity is shaped. Who these actors are is also telling of the specific Latin American norms, values, and beliefs that prominently shape Reddit's Latinx identity. In relation to Latinx identity within a U.S. context, the presence of subreddits representing Mexico and Cuba is not surprising. Within the U.S., the Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican communities are the most established Latinx groups (Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007). Latinx scholars (Muños, 2007; Alcoff, 2005; Gutiérrez and Almaguer, 2016) have noted the overrepresentation of Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans in Latinx studies, which has led to a skewed perspective of Latinx identity (Marrow, 2007). The rise of Latinx people from other parts of Latin America was first noticeable in the 2000 U.S. census, which reported that Central Americans, South Americans, and Dominicans accounted for 10.8% of the Latinx population (Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007). It should be noted that the exact number of Central Americans and South Americans is likely underreported, since 17.3% "did not specify a detailed Hispanic origin" (as cited by Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007, p. 1). While knowing the exact numbers is difficult, the census information still illustrates "the growing economic, social, and cultural presence of Central and South American immigrants within the U.S. Latino population" (Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007, p. 1-2). Marrow (2007)

acknowledges these “new” Latinx people as other Latinos. Today, other Latinos remain understudied, but present new cultural and social norms that further heterogenize what it means to be Latinx in the United States.

Although the general demographic makeup of Reddit’s Latinx users is unknown, the results of this study demonstrate how the norms, values, and beliefs from countries and territories other than Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico play a significant role in shaping the site’s Latinx community. 9 out of the 15 (60.00%) networked gatekeepers identified in this investigation represent countries from which other Latinos are known to derive from. Marrow (2007) notes that other Latinos compared to Mexicans, Cubans, and Putero Ricans tend to be more diverse in terms of their social and economic backgrounds. How this diversity shapes the digital-race assemblages of Latinx identity in the digital sphere exists outside the boundaries of this study, but like the findings above, understanding how other Latinos provide new meanings of what it means to be Latinx is another fruitful area for further research. The implications of these findings and area for future research is discussed in the following chapter.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Situated within a sociotechnical understanding of communication technologies, this investigation explored the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice. Specifically, this project conducted a case study on Reddit's Latinx community and assessed the extent to which it was able to establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public in the digital sphere. Networked gatekeeping was the main methodological lens and digital-race assemblage was the main analytical framework used to perform this study. Whereas digital-race assemblage provided an understanding of how race and ethnicity function in the digital sphere, networked gatekeeping captured the dynamic nature of power relations. Together, these theoretical frameworks register how race and ethnicity online emerge from digital networks, how they interact with the platform's sociotechnical architecture and affordances, and their relationships to whiteness. Ultimately, this thesis provides a critical race, ethnicity, and technoculture understanding of the relation to whiteness that frames minority voices online.

As outlined in chapter 2, the history of race and ethnicity in online communities through a digital-race assemblage lens demonstrates how Web 2.0 applications afford users the ability to navigate fluid, multidimensional relationships to whiteness. Prior to participatory features, the digital ecology was characterized by its default whiteness. The digital-race assemblages that emerged at this time mimicked familiar racial and ethnic stereotypes. Like previous communication technologies, these digital-race assemblages were framed within whiteness. However, the introduction of Web 2.0 platforms and internet-enabled phones transformed the emerging new media landscape. While internet-enabled phones increased the presence of minority users, participatory features enabled

internet users to actively engage in the production, diffusion, and consumption of information. These two technological catalysts signaled the emergence of digital-race assemblages that were not framed within but in relation to whiteness.

Ethnographies on teens' social media use during the early 2000s reveal how users navigate multidimensional relationships to whiteness when interacting with and on these sociotechnical systems. The language teens used to describe their platform preferences illustrated how they were forging fluid relationships to the internet's default whiteness. The textual analysis of Mexican-American teen profile pages conducted by white undergraduate researchers demonstrates how a user's ideologies of race and ethnicity and relationships to whiteness shape their relationship to the digital-race assemblages that emerge from these spaces. The student researchers claimed that the profiles of these Mexican-American teens perpetuated negative stereotypes. However, after viewing the profiles of white teens, the undergraduate students concluded that the Mexican-American teens were not perpetuating stereotypes, but instead became the subject of stereotypes. The juxtaposition between Mexican-American and white teen Myspace profiles enabled the students to become salient of their own relationship to whiteness, and thus the white norms they were projecting onto the Mexican-American profile pages. Overall, early ethnographies on the digital segregation of Myspace and Facebook users reveal the fluid power dynamics that Web 2.0 systems enable.

Mass media and information diffusion studies conducted around the same time also captured these fluid power dynamics. Their findings suggested that the previous top-down linear models of information diffusion inadequately explained the new media ecology's multidimensional and networked environment. Networked gatekeeping was developed to

address this theoretical gap. Unlike its predecessors, networked gatekeeping actively acknowledges the role of the gated and combines social network analysis and gatekeeping principles to serve as a flexible method for understanding the contextual gatekeeper/gated relationship. Applications of networked gatekeeping to crowd-centered environments highlight four key findings: (1) networked gatekeeping mechanisms that afford non-elites to be elevated to prominence, (2) the emergence of networked publics, (3) the structure of networked visibility, and (4) how users' actions are bound by the limitations of a platform's architecture and affordances.

While the intersection of Web 2.0 applications, political unrest, and crisis events evidence sociotechnical processes that disrupt traditional forms of information diffusion, new media political communication studies illustrate how sociotechnical features like hashtags and hyperlinks enable network effects like homophily. In enabling users to forge homophilous connections, these sociotechnical affordances allow the localization of norms, values, and beliefs in the form of networked publics to emerge. In relation to digital-race assemblages, the emergence of networked publics signals the localization of a specific and shared set of relationships to whiteness. This is evidenced in Black cyberculture and Black online communities. Black internet users leverage these systems' sociotechnical affordances to afford themselves agency over the construction of their collective online identities. By navigating relationships that are not within but in relation to whiteness, Black online communities and Black cyberculture produce digital-race assemblages that provide new meanings for what it means to be Other. However, history reminds us that the ability to counter white hegemonic framings of Black identity is not by virtue of Web 2.0

technologies. For nearly 300 years, the Black community has used networking and communication technologies to afford themselves agency over their collective voice.

While Black users demonstrate the ability to establish visible networked publics, the Latinx community struggles to do the same. For a visible Latinx networked public to emerge in the new media ecology, the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture must enable the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. Central to these negotiations is the ability to navigate multiple racial and ethnic identities at once and forge both intra-nation and cross-nation connections. The architecture and affordances of most Web 2.0 applications prioritize homophilous connections. Therefore, the heterophilous connections that thread the Latinx community together are unable to materialize. Consequently, Latinx networked publics emerge as isolated and disconnected clusters that represent specific Latin American countries. The white hegemonic norms that fragment the Latinx community offline are magnified online, and thus rendering their online collective voice nearly silent.

Reddit was the platform chosen for this case study because it differs from most platforms in that its design and features allow users to navigate multiple facets of their identities and forge homophilous and heterophilous connections. Reddit exists as an interconnected network of subreddits. Each subreddit is centered on a specific topic or interests and is the main site of user connections. Since relationships among users are centered around their shared interests, the platform's architecture and affordances enable relational networked publics to emerge. The relational nature of these networked publics allows users to forge homophilous and heterophilous connections. Therefore, Reddit presents optimal features for a Latinx networked public to emerge. However, the platform

is not known to be a welcoming environment. Toxic publics are known to command the site's most visible content and actively suppress the voices of people of color. While Reddit provides the features necessary for a Latinx networked public to emerge, its participatory culture is rooted in toxic geek masculinity and is known to be racially contentious.

To understand the extent to which Reddit's Latinx community is able to establish, maintain, and promote its own networked public, this thesis developed the following research questions:

*RQ1: How do prominent Latinx networked gatekeepers negotiate the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit?*

*RQ2: To what extent do the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigate intra-nation (homophilous) and cross-nation (heterophilous) connections on Reddit?*

*RQ 3: What can we learn about how Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed through the structure of the captured networked public's connections and relationships?*

Networked gatekeeping guides this thesis's methodological underpinnings, while digital-race assemblage informs its critical analysis. Together, these theoretical frameworks register the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice.

## 5.1 **What we did**

To answer these research questions, this investigation first located Reddit's Latinx networked public. Using /r/LatinoAmerica as a port of entry, a software engineer scrapped Reddit's API on January 5th, 2020 to collect a list of all the subreddits with at least 100 subscribers. The site's API was then queried to obtain an edge list of the connections the moderators forged among the site's various subreddits. /r/LatinoAmerica's recommended

Reddit communities and their associated subreddits were extracted from this edge list. The connections of any forums that hyperlinked /r/LatinoAmerica as a recommended Reddit page were also recorded. This process captured a Latinx networked public made up of 1,811 unique actors.

Networked gatekeeping methodologies were used to identify the captured network's gated, central actors, and networked gatekeepers. After identifying these actors, a content analysis was performed on three levels: the entire network, the central actors, and the networked gatekeepers. Each subreddit was coded to assess its central topic, the country it represents, and whether or not it is representative of Latinx identity.

Understanding the norms, values, and beliefs present in the entire network, the central actors, and networked gatekeepers revealed how the community's standards were negotiated among the members of the captured networked public. Comparing the results of these content analyses demonstrated how the networked gatekeepers negotiated the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity on Reddit.

Following these methodologies, this thesis conducted a three-part analysis on the homophilous/heterophilous nature of prominent actors' ties. To perform this analysis, all the ties made to and from the 15 networked gatekeepers were extracted to produce the Latinx Prominent Actors Subnetwork. RQ2 part one assessed the homophilous/heterophilous nature of the ties present in this subnetwork. RQ2 part two used dyadic ERGM models to test their statistical significance. RQ2 part three examined each prominent actor's ego network to provide an understanding of which networked gatekeepers drove the homophilous connections and which drove the heterophilous connections.

RQ3 examined RQ1 and RQ2 results through a digital-race assemblage lens to explore the collective identity that emerged from the captured networked public's connections. Developed to understand how race and ethnicity function in the digital sphere, digital-race assemblage claims that collective identities emerge from the connections between and among digital networks. The history of race and ethnicity via a digital-race assemblage lens illustrates how Web 2.0 applications allow users to navigate fluid relationships to whiteness. As users interact with and on these systems, they are situated within digital networks that navigate multiple relationships to whiteness. A digital network's collective identity is framed in relation to its relationships to whiteness. To understand the relation to whiteness that frames Reddit's Latinx identity, RQ 3 assessed RQ 1's and RQ 2's results via a digital-race assemblage lens. This analysis is rooted in a critical, historical, and political understanding of Latinx identity formation to understand the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity. Ultimately, the nature of Reddit's Latinx identity demonstrates the relation to whiteness that Reddit's Latinx identity is constructed, thus revealing the extent to which Reddit's Latinx networked public is able to establish, maintain and promote their own voice.

## 5.2 **What We Found**

### 5.2.1 **RQ1 Results: In Relation to More Whiteness**

Examining how the prominent actors of Reddit's Latinx networked public navigated the demographic and ideological diversity of Latinx identity produced three key findings. The first finding demonstrated that a Latinx networked public exists on Reddit. Using /r/Latinoamerica as a port of entry, this study captured a networked public made up of 1,811 unique subreddits. Although most of the subreddits represented non-Latin American

countries, the networked public's central actors and networked gatekeepers (the core actors involved in constructing Reddit's Latinx identity) predominantly represented Latin America countries and Latinx norms and values. The second finding revealed how Latinx networked gatekeepers negotiated norms that are central to both the Latinx community and Reddit. The content analysis of the entire network reported soccer and other sports as the most prominent subreddit topic. Among Latinx people, soccer is the most popular sport, and on Reddit /r/Sports and /r/Soccer are some of the oldest and most popular forums. As a cultural norm, soccer functions as an intersection of interests between Redditors and Latinx users. This intersection of interests reveals a negotiation process involving norms that are popular among Redditors and norms that are central to the Latinx community. The last finding in RQ1 illustrated that the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public were able to circumvent popular Reddit norms and elevate those that are central to Latinx identity. Despite the popularity of soccer-related subreddits and the number of forums that represented non-Latin American countries, the central actors and networked gatekeepers overwhelmingly represented Latin American countries and Latinx norms, therefore suggesting that the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public were able to elevate norms that are more central to Latinx identity.

Overall, these findings present two negotiation processes. The first involves the negotiation process between Reddit's popular norms and those that are central to Latinx identity. The content analysis revealed that the majority of the subreddits that made up the networked public were centered around soccer. 59.00% of the soccer subreddits were dedicated to teams outside of Latin America and the U.S. The volume of subreddits dedicated to teams outside of the U.S. and Latin America suggests that soccer and sports

function as an intersection of interests for Redditors and Latinx users. However, this intersection of interests does not explain the quantity of non-Latinx soccer forums. These results suggest that when the platform's popular cultural norms intersect with those of a smaller community it magnifies said community's relationship to said cultural standards. In other words, the norms, values, and beliefs rooted in the platform's participatory culture affected the framing of Reddit's Latinx identity. Future research should further explore how a platform's participatory culture shapes how minority networked publics are established, maintained, and promoted.

The second negotiation process revealed in RQ1's results is centered around the negotiations that define Latinx identity. Only 27 out of 48 Latin America countries are represented in the captured networked public. Of these 27 countries, Brasil and Mexico were the most represented, indicating that cultural standards specific to Brasil and Mexico played a larger role in shaping Reddit's Latinx identity. The absence of 21 Latin American countries and the overrepresentation of Brazilian and Mexican norms parallel the Latinx community's offline intra-community tensions. As outlined in chapter 2, contestation over racial, ethnic, and cultural names are central to the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. These results suggest that these intra-community tensions are entangled and intertwined in the internet's materiality. These tensions are rooted in ideological differences regarding how to properly navigate whiteness without erasing the political, historical, and genealogical diversity that united Latinx people. Who is and is not given a voice is a central axis of this negotiation process. The absence of 21 Latin American countries and the overrepresentation of Brasil and Mexico mirror this negotiation process. Future research should explore how who is and who is not represented in networked

publics affects our understanding of the collective's online identity. Internet access remains an issue for many Latin American countries and affects which norms, values, and beliefs shape our understanding of Latinx identity. These digital inequalities, how they are produced, and their effects should be further explored. Overall, the norms, values, and beliefs that were and were not represented in this study affected this project's understanding of Reddit's Latinx identity.

### 5.2.2 **RQ2 Results: HETEROphily**

Exploring the nature of the prominent actors' connections also produced three key takeaways. First, RQ2's results reported that the networked gatekeepers of Reddit's Latinx networked public forged statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections. This allowed a Latinx networked public to materialize, because users were able to forge the cross-nation connections that thread the Latinx community together. These results challenge homophily as "the only" organizing principle and suggest that heterophily is also central to the formation of communities. Researchers should further explore heterophily as an organizing mechanism, especially among populations that seem inherently homophilous. These findings further suggest that a platform's architecture and affordances influence the types of connections an actor forges, thus providing further evidence that communication technologies are not neutral actors but instead in service to their usage. Web developers should consider the value of intentional design and sociotechnical architecture and affordances informed by heterophily to counter the homophilous nature that defines most Web 2.0 applications.

Alongside these statistical findings, RQ2 part two presented which networked gatekeepers drove homophilous and heterophilous connections. Each prominent actor's

ego network was examined to assess the nature of their connections. Out of the 15 networked gatekeepers, 12 established predominantly heterophilous connections. However, the two subreddits representing Brasil forged more homophilous than heterophilous relationships. The implications of these findings in relation to Latinx identity are discussed later in this chapter.

Lastly, RQ2 part three revealed that most of /r/Uruguay's relationships involved subreddits that were classified as NEP. Subreddits labeled as NEP did not present enough information to be coded because they presented zero to few posts and subscribers. A deeper investigation revealed that the majority of these subreddits are moderated by the same user. These results mirror previous studies illustrating how technologically literate users game the system to elevate the visibility of certain content and actors. Massanari's (2015) digital ethnography on Reddit documents how a group of users known as "the knights of the new" patrol the site's new content to elevate "quality" content and downvote "worthless" content. By patrolling the quality of the content submitted to the site, they function as gatekeepers of the platform's participatory culture, maintaining its norms, values, and beliefs by deeming what content is worthy of visibility. In this study, a single user elevated the visibility of /r/Uruguay. This again demonstrates the fluid power dynamics networked environments enable, but it also illustrates the vulnerability of networked environments. Previous networked gatekeeping studies reveal that the fluid power dynamics Web 2.0 system enable allows the crowd to collectively determine which actors are elevated to prominence. The results of this study and the "the knights of the new" demonstrate how these fluid power dynamics can be manipulated by single or a few

users. Understanding the vulnerability of fluid power dynamics and their effects on the gated is a fruitful area for future research.

In addition to understanding the vulnerability of fluid power dynamics, scholars should also consider exploring the quality of an actor's connections, metrics to gauge that quality, and how the quality of an actor's connections affects the power dynamics of a networked environment. While these results illustrate how a single user can elevate the presence of a specific actor, the connections through which /r/Uruguay achieved networked gatekeeping status were to subreddits that were not well established. 62.91% of /r/Uruguay connections were to subreddits coded as NEP. These subreddits did not present enough information to be properly coded because their central topic was not defined by their name, description, or rules. They only presented a few posts and subscribers. These subreddits are ghost communities that were not well established at the time this study was conducted. These results suggest that the quality of an actor's connections serves as a metric to said actor's position in the network. Understanding the quality of connections in the digital sphere will become increasingly significant as non-human actors become increasingly present in the digital sphere. Further networked gatekeeping studies should explore the quality of a network's connections as a central variable.

### 5.2.3 **RQ3 Results: Let's Get Critical**

RQ3 examined RQ1's and RQ2's results via a digital-race assemblage lens to understand the Latinx identity that emerges on Reddit from the networked connections between and among the captured subreddits. Overall, viewing the findings from RQ1 through a digital-race assemblage lens demonstrates how Reddit's Latinx identity is framed

in relation to multiple dimensions of whiteness, all of which are fluid in nature. RQ1's findings illustrate how the networked gatekeepers were caught in between norms that are central to Latinx identity and norms central to Reddit. The process of having to navigate two different systems of norms demonstrates Latinx identity's liminal nature, which is commonly expressed as "*ni de aquí, ni de allá*" or "neither of here, nor there." The Latinx networked public captured in this study achieved visibility on Reddit through its connection to soccer. Historically, soccer has been utilized as a mechanism of colonization and assimilation. The high percentage of European and U.S. soccer-related subreddits in Reddit's Latinx networked public suggests that soccer, as a cultural norm, is a mechanism of digital colonialism. Although the results show that the networked public achieved visibility via assimilation, the central actors and the networked gatekeepers represented norms, values, and beliefs central to the Latinx community. The process through which these community standards were elevated mirrors the liminal nature of Latinx identity. In being "*ni de aquí, ni de allá*," Reddit's Latinx identity exists liminally between Reddit's participatory culture and Latinx culture.

As outlined in chapter four, Latinx users leverage their geographic diversity and shared language to establish individual and shared spaces within the networked public. The digital materiality of these individual and shared spaces illustrates how these subreddits exist in opposition to the internet's default whiteness. Historically, English has functioned as a mechanism of standardizing white American norms. This is demonstrated by The Ford English school, the Americanization School in Oceanside, California, and the U.S. public education system. English was also designed as the normal language of the internet (Jordan, 2002). This study captured several subreddits in which Spanish and

Portuguese functioned as the main language. The presence of these subreddits reflects resistance toward the standardization of English. Therefore, these results provide further evidence of Web 2.0 applications enabling fluid relationships to whiteness.

In addition to enabling fluid relationships to whiteness, RQ1's findings via a digital-race assemblage lens also highlight the ideologies of race and ethnicity and the relationships to whiteness users bring with them when engaging on and with Reddit. Again, the communities used their shared languages to establish shared spaces within the Latinx networked public were established by the communities' shared languages. Spanish and Portuguese are the main languages spoken in Latin America, a direct product of Spain's and Portugal's colonization. While establishing shared spaces via these shared languages counters the internet's and Reddit's white American norms, it mediates Latinx identity's specific relationships to whiteness. The Latinx community's relationships to white Europeans norms are entangled and intertwined in Reddit's materiality. Therefore, these results reveal how Reddit's Latinx identity is framed in relation to multiple dimensions of whiteness. Although framed in relation to whiteness, these relationships are fluid in nature. Their fluidity suggests that the moderators of Reddit's Latinx networked public are able to leverage the site's design and features to afford themselves agency over the construction of their collective identity. However, they do not escape the relationship to whiteness that frames their collective identity. Instead, it becomes coded into the materiality of their digital voice.

It should be noted that this thesis only provides a general overview of the structure of Reddit's Latinx identity. The results, findings, and conclusions presented in this project only speak to the nature of Reddit's Latinx networked public as captured in the specific

time and space this project's data was collected. Given the fluid nature of collective identities and the digital sphere's fluid power dynamics, the outcomes produced in this study are subject to change. However, there is a clear path forward. This project only examined the Latinx identity that emerged from the relationship established among the subreddits by the site's moderators. Moderator and user relationships are known to be continuous (Centivany & Glushko, 2016; Matias, 2016). Scholars should conduct digital ethnographies, in-depth interviews, surveys and additional mixed-method studies to understand the moderator/user networked gatekeeping relationship and how that relationship shapes the collective's digital voice.

In addition to the analysis outlined above, RQ3 also examined RQ2's results via a digital-race assemblage lens. RQ2's three-part analysis examined the nature of the connections forged by the network's prominent actors. The results of this analysis via a digital-race assemblages lens communicate the value of heterophily as a central variable not just in research but also design. These results reveal that both homophily and heterophily were central in establishing, maintaining, and promoting Reddit's Latinx networked public. They also provide further evidence suggesting that the moderators of Reddit's Latinx identity leveraged the site's sociotechnical architecture and affordances to establish agency over their collective identities. The ability to afford themselves this agency supports previous media studies claiming that communication technologies are neither good nor bad, but in service to their usage. In relation to whiteness, the statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous relationships captured in this study illustrate how heterophily, as a mechanism, can counter white hegemonic norms. Overall, these findings reveal the value of heterophily in the formation of collective identities.

In addition to these statistical results, RQ2 revealed that the only networked gatekeepers that forged more intra-nation connections than cross-nation relationships were both subreddits that represented Brasil. In forging these intra-nation connections, the Brazilian subreddits were able to differentiate themselves from the rest of the prominent actors. This differentiation parallels how Brazilians communicate their identity in offline spaces. Sociologist Matres (2007) explains how “Brazilian immigrants routinely use the term Hispanic to name a collective identity different from their own” (p. 241). In doing so, they establish a clear distinction between “us” and “them.” These results suggest that homophily is a mechanism that reaffirms Brazilian identity on Reddit; therefore, homophily and heterophily are both central to the formation of Reddit’s Latinx identity.

Lastly, RQ3’s results portray how navigating homophilous and heterophilous connections can produce new meanings for what it means to be Latinx. The networked gatekeepers represented several countries outside of those typically associated with Latinx identity. Since most of the U.S.’s Latinx population is Mexican, Cuban, or Puerto Rican, their norms, cultural standards, and experiences shape our understanding of Latinx identity. Recent studies demonstrate the increased presence of Latinx people from other Latin American countries. Other Latinos is a term developed by Latinx Scholars to describe these Latinx immigrants and their descendants. Several of the countries that Other Latinos are from were represented among the captured networked public’s prominent actors. The representation of other Latinos in Reddit’s Latinx networked public suggests that Reddit’s Latinx identity can broaden our understanding of Latinx identity outside of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican norms, culture, and experiences. Future research should explore these subcommunities to provide new meanings of what it means to be Latinx.

### 5.3 **So, What Does it All Mean?**

Using Reddit's Latinx community as a case study, this project explored the extent to which Web 2.0 applications afford marginalized communities a voice. Networked gatekeeping and digital-race assemblage were the two frameworks that guided this thesis's methodology and analysis. The findings discussed above point to three larger theoretical implications regarding these frameworks and their relationship to communication technologies.

#### 5.3.1 **Networked gatekeeping is a powerful tool**

While most of the captured network was made up of soccer related subreddits, the central actors and networked gatekeepers represented community standards that are more central to Latinx culture. Additionally, RQ2's results presented statistically significant homophilous and heterophilous connections. These results support previous findings as they further evidence the fluid power dynamics Web 2.0 applications enable. As explained in chapter 2, moments of political unrest and crisis events demonstrate how the open and inclusive logic of crowd-centered systems enables networked gatekeeping processes that disrupt traditional forms of information control (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013; Robinson and Leavitt, 2017). However, these studies were situated within the context of information studies. The results of this study suggest that networked gatekeeping can serve as a robust framework to understand the relationships of power involved in the process of constructing online racial and/or ethnic collective identities.

Networked gatekeeping's ability to capture fluid power dynamics presented the opportunity to understand the effect of hegemony in an online context. In studying the way a minority group constructs their collective voice on Reddit, this thesis captures how the

site's participatory culture shaped the Latinx networked public and its visibility. Each platform is unique in the specific identity practice they enable and the participatory culture they produced. Using networked gatekeeping as its main methodological lens, this study was able to examine how the norms, values, and beliefs present in the network are negotiated among the gated, central actors, and networked gatekeepers. In identifying these actors and tracing the elevation of community standards, networked gatekeeping captured the relationship between the platform's participatory culture and the fluid nature of power dynamics Web 2.0 systems enable. The ability to study this relationship revealed the effects of hegemony in an online context. Therefore, networked gatekeeping presents itself as a robust framework for understanding the power dynamics involved in the formation of online racial and/or ethnic collective identities. How the intersection of sociotechnical architecture, affordances, and participatory culture shapes online minority spaces is a fruitful area of research for future networked gatekeeping studies. This work is vital in understanding the hegemony and inequalities of the digital sphere.

### 5.3.2 **Not just homophily, but heterophily too**

In addition to demonstrating the value of applying networked gatekeeping in critical race, ethnicity, and technoculture context, the results of this study also communicate theoretical implications regarding the framework's theoretical underpinnings. Networked gatekeeping is an interdisciplinary framework that combines traditional gatekeeping and social network analysis principles. As previously discussed, homophily is regarded as an axiom among social network analysts. Homophily describes the tendency for people to forge relationships based on their similarities. As a central social network analysis principle, homophily informed the development of networked gatekeeping. Building off of

Barzilai-Nahon, Meraz and Papacharissi extend the framework outside the purview of newsroom practices and propose it as a crowd-centered theory to explain the fluid power dynamics that Web 2.0 systems enable, Networked gatekeeping as a crowd centered theory centralizes homophily as an organizing principle:

Homophily also operates as an underlying process in networked gatekeeping, explaining how like-minded publics coalesce. Homophily determines attention and drives gatekeepers to prominent status. There are several social acts that indicate tendencies toward homophily.

Meraz and Papacharissi establish homophily as a networked gatekeeping principle by demonstrating how sociotechnical features like hashtags and hyperlinks produce homophilous effects. Their analysis reveals how homophily shapes the actors who are crowd sourced to prominence and enables ideologically consonant networked publics to emerge. The results of this study provide further evidence that homophily is central to the formation of networked publics. RQ2 results demonstrated how the networked gatekeepers forged statistically significant homophilous connections. In the context of Latinx identity, homophily is defined as intra-nation connections. The statistical significance of intra-nation connections suggests that homophily is a predictor of tie formation in the captured networked public.

In addition to presenting statically significant intra-nation relationships, the results also revealed how the networked gatekeepers that represented Brasil forged more homophilous than heterophilous connections. As outlined in chapter 3, the ability to forge these homophilous connections mirrors how Brazilians reaffirm their Brazilian identity offline line. In forging more intra-nation than cross-nation relationships, these networked

gatekeepers reaffirm Brazilian identity as a component of Reddit's Latinx community. Therefore, this study provides further evidence of homophilous effects enabling community boundaries.

Although the results of this study further suggest that homophily is an organizing principle, they also present statically significant heterophilous connections. The ability to forge heterophilous connections was central to the formation of Reddit's Latinx networked publics. As previously explained, Latinx networked public become visible in the digital sphere when the intersection of a platform's architecture, affordances, and participatory culture enable the negotiations that constitute Latinx identity. Central to these negotiations is the ability to establish cross-nation and intra-nation relationships. The design and features of most social media sites prioritize the formation of homophilous connections. Latinx networked public struggle to become visible on these platforms because the cross-nation connections that thread the Latinx community together are not able to materialize. Consequently, Latinx networked public emerge as disconnected and isolated clusters that represent individual Latin American countries.

Reddit was chosen for this study because its sociotechnical architecture and affordances allow users to navigate homophilous and heterophilous relationships. Additionally, early observations suggested the presence of a Latinx networked public. The results of this study provide further evidence confirming the presence of Reddit's Latinx community. The prominent actors forged statically significant heterophilous connections and 12 out of the 15 networked gatekeepers established more cross-nation than intra-nation relationships. While the prominent actors that represented Brazilian establish more homophilous connections, their ability to create heterophilous connections established

Brasilian norms, values, and beliefs as a part of the community standards that are central to Reddit's Latinx identity.

In electing to study an inherently racial and ethnically diverse population, this thesis actively centralized heterophily as a variable. In doing so, the project aimed to fill the theoretical void acknowledged by scholars such as Wendy Chun. In her essay *Queering Homophily*, Chun (2019) explains how studies “proving” homophily obviate the historical, political, and systematic institutions of segregation that define our society. Instead of criticizing, homophily validates current systems of segregation. Instead of diversity, homophily assumes the foundation of collectives, communities, and neighborhoods rests on commonality. Instead of being a “starting point for deeper questions,” homophily “cooks the endpoint it discovers” (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, p. 83; Chun, 2019, p.80). In ignoring these hegemonic effects, social network scientists circulated the notion that communities are only bred from similarity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001).

The results of this study demonstrate that heterophily is a pillar of Reddit's Latinx identity. However, the findings also demonstrate that homophily played a significant role in establishing Reddit's Latinx community. Therefore, both homophily and heterophily functioned as organizing principles in study. The results of this study challenge homophily as “the only” organizing principle and suggest that not all communities are bred from similarity. This suggests that the organizing principles that are fundamental in establishing community boundaries may differ from one population to the next. While some groups require the ability to navigate homophilous and heterophilous relationships, others might be more dependent on homophily, heterophily, or neither. Also, the context in which homophily and heterophily operate may change from one group to the next. This study

explored homophily and heterophily in the Latinx community within the context of cross-nation and intra-nation relationships. Other forms of homophily and heterophily may play a role in the formation of Latinx community or other communities. Nevertheless, the results produced from this study demonstrate the value of heterophily as an organizing principle. Even in seemingly homophilous or heterophilous populations, future researchers should explore the relationship between homophily and heterophily to provide a deeper understanding of community formation.

### 5.3.3 **Vulnerable systems**

The results of this project not only illustrate the value of heterophily as an organizing principle, but also the potential vulnerability that fluid power dynamics present. As previously discussed, /r/Uruguay was elevated to networked gatekeeping status but nearly two thirds of its connections were to subreddits that did not present enough information. Additionally, a deeper analysis revealed that most of these subreddits were moderated by the same user. This suggests that the visibility of /r/Uruguay was elevated by a single user, which mirrors previous studies that demonstrate how a platform's visibility can be hijacked by just a few users. While Web 2.0 applications enable the gated to collectively elevate specific actors to networked gatekeeper positions, these systems and the fluid power dynamics they enable are vulnerable to being gamed. This vulnerability is rooted in the design of these systems.

Like previous communication technologies, Web 2.0 platforms were perceived to function as neutral actors that had no effect on the way users interact with and on them. New media studies demonstrate that this is far from the truth. The design and features these systems enable has a direct effect on user engagement. However, when these systems

were first developed, they were designed and treated as conduits that mediated social interactions. Given the digital sphere's networked nature, network science principles informed the design of Web 2.0 applications' sociotechnical architecture and affordances. Understanding relationships of power is pivotal in network science research. Several scholars have concluded that a network's structure shapes the nature of power dynamics. (Kadushin, 2012; Castells, 2011; Easley and Kleinberg, 2010; Borgetti, Evert and Johnson, 2013;).

Networked gatekeeping studies reveal that the structure of digital networks in the new media ecology are not fixed but fluid. During moments of political unrest and crisis events, Web 2.0 applications have demonstrated the ability of disrupting traditional forms of information control. The fluid nature of power dynamics in the digital sphere facilitated the disruption of previous hierarchical structures of information control. However, studies on online harassment and toxic networked publics reveal that the sociotechnical architecture and affordances "that facilitate activism and cultural participation" also "enable networked abuse and targeted intimidation" (Marwick, 2017, p. 180). Digital campaigns of hate and harassment, like the ones outlined in chapter one, demonstrate how a vocal minority is able to operate these applications' sociotechnical architecture and affordances to elevate the visibility of problematic content. In these moments, toxic networked publics mold the fluid power dynamics into a hierarchical structure that produces a power law in which a few actors are able command an inordinate amount of power and attention. Therefore, Web 2.0 sociotechnical systems enable fluid power dynamics, but they do not enable digital equity.

In the digital sphere, voice equates to visibility. The ability to give an account of oneself is not only an issue of efficacy but a metric of being seen. Equity in the digital sphere is intrinsically tied to visibility. Toxic networked publics actively suppress the voices of women and people of color by commanding a site's visibility. Their ability to do so demonstrates a lack of modularity in systems' design and in the structure of the visibility they produce. Among network scientists, modularity is a metric to detect communities (Newman, 2006; Kharrazi, 2018). Broad definition of modularity describes it as: "the degree to which a system's components can be separated and recombined, and it refers both to the tightness of coupling between components and the degree to which the 'rules' of a system's architecture enable or prohibit the mixing and matching of components" (Schilling, 2000, p. 312). A system's modularity describes the degree to which the system and its components can function collectively and independently and in new contexts without disruption.

In a social context, modularity is a metric of equity. The digital sphere is a multidimensional and interconnected system of digital networks. The actors of these digital networks are components of the digital sphere. The ability for a few components to disrupt the equity of other components suggests a low degree of modularity. Designed as neutral actors, Web 2.0 systems' architecture and affordance were not intentionally designed to produce modular networks, therefore creating an unequal distribution of digital equity. Future researchers and web developers should further explore digital equity in relation to voice and the value of modularity in these technologies' design and features.

#### 5.4 **Limitations**

At the start of this study, I approached race and ethnicity from an understanding of “what is race and ethnicity”. As I laid the foundation of this thesis, I gained a deeper understanding of the philosophical, ideological, and ontological underpinnings that constitute race and ethnicity. The works of Wendy Chun, Kishonna Gray, Sofia Nobel, and Lisa Nakaurma were pivotal in etching these roots. Ultimately, these scholars and their writings incited a shift in my understanding of race and ethnicity--a shift from *what* is race and ethnicity to *how* race and ethnicity is. This is likely reflected in the tension of this thesis’s narrative flow. Nevertheless, I ended this investigation with the intention of exploring how we do race and ethnicity but given the context from which this thesis broke ground the findings outlined above are still bound to an identitarian (Sharma, 2013) understanding of race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity as presented in the study is framed as an extension of identity, which is enveloped in the social, whose architect is hegemony, and thus ultimately binds race and ethnicity in relation to whiteness. While situating race and ethnicity in relation to whiteness and not within whiteness emancipates race and ethnicity from the grips of white supremacy, race and ethnicity cannot exist without the wrinkled scars of its trauma. To center our understanding of race and ethnicity *in how it is* versus *what it is* enables its agency over white supremacy. This path towards recovery awaits in the development of paradigms, disciplines, discourses, methodologies, technologies et cetera that are rooted in how race and ethnicity is.

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