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Mestizo, Negro, Blanco—What Does it Mean? Racism and Colorism's Effects in the Latinx Community

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**Mestizo, Negro, Blanco—What Does it Mean? Racism and
Colorism's Effects in the Latinx Community**

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

This study explores how Latinxs understand their racial identity and how colorism emerges, develops and evolves in the lives of Latinxs. We want to look into how racial identity affects race and color perceptions and relationships in the community. Data in this study came from 10 individuals who participated through in-person interviews or submitted a paper survey between March 2018 and March 2019. The patterns that emerged in this research demonstrate a challenge and confusion to Latinx racial identity. Familial influence is a way that colorism and racial identity is formed and understood. Colonial history of Latinxs is also discussed as a mechanism that continues to uphold colorism in the Latinx community. The limitations of the study were also discussed.

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Chapter I: Introduction

When we think about colorism, racism, and its effects, who do we think about? Often Latinxs are left out of the conversation of racism and colorism in the United States. What the larger audience outside of *Latinidad* fail to understand is that Latinxs can be Black, Native, White, Asian, Mixed, etc. The phenomenon of racial identity does not only permeate the Latinx community. This discussion has been focused outside of ethnicity. One can look at the famous doll test completed in the 1950s (Lavarone & Durso, 2016). White and Black children as young as four-years-old subconsciously preferred white dolls over dark skin dolls. What was obvious from this discussion was an assumption that none of these children were Latinx. What if those children had identified as Latinx? How would have that changed the dynamics?

Latinx is a gender-neutral term in comparison of the Latino/Latina binary; colorism is similar to racism, but within communities of color it is how different skin colors are valued—most often light skin is seen as “better” than dark skin (Hiplatina, 2018). *Latinidad* means people within the Latin American community, either born in or growing up around a dominantly Latinx culture.

Regularly, Latinxs are thought of as people of color—within the system of racism, meaning that they cannot be racist, but can be prejudice since they lack the systemic power (whiteness) to actually be racist—however, racist ideology permeates Latinx culture from phrases like “*mejorar la raza*” (“better the race” by marrying a white or lighter skin Latinx) to anti-Black policies that have been led in the Latin America. So, this

begs the question how does racism and colorism influence Latinx communities? How do Latinxs understand their racial identity in the context of *Latinidad* and colorism?

It is imperative we enlighten ourselves about how racism, colorism, and whiteness were formed through colonialism and continues to be sustained in Black, indigenous, and other communities of color today. White supremacy and the ideology of whiteness not only rely on white people but use other marginalized communities to uphold the status quo. Through circumstances like colorism and racism, white supremacy affects how communities interact with one another. It is where phrases like “*pelo malo*” (meaning “bad hair” towards afro-Latinas) are bred and perpetuate similar racial injustice as we see in the broader United States. *Dark Girls* (Capretto, 2013) is a documentary that explores Black women’s childhood experiences growing up in the United States—had this been focused on ethnicity, like the doll test, would it have changed the experiences, or would they be similar? Whiteness is an ideology that prevails in Latinx communities, with such phrases as “*mejorar la raza*,” stereotyping afro/indigenous Latinx decedents, and anti-black/colorblind attitudes. Whiteness can also be seen as synonymous with Colorism as colorism is the preference of lighter skin. Race and color are understood in Latin America differently than that in the United States. In the United States, race is not acknowledged because of its painful past, whereas in Latin America race is acknowledged, but when you speak about your heritage you say Mestizo, meaning mixed with African, Indigenous, and European blood, you do not individualize yourself—especially not as African or Indigenous.

Observing how colorism affects Latinx communities is critical to study, especially in today's social and political realm. From the perspective of this course, this research is applicable. We are observing how racism's counterpart—colorism is continuing within group discrimination of Latinxs. There has been limited research conducted in this area. The bulk of research of colorism in Latinx communities has been done in the 1980s and 1990s, with some new research in the past decade. The information gathered from previous research 20-30 years ago is still true and relevant as we have not eradicated racism or colorism from our society. I believe that this research will contribute to what has already been established.

It is imperative to understand this because most research has focused on white or light skinned Latinx populations which have a very different perception and experience of *Latinidad* than darker skinned, Black and Indigenous Latinxs. However, by taking in account prior research, I have found it critical to focus on how colorism and racism are embedded in Latinx communities and how that affects the relationships and identity of the Latinx community as a whole. By assessing community identity and self-perception based on colorism and racism in Latinx communities, we can start to bridge gaps found in previous research.

I seek to understand the prevalence of colorism and how whiteness/white supremacy is affecting Latinx communities. When people think of Latinxs, they often think of people who look like me—brown skin, but not too dark, with brown eyes and dark hair—but regret to understand the fact that Latinxs are of all races and we are not truly able to come under one pan-ethnic label. My goal is to understand colorism in

Latinx communities. How do Latinxs understand their race in the context of *Latinidad*? How do Latinxs uphold white ideology and white supremacy within their own communities? How does colorism and racism maintain white supremacy in Latinx communities? Is a first-generation Latinx-American more likely to carry on these ideologies or are they likely to challenge those ideas versus a second, third, or fourth generation Latinx-American? What are the similarities and differences between Latin American and United States cultures in the way they approach and understand race? It is important to tackle the various aspects of racism and colorism to observe how they manifest in beauty, media, occupational status, income and many other factors.

The themes that I will be looking for patterns in or around concern: how colorism shapes identity and how history has shaped our present perceptions and understanding of race and color in the Latinx community. The patterns I may find regarding these themes may contribute to alternative approaches to studying race in Latinx communities. I want to attempt to address the following questions in my research:

1. How do Latinxs understand their race in the context of *Latinidad*?
2. What racial ideology do people hold in their own communities and how may they vary by their social demographic characteristics?
3. How does colorism emerge, develop and evolve?

My research will strive to center Afro and Indigenous Latinx voices to understand whiteness and how it influences Latinx communities within the United States. Afro and Indigenous Latinxs are the ones who suffer the most discrimination with regards to colorism, so it is essential to focus on their voices as they understand and have

experienced unfair treatment. In the new age of multimedia, blogs found discussing whiteness, white privilege, and race/ethnic issues in the Latinx community are used to support the academic studies discussed in this literature review.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, and Organista (2014) were some of the first pioneers of race issues within Latinx communities. They embarked to contribute to the understudied area of colorism and its significance in the Latinx community. They looked at three eras: conquest, colonization, and post-colonization to understand if they are connected to today's color-blind racial attitudes and *mestizaje*—the mixing of races. Their research showed the establishment of racial and ethnic tensions and the consequences of today's Latinxs who are of indigenous and African descent. They discussed how color-blind attitudes and *mestizaje* are used to deny and minimize skin color privilege in Latinx communities. Their research called for further examination in centering the narratives of Afro and Indigenous Latinxs to explore within-group and between group experiences of colorism and related attitudes beliefs and feelings; explore how colorism affects Latinxs racial and ethnic identity development; and studies regarding how Latinx/immigrants understood the concept of race prior to arriving in the United States (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014).

Acknowledging *Mestizo* History and Identity

Chavez-Dueñas et al. (2014) discussed within group discrimination; they concluded that ideologies like *Mestizaje*, the mixing of races—the idea that we are all mixed with Black, indigenous, and European ancestry, have contributed to this color-blind ideology within Latinx communities. They posit that conquest, colonization, and post-colonization have influenced the skin color privilege and discrimination prevalent in Latinx communities. During conquest, Spaniards came to save the Indians because

they were “heathens” (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014, p. 19). Thus, the Spanish interpretation, rooted in a European perception of the world took hold during this era founding social inequality between white and non-white populations.

In the post-colonial era, *mestizaje* was and is still currently used to unite everyone as being of mixed decent, and thus inferring a color-blind society. This first started with Vicente Guerrero, the second President of Mexico, but first Black President.

President Guerrero

made a decision that would have significant repercussions for future generations.

He decided that race, as a demographic category, would no longer be part of

Mexico’s national census. His assumption was that if people were no longer

categorized based on race, social inequality would cease to exist. Chavez-

Dueñas et al., 2014, p. 8)

Actions like these promote assimilation tactics in which Afro and Indigenous Latinxs suffer if they do not fit the status quo. Vicente Guerrero also demonstrated an interesting action being an Afro-Mexican, he promoted the assimilation of uniting as one rather than being able to identify as you chose to. In a way, this demonstrates how whiteness is prevailing because there is a minimization, or even elimination of choosing African or indigenous roots. The effects of colonialism promoting assimilation are shown to have lasting effects on people and the way they see and act in the world.

Attempting to categorize all Latinxs as one leaves out Black, indigenous, and dark skin Latinxs from the big picture of the racist ideologies that have pervaded Latin America post colonization. Chavez-Dueñas et al. (2014) posited that the use of a pan-

ethnic label, such as “Latinos,” hinders the opportunities of darker skinned Latinxs and those who have less white (European) looking phenotypes. In other words, light skinned Latinxs also benefit from White privilege to varying degrees but this mostly unacknowledged and denied. What this means is that it is hard for Latinos to admit there is skin color privilege. Latinxs who are white or lighter admit there is class discrimination but fail to see discrimination based on skin color. Colonialism began the racial stratification we see in Latin America. In the colonial times, there was extreme racial stratification and discrimination.

In today’s society, one could say racial segregation and discrimination is still prevalent but manifests itself in other ways. In interviews with 36 self-identified White-Hispanic women, Stephens and Fernández (2012) found that skin-color was associated with desirability among peer groups, increased value in dating contexts, sexual appeal to men, and a marker of Hispanic identity in social contexts. Although only white-identified Hispanic women were interviewed, their responses shed light on how Latinxs understand race/skin-color whether consciously or not. In particular, these women stated having their skin-color viewed as dark would be problematic—21 of the 36 women stated that they would be treated negatively if their skin color was perceived as being darker or placed them in the identity of being ‘Black.’ On the other hand, these women also stated that being too light, white, pale, or ‘without color’ would be viewed as unattractive. Even if these women do not like or want to be too white, they still insinuate an understanding of blackness and darker skin tones as unattractive and undesirable, thus influencing discrimination based on perceived race and skin color. The

respondents' admitted they like lighter skin and know that there are negative associations with darker skin colors. This influences discrimination based on skin color because it impacts who is considered attractive and desirable. This perpetuates the continuation of families saying those damaging phrases like *mejorar la raza*. It contributes to the high rates of missing and murdered indigenous women. It has little afro-Latina girls hating their skin, buying skin whitening products.

The women above would pick white skin colors over Black/Dark colors, but what kind of influence does immigration have on racial/color perceptions? What Frank, Akresh, and Lu (2010) hypothesized on their analysis is that if Latinx immigrants realize there are consequences for having or being associated with darker skin, then those who do opt to select the "white" racial category will be afforded the privileges and advantages connected to being white, if they are perceived as such (being white/having lighter skin). If this does happen, then there may be a future in the expansion of who is considered white to include lighter skin Latinxs, similar to what happened with the Italians, Polish, and Irish. Since discrimination in the Latinx community has been found to affect occupational status, we know that this can influence income levels as explained by Espino and Franz (2002). It is interesting to ponder why do Latinxs choose the "white" racial category. As mentioned, lighter skin tones may be able to pass with the benefits, but not everyone who selects the category gets the benefits of being perceived as white.

Skin-color prejudice and within-group racial discrimination: Historical and current impact on Latino/a populations begins to shed light onto the ways that racism and

colorism have been influenced by the lasting effects of Colonialism. Colonialism has continued influencing the ideology that whiteness in Latinx communities is better, thus continuing discriminating against Afro and Indigenous Latinxs. Consequently, Chavez-Dueñas et al. (2014) discussed how *mestizaje* is used to promote a pan-identity which has undertones of colorblindness. Is this another way to not recognize afro-Latinxs, by limiting racial categories, is this promoting anti-blackness and further racial stratification like what was once done in colonization?

Challenges of Accepting Black, Indigenous, and Spanish Ancestry

Frank et al. (2010) observed Latino immigrants and how they fit into the racial categories of the United States. What they hypothesized is that there is a racial boundary being formed in the United States around the existing racial structure. What they found was the darker skinned Latinxs will experience skin-color-based discrimination and Latinxs integrated into the United States are more likely to opt out of the United States racial categorization scheme. This is critical to understand as a perspective because Latinxs perceptions of themselves may have changed when they immigrated to the United States. After immigration, how do their perceptions of race and color influence their relationships with others in their community?

Living in two worlds—too Black for Latinos and too Latino for Black folks—This has significant outcomes for how Black and darker skinned women and people will be perceived (if they are Latinx enough and treated in regard to how they are perceived by people once they immigrate to the United States, per say).

Dark skin, along with very light skin, was also associated with being 'un' Hispanic. These women felt that one must have the midrange tan color to be accepted as a member of their Hispanic community. This tangible symbol their ethnic 'membership' ensured they would not be is taken for being 'white' or 'American' by fellow Hispanics. (Stephens & Fernandez, 2012, p 89)

Although Stephens and Fernandez's (2012) research focused on beauty perceptions and attractiveness, it enlightened us to how these Hispanic women view skin color/race and its advantages or disadvantages. This is essential to understand as one delves deeper into learning about race, colorism, and within group discrimination of Latinx communities. These women discussed what your "typical" Latina should look like. What often influences how women should look like? More often than not the media does, and what does the media promote for a Latina: medium/light brown skin, thick wavy hair, but not *too* curly, hourglass figure, and somewhere between the *santa* (saint)/*puta* (whore) dichotomy. Often the Latinas who are darker are seen as the *putas* whereas the light skin Latinas are seen as the *santas* if you observe who are the main people on TV networks like *Telemundo* or *Univision*, you see that there is a limited representation in the diversity of *latinidad*. Stephens and Fernandez may have focused on beauty, but what is seen as beautiful may also influence how people pick and choose their partners. If these characteristics have a strong influence on what is perceived as beautiful, those phrases like *mejorar la raza* and *pelo malo* in the Latinx community will continue and we will continue to see that white/light skinned people are promoted as the epitome of beauty.

During colonization, social stratification was created through skin color and physical attributes.

Such a stratification system was designed to allow Spaniards to hold and control political, social, and economic power at the cost of impoverishing indigenous and African groups (Ogbu, 1994; Organista, 2007a; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). . . Your placement within the stratification system determined the power and privilege you held within the colonies including noble titles, legal class divisions, censorship, access to formal education, and other life enhancing resources (Livi-Bacci, 2008; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). (Chavez-Dueñas, et al., 2014)

In the Latinx community, how pervasive is racism and colorism in affecting people's life opportunities? Espino and Franz (2002) found that there was an impact in occupational status with regard to skin color: "In all cases, very light Latinos have a higher occupational prestige than very dark Latinos, although medium-skinned Puerto Ricans have the highest occupational rankings for their ethnic group" (p. 612). Espino and Franz concluded that the darker-skinned a Latino is, the more often they will face discrimination. They found that "Mexican and Cuban individuals who look more European have higher prestige scores than Mexican and Cuban individuals who have less indigenous or African appearances" (p. 613). This demonstrates how the racism and colorism that came with Imperialism and Colonialism is still affecting people today. If you are darker, you are seen as less than worthy of respect. If you are lighter, you are seen as European and thus more valuable. If these individuals who appear more

European have these privileges, how are they or do they change when they immigrate from Latin America to the United States? This is important to observe as the lighter or whiter a Latinx person is perceived to be, especially in the United States, their lives may be drastically different than those who are perceived as darker, Black or Indigenous Latinxs.

How does immigration from a Latinx country to the United States affect the way one perceives their race and others in the context of *Latinidad* in the United States? Frank et al. (2010) found that Latino immigrants realize the advantages of a White identity, but darker-skinned immigrants experience colorism (skin-color discrimination within group) that affects annual income. Think back to Imperialism and Colonialism, who held the most wealth and who had to work for the wealthy? Latinos who were integrated into the United States were not participating in the racial categorization of the United States. Frank et al. posited that a racial boundary is being created around Latino communities—those who are darker and those who are more experienced in the United States' racial stratification system. The racial stratification felt by Latinxs has led to them opting to choose “some other race” when filling out data. This identification as “other race” has led Frank et al. to believe that Mexican-Americans and Latinxs are creating their own race by opting out of conforming to the racial stratification proposed in the United States. This has led me to question if the idea of Latinxs as “some other race” promotes *mestizaje* or is it manifesting itself in this way? Or should Latinxs develop another “race”?

In addition, Massey and Denton (1993) explored how residential segregation has been influenced by continued discriminatory policies against Black Americans. They argued that during slavery, Blacks and whites lived in close proximity to each other. As time progressed, new policies were adopted to enforce a separation between Blacks and whites, a major policy that was enforced was residential segregation. There are some places so segregated in the United States where the community is over 70% Black and defined as hyper-segregation, which leads to the problems associated with the ghetto—joblessness, crime, poverty, etc. It would be interesting to see how and if Latinx immigrants are affected by segregation. In their research, Massey and Denton did note that Hispanics and Asians experience far less segregation than Blacks. Their research separated Black Hispanics from Black Americans. What we have observed already, I would not doubt that Black Hispanics in Latin America and when immigrating to the United States, may experience similar discriminatory practices.

Finally, Bonilla-Silva (2001) dug deeper in his book *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*.” He contended that racism should be conceptualized in structural terms, not as individual instances. Bonilla-Silva labelled the current system of race relations as a Racialized Social System which labels people as either beneficiaries or subordinates of the system. As beneficiaries or subordinates in the racialized social system have different social rewards, they will develop different material interests. For example, the dominant group will want to protect the status quo, while the subordinate group will fight for an equal position in society. Similar in American Apartheid, policy and language are used to enforce a racial residential

segregation through a façade of non-racial terms. Bonilla-Silva also argued that the dominant group creates an ideology that gives them the ammunition to account for racial inequality. He termed this “color-blind racism” (p. 141).

There are various ways to understand and view Latinxs in the United States and Latin America. We see similarities in colorblind ideology being promoted but fail to realize the stark consequences of leaving race out of the discussion. White privilege is upheld in distinct ways through ideologies aforementioned like *mestizaje*, phrases like “*mejorar la raza/pelo malo*,” and how Latinxs view and understand themselves as Latinxs within the Black/white dichotomy of race relations. Immigration to the United States may also challenge Latinxs perception of themselves. They may opt to identify more with white Americans if they are white or light skinned Latinxs, while Afro Latinxs, Indigenous Latinxs, and darker skinned Latinx folks may not receive the same treatment and continue to be discriminated against within the racial profiling of the United States. While not all these studies focused an Afro-Latinx or Indigenous narrative, they did explore how colorism affects Latinx racial/ethnic identity development and how immigrant Latinxs fit into the larger picture of the United States’ racial structure either through foreign born or native born Latinxs. It is important to include these perspectives in this research as a way to compare my field work with what has already been said.

Social Media Analysis of Current Race-Relations

Discerning the within group discrimination and prejudice in Latinx communities can begin to be understood using critical race theory (CRT). White privilege is the central aspect to CRT. In the literature review, we investigated the different ways white

privilege exists in Latinx communities: white/light skin/mestizo Latinxs have better occupational status, they face less discrimination, and are seen as the “acceptable” Latinx—meaning they fit into the perceived stereotype of what a Latinx person looks like. The imprint of racism and colorism faced by Latinx communities was left by Colonialism. They may not manifest themselves as they once did, but we see their lasting influences on race and color in Latinx communities.

A Huffington Post article (Pastor, 2014), *Are Latinos Really Turning White*, discussed how Latino immigration and how the United States census asks questions regarding race can lead to reasons the “white” category is growing in the Latinx community. For example, the census provides the following options for race: White, Black, or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander or two or more races. On their page they noted that the concept of race is separate from the concept of Hispanic origin (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Similar to Frank et al.’s (2010) research, “this suggests that single racial origin questions do not include Latino as a racial group may force individuals to artificially place themselves in categories that do not adequately represent their self-conceptions” (p. 378). Thus, not being able to truly identify how they want, assimilation is promoted to Latinxs to unify as Latinx, rather than recognize their individual roots.

Everyday Feminism, an online resource, created a list of examples of white privilege in Latinx communities (Lazo, 2016; Reichard, 2016). The compilation of discrimination faced from afro-Latinxs and indigenous-Latinxs is apparent in how history treated them and how it has continued into today. The literature review discusses the

impact of colonization and how the ideologies that came with colonization have not left Latin America. Latinxs still believe in the *mestizaje* ideology which stunts the conversation on racism and colorism in Latin America. In the United States, the way race is approached and discussed may be difficult, but it is being taken seriously in social and political decisions. Unfortunately, compared to Latinx communities, the discussion is not taken as seriously. Classism is seen as a major factor of discrimination rather than race.

Everyday Feminism (Lazo, 2016; Reichard, 2016) began this conversation of discrimination by highlighting the practices certain groups faced by the dominant class: “Your relatives were never enslaved or colonized, and no government has tried to stop you from having children.” The relatives that were not enslaved or colonized were the ones that came from European roots or were palatable to the white gaze. “Your family had no problem migrating to Latin America,” look at today in the United States. Trump’s comments have not promoted a friendly narrative towards Latinxs. (BBC News, 2018). He commented they are drug dealers and rapists.

You’ve never been told you have *Pelo Malo* (bad hair); You’ve never been told you are too dark to be beautiful, successful or desirable; You resemble Latinx celebrities who are praised for their good looks; TV/Films depict people who look like you in positive light. (BBC News, 2018)

When you look at *Telemundo* and *Univision*, you see more light-skinned and white Latinxs than you do dark-skinned. When you see dark Latinxs on TV, they are featured as the help, the evil ones, or the ones not depicted in a positive light. “Light

skin Latinos make more money, have lower unemployment rates, live in more affluent neighborhoods with more resources, complete more years of schooling, are considered smarter than darker Latinos, more likely to marry “higher-status” (read: white) spouses and light skin Latinos have the *privilege* of being seen as Latino.” These examples show the individual and structural power white/light/mestizo Latinxs hold over their Afro, Indigenous, dark skinned counter parts in individual, social and political contexts.

Similar to law and policy in the United States, Latin American governments have organized for the *Blanquimiento* (whitening) of Latin America through racist policies that upholds whiteness as the standard (Afropede@, n.d.). Culturally, whiteness is accepted and praised over any afro or indigenous roots. When afro and indigenous roots are being recognized, it’s through the colorblind lens of *mestizaje*, that postulates all Latinxs are African, indigenous, European, and that we should all be together as one, under the Latinx identity.

How did the colorism and within group prejudice and discrimination commence in the Latinx community? One can look back to the conquest of Latin America, the colonization, and the aftermath of colonization. *Colorism in Latinx Communities* by Padilla (2015) mentioned that during the conquest and colonization of Mexico and Latin America, the Spanish rigidly followed the “sistema de casta,” the caste system—they had the term mestizo, which is still used today to discuss someone of indigenous and white ancestry. Then there is “salta atras” to describe someone of Black and Spanish descent. Translated, the phrase literally means “jump backwards.” Thus, inferring inferiority of those who are perceived as Black. It is interesting to observe how it is

better for an indigenous person to mix with Spanish and they are called “mestizo” versus mixing with an African which would categorize them as “salta atras.” The words have a strong connection to how light skin Latinxs observe and develop perceptions about dark skinned Latinxs to this day.

By 2050, researchers say that Latinxs could be the largest minority group; however, this does not mean that the minority will become the majority. What does this mean in terms of the persistence of racial ideology? *The Latino Flight to Whiteness* (Darity, 2018) discussed a skepticism that should be held when discussing the new demographics. One should be wary about the trends in racial classification and be skeptical about the emergency of a majority-minority America. Whether self-identification as white translates into social identification as white is another discussion.

A study done in 2014 by Vargas in the *DuBois Review* indicated that only “six percent of Hispanics who say they are white also say they believe that they are perceived by others as white.” Think about the white Hispanic women who said they did not want to be too light to be confused as white or non-Hispanic, but neither did they want to be too dark as that was associated with negative perceptions.

In “From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial: Towards a New System of Racial Stratification in the USA,” a 2006 article in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Bonilla-Silva argued that the shifting American racial boundaries are producing a provisional space for Hispanics collectively as “honorary whites”—Like Italians and Irish, some Latinxs who identify as white will select and understand themselves in this racialized consciousness. What

future will this hold for Latinx racial identity and relationships within the Latinx community?

The racialized consciousness has been used to promote a pan ethnic identity of understanding *Latinidad*. In *Latinos and Whiteness: On Being Sold an Empty White Privilege Knapsack* (Race-work, Race-love, 2014) hits an interesting point:

Let's review this again: Despite being told that Latinos have "no race" that we are in fact an 'ethnicity' we forget that Latinos are in the process of racialization.

Why? Because the process of racialization is not at all spoken about in mainstream conversations. This was given more ammunition when the Hispanic label came about. Labeling people Hispanic by falsely identifying a Spanish language background as our unifying factor (that's for another piece), despite our various skin colors, made Latinos become a part of an ethnicity not a race.** (** Interestingly, this is a vestige of the popular 'racial democracy' experiments in Latin America, where Black was erased, and mestizaje came about, regarding most Latin Americans as 'colorless' which generally is a proxy for White). (¶ 5)

Surmising again the idea of colorblindness to alleviate the racial history of Latin America; to promote Latin America as a mixed country without recognizing or realizing the consequences colorism, racism and white supremacy has on afro, indigenous, and dark skinned Latinxs.

This caste system has infiltrated the way Latin America runs today. The thorough examples of white/light skinned privilege given by *Everyday Feminism* captured the ways that colorism continues to have a drastic effect on darker skinned Latinxs—those

who look indigenous or have African features (Lazo, 2016). Race, class, and gender manifest themselves in various ways that control and influence how white privilege works for people who are white or light enough. The exclusion of darker skinned Latinxs from public institutions has shown to lead to a lower quality of life. White privilege affects people being able to get out of poverty, have equal opportunity and access, and be seen as Latinx enough to those who fall outside of *Latinidad*. We see how Imperialism and Colonialism began this trend of discrimination and racial inequality. The creation of the caste system and now to the way some countries let people identify, promotes the white ideology that began with Colonialism. Critical Race Theory helps us unfold how colorism emerges, develops and evolves in Latinx communities and how we can create a non-racist, non-colorist society.

Chapter III: Methodology

My study was meant to analyze how Latinxs understand their racial identification and how colorism affects Latinx community relationships. Comparing responses of personal experience and observations happened in three patterns: challenging and understanding racial identity, familial influence on racial perceptions and colonial history as the foundation for current race perceptions and relationships.

Target Population

Target populations are Latinx people of all ages, all immigration statuses, all different skin tones, genders, different Latinx nationalities, various classes, number of children, and different professions with an emphasis on Afro and Indigenous Latinxs because they have not been the center of previous studies. Informants were identified by recruiting online via the Facebook group LOCUS which is an online group for people of color in the Twin Cities to connect each other to employment, volunteer, or professional development opportunities.

Data Collection Process

Information was gathered through in-depth interviews and paper surveys in either English or Spanglish (a combination of Spanish and English) (see Appendix A). The interviews were conducted at Indigenous Roots, 788 E 7th Street, St. Paul, MN in a private room for about an hour each. First and foremost, a consent form was provided prior to starting the interview, on the survey there was an informational disclosure stating if they filled out the survey they consented (see Appendix B). Ethical concerns may include when discussing racism and colorism in Latinx communities, depending on

identity, it may trigger traumatic experiences. To remedy this, in the interview, I informed them that I might ask some related questions depending on their story. Five in person interviews were conducted in March 2019 and five paper survey responses were received in March 2018 (see Appendix C). With the interviewee's permission, interviews were transcribed while interviewing and data was recorded on audio on a personal laptop which is password protected to ensure anonymity.

In addition to in person interviews, paper surveys were distributed if people could not make the in-person discussion. One interviewee had also filled out the paper survey. The survey was distributed spring 2018 and had five questions and was translated into Spanish as well. The questions were:

1. How do you understand your race in the context of *Latinidad* (term that refers to the various attributes shared by Latin American people and their descendants without reducing those similarities to any single essential trait)?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Latin American and United States culture in the way they approach and understand race?
3. How do Latinxs uphold white ideology and white supremacy within their own communities?
4. How does racism and/or colorism affect the community identity of Latinx communities and How has racism and/or colorism affected you within the Latinx community?

The survey and interview responses are being used to shed light on what has been discovered in the literature review to develop ideas for discussing and combating whiteness/racism/colorism within Latinx communities.

Sample Size

The small sample gathered is not near the size required for statistical representativeness. And yet, given the nature of my qualitative study, I can approach sample representativeness by pursuing sample diversity (Weis, 1994). In terms of sampling strategy, I used snowball sampling because I used the networks of the interviewees to conduct the interviews. Since the sampling size will be less than 20, between 10-15 responses the snowball technique seems to fit best (Schutt, 2015). I am aware that the initial contacts may shape the outcome of the research; however, I am hopeful that the research will not be stifled by this circumstance.

Research Informant Demographics

Table 1

Research Informant Demographics

Age	Race	Ethnicity	Profession	Socioeconomic Status	Children	Education	Current Residential Area
24	Black/Dominicana	Latina	Social Worker	Lower/middle class	None	BA & MBA	Farmington, MN
38	Mexicano	Latino	Organizer	Lower/middle class	None	BA	NE Minneapolis, MN
23	Mexican	Hispanic/Latino	Student	Lower/middle class	None	Almost BA	Northfield, MN
23	Mexican American	Mexican American	Sexual Health Educator	Middle Class	None	BA	St. Louis Park, MN
41	White/Latinx	Peruvian American/Latina/Latinx	Transportation Engineer	Middle Class	None	BA & 2 Masters	Minneapolis
N/A	N/A	Mexican Immigrant	Mom	N/A	3	N/A	St. Paul, MN
N/A	N/A	Mexican Immigrant	Daughter	N/A	3	N/A	St. Paul, MN
55	N/A	Latina/Marten	Mom	N/A	2	N/A	Stillwater, MN
24	N/A	Latin Caribbean/Afro-Latino	Son	N/A	N/A	BA	St. Paul, MN
N/A	N/A	Mexican	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Mexico

Interviewee Profile Summary

Out of the 10 interviewees, six were older than 35. Two interviewees had master's degrees. Six out of 10 have their bachelor's degree. I was able to interview two sets of families: the first family was a mother and son the second family was mother, son, and daughter. Only three identified as Afro-Latinx, none identified as indigenous. One of the interviewees was located in Mexico, the rest currently reside in Minnesota

around the Twin Cities. Only four interviewees had children. Two out of 10 identified as living in middle class socioeconomic statuses.

Chapter IV: Results

While everyone's experience was different, one similarity came through: many of those in the Latinx community struggle with their identity or at the very least question the terminology used to describe who they are. The following three themes emerged while analyzing the responses: personal racial identification, familial influence and colonial history. What I mean by personal racial identification is how each interviewee identified their race and ethnicity and how they came to understand themselves as such; familial influence are the sayings and stories told in families that either uphold or challenge the status quo; and colonial history is discussed as a means to understand the present and related circumstances.

Questioning and Challenging One's Latinx Identity

For some interviewees, when asked what your race is or how do you identify your race, were struggling to find the right words. Some went right away into analyzing their response and some just answered confidently stating their identity. Even though some displayed confidence, when digging deeper, it is observed that even then they questioned the terms used and hoped for something more inclusive. This demonstrates a peek into colorism as non-black Latinxs try to find an identity that describes their experience.

Jumping in Interviewees 3 and 4 immediately explained their statements for when asked their race and ethnicity. Interviewee 3 (who is a 23-year-old student) went on to say "Knowing what answers people want, I say Hispanic/Latino. That's what people want. That's what you call this pool of people who speak Spanish." This

demonstrates there is an unconscious, or even conscious, knowledge of what it means to be Latinx. A major identifier is language, after appearances for people who are not a part of the community, especially for people outside of *latinidad*. He stated that school was a place where he was able to learn sociological concepts that pushed him to question what he says, whereas in the past he used to just say things without question. Interviewee 3 continued, “even though I identify as Latino or Hispanic, besides Mexican, I wouldn’t know what I would identify as, maybe because I do not know my generational history.” His response almost echoes what Interviewee 4 (23-years-old and BA holder) said when asked about her race: “I know I’m not Asian, Pacific Islander, no Black/afro roots, I wouldn’t say indigenous or native cause I do not know the history . . . sometimes I could say mestiza or white, in the sense that I’m not Black.” She recognizes what she is not but cannot seem to figure out what she is. This is interesting because in the social media analysis it was discussed how Latinxs are almost making “another race” by identifying as other when filling out surveys such as the census. Chavez et al. (2014) warned about a pan-ethnic label for Latinxs, is this another way to recognize the diversity in *latinidad*?

Additionally, Interviewee 2 (a social organizer) questioned the terms used to describe Spanish speakers saying, “I have to consider what the hell is Latino? It’s a word that’s recent, where did it come from, who coined that word”? It is important to ponder this. How old is the term Latino? Hispanic? When asking Interviewee 4 about her ethnicity she goes on to say that it’s a confusing question— “when I look into descriptions of what race is I do not fit those categories.” What does the future hold for

racial categorization? Interviewee 5 (who is mixed with White and Peruvian) also expressed difficulty selecting race. Interviewee 5 says “it depends on the questions. On the census I guess that [my race is] white. If it was more open [ended] I would say Latinx [for my race].” Continuously challenging identity, Interviewee 7 stated that she knows she has indigenous blood in her because of her brown skin, but then also says that she’s Latina along with being indigenous. She selected Latina as a race to identify and understand herself as a separate race. She also talks about how the communities here [in the United States] are separated. They do not discuss or even think about racism. She also talks about how there’s always going to be racism because people are different and treat people who are different badly, especially indigenous people. She realized in her answer about how racism and colorism affect the Latinx community she says it’s an impediment to coming together.

These responses further illustrate the difficulty in understanding one’s racial identification, but also demonstrate a possibility of creating a new racial category. Is there a limited grasp on racial identity that affects the ideology of racism and colorism in the Latinx community? Does this lack of knowing one’s racial identity harm afro and indigenous Latinx populations, if so how? Not just physical harm, but erasure from history, from society and everyday life. This is relevant to consider as white expansion may soon include some Hispanics as honorary whites which may further perpetuate racism and colorism.

Interviewee 1 brings together many perspectives on racial identification. She is an Afro-Latina from the Dominican, born and raised in the United States, but lives in the

suburbs. I think this experience really challenges United States Latinxs because often times residence and identity are not thoroughly discussed. Interviewee 1 talked about how it was a journey for her to be able to identify the way she does today, she explained, "I was in denial about the color of my skin, I thought that being Latina you could not say that you had anything to do with being African or being Black because that was always a negative thing." She discussed college as being the force that pushed her to question her identities and past knowledge of who she was, similar to Interviewee 3. She said:

I got into the Latino group, I started talking to international Latinos [it was] good and bad. I felt triggered not being Latina enough because I was born in the U. S. it made me question and investigate myself and started doing research on where Dominicans were in the United States.

Many of the interviewees have, at minimum, a bachelor's degree, and it begs the question if holding a degree gives people the skill to critique themselves to understand their racial identity and position.

Interviewee 10 (from Mexico) started off by saying that she's mestiza, and that the history is a mix of people that is now today's culture. She also talked about how in the United States people did not mix as much as they did in Mexico. In Mexico it is more mixed than in the United States, and that people group themselves with people like them often. She said people group themselves economically, socially, and culturally. She talked about how these actions are used to step on top of people for their own benefit. She knows discrimination exists and said that she has not experienced it. She

also talked about how in Mexico, those who receive the brute end of the discrimination stick are those who are indigenous. She said there are many people who do not respect them. She also said what Interviewee 7 said surrounding how the indigenous are regarded and treated. Similar to what another interviewee said, people do not realize these ideologies comes from the colonial mentality that began in Latin American hundreds of years ago with colonization.

How has immigration challenged racial identity? Interviewees 3 and 5 were the only two that were raised outside of the United States at some point. Interviewee 5 grew up in Peru until her early childhood whereas Interviewee 3 was raised in the United States, then went to stay in Mexico from 2007-2009, and then returned to the United States. When asked if their understanding of race was challenged when immigrating back to the United States, Interviewee 3 (who lived in Mexico from 2007-2009) explained:

It's shown me that it's very complex . . . In Mexico, it's more colorism-people aren't seen as different races . . . Colorism is an aesthetic thing, being darker from what I've experienced is not something a lot of people want to be. Lighter skin was more desirable that I saw in Mexican schools, family, all around.

Interviewee 5 alluded to classism rather than racism when immigrating to the United States. She discussed "white people do that to other people [in Peru], 'oh you are from a rural farm,'" insinuating a lower-class status because of their location. Interviewee 3 admitted that race and color are complex to understand and discuss based on the environment in Mexico, Interviewee 5 almost dismissed it, but brought the

point that if you are in the same class status, discrimination happens in those walls. What this demonstrates is that in the United States there is a greater personal conscious analysis of race. It is consistently present, and you cannot go a day without noticing how race affects you if you are a racialized person. Would being born and raised in the United States then going to a Latin American country versus being born in a Latin American country then immigrating to the United States have this much of an impact? That is what the results seem to tell us.

Being raised on the island St. Merten and later immigrating to the United States, Interviewee 8 discussed the differences of growing up on the islands and then immigrating to the United States. She said: "In the Caribbean, my Latinidad was very present. I had my community from all walks of life, always around me and ever-present. From the food to my clothing to Spanish-speaking to the music on the streets." She also touched on what was discussed earlier, when trying to put together all people as one under the term Latino, you lose the cultural beauty of what makes each country in Latin America unique. Like Chavez-Dueñas et al. (2014), the interviewee warned about the pan ethnic label to put all as one. She discussed the media influence as well in that we see a majority of white people and are transmitted the idea that you must be white like them to succeed. She talked about how some people feel forced to change themselves to assimilate to the dominant culture:

It's unfortunate to see that has and continues to happen and even worse: they do not realize it or acknowledge it [that they are upholding white supremacy]. Mi gente have been brainwashed to think they need to be white in order to achieve

success or be considered beautiful. I see how they see it that way. They are shown and told through movies, magazines, new stories and blatant data that whiteness is supreme. It's an endless cycle which is very hard to break.

But she discussed how she's been able to push back and be prideful in who she is because she will not be erased. She said:

It's very specific in certain countries as to what is their cultural identity. In America, they do not understand us, so they generalize us into one big group. It's easiest for them that way but very insulting. In Latin American culture, they understand race with depth and intersections of class and economic status. People on the street won't have the academic language but they understand it way better than your average American.

Does this force she discussed come from immigrating from Latin America to the United States? Or is the forcing coming from the systems of oppression, including but not limited to, colorism and racism? She challenged the perception non-Latinxs have of categorizing Latinxs all as one; that doing so is almost "dumbing down" the complex identities of *Latinidad*. It is interesting to observe this response because it slightly contradicts, or at the very least challenges some assumptions. It was assumed that in Latin America race hides behind class, but as a nonblack Latina having grown up in the United States, that is how I have witnessed this phenomenon.

Interviewee 6 illuminated the feelings that immigrants have when coming to the United States. The treatment is different in the United States versus Mexico for her. Her response to the first question from the paper survey, said that unlike the United States,

there is not racism in Mexico; she said that discrimination happens due to economic background and not race. However, she does note how people with darker skin, often related to or tied to indigenous, are discriminated against more than those with lighter skin. Finally, she discussed how indigenous folks are seen as backwards [by greater Mexican society] and not respectable because their traditions seem backwards to some people. Her discussion confirms the color blindness to discrimination that has been discussed in prior research. The missing connection was between the economic discrimination and racial discrimination. The way that she discussed the two types of discrimination makes it seem as though they are not connected. In the literature review, however, we have found that racial discrimination affects economic disparities. The heavy discrimination against indigenous people also ties back to the literature review when discussing colonization. The Spanish came over to save the “heathens” and to promote Christianity. However, we remember that being indigenous and white equaled *Mestizo*, whereas being mixed with Black and Indigenous is called “*salta atras*,” which means “jump backwards.” We see that the remnant of these feelings of superiority continue to influence inequalities against the indigenous people today.

It was interesting to see the answer that white supremacy supersedes all on their survey response. Out of all the responses, Interviewee 9 is the only one that called out white supremacy directly as to the effects of race and color in Latinx communities. There is lack of discussion as to further understand what they meant because they did not write more. This is also the one response where they acknowledge they had the privilege of passing as white and the conflicting feelings they had growing up because

that's not how they perceived themselves with the messages of being lighter as better. This respondent's review ties back to what was discussed earlier with certain phrases used that indirectly or directly support whiteness as superior over Black and indigenous.

Additionally, what these responses reveal is that growing up in the United States and having a different concept of how to understand race is a driving factor for United States Latinxs questioning their race and also trying to be more inclusive than what was previously done. This may lead to the creation of another race within the Latinx community for those born and raised in the United States. How will that affect future racial identification for the next generation? Immigration may also play a part in challenging racial identity; the question is to what extent? If race changes, colorism may increase or decrease. It may increase if more Latinxs choose white as they see a benefit in doing so, choosing black or dark or anything not white may be seen as negative. Most of the interviewees also have at minimum a bachelor's degree which I believe played a role in whether or not they questioned their racial identity and to what extent.

Familial Influence on Race and Color Perceptions

Familial influence was considered as another mechanism that brought confusion to racial identity and also perpetuated negative stereotypes about Afro-Latinxs and Indigenous Latinxs. Experiences ranged from personal observations to personal experience with discrimination because of their skin color/tone.

Beginning with personal observations, Interviewee 3 admitted that their family has played a role in perpetuating stereotypes. He says, "from [a] baby being born, [they

say] 'oh he came out lighter or darker', we're the same family, why mention that? My niece is darker than her siblings and they are always making jokes about how she's darker than them." He realizes that skin color is important to his family and being lighter or darker influences that. Growing up hearing microaggressions similar to these often, how does that impact the understanding of one's identity?

Interviewee 5 grew up in a household that was mixed: white and Peruvian. She described growing up in the 80s she learned who is "officially" Black and who was perceived to be Black. She spoke about her mother making a distinction between her and her father not being Black, she said "my mom was definitely like, well you and your dad are not Black." She mentioned that her father is dark, but not Black, however there are Black Peruvians. Going on about growing up in Kentucky, Interviewee 5 discussed how she felt othered growing up in both, Peru and in Kentucky. Interviewee 5 said:

My mom talks about that people would think it was weird if she was with me and my parents were viewed oddly in Peru. If I was with my mom (I was dark growing up and my mom was pale) . . . people were curious, at their kindest they were curious.

She said that she remembers hearing remarks from people growing up but that she blacked out a lot of it, "it's just an uncomfortable feeling as a kid, you are small [and do not know what to do]."

Interviewee 4 presented some interesting dynamics to consider when discussing familial influence of race; she had us consider geographic location, financial privileges and how to hold oneself accountable in progressing race relations in the Latinx

community. Growing up learning about her heritage she talked about trying to have these conversations with her grandmother when she was alive:

My family does not talk about race and color, there is an idea that light is better and darker is not. They are Mexican, but do not talk about being indigenous or not. I am who I am because of the rape and erasure of indigenous people when colonizers came to Mexico.

She went on to explain how even in Mexico it is divided up regionally by who is more indigenous or not, “My husband and other friends [are] from northern parts of Mexico, [which is seen as] more superior, whereas my mom and dad are from more indigenous [locations in the south].” She also mentioned how if she was to have children with her husband, the kids would be more Mexican because her husband is from Mexico while she is Mexican-American. It is interesting to note because as discussed in the literature review, there is talk if there would be a new race that Latinxs could identify as or create. Interviewee 5 also mentioned that her parents came to the United States on a vacation, overstayed, but went through the paperwork to become permanent residents; she acknowledged that as a privileged experience. When or how does one’s immigration status affect how one understands their race and identity? Lastly, Interviewee 5 talked about how she is more cautious of her interactions with people. She wants to hold herself accountable to nonblack Latinxs and says it’s important to understand her privileges.

Additionally, personal experiences were also spoken about to highlight familial influence on race and color perceptions. Interviewee 2 brought up some critical

experiences growing up. He talked about his mother, who is white passing, and his father and that side of his family who is very dark and how that shaped his outlook about himself growing up. He talked about growing up there was a preference of *mestizaje* over indigenous [identity]. He went on to say, "I grew up wanting that or being attuned to that because of my mom. My dad wouldn't fight against it. My father is very dark. He would be confused for Black, but no one in our nearest family looks afro-Latino." Later he discussed how it was taboo to talk about race in his family, "People do not talk about it and aren't proud of it. I think it was because of the caste system the Spanish implemented on folks, we can still see it today." Colorism did not have to be direct for interviewee #2 to know that being Black was associated with negative perceptions. He shared a story about what happened at his rich uncle's house:

He has blonde hair, one of those Spanish looking Mexicans... surrounded by my dad's family he said 'que paso como te sientes que venimos a arreglar a la familia', nobody stood up in the face of that they laughed like an inside joke.

What was said was paraphrasing the age old saying of *mejorar la raza*. This experience was one of many where his parent's silence influenced his identity growing up. He said, "in my early teens I wanted to identify with my Spanish roots because I thought it was cool that families had family crests." He also talked about how his mom pushed for their individuality and autonomy but with a dash of prejudice/racism. He said, "I remember we would say things like 'mom, I like this girl' and then she would find out she's Black and would say 'that's great but imagine how their hair or skin color is going to come out.'" Interviewee 2 realized he has a lot to unlearn; his mother passed away,

but he would ask her if he could, why do you think that way? This rings eerily similar to what the 36 white Hispanic women that were discussed in the literature review said. They knew that being too dark was seen as undesirable and associated with negative consequences, similar to the mother of interviewee #2.

Sharing a different side of familial influence Interviewee 1 shared a story where the family member of her mother's partner said something derogatory about Black people and her mother retorted, indirectly condemning their choice of words:

My mother is dating a Mexican, all his family is from Mexico. We went to a birthday party, my mom asked me to come—my mom is white passing—everyone was nice, but they did not know who I was. I explained that I was the daughter and they were like oh I did not know you had a Black daughter. They were very surprised. My mom was talking to her partner's sister and they were talking about an experience with a Black person, they were saying, 'I do not understand they all look like monkeys' then the lady gasped, and my mom said, 'well my kids look like that too, so I do not agree with that comment.' Now the lady does not talk to my mom very much and is hesitant to talk to her, but now that relationship isn't the same and if I see her again she's not going to treat me the same, she sees me in a different light.

Her story is different from the others as she has lived the experience of being Black in Latinx communities. While most other families say things without consequence, her mother defended their identity as Black Latinxs. Encompassing both patterns of

personal observation and experience, Interviewee 1 shared another interesting perspective for us to consider as Latinxs living in the United States:

I have a cousin who lives in the Dominican Republic, same age and it's interesting because she has experiences that I do not. Going to work she has to get her hair done or they won't let her go to work that day they will send her home; here they would never do that to me, rather it's never happened to me. Getting an interview, I see it where I do not get a call back when I have curly hair and with straight hair I get call backs. Her hair is more coarse than mine, like 'pelo malo' and she says 'oh diana tiene pelo Bueno.'

This story highlights the different experiences of Afro-Latinxs within the United States and outside in other Latin American countries. This research did not go deep into comparing and contrasting Latinx experiences between the United States Latinxs and Latin American Latinxs, but it begs the question for further examination. Are there privileges associated to residing in the United States as a Latinx person?

Familial influence had a negative impact on the racial identity and relationships for non-black Latinxs. For those who identified as afro-Latinxs, they had a different story, where they felt supported by their family. The ideology of white as better and dark is not continuing to be prevalent in Latinx families. The saying "*mejorar la raza*" has not subsided.

Colonial History as Foundation for Present Day Colorism/Racism

Colonial History was discussed as the foundation for the racial relations and racial identities we have today. Being Latinx there are two colonial histories you

navigate, the colonization by the conquistadores and the manifest destiny of the northern United States. The long-lasting influence of the conquistadores though is what continues to influence Latinxs communities. The following interviewees understood the lasting impact colonialism has had on race, racial identity and relationships within the Latinx community. The interviewees not mentioned failed to make a connection to colonialism or did not mention it.

Directly discussing how colonization has had lasting effects on her racial identity, Interviewee 4 said, “our history is not written, I can’t google it, it is a long process.” This sentiment is interesting, because how does one reconcile or learn about a history that was banished, burned and beaten out of people? Four hundred years later and we are still uncovering new objects and materials from the past. How do we understand the future of our identities when our history is limited? I think that is what is meant and it’s critical to ponder if we want to have an identity that encompasses the Latinx community, but also does not lump the diversity of *latinidad* as one.

Additionally, Interviewee 2 brought up colonialism as a force that has impacted how we identify ourselves today. He said, “it’s a consensus to identify ourselves as Latino,” but he explains further saying, “it’s not correct cause we’re not from the language Latin, Latin is a colonial word, Spanish a colonial language.” To this, he discussed a brief history of Mexico; the people there used to be the “Mexica” (pronounced like Mesh-eek-ah) people, hence Mexico: “It’s Mexico for a reason, I think that’s why I identify Mexican as a race...[but] Mexican as race is problematic because you can’t just encompass all of Mexico under one blanket.” He shared sentiments about

his identity being hard to identify, but not just him, but others as well, “I know people that are descended from indigenous, they’ll say I’m Mexican [and indigenous], but some won’t identify with Mexican, they’ll just identify with indigenous.” It would be important to observe even the Mexican experience with race versus other Latin American identities.

Continuing, Interviewee 1 discussed how colonization had Latinxs glorifying one ancestry (European) we come from but rejecting others (Black and Indigenous). Within her own family she has a grandfather who is Italian:

My grandpa was born in the Dominican Republic, but his parents are Italian. He would identify as white . . . Why are we glorifying my Italian grandpa? But not my grandma, her mom that has people from Africa. Glorify Africa too, but just my grandpa from Italy.

When asked about the future of Latinx racial identity and identification she seemed hopeful in her response:

I see us understanding more of the complex identities we have within Latinx. We used to say Latino now we say Latinx, it’s going to take some time, but there are other identities. In the Dominican, women groups are making [racism and colorism] a topic of conversation. There are Haitians that have been in the Dominican Republic for generations but aren’t seen as Dominican because they’re darker. Understanding colorism and fixing that will make us own our identity and proud.

Interviewee 3 wrapped up his interview stating:

A lot [of colorism] is tied back to the Eurocentric society we have which is a result of colonialism. Western European societies have shaped a lot of how the world works. Colorism is tied to the European view of whiteness being superior—we do not realize it.

Think about some of the responses you have read. Some were able to name where and how discrimination was founded in Latinx communities and others completely dismissed any form of racism in the community, but rather said discrimination happened at the class level. However, even when making that statement, interviewees said they did notice people with darker skin were treated worse. How does that work?

Interviewee 1 understood and interpreted Spanish influence in Latin American communities like this when asked how her racial make-up affects her understanding of being Latinx:

Not to justify Spain, but see where culture is coming from, why we have Latin dances, why we speak Spanish. But there also isn't a specific box of what Latinx is and you do not have to fit that. It's important to know your history and where you are coming from. These traditions help you understand why you identify as that.

She recognized that Spain was brutal in their colonization of Latin America, but also says we cannot erase that part of ourselves as it is the history of these countries. It's a blended version of *mestizaje*. Realizing we come from the same history, but also holding those accountable that caused harm. Is *mestizaje* capable of this?

Not all interviewees discussed colonialism but those that did shared that the history is complex, thus leaving us with tough waters to tread today surrounding the Latinx identity. How does one begin to understand their racial make-up? Is it through blood quantum, culture, language or what? Consider, people from Argentina or Uruguay who speak with the unmistakable lisp and are also the lighter skinned Latinxs who consider themselves high and mighty compared to the rest of Latin America. Latinx identity is deep and vast. There are many avenues that need to be investigated to grasp the idea of how convoluted the Latinx identity really is. Most of the younger respondents commented in one way or another about colonization and how its history has influenced today; however, the older respondents did not make any mention of it.

Chapter V: Discussion

I believe this research may have opened our eyes to other ways of considering and thinking about race in Latinx communities, but we also have more questions than answers. We must consider the following: a thorough comparison of Latinx attitudes inside and outside the United States, further observation on how families perpetuate racist ideology and come to terms with the colonial history and its continued influence in Latinx communities. Personal racial identification was the largest section of personal critique. There was much confusion over how to identify, especially as non-black Latinxs. The interviewees who identified as afro-Latinx seemed more confident in their racial identities than the others. Although Interviewee 1 had a journey to understand her identity as she does today, she is confident and proud to say she's Black and that she's Latina.

The research enlightens readers as to how colorism has evolved and is present in Latinx communities. The prevailing ideology of *mestizaje* as well as knowing and understanding that people who are darker are treated worse, showed us how racism and colorism is still affecting Latin Americans today. The way Latin Americans deal with race is by hiding behind the façade that everyone is mixed race therefore no one can be racist against each other. The ideology of *mestizaje*, the idea that everyone has Black, indigenous and Spanish ancestry, helps maintain the status quo of not challenging racial identity and silencing those who do. This is damaging because it leads people to believe that race has nothing to do with discrimination when we see that it has a lot to do with the discrimination perpetuated in Latinx communities, especially towards those

who are darker and/or perceived as Black. The findings on familial influence and the legacy of colonialism expose how deep seeded these thoughts and actions related to race and identity really are. The respondents to our survey showed us how far we still have to go in order to understand how Latinxs understand their racial identity inside and outside the Latinx community. This is just one step to eradicating racism and colorism within our community.

We were able to contribute other points of view to consider. I believe this research also points out how complex the Latinx community is to understand. I hope that this research may inspire future research and experiments, in order to consider other avenues that have not been thought of yet.

Chapter VI: Limitations and Future Research

One critical limitation of the research to consider is that I am a nonblack Latina trying to learn more about the Afro-Latinx/darker skinned Latinx experience. As a nonblack Latina and someone who recognizes they are lighter brown, my experiences within *latinidad* have been different than those who are dark skin. It is important to recognize the privilege I hold as a light skin Latina in the community while I conduct this kind of research. An interesting perspective future research could take would be to critically focus on the Afro and Indigenous Latinx experience. White supremacy, racism, and colorism are maintained by anti-blackness in our communities. Although Black and Indigenous Latinxs are both severely discriminated against, do indigenous Latinxs hold a privilege over Black Latinxs in terms of skin color?

Out of the 10 interviews and surveys, I was able to conduct three with people who identified as Afro-Latinxs and none as Indigenous Latinxs. Although the direction of this research was about relationships, there was a limitation as other themes emerged, for example, further research should have a more political focus in the Latinx community to observe identity politics and how it plays out. It would be critical to study this as the term “white” may expand to include some Latinxs, the way it stretched to include to Irish, Polish and Italians once deemed inferior to the white race. There is a plethora of pathways to take this investigation further. One can distinctly look into education and what kind of education facilitates critical thinking skills in order for one to improve their previous race perceptions and relations. A generational comparison would also be

imperative as immigration from a Latinx country to the United States may reshape how one perceives their racial make-up.

Obviously, it would be pertinent for future researchers to expand their participant pool as this experiment was limited to 10 interviewees. They were all concentrated in Minnesota, though some grew up in other locations. I believe getting answers from Latinxs from all over the U. S. will illuminate more material to analyze, like language, for race relations in the Latinx community. There are various ways to question the racism and colorism that continues within the Latinx community, this is just one narrative that hopefully opens Latinxs to consider other ways of thought to continue the fight against racism and colorism in our communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey

Whiteness in Latinx Communities, Spring 2018

Authors: Alexandria Koning, Frida Alvarez, Darius Jiggetts

Filling out this survey is giving your implied consent to participate in our research.

Please fill out the following survey to the best of your ability, then e-mail:

faalvarez@stcloudstate.edu

Demographics:

Age:

Gender:

Location:

Languages spoken:

American generation (1st, 2nd, etc.):

How do you identify (racially/ethnically):

Contact information for follow up if needed:

Informal Interview Feedback (please provide examples, if applicable):

1. How do you understand your race in the context of Latinidad (term that refers to the various attributes shared by Latin American people and their descendants without reducing those similarities to any single essential trait)?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Latin American and United States culture in the way they approach and understand race?
3. How do Latinxs uphold white ideology and white supremacy within their own communities?
4. How does racism and/or colorism affect the community identity of Latinx communities?
5. How has racism and/or colorism affected you within the Latinx community?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Whiteness in Latinx Communities - Consent to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study about Whiteness in Latinx Communities. If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to interview and discuss how whiteness, racism, and colorism has affected the Latinx community from your understanding as a Latinx person.

Benefits of the research there is a large gap in this research that does not include the voices of Black and Indigenous Latinxs. My hope is to provide opportunity to give voice to how racism, colorism, and whiteness is dealt with in the Latinx community from other perspectives.

Risks and discomforts. When discussing racism, colorism and whiteness you may be triggered by a memory of discrimination or when you may have been a perpetrator of such discrimination. I will minimize these by providing a basic list of questions and informing you that I may dive deeper into some statements depending on their relevance.

Data collected will remain confidential. Audio and written notes will be stored on my password protected laptop. Participant name will not be used in the writing of the research paper. Direct quotes may be used but they will not be attached to any information. Pseudo-names will be used to link data to participants. During the interview you may refuse to answer any questions, or you may withdrawal any time before, during or after the interview. After the interviews I will send participants my paper to be edited if participants would like to make any clarifying statements or omit anything.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty from the interview or research.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Frida Alvarez at 612-437-1223 or faalvarez@stcloudstate.edu. Results of the study can be requested from the researcher.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate.

Signature

Date

Appendix C: In-Person Interview Questions

Review IRB consent form then after collecting demographic information start off explaining research and need to fill the gaps and intention of research and where trying to go.

How do Latinxs understand their race in the context of *latinidad*?

What racial ideology do people hold in their own communities and how may they vary by their social demographic characteristics? Observing how colorism emerges, develops and plays out, Why does colorism persist or solidify/strengthen within the Latinx community? Not receding?

ask them to recommend people to you to reach out to for interviews (snowball)!!!!!!!

- Name
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Profession
- Socioeconomic status
- Children
- Education
- Where were you born
- Where were you raised
- Residential location currently
- Residential demographics
- What makes you feel Latinx?
- How does your racial make-up effect your understanding of being Latinx?
- What saying did you hear growing up about Latinxs?
 - Externally, about the Latinx community
 - Internally, within the Latinx community
- Immigration story?
 - Born in another country then raised here?
 - Did your understanding of race change or was challenged at all when you immigrated?
 - Or born and raised in US?
- How would you describe your skin color?
- What kind of racial discrimination have you experienced if any?
 - From Latinxs?
 - From others?
- What future do you see for Latinx racial relationships?
 - With other Latinxs?
 - With others?
- What future do you see for how individuals will identify racially within Latinxs?

Appendix D: Interviewee Profiles

- *Interviewee 1* is a social work adoption professional. She identifies as a woman. She is Dominicana. Born in Minnesota, currently lives in Farmington, MN and holds two degrees: Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Business Administration.
- *Interviewee 2* identifies as Mexican and is an organizer in the community. He identifies as a man. He was born and raised in the United States. He works in a nonprofit that helps achieve and protect workers' rights, even if they're undocumented. He lives in Northeast Minneapolis and holds a Bachelor of Arts.
- *Interviewee 3* is a student at a college in Northfield, MN. He will be receiving his Bachelor of Arts this spring. He identifies as a man. He was born in Mexico and raised in the United States for most of his life.
- *Interviewee 4* is a sexual health educator and lives in the St. Louis Park area. She is one of two interviewees who classified as middle class. She identifies as a woman. She was born in New York, NY and raised in Minnesota.
- *Interviewee 5* was one of two respondents to hold a master's degree and also classify as middle class. They are mixed with white and Peruvian. She identifies as a woman. They reside in Minneapolis, MN. They were born and raised in Peru until they were young and moved to the U. S. around five-years-old.
- *Interviewee 6* is the mother of *Interviewees 3* and *7*. They were born and raised in Mexico, but later immigrated and settled down in St. Paul, MN. She identifies as a woman.

- *Interviewee 7* is the daughter of *Interviewee 6* and older sister of *interviewee #3*. She identifies as a woman. They have three children and currently reside in St. Paul, MN. She was born in Mexico and grew up in Mexico and the United States.
- *Interviewee 8* is the mother of *Interviewee 9*. They were raised on an island, St. Merteen, and then later immigrated and settled down in Stillwater, MN. She identifies as a woman. They identified as afro-Latino, but also as a Caribbean Latina and a Martener.
- *Interviewee 9* is the son of *Interviewee 8*. He identifies as a man. They were raised in Stillwater, MN, but now reside in St. Paul. He also graduated with a BA and currently works in government.
- *Interviewee 10* was born, raised and still resides in Tamaulipas, Mexico. She identifies as a woman.

Appendix E: Recruitment Consent

To whom it may concern,

My name is Maryanne Quiroz, the co-director and co-founder of Indigenous Roots located at 788 east 7th street, St. Paul MN, 55106. Frida Alvarez has reached out to our organization to assist in recruiting potential interviewees for her thesis project. We are also providing space for Frida to conduct her interviews in private. Frida will be holding 1-2 hour long sessions with the interviewees to understand racism and colorism within Latinx communities. We give Frida the permission to use our space and network for her thesis research.

If you have any other questions, comments or concerns please contact me at 651-366-0006



December 17, 2018

To whom it may concern:

Founded in 2013, LOCUS is a volunteer-run network that works to provide space, connection, and opportunities for authentic community building, identity-driven leadership, and resource sharing – by and for people of color and indigenous peoples.

On behalf of the LOCUS Leadership Team, we submit this letter in regards to Frida Alvarez's Masters Thesis, entitled, "Racism, Colorism, Proximity to Whiteness and its effects on Latinx Communities." In support of her research, we give permission for her to post a recruitment statement and a link to the survey on our Facebook group page.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with questions or more information at locus.mn@gmail.com

Sincerely,
Rashanda Bruce
Kristell Caballero Saucedo
Lindsay Pluger
Tiffany The-Htar
Diane Tran

Appendix F: Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Frida Alvarez
Email: faalvarez@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Expedited Review-1**

Project Title: Whiteness in Latinx Communities

Advisor: Jiping Zuo

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

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SCSU IRB# 1857 - 2393	Type: Expedited Review-1	Today's Date: 1/18/2019
1st Year Approval Date: 1/18/2019	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date: 1/17/2020	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date: