

**NO SOY GÜERO, SOY LATINO:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
‘WHITE-LOOKING LATINXS’**

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Abstract

This study documents the experiences of racism and discrimination that college students, staff and faculty have experienced in their K-12 education. Even though there are questions to participants about other aspects of their life and experiencing racism, the central focus will remain on experiences during K-12 education. This research and partial replication builds on the study entitled *Because I'm Light Skin . . . They Think I'm Italian: Mexican Students' Experiences of Racialization in Predominantly White Schools* by Dr. Edward Fergus. This study uses a phenomenological framework for analysis, which I will also use in my partial replication, because consistent with other qualitative scholars, I believe the lived experiences of students are as crucial as numerical data. Testimonials provide a far better way of addressing the dynamics of racism and colorism than simply numbers (used in quantitative research). This is the method as to how I will be gathering data. I refer to my honors thesis as a partial replication of Fergus's study because unlike Fergus, my focus will be on Latinx¹ students staff, and faculty. The other factor that will be changed in the study is the number of participants. Fergus interviews six Mexican students whereas I will be interviewing 7 Latinx students, staff and faculty. My findings will be analyzed and compared to each of the other participants' testimonies. I hope that this research brings inspiration to others and for society to understand what is existent in PWIs and PWCs.

¹ Latinx is a gender-neutral alternative for Latino and Latina. In culture, the term Latino has been used a plural masculinized way of addressing all Latinos and Latinas together. Many activists and scholars refer to all Latino and Latina as Latinx to be gender inclusive.

Key:

BYP: Black Youth Project

IRE: Indirect Racist Experiences

PoC: People of Color

PWI: Predominately-White Institution

PWC: Predominately-White City

SEP: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

SoC: Student(s) of Color

TCE: Theory of Cultural Ecology

WLL: White-looking Latinx

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“Primero es lo difícil, despues viene lo facil” – Señora Miroslava

CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

An interesting and disturbing fact about race is that an ideology exists about the assumed biological definition of race through skin pigment, facial features, hair texture, rather than recognizing race and ethnicity as social constructs (e.g., Lopez 1994; Zuberi, Patterson, & Stewart 2015). The definition of race varies by language, region of the world, and by societies. Anthropologist Alan Goodman notes the ever-changing definition of race and states that “race is an outdated idea and a myth” in the scope of science (Goodman 2017:1). Ian F. Haney Lopez (1994) states that there are two definitions of race: The Biological Construction and the Social Construction. Consistent with current race scholars, for the current study, I will be referring to the social construction definitions, which is “a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry” (Lopez 1994: 7). Similarly, Zuberi and his colleagues (2015:110) claim: “We advance that race rests on the experience of shared social relations rather than a unitary (i.e., individual), shared subjective characteristic such as skin color.”

Robertson and colleagues state that “Latino students have created distance between themselves and members of their ethnic group to more easily assimilate within the dominant PWI [Predominantly White Institution] culture” (2016:723). This is likely, at least in part, a result of cultural shame. Monzo (2016:148) describes internalized oppression as “a belief or fear among people of color that perhaps whites have been right all along and that non-whites are not as smart, beautiful, resourceful, good, or deserving of success.” I can personally testify about this experience; I have felt that I should be ashamed of my heritage and identity as a Mexican -

American. Still, to this day, I struggle at times, but I am able to say that I have significantly improved my embracement of a Latinx heritage and identity.

Another factor that is associated with identity and internalized oppression is the discrimination against ‘White-looking’ Latinx (WLL). Edward Fergus conducted a study that “provides findings from interviews with six Mexican students who discussed teachers identifying them as “White-looking” or “Hispanic/Mexican-looking” (Fergus 2016: 460). The current study, my thesis, is a partial replication of Fergus’s (2016) study except that I am focusing on White-looking Latinx (WLL) college students, staff and faculty.

Although this partial replication of Fergus (2017) will not allow for gender comparisons, it is beyond the scope of an undergraduate honors thesis to be able to adequately address gender differences in this still largely exploratory and qualitative research. Also, while there are advantages of interviewing Latinx youth, such as Fergus did, interviewing college students, staff and faculty will allow me to see their hindsight about their experiences with colorism and racism as youth, and as adults at the university level at a PWI. (Also, understandably, it is far easier to be consistent with IRB demands when only including those 18 and older in a study.)

Two central themes were clear in Donna Murch’s (2010), *Living for The City*: the *claiming* and *embracing* of identity. Donna Murch relates black power, activism, and black identity to embracing and claiming blackness in the Bay Area in the 1960s. I contend that ‘White-looking’ Latinx have difficulty embracing and claiming their Latin heritage and identity from a young age (as you will be reading later in my findings chapter). I anticipate to learn more about how WLLs embrace their heritage after overcoming racism and discrimination. This is a common issue in the Latin community, especially for those of us that were raised in the United States, let alone PWCs.

Derald Wing Sue claims in *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, that “many Latinas/os believe that their lower standard of living and personal well-being are affected by prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination” (2010:154).

“Microaggressions were more harmful and impactful than overt instances of racism” and in cases like these, there is an associated possibility of having long term results of psychological impacts (Sue 2013: YouTube). Considering the time that I have for this research, I will not be studying the long term psychological impacts in Latinx. If time allows one day, I will continue this research and investigate how the experiences of Latinxs has affected them to this day. Rather, I am interested in comparing themes and experiences of Latinxs between their K-12 education years, familial home setting experiences, and their current experiences being at CU/Boulder, as stated in the *abstract*.

An interesting question that was used in the study with Fergus was, “*You think if you were darker, people would judge you? [...] how so?*” This approach that Fergus took to asking questions is a similar approach to the replication that I will be conducting. In my study, I plan to ask the participants about their experiences with colorism as children, young adults, and now as college students, staff, and faculty. I also want to be sure to examine how this colorism is experienced in different spaces (e.g., home, school, neighborhoods, etc.) because it is crucially important how systems of society work both separately and together. The issue of racism is commonly seen, or *interpreted*, as severe in PWCs, especially at PWIs. It becomes a serious problem when racial issues are incorporated into education. There seems to be a sense of alienation that arises in Students of Color (SoC). I have certainly experienced this during my first semester at CU Boulder in my *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies*. There were approximately 40 students, of which only me and a student from India were the only SoC. Did I

feel alienated? To the max. I withdrew from that class by the second day of classes. Never once again did I want to take a course where I was the outcast.

It is in the hands of People of Color (PoC) and allies to stand up and make change. To research current racial issues and to create solutions so that no one, especially students, are left behind and seen as outcasts. We must all learn to embrace our heritages, roots, and identities to move forward together. I hope that I can contribute to this issue with this research study.

Institutional Oppression and Racism

Steven R. Cureton examined the experiences of African Americans on PWIs. He states that, “Furthermore, many African American college students have difficulty adjusting to college, especially because they are subject to the same kinds of problems they experienced before attending college” (Cureton 2003: 296). It is not as easy to state this for Latinx students as it is for African American students, yet there is a central basis for which the ideology of *struggle* comes into play – that is simply being a SoC. A similarity between, or shared base, for Latinxs and African Americans is that they are both PoC. It is inaccurate, however, to state that all African American and Latinxs share the same experiences. Later in the findings chapter, you will read how some participants answered that they have experienced being followed by security guards around stores and such – which is a common theme in the lives of African Americans. I believe that Cureton is referencing racial profiling.

Theoretical Lens

This study will be approached and analyzed using a *phenomenological* lens. The hermeneutic phenomenological reflection follows Max van Manen’s classic work in his book

Researching the Lived Experience. Some scholars have used the phenomenological lens to address the lived experience of racism upon people of color (e.g., D’Cruz & Noronha 2018; Freeman 2017). It is important to conduct research on matters of racisms, discrimination, and microaggressions using a phenomenological approach because as the principal investigator, I am able to compare, contrast, and analyze the lived experiences of this study’s participants. I decided to use this approach because when searching for theories and methods, I concluded that phenomenology could serve as a base to approach research questions and the analysis of my findings. When collecting data, I am making sure to: collect the appearances of things (experiences), how certain things (microaggressions, insults, comments, etc.) appear in the experiences of the participants, and the way the participants experienced things, it is all about finding the meaning or a reasonable explanation in the things (factors) of certain experiences. When referring to the questions that I asked, I made sure to ask a lot of questions (follow up questions) that centered around “*how did that make you feel?*” Phenomena serves as reliable “sources” to include in this research.

Fergus utilized a phenomenological approach because, by reading his study and coming to a conclusion, he wanted to understand the experiences of students coming from different perspectives of being conscious and studying the phenomena of the experiences. I also aim to use Phenomenology to describe phenomena as participants experienced a certain event in their life. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states:

Phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily

awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity” (2003).

Coining the term, American anthropologist and leading neoevolutionist, Julian Haynes Steward developed the cultural paradigm after having studied South American indigenous groups. Fergus (2016) also incorporated ‘cultural ecological’ (in his words) to study 6 Mexican students in high school in (he conducted the research in 2000 and published in 2017).

I will use Cultural Ecological Theory to compare the similarities and differences among the participants’ experiences in relation to the changing environment – which in this case it will be a K-12 education environment, a PWI environment, and a familial (home) environment. Numerous other scholars have drawn on cultural ecological theory, including Ferguson (2017) in their attempts to understand students of color, racial discrimination, and identity development (e.g., Chochas 2001; Gonzales-Backen 2013; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way 2009). Cultural Ecology focuses on the adaptations of humans to social environments. There will be a thorough analysis of cultural ecological theory in Chapter 2.

The purpose of this study is to further explore racism, discrimination, and microaggressions and to explore the questions of *what* these three factors lead to by comparing the one environment I am heavily focusing on which is K-12. I will be placing an emphasis on PWI (CU) and PWC (Boulder). Individuals cannot be understood if their experiences are not understood and examined. I hope that with the research and analysis I can further contribute to academia by sharing my findings and having one more piece of literature to inform everyone of this subject. It is important to note environment changes with a cultural perspective in order to critically examine experiences of Latinxs in this ever-changing society.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a review and analysis on the of available literature that has been published on the subject of racism and discrimination that is associated with WLL (White-looking Latinxs) in the K-12 setting. It was a crucial part of the literature review to gather sources that referenced any aspect of this topic given the insufficient amount of literature on the topic of racism, discrimination, and WLL. Thus, the data collected for this thesis will contribute to the significant void in this research, and, ideally, contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of WLLs' in education K-12. Not being aware of such realities causes populations like students, university staff and faculty, and family members to be unintentionally ignorant – especially when addressing this issue at PWIs (Predominately-White Institutions).

What is Latinx?

National identities have been redefined by associated members of each nationality. In the context of United States politics, the Latinx identity has shifted its name and ideologies. In the current political climate, there has been clear to witness a change in nationality, identity, and definition of the self. #BlackLivesMatter is one of the most drastic social and political movements in recent times. Following up with this movement. In comparison, there is the Latinx community, which is the most vulnerable U.S. population in terms of immigration and deportation. In the year 2014, the Latinx (“Hispanic”) population in the United States reached a new high 55.4 million, of which 17.9 million were under the age of 18 (Vega 2016). However, there seems to be a shift happening when it comes to the “requirements” of being Hispanic/Latinx.

Speaking Spanish is certainly something that many Latinxs have considered the “*must*,” per say, to be considered Latinx, but in reality, that has shifted. In the scope of nationalism, George Mariscal associates hybridity with bilingualism and culture (Mariscal 2005). There is a major intersection between language, ‘Spanglish,’ and cultura. The use of Spanglish is very common in Latino households, and that is something that is easily noticed in Aurora/Denver metro area homes, but also in the streets and anywhere in public. The hybridity of Spanish and English is a result of schooling. Ana Lucia Gonzalez from BBC informed that “children who’ve been through US schools, are bilingual. Very often they switch between languages within a single sentence, or borrow English words and put them into Spanish, making a hybrid known as Spanglish” (Gonzalez 2010).

Spanglish is a getaway, an escape. It is what defines many Latinx as Latinx – it is what defines them as who they are. Along with language, is cultura, they go hand in hand. However, cultura can also be analyzed by itself. *Cultura* is what forms a community, what brings people together both in and outside of el hogar, or the home. Latino men particularly have strong ties to machismo. Machismo is hypermasculinity in the Latino household. An overprotective and *internalized egotism*² persona, and for having the feeling of ‘siendo el mero mero,’ or being the ‘shit.’ In my opinion, and with personal experiences, I would say that machismo is part of the cultura in the Latin community. It is as if one starts to build a wall around oneself and thinking that “I am the best of the best.” I am unable to speak for all, but I strongly believe that Mexican Latinxs are so focused on being ourselves while living in the U.S., that we sometimes forget our own cultura.

² Intellectual, physical, and social overestimations that are noticed but not spoken about or mentioned in the open air to others. In a way, it is as keeping the ego on the ‘down-low’ – not having to admit that one is egotistical.

Latinx identity is not only defined through machismo (specifically for me), but also through education and the workforce. Something that Latinos have in common is the harsh judgment that they experience growing up in the U.S. school systems and the workforce in ‘the states’³. Something that Mariscal point out is that the struggle is to be accepted to be a part of the community that does not recognize you at times (Mariscal 2005). When Latinxs are seen in public, due to stereotypes, many (White) people assume that they work in three possible occupations: first, as construction workers; second, as landscape workers; and third, as house cleaners⁴. Part of the cultura in Mexico, from personal family testimonies, is that the “expected” outcome is to not complete K-12 education. My mother and father never got passed the 7th grade, and many of my friends’ parents did not either. Instead, they decided to leave school to go work in the fields and with the animals in the rancho to make a living. *That*, is the “norm” in Mexico – at least in the small ranchos where my family is from. Chicanxs in the United States often experience criticism by their own immediate family members and extended family for attending college. The reality, the expectation, is *not* go to college, not even community college.

The Pew Research Center published an article entitled *Hispanic Trends* in 2012. The authors, Paul Taylor, Mark Hugo Lopez, Jessica Martinez, and Gabriel Velasco wrote about “Hispanic identity” and reported that “about half [of Hispanics] (47%) say they consider themselves to be very different from the typical American. And just one-in-five (21%) say they use the term ‘American’ most often to describe their identity.” The relation that Latinxs and Americans have in common are not quite so strong. Almost half (47%) of Latinxs consider

³ *The States* is a reference for The United States of America. It is a common phrase in Spanish known as *los estados* and/or *el norte* (the North).

⁴ This is taken from years of personal experiences. Things that I have witnessed and seen either in within my own family or from hearing it from other people.

themselves to be different than the typical American and with these differences come political views, customs and traditions, and language. Another fifth (21%) might indeed associate themselves as “American” because of either their skin color, or maybe because of customs, traditions, and place of birth – just because one is born in the United States does not mean they are not American by ethnic terms. The same is true for people that are *not* born in the United States – it does not mean they are American by ethnic terms (Taylor et al. 2012).

Embracing an identity starts at a young age. As you will read later in the findings chapter, a participant did not embrace her roots, heritage, and overall Latina identity until she was a senior in high school (she is now a second semester freshman at CU). With age comes an understanding of identity and assimilation. As Andres Tapla reported, “younger Latinos are less likely to be assimilationist in mindset than were their first-generation parents, who — facing discrimination due to their limited or accented English — often chose not to teach their kids Spanish” (Tapla 2014, pg. NA).

This section was intended to provide insight on the Latinx identity and some aspects of its makeup. It is important to note the cultural and social definitions of what it means to be Latinx. There is an extensive literature on how this identity is constructed and what it consists of – there is more than one “version” of being Latinx. For purposes of this research and chapter, it is key to remind ourselves that the literature reviewed here will not target any specific Latinx population [other than that of Fergus’s study, which consisted of all Mexican Latinx students]. The following section will consist of a literature analysis of racism and the factors associated with it that are present in K-12 education.

K-12 Education

Looking back on my school years K-12, I never had a genuine classroom conversation or lecture about racism and what it meant to discriminate and be discriminated against. I never personally experienced major encounters of racism or discrimination, and do not remember witnessing others' racial discrimination occurrences. I lived in a city with a diverse population of over 300,00 residents that I supposed could be described as progressive and accepting throughout my K-12 schooling. However, this is not the case for others. Clearly, students in less diverse K-12 settings experience more racism and discrimination than others. I am unable to speak for all, but many Latinx students, parents, and families would agree that Aurora, Colorado and Denver, Colorado are two of the most diverse cities in which to live and attend school. Unfortunately, there are some Latinxs that experience racism and discrimination (though uncommon) in places like Aurora and Denver.

Innocence is associated with children in elementary and middle schools when maturity levels are not fully developed.⁵ Notably, in 2010 Anderson Cooper/CNN carried out a study with the assistance of professionals called *White and Black Children Biased toward Lighter Skin*. They found that “white children had an overwhelming bias toward white, and black children also had a bias toward white, but it was not nearly as strong as the bias shown by the white children” (CNN 2010). The journalistic evaluation was an attempt to re-create a previous study “conducted [in the 1940s] by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, designed to measure how segregation affected African-American children” (CNN 2010). Many people claim to be colorblind and many also claim that children are also colorblind. According to Gloria Swindler Boutte and her

⁵ Maturity levels for high schools are not fully developed either, but it is taken into account that they are at least more mature than those students in both elementary and middle school.

colleagues Julia Lopez Robertson and Elizabeth Powers-Costello (2011), however, this is not the case.

Lopez-Robertson and colleagues explained that “young children are not colorblind and that they think about and experience racism in their daily lives” (Lopez-Robertson et al. 2011:335). In Lopez-Robertson and colleagues (2011:335) study an early childhood teacher shared that she did not “care if they’re [her students] Black, White, or green with polka dots, I treat all children the same.” I would argue, and I am sure many others would as well, that this statement is absurd and can be interpreted as the phenomenon of the myth of colorblindness. The standalone phrase of “I treat children the same” is an assuring comment that does not involve race, rather, race is assumed to be taken out of the picture. But could this teacher view certain abilities from certain students are *better* than those of other students [with a certain skin color]? Possibly. Lopez-Robertson and colleagues (2011) did not clearly analyze what was implied by this early childhood educator.

Lopez-Robertson and colleagues define institutional or structural racism as “a system of social structures that produces cumulative, race based inequalities” and also argue that “*good* people can and do contribute to racism and other forms of oppression” (Lopez-Robertson et al. 2011: 335). This is a segue to what is known as *unintentional racism* (which some claim exists, and others dismiss as absurd). Unintentional racism is an unconscious act of racism not usually not motivated by prejudice or intent to harm. However, different organization and activists like the Black Youth Project (BYP) argue that “There is no such thing as “unintentional” or

“implicit” racism, because racism is always for the sole *purpose* of sustaining the power of whiteness. Therefore, it is always *purposeful*” (Ziyad 2017: pg. N.d.)⁶.

[White] people⁷ are overlooking racism, people of color, and viewing people no matter “if they’re Black, White, or green with polka dots” (Lopez-Robertson et al. 2011:335), because they are bound to develop biases towards skin color “unintentionally.” As important as it is to understand how unintentional racism is approached, it is crucially as important to understand how racism is approached by students in K-12 schools.

Lopez-Robertson and colleagues provided a few examples of work done by second grade students in one of the author’s class. Two of the four students started their statements with, “Racism *[is]*...” and the other two start their statements with. “*I think*....” It is important, I think, to take this into consideration because students bluntly express their thoughts and feelings straight from how they are. There is a more assertive – more reassuring – tone with ‘is’ than ‘I think.’ But in either case it is important to know and understand that students are aware of racism being so young and in second grade. All the negative connotations that racism is linked to for a second grader to know is very saddening. The last thing a child should be worrying about at such age is violence, profiling, racism, etc.

Racism in early childhood education can be traced all the way back to when 18th century when Europeans took over indigenous lands, culture, customs, language, and education of the Native Americans. The Americanization school for Native Americans and Mexicans stripped

⁶ Hari Ziyad is a storyteller and the Editor-in-Chief of RaceBaitR. His article ‘The myth of “unintentional” or “implicit” racism’ was featured on the BYP.

⁷ Ziyad refers to White people in his article because he discusses White people’s racism and issues on anti-Blackness.

them of their heritage and roots and imbedded in them the English language and Eurocentric ideals. From punishing children and beating them for speaking their native tongue, these children were forced to be Americanized, unwillingly. Unfortunately, racism is present even in today's K-12 education when students speak their native tongue. Zuberi, Patterson, and Steward (2015) claim that "racial classification is determined by socially defined rules" (2015: 110). I do not have knowledge on child psychology but I would say that it is apparent for children when they witness acts of racism and/or discrimination in the classroom. As mentioned before, Anderson Cooper (2010) noticed that children were "woke"⁸ (in slang terms) about racism at such a young age.

Another aspect of racism expressed in K-12 schooling is in the names of students. Names carry significance to many people today. For example, in my family the name *Miguel* is used quite frequently with a lot of cousins of mine, including my own younger brother. This name has been carried for a few generations because my aunts and uncles carried it after my grandfather. Other common names that are carried through generation are: Fernando, Alejandrina, Manuel, Raul, and Emma. Seen frequently in the current generation, these Mexican-origin names give trouble to those that do not speak Spanish. The mispronunciation of a name sometimes is taken as offensive or rude. "Names can connect children to their ancestors, country of origin or ethnic group, and often have deep meaning or symbolism for parents and families" (Kohli et al. 2012; 444) which is a reason many students become defensive when their names are mispronounced.

Kohli and colleagues argue that "the cultural mismatch that guides this interaction [misinterpreting, disregarding, and butchering a student's name] is a racial microaggression"

⁸ This term is in reference to how people are in the know and aware of current affairs in the world regarding politics, race and ethnicity, culture. In other terms "to be educated."

(2012: 444). Something so little, something so simple means a lot to many people. A name is the ultimate *identity* of one's self. Kohli referenced another one of her works in saying that "Although racism is tied to race, it is not always acted out based on racial categories; it also enacted based on factors affiliated with race such as language, immigration status and culture" (2009: 445).

As clear as it may appear to be, racism in K-12 is very broad. It is not necessarily always about the actual racism that is found in K-12, but about how children interpret race and how they approach this topic. Race also has to do with how identity is structured case by case, by each individual. Though there is no extensive literature on this topic, it must be acknowledged that students in K-12 get exposure to race, ethnicity, and social construct each and every single day of their lives. At times, students [we] are so unaware of our racial wrongdoings, that it has become 'natural' to do. That is partly why I am conducting this study – in order to understand how racism is exposed in a variety of settings including K-12. The following sections identify the theoretical approach that I used for this study.

Cultural Ecological Theory

This thesis is guided by Cultural Ecological Theory. This theoretical approach attempts to examine the similarities and differences in K-12 culture in relation to the environment (experiences) in order to determine what factors influence any racist and discriminatory developments. Cultural Ecological Theory and phenomenology analyze the similarities and differences in racism, discrimination, and/or racial microaggressions in relation to the environment which will be K-12 education, and, beyond the scope of this study, at PWIs/PWCs. I will also be incorporating other literature analyses from race scholars to expand the perimeters of the theoretical approach. My research goal is to attempt and find if "race is a social

construction that is solely used for the purpose of human stratification” in K-12 based on the experiences that the 7 participants in my study shared. The following chapter, Chapter 3, explains the methods used in my thesis study, and the findings will be reported in Chapter 4.

Cultural Ecological Theory focuses on factors in the environment. In this case, the calling of names and writing and drawing depictions of racism is part of what is part of Cultural Ecological Theory. More specifically, these factors can include calling of names, mispronunciations, microaggressions, Americanization, drawings, and so on, that all influence how students approach racism and discrimination in the K-12 educational setting, being K-12 schooling. I want to make it clear that I am not analyzing culture and racism, overall, rather “just” racism experienced by WLLs in K-12 among this study’s participants.

Edward Fergus (2017), the scholar whose work most directly drives my thesis research, does not use Cultural Ecological Theory to structure his study. Conversely, he argues against Cultural Ecological Theory, attempting to disprove it. My goal is not to disprove Cultural Ecological Theory, rather, I am using the theory to examine my participants’ experiences with racism, discrimination, and/or microaggressions in their K-12 school experiences.

It is important to note the participants’ experiences in order to examine the ecological factors that led to racism, discrimination, and/or microaggressions. In order to understand and examine participants using Cultural Ecological Theory, it is necessary to have phenomenology as the base to understand experiences of racism. Call-Cummings and Martinez stated that “one’s race or ethnicity continues to determine one’s life outcomes” (2016: 564). Taken into account as a factor, race and ethnicity are essentially “responsible” for the outcomes of one’s life. These are important factors to take into consideration when addressing Cultural Ecological Theory. No two encounters are ever the same when discussing racism, discrimination, and/or microaggressions

for non-White people [WLL]. Race and ethnicity are key in the makeup of identity of people. How this is addressed in schools (K-12) is not common.

Education policy and foundations indicate that the structure of the K-12 system has been and continues to actively disadvantaging students of color , especially Black and Latinx students (e.g., Anyon et al. 2018; Benner 2017; Blaisdell 2016; Lozado et al. 2016; Wormeli 2016). Placing Latinx students in English Language Acquisition/Development courses has been one major way in which school have segregated bilingual students, predominately Spanish and English. My little brother, Angel, for example, has been pulled aside from his homeroom course all throughout K-6 currently. Educators claim to be assisting him with his English language development and support with mathematics, literature, and composition. There have been improvements in his skills, but there is something wrong with the way this is done. Angel has always hated being pulled aside from his classes and from his peers.

Internalized racism exists over ethnic identity in the Latinx community (Monzo 2016) and it is a cause of racism in K-12. We must acknowledge that this type of racism has a lot of power and say. There are family members that literally hate, dislike, and judge their own people for certain things like hair color, eye color, skin color, language abilities, and more – racism. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine this area here but participants of this study have experienced family racism.

Conclusion

Racism has been a significant problem in the U.S. since colonization began. As this chapter emphasizes, it is a serious problem in the K-12 educational system in the U.S. (e.g., Anyon et al. 2018; Benner 2017; Blaisdell 2016; Lozado et al. 2016; Wormeli 2016), it has been

present since the early years of colonization, and it will continue to be present, unfortunately. Understanding the scope of racism and discrimination is important to examine why it happens, but an effective method to approach this is by using a phenomenological lens and Cultural Ecological Theory. The following chapter describes the methods used to collect data specifically from WLL college students about their K-12 experiences with racism. Reporting these findings (Chapter 4), will hopefully provide more understanding of this phenomenon. It is clear from this chapter that very limited research exists on the WLL youths' experiences with racism in K-12. The following chapters describe the methods and findings of the current study.

CHAPTER III: THE METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide information on developing my research design and the details of the design (methods). This includes the recruitment process, a description of the participant sample, the interview setting, and the data analysis method. Given that my study relied on interviewing people, it required approval and authorization from the University of Colorado Internal Review Board (IRB). I submitted my IRB application to conduct this study, and after they reviewed and approved my proposal, I began collecting data. Fergus challenges Cultural Ecological Theory arguing that “[...] differences in academic performance are bound to an intersection of social constructs of power and privilege regarding race [...]” (2017: 461). For my thesis study, I am not analyzing academic performance. Instead, I believe it is necessary to examine how power and privilege are factors in racism. Therefore, my interview questions ask participants about privilege. Fergus’s study “explores the question of whether the ways in which Latino/a students’ variation in skin color intersects with the manner in which they interpret available opportunities in society and school” (2017: 461). This is not a major component of the study that I am partially replicating. Instead, I am using Cultural Ecological Theory to examine my participants’ racism experiences in their K-12 education. Ecological factors in my study include: friends, family, educators/teachers, calling of names, drawing, and cities/towns. It is important to understand the structures, concretely, of diverse experiences [of racism in K-12] (Freeman 2017). Race is a social process that is rather dynamic (Zuberi et al. 2015) because there are so many variations of it, but the core is the same.

Conceptualization of the Research Questions

I began my study design intrigued with the research question of how racism and discrimination are experienced by White-Looking Latinx. In reading materials on this topic, of which there is very little, I came upon Fergus's (2017) study on experiences of racialization in predominately White schools. His framework provided me with a starting point for the project I was envisioning. I was eager to conduct this research given my own and my fellow Latinx acquaintances, friends, and family experiences with racism and discrimination in a variety of settings. My goal was to go beyond anecdotal experiences, focusing on WLLs. Obviously, I am unable to speak for all Latinx individuals, but with my thesis project, I hope to advance an understanding of WLLs' variety of experiences with racism, microaggressions, and discrimination in a K-12 setting.

Ethnographic scholars address the issues of "positionality" and "othering." For example, Rubin and Rubin (2012) raise the concern of cross-cultural, insider-outsider problems in conducting research on a group to which someone does not belong. As a Latino, I had insider status to studying Latinx individuals and their experiences with racism. Consistent with Rubin and Rubin (2012), I believe my sample recruitment and interviews benefited from my own identity as a brown-skinned Latino. If I were Black or White, for example, it is more likely that my participants would not have trusted me with some of their experiences and testimonies. Stated alternatively, with my positionality as a Latino, there was more likely a genuine connection with my participants of the same (or similar) identity, which in turn likely resulted in a greater willingness to both participate in my study and to talk more openly discuss the research questions about racism and discrimination. I approached data-collection, with what I believe was a very open-mind, given the exploratory nature of my study, and knowing that there were risks

for implementing my study that everything would not necessarily go as planned. Indeed, this occurred which I include in sections of this chapter.

Recruiting Participants

Following my IRB approval, I started recruiting potential WLL participants in January 2018 for focus groups and perhaps, one-on-one interviews. My approved IRB proposal, included a variety of recruitment methods including a flyer (Appendix A), email (Appendix B), class announcements (Appendix C), the participant consent form (Appendix D), and word of mouth (the assistance of my colleagues and friends to spread the word). To assist subsequent researchers attempting to study this or a similar research question, I include all of the IRB approved recruitment methods in the appendices. However, I was able to sufficiently gather the necessary number of participants from the email and word of mouth. My primary recruitment method, the IRB-approved email, explained my study and asked professors, my department's administrative assistant, and a few other colleagues in other units to mass send the email to anyone they know might be interested and to other colleagues of theirs (see Appendix A). These networks were very beneficial, and included the recruitment email reaching student organizations and all of the affiliated students, staff, and faculty in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

Additionally, because I wanted to reach out to as many White-looking Latinx (WLL) students, staff, and faculty as possible, I asked my supervisor, Theresa, a CU Boulder Advisor, if she would be willing to send out the email. I first thought that she might be able to send out the email to all of her connections (which I assumed to be all employed advisors at CU Boulder) so that it would be easier for me to obtain more participants. It turned out, however, that she did not have authority to execute such task. Rather, she reached out to Victor, a staff member that

overlooks the online advising platforms at CU Boulder, and he approved the email. After he had approved this, Victor sent the email out to *all* advisors affiliated with CU Boulder. This was a highly effective method because all advisors at CU received my emailed message and they were then able to send the emails out to students, staff, and faculty, and even spread the word by mouth.

Within approximately two weeks after sending the emails (and them being forwarded with the help of my networks), I received about 15 inquiries from interested participants. I noticed that it was going to be difficult to manage everyone's availability, so following the advice from one of my professors, I created a Doodle Poll Survey online. Twelve of the fifteen interested parties responded to the Doodle Poll Survey.

As previously noted, my original plan was to use focus groups for the interview questions (Appendix F), so that the respondents could have more of a discussion about their experiences. Perhaps unfortunately, I was unable to organize focus groups. As noted in the last paragraph, fifteen participants signed up for a focus group, but then 4 quit responding to requests to schedule a focus group. After consulting with my advisor, I decided that I needed to pursue individual, one-on-one interviews with participants. I continued the recruitment process via email through the second week of March. Although focus groups would likely allow more participants and some interesting discussions among WLLs, the one-on-one interviews also held advantages. Primarily, some of the participants may not have felt comfortable reporting their experiences to a room of (possibly) strangers, where the other participants were not beholden to keep their disclosures confidential. Another advantage of the one-on-one interviews relative to focus groups, is that I was not only able to tape the interviews for each participant so that I would more accurately know which participant stated what words, but I also did not run the risk of

having one focus group member deny audio-taping, in which case I would not have been able to tape the focus group (for obvious ethical and IRB reasons) – fortunately this did not occur.

Sample

The sample of participants for this study were individuals (students, staff, and faculty) that identified racially/ethnically with the Latinx community, were White-looking (WLL), and currently attending/working or have attended/worked in a PWI. I required participants to be 18 years of age or older. Appendix E is a table describing the sample, including how the participants identified ethnically, their age, and their category of position at CU-Boulder (i.e., student, staff, or faculty).

The Measurement/Interview Instrument

I composed two sets of questions for this study: one for focus group interviews, and the other for one-on-one interviews. Because there were no focus groups conducted in this study, I pulled questions from both sets and organized a final document of questions that were asked to participants. The three sets of questions are found in the appendices. Due to the lack of focus groups in this study, I decided to not use to use only certain questions that I created for this type of interview. Rather, I choose certain some questions from both original sets (focus group and one-on-one interviews) and combined them into a new document that I would then use as the official questions for all the participants in the one-on-one interviews. Consistent with qualitative interviewing, I often used probes for my participants to clarify some of their answers. Interestingly, none of the participants in the study declined questions. I referred to Fergus's (2017) study for guidance on how to construct questions. My advisor suggested to contact Fergus via email, and that is what I did. Fergus contacted me back and referred me to his 2004

publication: *Skin Color and Identity Formation: Perceptions of Opportunity and Academic Orientation among Mexican and Puerto Rican Youth.*

Interviews

I completed 7 one-on-one interviews. Similar to most research, I experienced a handful of participants who canceled scheduled interviews with me. Some canceled a few days before the scheduled day and others canceled the day of the interview. It was a lengthy process to schedule interviews with participants, and at times, overwhelming. Instead of the food and beverages offered for the focus groups, I provided \$15.00 cash compensation for all the interviews. Notably one participant, Lobix⁹, that refused the monetary compensation because he felt that participants for this kind of study should not be compensated, especially since I did not receive a research grant or financial assistance.

At the commencement of the interviews, I signed the consent form and ‘receipt’ for the compensation and briefly explained to the participants what they were signing. In the back of the consent form I provided a space so that participants could create their own fictitious name for me to use in the study. There were four total copies of documents: one copy of the consent form and receipt for myself, and a copy of both for each participant. I also asked participants if it was acceptable for me to record the interviews. Fortunately, all participants agreed to having audio-taped interviews. The interviews were audio-taped using the downloaded phone application “Voice Recorder.” I only used my laptop computer during the interviews to read my final interview questions (Appendix H) Consistent with other qualitative interview data collection, I

⁹ All participants provided made-up names for the purposes of my thesis, in order to maintain their anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

would sometimes skip a question on the measurement instrument because the participant had already answered the question under an earlier question.

As previously reported, the data for this study were collected from one-on-one interviews with the participants. As stated, the initial intention was to conduct one or two focus groups where I was going to provide food and beverages for all participants. The one-on-one interviews were all conducted at the University of Colorado Boulder in private and enclosed offices/study rooms.

Conclusion

This chapter described the methods used to study White-Looking Latinx (WLLs) in terms of their experiences with racism and discrimination. Consistent with other ethnographic and exploratory research, the qualitative data were analyzed by careful and repeated combing through them looking for themes. Ideally, I would have been able to collect a larger sample, but this relatively small sample was still fruitful for identifying themes. The following chapter will report the themes and provide descriptions of them and examples through quotes from the participants.

CHAPTER IV: THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed my thesis methods. This is the findings chapter, with the goal of providing a description of the participants, insights on their experiences, and how they view racism and discrimination. In analyzing the qualitative data, I carefully combed through the interviews, searching for themes. In addition to describing the participants' demographic characteristics, this chapter reports the three themes, providing descriptions and examples of them. Appendix E is a table summarizing the demographic and ethnic makeup, and names of participants (fictitious names). Appendix I is a summary of the 3 themes (2 main themes and one subtheme) identified in my analysis. Latinx students, faculty, and staff have, and are still, experiencing racism. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully report on areas other than K-12 where racism is experienced (e.g., in the familial home, and at PWIs).

I interviewed 7 total participants: 2 staff members, 1 faculty member, and 4 undergraduate students. The age range of the sample was 18 to 53 years old. The 2 main themes identified in the qualitative analysis were (1) Racism while Attended Predominately-White K-12 Schools, and (2) Indirect Racist Experiences (IREs). The third theme I identify as a subtheme, because it was less predominant (reported by 2 participants), but it had a very powerful impact and is likely occurring among many WLLs. I label this subtheme Transformations in Self-Identification. The last subtheme is identified as Standards of Beauty.

Theme 1: Racism while Attending Predominately-White K-12 Schools

There were a total of 6 participants that talked about attending predominately-White K-12 school: Elana, Lobix, Leyla, Mayra, Jose, and Seb. All but one participant (Jazmine) had this experience. *Notably, the participants' experiences with attending predominantly White K-12 schools was not uniform.* Both Lobix and Elana were one of the only two Latinx students in their class. Elana claimed that she experienced small amounts of microaggressions in her K-12, which might be attributed to her very light-colored hair (more then, than it is now, she noted). That is, she could and did pass as White. Denver-born and Brighton-raised, Elana stated in her interview that she “was too proud [of being White-passing] to really care [about the negativity].” Although she reported limited experience with racism, she did mention that once in high school a [White] student walked up to her and told her “you can’t be Mexican because Mexicans don’t have curly hair.” She was annoyed at this random girl in her class for stating this about her.

Lobix also reported being one of two Latinx students at his first college that he attended (even though this is not K-12, it is still important to note). His experiences were significantly different than Elana’s. Directly quoted from the recorded interview, he answered that he “hated it there,” and only attended because he received a scholarship to the college. “Horrible” was Lobix’s answer to when I asked him how he would describe his experience in his K-12 schooling. His experiences he attributed to racism ranged from being denied enrollment in Advanced Placement classes, to being pulled out of class and being placed into another classroom with other Latinx students to be “babysat” and being taught nothing – it’s a shame. Lobix described his K-12 racism experiences as “alienation” and “disconnectedness.” These findings are consistent with some of the reviewed scholarship, the poor treatment of the K-12 school system’s students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students. With hardly any

privilege, these students are unable to succeed and excel because they are not provided with any opportunities to do so. As with Lobix, the end result is the student's feeling of alienation, in addition to a record that does not reflect her/his academic abilities.

Unlike some other participants, Mayra focused on her experiences as a WLL after K-12. Born and raised in Denver, even though she did not mention whether she attended a diverse K-12 setting or not, she focused on her current work experience as a staff member in an otherwise all White CU Boulder office. Mayra is the only Latinx staff there, yet she is WLL/White passing. I wonder now, after reviewing the interview, if she was hired for this same reason: because she appears to be White. This is something that I failed to ask her during the interview, and in retrospect, wish I had. Even though this is not a K-12 setting, it is a setting of education and professional employment. She mentioned to me that her supervisors and coworkers are aware that they are White and their White privilege. Significantly, she seemed to be a little bit relaxed when she mentioned this, almost as if there was some sort of "relief" – knowing that her coworkers are aware they are White and she is only White passing.

Both Jose and Mayra experienced similar situations in that both transitioned from racially and ethnically diverse settings (cities, schools), to Predominantly White Colleges/Predominantly White Institutions (PWCs/PWIs). Jose attended two public districts in Colorado that were diverse, and switched to a predominately-White high school and now a PWC campus. Mayra attended a diverse school in Denver and after graduation was employed at CU Boulder, a PWI. As much as the participants experienced and attended predominately-White K-12 schools, there are also those experiences and instances that some also did *not* experience, that others in their social circle did. The following section recounts such instances and describes other reoccurring comments and areas regarding this topic.

Theme 2: Indirect Racist Experiences (IREs)

Four participants discussed indirect racist experiences in K-12: Elana, Lobix, Leyla, Mayra. I use the term “indirect racist experiences” (IRE) to reflect racist and discriminatory experiences that the participants experienced in regard to others whom they know: family, classmates, friends, and so on. The IREs that were reported in this section of the findings, occurred during the time of attendance in K-12. Importantly, some participants talked about very openly about their IREs. To this end, some of their descriptions were in fine and close detail. Although some IRE examples the participants provided were short, while others were extensively long, the overall finding was: As WLLs, these participants had privilege that they were both aware and unaware of. Some used it to their advantage, and some did not. This was the case for Seb, a 53-year-old staff member at CU Boulder.

Seb’s experience was unique because he attended public elementary school and switched to private Catholic middle and high schools. One day, Seb had a problem with the irrigation system in his yard, when the supervisor came over to check what was going on he told Seb, “That’s what the Mexicans are for.” He told me: “I wasn’t prepared for that, it made me feel really awkward, I didn’t really know how to challenge his remarks.” It is instances like these where WLLs are caught off guard from the ignorance and racism/discrimination of others. He claimed to not have any overt experiences on this subject, but he still provided many IREs.

Notably, a few participants provided information regarding their elder family members. Both Lobix and Mayra revisited instances in their past regarding their uncle (for Mayra) and great-grandmother/uncle (Lobix). A reoccurring reference to their experiences, for Lobix and Mayra, was the relation to being White-looking and beauty. Today, especially in Latin novelas and television series, the actors and actresses are all predominately lighter-skinned Latinx. In

major television networks and movies or novelas, there is a consistent portrayal of wealthy, privileged, and upper-class citizens [in Mexico] as all young White-looking and the portrayal of the poorer class, underprivileged, and struggling citizens are dark-skinned older [Mexicans].

Mayra referred to her cousin, Anna, age 6 or 7. Anna was putting on lotion and said told Mayra that she wished she was White like her. Anna's dad (Mayra's uncle) is dark skinned. Anna is also dark haired, has long eye lashes, has dark skin. Mayra reported Anna as mad at the fact that she is not white like Mayra. Where did she get this ideology from? From her classmates. "The other girls at school tell her she is ugly cause she is dark," Mayra told me. This idea of beauty, goodness, ugliness, in relation to skin color is common, and similar to that of Lobix's experience with his uncle.

Lobix's uncle, recalled his childhood when his mother used to make him and his cousins scrub their skin and take "pumice baths" to become lighter skinned. For Lobix's great-grandmother, being dark-skinned was considered "dirty." For my final question, I asked all my participants if they had any concluding comments they'd like to share. What did Lobix conclude the interview with? "I would love to be dark skinned, I hate being light skinned, I *really* hate being light skinned. So, I just feel like people assume I'm white, which I'm not." Powerful and moving, these qualitative data report the raw voices of those who have suffered in their own skin and life experiences. Moreover, the longings are disparate—longing for lighter and longing for darker skin. For someone to want to be a different skin color is a strong statement. With physical appearance comes identity and embracing who you are. This following section will discuss some points on participants' identity/embracing themes.

Subtheme 1: Transformations in Self-Identification

Although “only” 2 participants, Leyla and Seb, raised the subtheme, I label Transformations in Self-Identification in K-12, given that this is almost a third of my sample and the impact was so strong, it is important to report in my thesis. Moreover, in hindsight I wish I had asked this question in my interview format, as I am very confident that other participants would also report this experience, had I raised it. On the other hand, this is why qualitative and exploratory research is so important; It helps identify phenomenon deserving of further scholarly attention. This final section of findings themes elaborates on this experience resulting from being a WLL.

Being a WLL had/has a strong impact on Seb’s relationships with his ethnic roots, family, students, faculty, and employers. Indeed, his current work is a specific attempt to expand the diversity on campus at CU Boulder. Seb told me: “A lot of our students today, they want to embrace their identities on their own terms and not because somebody else is telling them how to do it.” Notably, this was also Seb’s experience during his time as an undergraduate at CU Boulder, with CU-B counselors trying to make him aware of his identity as a Latinx. “I was offended by that,” said Seb when he recalled an instance when a counselor directed sentiments toward him that supposedly he did not know what it meant to be a Chicano.

Seb admitted that “after first generation immigrants, each generation becomes more and more Americanized, and I suppose I fall in line with that pattern at some level.” Seb has a point: It is important to take into consideration the ever-changing identity of the Latinx, and the ongoing estrangement from the Latinx identity across generations. I can testify to this. Both my father and mother are more “traditional” Mexicans (my father more than my mother), my siblings and I are more progressive and liberal. My grandparents are even more traditional than

my parents. The end result is an ideology that current Latinx (millennials) are quickly losing their Latinx identity.

Leyla had a more complex K-12 setting. Her experiences with racism in K-12, were more IREs, not racism towards her but Latinx in general. She mentioned that she used to hang around the popular kids in middle and school and they made jokes about “beaners” and crossing the border. Leyla noted that these White students were unaware that she was Mexican. She said, “It definitely didn’t want to make me tell them I was Mexican.” Leyla went along with the jokes to “fit in.” She believed that if she would have “come out” as Mexican she might have been shunned or kicked out of the social/friend group. This belief seems accurate given what she reported. Most importantly, the denial of her identity caused her to refuse her Mexican heritage and pride, until her senior year in high school.

Leyla started to embrace her identity in high school. She discussed the long process to accepting herself as a Mexican. Significantly, she stated that she is appreciating her Mexican identity now. “I finally identity as that [Latina] in a confident way” she said proudly.

Notably, neither Leyla nor Seb reported experiencing any strong, firsthand, direct racism or racial discrimination. Yet, their reports on having their Latinx identities denied, vilified, and even denying themselves, point to a painful and confusing experience, that is likely very shaming.

Subtheme 2: The Standard of Beauty

Unsurprisingly, some participants informed me that they not only experienced racist discrimination as WLLs and being light-skinned, but they witnessed it among the majority of all Latinx students in their classes and schools. Some participants testified that they either felt

alienated or felt like they were going to get shunned if they “came out” as being Mexican or Latinx. I found a trend between the exterior traits of being Latinx and the treatment that is associated with this identity. More specifically, if one is a dark-skinned Latinx, then a certain kind of negative treatment is “expected” to occur, in what I label as almost a (racist) “beauty standard” that one must fit into.

One participant, Jazmine, had a unique experience in K-12. She attended schools in Colorado Springs that were racially and ethnically diverse. There were students that were low income, and of difference classes. Jazmin claimed that in her middle school there was a lot of diversity, but it was mainly in the remedial classes and these students were interpreted to be the “bad kids.” Here, we are able to see that possibly skin color, class status, income, and ethnicity have to do whether one is “good” or a “bad” person/student. It was interesting, however, that she also mentioned that the majority of teachers there either Hispanic or people of color. Colorado Springs is a mainly conservative town and that is where she experienced the least negativity whereas in Boulder she experienced more.

During the interview, which was very intriguing, she offered to show me a picture of her and her family. I must say that I was blown away by what was shown to me. If you took a look at Jazmine you would imagine that she is a White American whose parents are white. Interestingly enough, I could imagine why she would say that she gets teased for “being adopted” (even though she is not) because the rest of her family is dark(er) skinned. Her siblings and parents were more dramatically darker than she is, and she is a White-passing Latina/Mexican. I was very surprised as to what I saw.

Jazmine claimed that in 7th, one day, she was wearing a belt with initials and the “cholo” style. Some school girls came up to her locker and talked “crap” in Spanish to her as if she

couldn't understand them (which they were unaware that she spoke Spanish). She was called a "wanna be Mexican." Her reply to this during the interview was "they [the girls] thought that my identity was invalid, you know what I mean?"

There is standard of beauty and identity that some people do not understand, such as the girls mentioned above. Jazmine's interview was a unique one. The same idea of a beauty standard can be seen with the interview description mentioned above with Lobix and his great-grandmother. She made her grandchildren take "pumice baths" to remove the darkness or the "dirtiness" away from their skin. This subtheme of beauty standard is can be seen with Mayra's cousin and how she wished to be like Mayra because she was "ugly" due to her skin color and physical features (according to her classmates). Even though the sample for this subtheme is roughly half of my participant sample, I would conclude it to be a subtheme because this idea of beauty standards came up, but not extensively to the point where there is information to further analyze.

Conclusion

I began this study with ideas about WLLs' experiences. Although I am Latinx, I am not a WLL. Similar to other exploratory research, I anticipated some of the findings I was surprised by others. I did not expect to find the direct racism experiences reported by Jazmine. Even with this sample of 7 participants, my thesis identified findings that future research needs to continue to address. Having attended predominately-White school is a theme that was reoccurring for the majority of participants. It is important to note this in order to further contribute to the study of WLL in PWIs/PWCs. This is a contributing factor to the way people experience racism and discrimination. Indirect racist experience findings also provide information on the powerful effects of racism even when it is not directed specifically at the individual of color—in this study, the WLL. Finally, this chapter found a fluidity in how some of these WLL respondents

self-identified, with these identities transforming over time, culminating in embracing their Latinx identities. The following and final chapter provide a summary and conclusions of my thesis research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

I was motivated to conduct my thesis on White-looking Latinxs (WLLs) due to the fact that there are WLLs in local communities and also because my little brother has been through some experiences in elementary school that caused him to hate certain classes and teachers. I have always found it interesting that family members comment and joke around with some members about being lighter skinned and how they're "not a part of the family". The research reviewed that guided this study indicted the complexity of racism among Latinxs, particularly in K-12 educational institutions (e.g., Fergus 2017). This design included intensive interviews with 7 WLLs at the University of Colorado-Boulder. The findings primarily reflect their experiences in K-12 or during their K-12 years, but not necessarily occurring in educational settings.

Four themes were identified after carefully combing through the qualitative interviews: (1) Racism in Predominantly White Schools; (2) Indirect Racist Experiences; (3) Transforming Identities; and (4) Racism in the Form of Beauty Standards. Although none of the themes were reported by all participants, they all raise fruitful research questions for future research. Additionally, some of the themes were not directly asked in the interview format, and were likely experienced by more participants and would have been documented by asking directly about them (i.e., beauty standards and transforming identities).

Significance of Findings

This study contributes to the understanding of race and discrimination. I started this research not being aware that White-looking Latinx face discrimination in their daily lives (by

non-family members), even more so, the complexities of this discrimination. Ideally, the findings will raise awareness that people of color experiences racism even when they appear White. Interviewing participants was an opportunity to learn about factors that affect racism and discrimination in settings such as family, K-12, and PWIs. Though, beyond the scope of this study, experiences within the family and at PWIs is crucial to understand in developing responses to decrease all forms of racist discrimination in a variety of settings, including K-12 schools.

Understanding family dynamics and how discrimination, microaggressions, and even racism appear at the home is crucial to finding possible solutions, or pathways that will allow families to better understand and work with one another. As exemplified in Jazmine's story, being the only White-passing member in one's family, can raise questions about identity and how that is embraced. It is especially key to understand how racism and discrimination appears in K-12 settings, as these are such vulnerable ages.

Even though there were only 7 participants in this round of research, there was enough information that was provided by all of them combined to really have a detailed analysis and examination of their life and how racism and discrimination appeared. Educators and scholars are able to further review literature and potentially this study, if published one day, to gain insight as to how approach race and ethnicity in their school (K-12) settings. Having a wide range of ages in this study was also important because it allows readers to gain insight into lives and experiences of current and modern times and also settings from past decades. These findings and research methods must be noted to further improve research on similar subjects, if not, extended replicas of this study.

Limitations

I faced limitations experienced by many researchers conducting interviews, such as individuals scheduling interviews and not showing up. Ideally, all participants would have shown up for their scheduled interviews and I would have had more time to recruit more participants, but the 7 participants allowed some important themes in the findings.

Further Research

Future research holds many possibilities for areas on race and ethnicity, including on the very unstudied area of WLLs. If time is not an issue, this study would be expanded into a state-wide research study that would focus on all the known PWIs in Colorado. The goal would be to aim participation of 50-100 in each campus, if possible. This will make a really dense study in terms of experiences and would allow future researchers to have a larger data sample.

It would also be beneficial to explore how racism and discrimination has affected participants to this day, taking on a more psychological approach, one on which I did not embark. Research on this would allow many people to understand how their past experiences, and the contributing factors to it, could be changed so that future generations will not experience the same thing. It is more or less of a training method for educators in K-12 and also for PWIs where campuses are not diverse.

Future research would also, hopefully, allow for a more intense (yet doable) and profound set of questions. Questions like those of Fergus; if time would have allowed, his set of questions would have been used. Future research could be more one-on-one interviews, focus groups, or quantitative surveys of WLLs.

Policy Implications

The findings from this study indicate that racism can have profound impacts on people of color who appear White. General awareness about racism should include these racist experiences, and this particularly important in K-12 school settings, where youth are marginalized by the powerlessness associated with age.

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Appendices

**APPENDIX A:
Recruitment Flyer**

**NO SOY GÜERO, SOY LATINO:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
'WHITE-LOOKING LATINOS'**

By: Efren Herrera, Ethnic Studies Honors Student at CU Boulder
Faculty/Committee Advisor: Dr. Joanne Belknap, Professor of Ethnic Studies at CU Boulder

I will be conducting two focus groups for my Honors Thesis Research on “White-Looking Latinos and Latinas” and how these members of the community have experienced racial discrimination in two kinds of settings: their own family community and their professional/educational community. I will ask general information questions, in depth questions about experiences (a phenomenological approach), and related topics. I am attempting to collect data to analyze and dive deeper into the understanding of why such discrimination occurs, especially at PWIs (Predominately White Institutions).

If you identify with the following three **bolded bulleted** (minimum requirements) criteria please consider signing up to participate and have the chance to win \$25 (two raffle drawings of \$25 each):

- **Identify racially/ethnically with the Latino community**
 - **“Pass” as White**
 - Have been targeted as “güero/a” by peers or family
 - Age 18+
 - Currently attend/work or have attended/worked in a PWI (Predominately White Institution)
 - Are Spanish/English bilingual
 - **Have at least two (2) *in-depth* experiences/testimonies of when you were discriminated against**
- Please contact Efren Herrera if you are interested in participating: efhe7596@colorado.edu**
PIZZA WILL BE PROVIDED

Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained to the greatest extent possible by me. Any names used will be changed to pseudonyms and kept confidential.

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APPENDIX B: Recruitment Email

This is what you will copy and paste to generate a mass email, thank you

Greetings students:

I am sharing with you all a forwarded email from an Honors Student in the Department of Ethnic Studies working on his Honors Thesis. This is a great opportunity to take up, please read the email carefully and consider participation to help out a fellow peer!

Hello Everyone!

My name is Efren Herrera and I am an undergraduate Honors Student in the Department of Ethnic Studies. I am reaching out to all of you, with the help of the Department, to tell you about what I hope is an interesting and valuable opportunity. I am scheduled to defend my honors thesis in April of 2018. My thesis is titled:

NO SOY GUERO, SOY LATINO: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST 'WHITE-LOOKING LATINOS'

I am recruiting participants that are interested in taking part in this study! I will be conducting a focus group where I will ask a series of demographical questions and personal questions about past experiences. I will also be conducting one-on-one interviews with anyone interested in taking part. I do, however, have "criteria" that participants must meet before being enrolled in the study, and these are:

- **You are typically perceived as or "pass" as White**
- **You identify racially/ethnically with the Latino community**
- You have been targeted as "güero/a" by peers or family
- You are 18 years old or older
- You currently attend/work or have attended/worked in a PWI (Predominately White Institution)
- You are bilingual in Spanish/English
- You have experiences of when you were discriminated against

*bolded points are required

**a chance to win monetary prizes are available in the focus group interviews and an automatic individual monetary compensation for one-on-one interviews.

If you are interested in getting more information about this study and/or are willing to participate, please contact me via email:

efhe7596@colorado.edu

Thank you all!

APPENDIX C: Class Read Aloud Script

Hello everyone, may I please have your undivided attention.

I have student and his name is Efren Herrera, he is an an undergraduate Honors Student in the Department of Ethnic Studies. He reached out to me to see if any of you would be interested to participate in an interesting and valuable opportunity. Efren is scheduled to defend his honors thesis in April of 2018. His thesis is titled:

NO SOY GÜERO, SOY LATINO: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ‘WHITE-LOOKING LATINOS’

Efren is recruiting participants that are interested in taking part in this study! He will be conducting a focus group where he will ask a series of demographical questions and personal questions about past experiences. Efren will also be conducting one-on-one interviews with anyone interested in taking part. He does, however, have “criteria” that participants must meet before being enrolled in the study, and these are:

- **You are typically perceived as or “pass” as White (this is required)**
- **You identify racially/ethnically with the Latino community (this is also required)**
- You have been targeted as “güero/a” by peers or family
- You are 18 years old or older
- You currently attend/work or have attended/worked in a PWI (Predominately White Institution)
- You are bilingual in Spanish/English
- You have experiences of when you were discriminated against

There is a chance to win monetary prizes are available in the focus group interviews and an automatic individual monetary compensation for one-on-one interviews.

If you are interested in getting more information about this study and/or are willing to participate, please contact Efren via email:

write down my contact information on the board for student to write down if interested in participating

efhe7596@colorado.edu

Thank you.

APPENDIX D: Consent Form



Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

**NO SOY GÜERO, SOY LATINO:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
'WHITE-LOOKING LATINOS'**

INVESTIGATOR: Efren Herrera Hurtado

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective for this study is to research discriminative experiences of primarily White-Looking Latino students/adults at PWIs (Predominately-White Institutions) and how it has affected them. The second objective is to examine how they have experienced these discriminations in their familial homes, predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (including college/university), and pre-higher education schooling (grades K-12). This topic has received little scholarly attention, and my goal is to fill this void, to not only document discrimination experienced by “white-looking” Latino/as, but to understand the circumstances in which they occur and their impact on the those who experience them. The end goals of this research study are to find, dissect, analyze, and conclude the findings in a cohesive form in order for other communities to apply them to their cultural and ethnically diverse spaces. My intentions for this study is to interview participants in two ways: focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED?

You are being invited because you have met the guidelines for full participation in this research study, and I believe the best way to understand this problem and to improve responses to it is to document and understand discrimination against “white-looking” Latino/as and the impact on them.

PROCEDURES

I will be interviewing you in either a focus group setting or one-on-one interview setting. These one-time interviews for focus group and one-on-one interviews are estimated to last between 1 and 2 hours. The focus group interviews will be in a secure conference room at the CU Boulder campus and the timing will be selected upon how many participants will attend (most likely in the afternoon/evening). One-on-one interviews will be chosen by you – the location and time (one that fits both of our schedules) – I am always open to reserving a private meeting space for us, if need be.

I have generated a list of questions for each group: both focus group and one-on-one interviews, that I will be asking you in relation to general demographic information and other questions relating to more personal thoughts and experiences on race and ethnicity, and discrimination and racism. The only activity that you will be involved with is answering the questions that I ask you to the best of your knowledge and with honesty – nothing else will be asked of you other than to answer questions. Before the commencement of the interviews, I will be passing around sticky name tags where you will be writing down a letter A-Z on them and sticking them somewhere I am able to see while monitoring the interviews. When I am writing notes, I will be addressing (in interview notes) you by the letter you have written on your name tag instead of your real name for confidentiality. I will address you by your real name if I need to call on you for some reason during the interview.

With your permission, I will be audio recording the interview/focus group. This allows me to more accurately transcribe each interview/focus group, to more provide improved data analysis.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Information given to me by you, the participant, will not be presented orally or in publications in a way that could reasonably be linked to the you, minimizing any potential harm, either physical, emotional, or psychological. All gathered information will be kept confidential, to the greatest extent possible by me, in paper documents stored away in a private and enclosed location, and/or in a password-protected computer file to which only I, Efren Herrera Hurtado, will have access. Members of the interview group may disclose information discussed in the focus group outside of the research context, thereby breaching confidentiality – this is highly discouraged. I have no control as to what is said outside of this research setting from other participating members. Please be aware that there is a possibility some information may be shared amongst other people by members of this group.

If you wish to not have your interviews audio recorded, handwritten or typewritten notes will be taken. The same procedures of confidentiality used for recorded information (demographics, computer files, etc.) will be applied to hand/typewritten notes as to the recorded audio transcribed data. Audio files will only be kept until the end of the seven (7) month period for the study (the 7 months commences when I receive the authorization from IRB to start participant

research. Written transactions, consent forms, hand/typewritten notes, and recorded demographics will be kept for 10 years for a potential possibility in which case I may use my findings to apply to a post- baccalaureate degree (start date will be considered the day that I receive confirmation from IRB to proceed with this study).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL You are able to leave the interview at any time during the session, even if you decide to participate and maybe later want to withdraw from my study. There will be no penalty for this other than you lose the chance of winning a cash prize at the conclusion of the focus group interviews.

You will be withdrawn from the research study without any consent under extreme circumstances such as: using offensive and harassing language *directly* to the interviewer or other participants or using any physical or emotional threat to the interviewer or any other participants. Under these cases, you will not be eligible for the possible compensation.

In the rare case that I must withdraw you, I will:

- 1) Let you know the offense that you have created
- 2) Let you know that you are no longer considered a participant of this study
- 3) Let you know that any, and all, recorded information about you will be physically and electronically destroyed
- 4) Let you know that you are no longer eligible for compensation
- 5) And if you have any further questions, comments, or concerns to contact me or my committee advisor directly after you have been dismissed

I will not actively seek a replacement for you if you are to be withdrawn.

QUESTIONS AND CONTACT

Please contact the research team if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you:

Principal Investigator: Efren Herrera Hurtado
efhe7596@colorado.edu

Committee Advisor: Dr. Joanne Belknap
joanne.belknap@colorado.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or irbadmin@colorado.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Fictitious name to be used in study: _____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX E: Participant Information

Name	Age	Ethnic Identity	University Affiliation
Lobix	53	Xicanx	Faculty
Jazmin	19	Latina/Mexican and Spanish	Student
Elana	19	Latina/Mexican	Student
Leyla	18	Latina/Chicana	Student
Jose	19	Latino	Student
Seb	53	Latino/Chicano/Spanish/Mexican American/Hispanic	Staff
Mayra	25	Mexican	Staff

*It is important to note that there are four interview/participants missing their information on here. These four participants were either unable to meet with me during the interview availability or are either available after the time that this thesis must be turned in. An update on this section will be performed as soon as the interviews are available.

APPENDIX F: Focus Group Questions

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your place of birth?
- 4) Where were you raised?
- 5) Do you believe you are in the category of racial passing? Belonging to the Latino community yet you also are accepted into the White community because of the color of your skin.
 - a. Why or why not?
- 6) How do you define your own identity? Racially, ethnically, culturally, etc.
- 7) Do you know what a microaggression is?
- 8) What was your experience growing up in elementary school and in middle school being a White-looking Latino?
 - a. Did you attend racially diverse school campuses?
 - b. How did your experiences differ with those of your high school career?
- 9) Have you been a victim of microaggression at the University of Colorado Boulder either as a student or as an employee?
 - a. What happened exactly when you were in this microaggression situation?
 - b. How did it make you feel?
 - c. Did you act upon it? How so?
 - d. Was it a student or staff/faculty member that acted out their actions?
- 10) Do you have any friends that know your true racial/ethnic identity?
 - a. How have they reacted if you have (ever) told them you are Latino?
 - b. Do they make comments to you about your race? Do they say racial slurs or racial jokes to you?
 - i. If so, which ones?
- 11) How does it make you feel being a Latino and being a student/employee here at CU Boulder?
 - a. Are you equally represented?
 - i. Why or why not?
- 12) Could you describe your family dynamics in terms of race and ethnicity?
 - a. Are you the lightest skinned there? Darkest?
 - b. Do you have other members of your family with similar skin tone?
 - c. Are you the “outcast”?
 - d. What racial comments or slurs have you heard in your home/family?
 - i. Were any of those implicated to you?
 1. If so, which ones?
 - e. How does it make you feel being a light skinned Latino at home?
- 13) How have strangers approached you or seen you in public if you speak Spanish or if you are seen with more Latin “looking” family/friends/etc.?

- a. Has anyone every been surprised when they find out what your name/last name is? Your hometown? Your languages spoken? Your place of origin?
- 14) Are there any last concluding words, comments or questions you may have or would like to state something?

APPENDIX G: One-on-One Interview Questions

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your gender identity?
- 4) What is your place of birth?
- 5) Where were you raised?
- 6) What is your ethnicity? *

*Identification with a certain cultural group because of the pertaining qualities of language, religion, values and beliefs, traditions, region, and customs.

- 7) Do you speak another language other than English?
 - a. If so, which one(s)?
- 8) Are you a student or employee of a PWI (predominately white institution?)
 - a. Please identify either one or the other, or both
- 9) Do you or have ever resided in a non-PWI/PWC (predominately white city).
 - a. If so, where?
- 10) If you live in a household (friends or family), how many residents live with you?
 - a. _____
- 11) What experience have you gone through that you might consider racism or discrimination?
 - a. How did this experience make you feel?
 - b. Do you believe it was because of your skin color or because of your ethnic identification?
- 12) *Do you ever speak Spanish on the streets?*
 - a. *How do people look at you when you do so on CU's campus?*
- 13) *Do you believe that is a racial/ethnic separation between students on campus?*
 - a. *Could you describe this?*
 - b. *How could this be "fix" or alleviated?*
- 14) *How would you describe your relationship with your family members being a WLL? (White-looking Latino)?*
- 15) *How would you describe your relationship with faculty, students/friends at Boulder being WLL?*
- 16) *Have any persons ever not known you are from Latin descent?*
 - a. *How did they react when they found out?*
 - b. *Did this change the relationship that you have/had with them?*
- 17) *Are you proud of being a WLL?*
 - a. *How does it make you feel that others see you as being a "privileged White"?*
 - b. *Do you ever use this to your advantage?*
- 18) *Does this affect your Latino identity at all?*
 - a. *How?*
 - b. *Are your proud to be Latino? White-looking?*
- 19) *Has being a WLL changed your relationship with your roots, family, yourself, friends, faculty, employers, etc.? How?*

APPENDIX H: Final One-on-One Interview Questions

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your gender identity?
- 4) What is your place of birth?
- 5) Where were you raised?
- 6) What is your ethnicity? *
- 7) Do you or have ever resided in a non-PWI/PWC (predominately white city).
 - a. If so, where?
- 8) If you live in a household (friends or family), how many residents live with you?
- 9) How would you describe your relationship with faculty, students/friends at Boulder being WLL?
- 10) What experience have you gone through that you might consider racism or discrimination at CU/Boulder?
 - a. How did this experience make you feel?
 - b. Do you believe it was because of your skin color or because of your ethnic identification?
 - c. Did you act upon it? How so?
- 11) How would you describe your relationship with your family members being a WLL? (White-looking Latino)?
 - a. Could you describe your experiences? If any. Thoughts? Comments?
- 12) Could you describe your family dynamics?
 - a. Are you the lightest skin? Darkest?
 - b. Are you the “outcast”?
 - c. Does your family make racial comments, jokes, or slurs against you?
- 13) Has being a WLL changed your relationship with your roots, family, yourself, friends, faculty, employers, etc.?
- 14) Could you describe your experiences in your K-12 schooling?
 - a. Did you attend a racially diverse setting K-12?
 - b. How did it make you feel?
 - c. How was it?
 - d. Reactions from peers?
 - e. Reactions from teachers?
 - f. Examples?
- 15) Have any people/peers/colleagues/etc. ever not known you are from Latin descent?
 - a. How did they react when they found out?
 - b. Did this change the relationship that you have/had with them?
- 16) “*You think if you were darker, people would judge you? [...] how so?*”
- 17) Any concluding words, comments, or questions you may have or would like to share?

APPENDIX I: Reoccurring Themes

Theme	Amount	Who?
Attended Predominately- White K-12 Schools	6	Elana, Lobix, Leyla, Mayra, Jose, Seb
Indirect Racist Experiences (IREs)	4	Elana, Lobix, Leyla, Mayra
Transformations in Self Identification (subtheme)	2	Leyla, Seb
Standards of Beauty (subtheme)	3	Jazmine, Lobix, Mayra