

Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations

Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences
2014, Vol. 36(1) 3–26
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DOI: 10.1177/0739986313511306
hjb.sagepub.com



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Abstract

The psychological literature on colorism, a form of within-group racial discrimination, is sparse. In an effort to contribute to this understudied area and highlight its significance, a concise and selective review of the history of colorism in Latin America is provided. Specifically, three historical eras (i.e., conquest, colonization, and post-colonization) are summarized. In each era, the establishment of racial and ethnic stratification and its consequences for Latino/as of indigenous and African descent are discussed. Connections between today's color-blind racial attitudes and *mestizaje*, or the mixing of races, is underscored to demonstrate how these strategies have been used, historically and today, to deny and minimize skin-color privilege. The article culminates with questions to help readers reflect and engage in dialogue about colorism as a prelude to recommendations for stimulating future research on this significant yet neglected topic.

Keywords

colorism, Latino, within-group racism, skin-color prejudice

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Diversity within Latino/as has received increasing attention in the literature over the past two decades. A number of foundational publications such as those by Bonilla-Silva (2010), Comas-Díaz (1996), Organista (2007b), and Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, and Gallardo-Cooper (2002), coupled with the Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003), provide a basis for facilitating professional dialogue about within-group stigma and discrimination. One such area is colorism or “a form of [racial] discrimination imposed upon Latino/as by members of their own ethnic group” (Organista, 2009, p. 291).

Although the psychological literature on colorism is sparse, the few studies available have found that darker skin-color prejudice negatively affects Latino/a mental health (Montalvo, 2004; Montalvo & Codina, 2001, Ramos, Jaccard, & Guilamo-Ramos, 2003), education, and income (Arce, Murgia, & Frisbie, 1987). For example, in their seminal article examining the impact of skin color and phenotype on the life chances of Mexican Americans, Arce et al. (1987) found that as compared with their lighter skinned and European-looking counterparts, darker and more indigenous looking participants reported less educational attainment (9.5 and 7.8 years, respectively), lower income (US\$12,721 and US\$10,450, respectively), and higher discrimination as assessed by self-report incidents of perceived discrimination with higher scores indicating more perceived discrimination (25.6 and 27.2). In addition, a study conducted by Ramos et al. (2003) compared the depressive symptoms between European Americans, African American, and Afro-Latino/a adolescents and found that Afro-Latinas reported the highest levels.

The purpose of this article is to (1) prime the reader for a historical appreciation of colorism and its current impact on Latino/as and (2) provide questions to stimulate dialogue about this challenging topic as a prelude to (3) recommendations for approaching research on colorism with Latino/as. To accomplish these goals, a brief overview on the history of the conquest, the colonial period, and postcolonial era is provided to highlight the establishment of ethnic and racial stratification and its negative consequences for Latino/as of indigenous and African descent. The legacy of *mestizaje* is also outlined as a strategy to minimize and deny the racial privilege of lighter skinned and European featured Latino/as. Furthermore, *mestizaje* is compared with more recent color-blind racial attitudes in the United States. We conclude with questions to stimulate reflection, recognition, and engagement in dialogue about colorism as a prelude to research recommendations.

The authors acknowledge that learning about within-group oppression or “family secrets” may elicit uneasy feelings such as discomfort or anxiety as well as anger, pain, shame, and guilt within Latino/as across the color

continuum. However, such learning can also be stimulating, insightful, and motivating to extend our social justice efforts to include within-group efforts to reduce internalized oppression. We are also cognizant that inviting colorism dialogue may disturb the status quo within Latino/a relations but hopefully in productive ways. By starting the colorism conversation, we do not minimize the history of oppression and discrimination that Latino/as have and continue to experience due to cultural differences, immigration status, gender, accentedness, socioeconomic status (SES), and so on, all well documented in the literature (e.g., Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Dittmann, & Lagunes, 2010; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Perez, 2012; C. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Torres & Ong, 2010). Instead, this article is an invitation to learn more about colorism, its historical foundation, and its current impacts on Latino/as and to simulate further inquiry. Education through history is one of the “most powerful weapon we can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, 2012, para. 13).

Selective History of Racial Stratification in Latin America

The history of Latino/as is a collective narrative of rich ancestral roots and traditions, conquest, colonization, slavery, and perseverance. If indeed we are committed to APA's (2003) Multicultural Guidelines and fostering a fairer society, the living legacy of history must be studied to avoid repeating its many pitfalls. In fact, the Multicultural Guidelines call on us to understand the influence that social, political, historical, and economic context have on individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

The Conquest of Latin America: The Importation of Racist Ideologies

The conquest was one of the most violent periods in Latin American history resulting in the massacre, domination, and oppression of indigenous people (Livi-Bacci, 2008; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). It began with the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors to the Caribbean Islands of what today is known as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. There, the Conquistadors encountered the Tainos, the Caribs, and other smaller indigenous groups. By 1518, the Conquistadors had arrived at the coast of Veracruz, Mexico (Garcia-Martínez, 2010; Livi-Bacci, 2008). As they moved further west into the coast of Mexico and South America, the Conquistadors encountered the descendants of the Mayans, the Aztecs, and the Incas (Garcia-Martínez, 2010; Livi-Bacci, 2008; Nalda, 2010). During their settlements

into what the Spaniards called “the new world,” they encountered various groups of people with centuries of established traditions, beliefs, and customs (Garcia-Martínez, 2010; Livi-Bacci, 2008). They viewed indigenous people as “heathens” who needed to be civilized (Livi-Bacci, 2008; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Thus, Spanish historical interpretations of indigenous behaviors were rooted in a European perception of the world, and the foundation of social inequality between the White and non-White populations in Latin America took hold during this era (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

Historians have described the encounter between the Spaniards and the indigenous population as having a tremendous influence on the Spaniards’ ability to survive and thrive in Latin America (Garcia-Martínez, 2010; Livi-Bacci, 2008). In fact, it has been postulated that while the Europeans found good conditions in the Americas (i.e., good climate, food, low levels of epidemic disease), conditions for the indigenous people rapidly deteriorated (Livi-Bacci, 2008). For instance, the indigenous people were faced with epidemic diseases for which they had no immunities and suffered dramatic economic and social “territorial dislocation” (Livi-Bacci, 2008, p. 7). Their traditions, religion, and even their names were lost. Overall, the indigenous groups were forced to live by the expectations of the Spaniards, including their beliefs about racial superiority and practices that transferred cross-generationally as Spaniards and indigenous people inevitably mixed (Garcia-Martínez, 2010; Livi-Bacci, 2008; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

The Colonial Period: A System Based on Inequality

During the colonial period, the Spaniards dominated Latin America and began using indigenous laborers to exploit the natural resources of the “new world,” which was rich in precious metals and agricultural lands (Casas Arzu, 2009; Tanck de Estrada & Marichal, 2010). Nevertheless, as the percentage of the indigenous population declined, the Spaniards found themselves in need of additional laborers. Such need gave rise to the slave trade and more than 10 million African slaves were brought to Latin America. The survival and reproductive capacity of Afro-descendants, in Latin America, were severely compromised by the inhumane and brutal conditions that marked their loss of freedom (Andrews, 2004; Livi-Bacci, 2008). Moreover, African slaves experienced high rates of mortality due to the strenuous work performed in the burgeoning sugarcane plantations and silver mining industries. Even before such labor exploitation, large numbers of slaves died during their transplantation to the Americas with one fifth to one third dying within 3 years of arrival (Andrews, 2004; Engerman, 2000). During the colonial period, Latin America was divided into a caste society, also referred to as a *system of stratification*

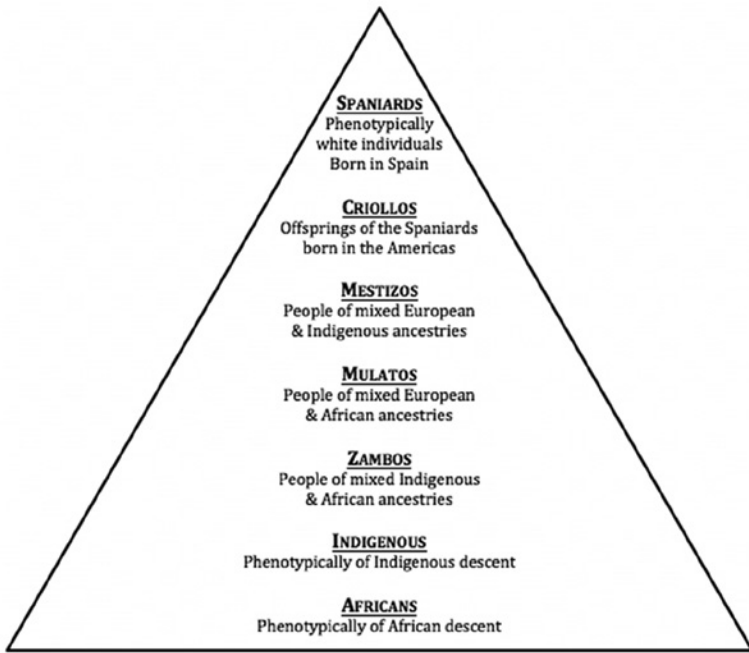


Figure 1. Latin American Social Caste Pyramid (LASCP).

Note. Informed by the 18th-century Latin American family caste paintings by Miguel Cabrera (Katzew, 1996). Racial mix determined hierarchy, social status, and economic privileges.

(Organista, 2007a; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). This system was based on skin-color and phenotypical characteristics. Figure 1 illustrates the social stratification system of the colonial period, where the Spaniards and their descendants strategically occupied the top. Such a stratification system was designed to allow Spaniards to hold and control political, social, and economic power at the cost of impoverishing indigenous and African groups (Ogbu, 1994; Organista, 2007a; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Moreover, an individual's placement within the stratification system determined his or her power and privilege within the colonies including noble titles, legal class divisions, censorship, access to formal education, and other life enhancing resources (Livi-Bacci, 2008; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

By the early 1800s, Spaniards composed about a quarter of the population and Africans a fifth, with the remainder a rapidly increasing racial blend of predominantly indigenous and Spanish roots (Livi-Bacci, 2008). Although

Spaniards were a shrinking minority, they possessed the power to discriminate on the basis of skin-color and phenotype as one of the main strategies to maintain the stratification of race, ethnicity, and power (Casaus Arzu, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). The colonial period lasted for about three centuries, ending around 1830 with each Latin American country eventually gaining independence from Spain (Livi-Bacci, 2008).

Postcolonial Era: Independence for Some and Continued Oppression for Others

During the postcolonial period, the foundation of White superiority, including the denial of inequality established by the Spanish conquistadors, flourished. These ideologies were built into the sociopolitical system. In fact, *mestizaje*, an ideology whereby everyone was deemed to be of mixed descent, was one of the main strategies the Spaniards used to deemphasize privileges associated with phenotypically White characteristics (Gates, 2011; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Consequently, even the descendants of the African slaves were socialized to buy into the idea of *mestizaje* connoting that all Latin Americans were of mixed indigenous, African, and European heritage (Gates, 2011; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

Afro-descendants and indigenous people subscribed to *mestizaje*; albeit, for different reasons than their White oppressors. *Mestizaje* was their feeble attempt to deny their racist ideologies and to “erase” the public discourse about their inferiority (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). To Afro-descendants, this ideology represented a forestalled acceptance of their humanity and a way to reject the stratification system established by the Spanish crown during the colonial period. In fact, one of the most well-known Mexican independence heroes, Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon, an Afro-descendant who fought to remove Mexico’s class and race distinctions, stated “May slavery be banished forever together with the distinction between castes, all remaining equal, so Americans may only be known by their vice or virtue” (Morelos y Pavon, 1813).

Moreover, Vicente Guerrero, another Afro-descendant who became the second president of Mexico, made a decision that would have significant repercussions for future generations. He decided that race, as a demographic category, would no longer be part of Mexico’s national census. His assumption was that if people were no longer categorized based on race, social inequality would cease to exist. Unfortunately, *mestizaje* rendered Afro-descendants and indigenous people invisible throughout Latin America with minimal changes to social stratification (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

The Legacy of *Mestizaje*: White Privilege in Contemporary Latin America

A related goal of *mestizaje* was the assimilation of indigenous and African people into a culturally homogeneous society. The direct descendants of the Spanish conquistadors or White elites believed that with time *mestizaje* would lead to the disappearance of indigenous and African cultures from Latin American society (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Assimilation was further accomplished by the blending and mixing of races supported by the government or what were known as “whitening policies” in Latin America (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009; Gates, 2011; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). These policies included two devious dimensions: (1) European immigration was encouraged, particularly to areas with high concentration of indigenous and African people (e.g., in Northern Mexico) (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009); and (2) White prostitutes were sent to areas where high concentration of Afro-descendants resided (e.g., in Colombia; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). The White elites believed that through interracial breeding they were going to “*mejorar la raza*” [improve the race] and dilute the African and indigenous characteristics from Latin America (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Interestingly, the phrase *mejorar la raza* is still used among U.S. Latino/as today (Comas-Díaz, 1996).

Current Impacts of Colorism

In the early 1990s, a group of people from Mata Clara was jailed in Mexico City. They were believed to be illegal immigrants from Central America. The police acted under the assumption that there are no blacks in Mexico and the fact that the detainees were not carrying any identification. Consequently, they were jailed. They were finally released after the intervention from the municipal president of Cuitlahuac, Veracruz, who confirmed to and convinced the Mexico City police that there were indeed black people in this territory . . . (Cruz-Carretero, 2006, p. 36)

The legacy of racism against non-White populations can be readily observed in today’s Latin American society by rendering them invisible to the devaluing of traditions rooted in indigenous and African beliefs and framing these groups as exotic others (Gates, 2011; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). For instance, a national survey conducted in 2010 by the Mexican Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación [National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination] (2012) identified discrimination as the main problem reported by the indigenous community in Mexico. Furthermore,

Table 1. Concealment Strategies: A Basis for Misinformation on Latino/as.

Strategies	Descriptions
Omission of social actors	A deliberate and purposeful exclusion of the history, including past and current contributions of Afro-Latinos and indigenous people.
Omission of racist practices	References to racial and discriminatory practices disappear from history. There is denial that racist practices exist and when discussed, it is acknowledged as occurring in foreign societies.
Naturalization	Racism and discrimination are normalized as natural phenomena that occur as a result of how a society develops. In other words, racism and discrimination are expected occurrences.
Distortion	Information on the history of Afro-Latino/as and indigenous people is not always portrayed accurately in textbooks and is often presented in a biased way.
Justification	Excuses are made to justify racist practices: The White elite had the right to defend themselves and the indigenous and Afro-descendants were blamed for the oppression they endured.

Note. Table informed by Soler Castillo and Pardo Abril (2009).

traditional indigenous clothing, accentedness, and behavioral mannerisms continue to be objects of everyday mockery and rejection in Mexico (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009). In addition, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (*Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*, 2011) reports that Afro-Latino/as in the Americas continue to be negatively stereotyped, described in a pejorative manner, and exoticized when represented in the media.

It is worth noting, however, that racism pervades a variety of other variables such as SES and gender (Montalvo & Codina, 2001). Although current SES is a direct result of centuries of marginalization, oppression, and exclusion, indigenous and Afro-descendants are often blamed for their struggles and are repeatedly perceived to be lazy, incompetent, and unable to improve their conditions (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Furthermore, concealment strategies were systematically used by White elites to provide misinformation to Latino/as relative to persons of indigenous and Afro-ancestry. For example, Table 1 describes four major concealment strategies used to misinform Latino/as about the historical and current implications of skin-color privilege. Despite

such pervasive concealment strategies, indigenous and Afro-descendant people throughout Latin American have staged various forms of resistance and protest against racism and discrimination.

The Struggle for Equality: Indigenous and Black Uprisings

Racism has limited opportunities for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities for centuries. These two groups have historically been the poorest segments of Latin American societies (Casaus Arzu, 2009; Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Unfortunately, such realities hold true today. For instance, epidemiological studies reveal high rates of health problems, low literacy and formal education, and high poverty (Hall & Patrinos, 2005; Ñopo, 2012). However, numerous social movements have shed light on such SES and health disparities.

The following section briefly discusses the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the Mayan movement in Guatemala, and the Afro-descendants movement in Colombia as vibrant illustrations of resistance to social stratification on the basis of ethnicity, race, and skin-color. Although a more comprehensive historical analysis is beyond the scope of this manuscript, these movements (e.g., Casaus Arzu, 2009; Marquez & Meyer, 2010; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009) were selected because they provide concrete examples of contemporary organized social movements by indigenous and Afro-Latino/as against colorism.

The Zapatistas: An Indigenous Movement in Mexico

The rebellion of the Mayan Zapatistas in 1994 illustrated the racist discourse and practices that the Mexican government and phenotypically White citizens have engaged in for centuries (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009). In 1996, the movement reached a major milestone with the passage of the San Andres Treaty, which judicially recognized indigenous groups as part of Mexico's populations as well as their autonomy. However, the treaty was never implemented because it reportedly threatened national unity (Marquez & Meyer, 2010). Such maintenance of national unity sounds similar to maintenance of the status quo and is perhaps yet a current version of *mestizaje* in effect today. Sadly, the indigenous people of Mexico continue to have the highest indices of poverty (Castellanos Guerrero, Gomez Izquierdo, & Pineda, 2009; Subcomandante Marcos, 2001).

The Mayan Movement in Guatemala

Guatemala is home to the largest number of indigenous inhabitants in all of Latin America with one of the highest inequality indices in the entire world (Hall & Patrinos, 2005; Minority Rights Group International, 2011). For example, the World Bank reports that indigenous people make up 58% of the poor and 72% of the extreme poor in Guatemala (Ñopo, 2012).

In the late 1970s, Guatemala experienced an unprecedented rise of indigenous individuals moving from the mountains of Guatemala into the cities. They also began to occupy high ranks in various armed organizations (e.g., La Organización del Pueblo en Armas [ORPA], El Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres [EGP]). “This irruption of indigenous people into public life caused a commotion among the power [white] elites and the fantasy of the ‘unredeemed’ Indian reappeared” (Casaus Arzu, 2009, p. 194). Between 1980 and 1985 a number of individuals who considered themselves White descendants of Europeans reached political power and committed one of the largest genocides in the history of Guatemala with approximately 200,000 killings and 100,000 disappearances (Casaus Arzu, 2009).

Similar to Mexico’s Zapatista movement, in the mid-1990s, socioeconomic disparities and brutality inadvertently propelled to the fore the organization of the Guatemalan Mayan social movement. Although the movement was successful at occupying new public spaces and having indigenous representation at local and regional governmental agencies, such progress has done little to decrease marginalization and poverty. Moreover, public opinion about non-Whites in Guatemala continues to be negative (Casaus Arzu, 2009). Reports conducted by the Human Rights Office and the CEDIM Foundation in Guatemala document that racism and discrimination against indigenous groups have not decreased in today’s Guatemala (Cojti & Edda, 2005; Diene, 2005; Human Rights Office & Morales-Alvarado, 2004).

An Afro-Descendant Movement in Colombia

Colombia is home to the second largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America (Asher, 2009), estimated at 10.6% by the Colombian government (Minority Rights Group International, 2008). However, the United Nations estimates the total population of Afro-Colombians to be at 26% (Minority Rights Group International, 2008). For centuries, Afro-Colombians have been the victims of oppression and invisibility. Although the Catholic Church condemned the brutality experienced by the indigenous community in Colombia during the colonial era, similar condemnation has not been expressed toward experiences relative to Afro-Colombians. In fact, the

church has remained silent about the atrocities experienced by Afro-Colombians during the time of slavery and beyond (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009).

By the early 1990s, Afro-Colombians sought formal recognition as an autonomous ethnic group. They reached some degree of success in 1993 with the passage of Law-70 facilitated by the new Colombian constitution of 1991 (Asher, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Law-70 recognized the multiethnic/multiracial diversity of the country, especially of indigenous and African descendants. Until this time, Afro-Colombians had not been fully recognized as ethnic groups because they were perceived not to possess “native characteristics.” Moreover, Law-70 granted Afro-Colombians the right to the land that their ancestors occupied and developed (Asher, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009). Nevertheless, such rights were restricted. That is, the property titles were given to the collective Afro-Colombian group rather than to individuals (Asher, 2009). Moreover, the regions occupied by Afro-Colombians are the lands the most ignored and neglected by the government and also affected by high rates of violence resulting from wars between the government and the paramilitary groups. Finally, despite the legislative accomplishments of the Afro-descendant communities, they continue to face forced displacement, high levels of poverty, and low levels of literacy (Asher, 2009; Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights, n.d.).

Throughout Colombian history, Afro-Colombians have attempted to define themselves in their own terms and raise awareness about their rich ancestral heritage that was central to the development of today’s Colombian culture (e.g., music, dance, spiritual beliefs, food). The Afro-Colombian movement has also achieved new forms of participation within Colombia to fight negative stereotypes (Asher, 2009). As in the United States, black skin color in Colombia has traditionally been associated with “laziness, backwardness, lethargy and neglect” (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009, p. 135). In fact, Jose Maria Samper, an influential 19th-century politician, described the Black man as “primitive, coarse, brutal, indolent, semi-savage and dark brown” (Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril, 2009, p. 136), reminiscent of U.S. stereotypes of African Americans during this period and still today.

From *Mestizaje* in Latin America to Color-Blind Racial Attitudes in the United States

Words such as “post-racial” and “post-racial era” are becoming more en vogue in today’s U.S. lexicon (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Schorr, 2008), particularly after the election of Barack Hussein Obama. Such postracial ideologies

or attitudes suggest that we have transcended race; that in today's society, race no longer matters and that our judgments are race free (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Post-racial ideologies or modern racism are not new. In fact, they were introduced and have been studied since the early 1960s under different frameworks including color-blind racism in the 1960s (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), modern racism in the 1980s (McConahay, 1983, 1986), new racism in the 1990s (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Cones & White, 1999), Racism 2.0 (Wise, 2008), color-blind racial attitudes (CoBRA), and color-blind racial ideology (CoBRI) at the turn of the century (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). While these terms vary, all connote and describe the same phenomenon: one that "denies or pretends to deny" (Helms, 2008, p. 12) the power of structural racism that lead individuals to believe that race/skin color is inconsequential in people's daily existence (Helms, 2008; Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). In fact, Sue (2003), a pioneering leader in multicultural psychology, points out that "white Americans, however, have distorted or conveniently used colorblindness as means of color denial" (p. 149). Table 2 provides examples of the four main tenets of CoBRA, reminiscent of *mestizaje*.

As a society, we need to make an informed and conscious effort toward seeing skin color and accepting that it is an "integral part of who we are" (Helms, 2008, p. 12) and a signifier of inequality that must be challenged. By acknowledging our differences, engaging in honest dialogues about privilege within our communities, we can begin to progress as a society that is not color-blind but racially conscious in a social justice oriented manner. The next section unpacks the fallacy of using Latino/as as a pan-ethnic label because it may lead to the perception of a homogeneous group where everyone is of mixed racial makeup, thus promoting a color-blind racial ideology within the Latino/a population.

The Fallacy of Latino/a as a Pan-Ethnic Label

Latino/as in the United States now comprise 50.5 million or 16% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). Latino/as are described as an ethnic group of individuals who can trace their descendants back to the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2008). Due to historical racial mixing, Latino/as exhibit a broad range of physical characteristics including wide variations in skin color and phenotype (Lopez, 2008), making it difficult for the government to categorize Latino/as with regard to race. But Latinos/as also experience the challenge of racial self-identification with 36% identifying as White, 3% as Black, and 51% as some other race (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011).

Table 2. Four Dimensions of Color-Blind Racial Attitudes (CoBRA).

Dimensions	Tenets	Descriptions	Examples
Definition	1. CoBRAare new forms of racial attitude expressions related to racial prejudice.	1. A modern form of racism that is more covert compared with old Jim Crow racism.	1. Persistent negative stereotyping; blaming people of color for racial disparities.
Cognitions	2. CoBRAare a cognitive schema, reflecting a conceptual framework and corresponding affect.	2. Skin color is unimportant in terms of social and economic experiences. Affect is associated with this idea and corresponding beliefs.	2. For Whites, the fear of being called a racist, belief in a just world. For people of color, the fear of using the "race card."
Multidimensionality	3. CoBRAare multidimensional.	3. CoBRAare complex and reflect multiple beliefs.	3. Color-evasion, referring to all people as being the same, evades the notion of White racial superiority. 3a. Power-evasion, referring to belief that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed regardless of skin color; the myth of meritocracy.
Expression	4. CoBRAare differentially expressed in White and people of color populations.	4. Anyone can adopt a color-blind racial perspective, irrespective of skin color. However, the degree and implication of adopting CoBRA vary depending on one's skin color.	4. Whites on average, adopt significantly higher CoBRA than racial and ethnic minorities. 4a. Whites experience discomfort about their own thoughts about race. 4b. People of color discomfort stems from feeling different and being associated with inferiority.

Note. Adapted from Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001).

In the United States, social stratification has served to maintain a color gradient with European descendants at the top of the hierarchy and non-Whites at the bottom. The literature defines the advantages automatically conferred to those of European phenotype as White privilege. In fact, Helms (2008) states that “regardless of what socioeconomic level one observes, whites are more advantaged” (p. 19) than people of color. She affirms that “white privilege is the benefit of being white and is the foundation of racism” (p. 19). It is no surprise that previous studies have found that Latinos/as who are darker or who self-identify as Black experience worse mental health outcomes (Ramos et al., 2003), higher prevalence of hypertension, poorer self-rated health, lower incomes (Borrell, 2005, 2006; Borrell & Crawford; 2006; Denton & Massey, 1989), and lower occupational prestige (Espino & Franz, 2002; Organista, 2007a) than lighter Latino/as who do not identify as Black.

We posit that the use of a pan-ethnic label, such as Latino/as, obscures the realities of darker skinned Latino/as and those who have less European looking phenotypes. It also renders the privilege conferred to lighter skinned Latino/as invisible. In other words, light-skinned Latino/as also benefit from White privilege to varying degrees but this mostly “is an unacknowledged secret that is overtly and covertly denied and protected through the use of self-deception” (Sue, 2003, p. 137). Light-skinned Latino/a privilege is reflected in their higher SES relative to darker Latino/as (Espino & Franz, 2002; Frank, Akresh, & Lu, 2010; Organista, 2007a).

For Latino/as, the *mestizaje*/color-blind racial perspective has facilitated denial and self-deception. This socialization is congruent with

the racial reality of white [U.S.] America [which] is a biased and bigoted one, [and has been] transmitted through our educational system and the informal but powerful stream of socialization practices of families, peers, groups, neighborhoods, churches, mass media, and other organization. (Sue, 2003, p. 74)

So how do Latino/as begin to talk about colorism?

Colorism: Can We Talk About It?

The socialization of Latino/as, through the ideology of *mestizaje*, as well as race privilege in the United States has resulted in a number of revealing statements frequently heard within the Latino/a experience:

- We are all *mestizos* (racially mixed).
- In Latin America, social class “matters more” than skin color.

- We have had an indigenous president in Latin America.
- There is no racism in Latin America.
- That's how things are.

Interestingly, other frequent comments seemingly connote a clear understanding of a skin-color hierarchy but with a persistent preference for Whiteness:

- *Hay que mejorar la raza o cástate con un blanco* [We need to better the race by marrying a White individual].
- *¡Ahí que bonita es suniña, es tan güerita/blanquita!* [Oh! How pretty your daughter is, she's so beautifully White!].
- *Vete por la sombrita* [Go into the shade (to avoid getting darker)].
- *Oh, nació negrito/ prietito pero aun así lo queremos* [Oh, he was born Black/dark but we still love him all the same].
- *Pobrecita, tiene el cabello tan malo* [Poor little thing, her hair is so bad (coarse)].
- *Eres tan Indio* [You are so Indian (connoting negative stereotypes about indigenous people)].

The discrepancy between what Latino/as say about the insignificance of skin color and their preference for Whiteness is not unique. Many groups use similar tactics to avoid experiencing the unpleasant affect and thoughts associated with discussions related to privilege. Historically, people have developed reasons to justify inequality, avoided focusing on their privilege, and denied responsibility for the status of non-White individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Johnson, 2005; Wise, 2008). Table 3 describes four main strategies used to justify or deny contemporary racial inequality, with Latino/a illustrations.

Latino/as use language that suggests understanding the racial hierarchy yet implement strategies to deny and justify the role of racism. We posit that the denial of how skin-color privilege has benefited light-skinned Latino/as, often at the expense of darker skin Latino/as, contributes to the old practice of divide and conquer devised by those at the top of the stratification system. Current practices of denial, coupled with the legacy of our collective history, make it difficult for Latino/as to engage in honest and self-critical dialogue regarding colorism needed to subvert this entrenched legacy.

Despite any unpleasant insights and feelings that learning about our past may engender, we must lean into our discomfort, integrate all parts of our past, and take collective responsibility for the privileges of Whiteness. We believe that many Latinos/as are committed to eradicating the oppression of people of color. However, such efforts may be undermined if we underestimate the role

Table 3. Four Main Strategies to Justify or Deny Contemporary Racial Inequality.

Main strategies	Latinos/as usage of strategies
1. Minimization: Suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting the lives of minorities; color-blind racial attitudes	1a. There is no racism in Latin America. 1b. We are all <i>mestizos</i> (racially mixed)
2. Rationalization: Racial phenomena are explained as natural occurrences	2a. That is life 2b. That is how things are
3. Deflection: Ignoring evidence of widespread systematic racism in health, criminal justice, education, and employment	3a. We have had an indigenous or a Black president. 3b. In Latin America, social class matters more than skin color 3c. I came to this country with nothing but my dreams
4. Competing Victimization: The myth of reverse discrimination	4a. I have been discriminated against for being poor.

Note. This work builds on the work of Bonilla-Silva (2010) and Wise (2008) by providing Latino/a illustrations of their strategies (Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, & Comas-Díaz, 2012).

that skin-color privilege plays in our richly racially diverse families and communities. The next section offers a call for increasing awareness by stimulating dialogue as a prelude to increasing research on colorism.

A Call for Dialogue and Research on Colorism With Latino/a Populations

Stimulating Dialogue About Colorism

The majority of us are not socialized to reflect and deliberate on our areas of privilege, which can lead to difficulties seeing, acknowledging, discussing, and studying the consequences of within-group stigma and discrimination. During occasions when skin-color privilege becomes part of the discourse, it is often done in a superficial manner leading to a shallow and fragmented understanding. This is further exacerbated by feelings of discomfort, guilt, shame, and the like, which serve to keep us silent, avoid inquiry, and maintain the status quo.

In this article, we invite readers to deliberately reflect and engage in dialogue about within-group differences that lead to privilege for some at the expense of others. Our aim is to render the experience of individuals of indigenous and African descent more visible that are still ignored within our communities.

In an effort to facilitate the reader's continued recognition, reflection, and understanding of colorism and its unique and current impacts on Latino/as, we offer five key questions:

1. How and where can you learn more about the historical foundations of racial differences within Latino/as?
2. What are the implications of your own skin color and phenotypic features with regard to differential treatment within one's own family as well as greater society?
3. How can you use your areas of privilege (e.g., skin-color privilege) to mindfully open access routes for those with less privilege?
4. What are some ways in which you may have benefited from the system of oppression and what are you doing to end it?
5. Have you ever used your minority status to your advantage without thinking how to give something back to the community?

Research Recommendations

Dialogue stemming from the above questions can serve as a prelude for stimulating colorism research. Given the underresearched state of colorism, exploratory and qualitative methods of inquiry are warranted to begin to deepen our understanding of such complex phenomena in the lives of Latino/as today. Researchers currently conducting studies with Latino/a populations are encouraged to pay closer attention to how skin color may serve as a mediating and moderating variable. To facilitate such research directions, the following research recommendations are offered:

1. Future studies should elicit the narratives of Afro-Latino/as and indigenous Latino/as to explore within-group (i.e., within the family or among peers in school and community) and between-group (i.e., with mainstream or non-Hispanic White society) experiences of colorism and related attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.
2. An exploration of how colorism affects Latino/a racial and ethnic identity development could expand our understanding of how such models apply to Latino/as across the color and phenotype gradient.
3. Studies regarding how Latino/immigrants viewed the concept of race, prior to their immigration to the United States, can advance the literature on colorism, especially longitudinal studies to explore the impact of exposure to race-conscious U.S. society and how this may compound colorism in complex ways.

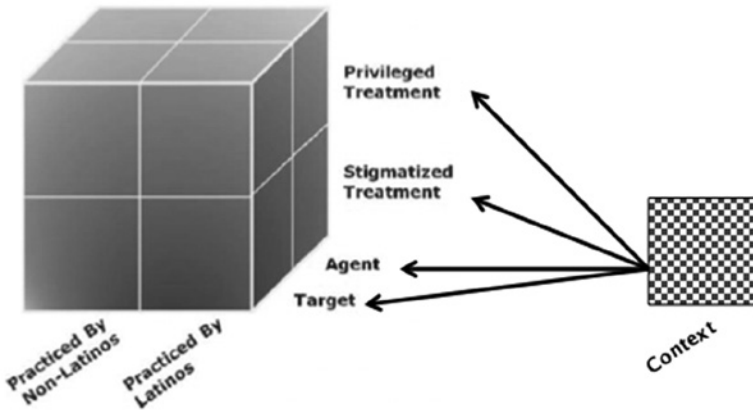


Figure 2. Dimensions of Latino/a phenotyping and colorism.

Note. Adapted from Organista (2009). The role of context has been added to the figure. Context will determine whether an individual is the target or agent of phenotyping and colorism, and whether privileged or stigmatized treatment is experienced.

4. It is important to explore how colorism affects family dynamics, such as parenting practices and sibling relations, in order to inform family interventions.
5. It would be fruitful for psychologists to collaborate with colleagues from across the social sciences (i.e., history, anthropology, sociology) to develop more complex conceptions of colorism and impacts on individuals and communities in contemporary race-conscious U.S. society.
6. Organista (2009) recommends developing and validating multidimensional scales of colorism to advance such psychological assessment research. Specifically, he states,

because Latinos can be both the targets and agents of phenotyping and colorism, both such experiences should be assessed as well. Further, because phenotyping and colorism can be experienced as positive treatment related to lighter skin privilege or negative treatment related to darker skin stigma, the resulting scale domains form a two types of discrimination (phenotyping, colorism) by 2 directions of discrimination (target, agent) by 2 types of treatment (privilege, stigma). (p. 5).

His multidimensional matrix is depicted in Figure 2 with a slight modification to convey the ever-present role of context in Latino/a phenotyping and colorism.

Conclusion

In closing, we affirm that Latino/a psychology and its culture-centered perspective have made great strides toward creating a deeper and more complex understanding of Latino/a behavior and mental processes as influenced by culture and ethnic minority status in America. However, similar to other disciplines and fields of study, there continues to be understudied yet important areas of inquiry in need of our attention such as colorism. In an effort to stimulate more dialogue and research in this area, a brief overview of the history of colorism in Latin America was offered. This historical account helps to ground our individual and collective efforts to better the lives of our Latino/a brothers and sisters through theory, research, and practice. “We must set apart a place for memory, for history, for that mirror which reminds us of who we were, shows us who we are, and promises what we may become” (Subcomandante Marcos, 2002, p. 93).

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to acknowledge Dr. Lillian Comas-Díaz and Dr. Joseph L. White (godfather of Black Psychology) for their unwavering support and encouragement with this project.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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