The Effect of Racial Microaggressions on Latinas:
Student Perceptions, Reactions, and Coping Mechanisms
by
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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal racial discrimination is positively associated with poor mental health outcomes in a number of marginalized groups across the United States (Brondolo, et al., 2008). This paper examines how racial discrimination affects the self-esteem, self-worth, and racial pride of Latinas using interview data from a purposive sample of students. The objectives of this study are: (a) to better understand the effects of racial microaggressions on young Latinas’ construction of self, (b) to explicate how these self-perceptions influence deviant behavior and maladaptive thought processes, drawing on strain and discrimination literatures, and (c) to examine the protective mechanisms Latinas employ with friends and family as a response to racial discrimination. Findings indicated that respondents experienced racial discrimination through a variety of channels, from negative stereotypes to feeling a distinct prejudice in academic settings. Participants utilized numerous coping mechanisms to deal with such encounters, most of which emphasized the importance of drawing strength from Hispanic values, culture, and language during times of adversity.
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Introduction

Interest in the effect of racial discrimination on deviant behavior and mental health outcomes has risen in the past years, with an emphasis on African American males (e.g., Dobbins & Skillings, 2000; Simons et al., 2003). Existing evidence suggests that experiencing perceived racial discrimination promotes anger, depression, and lower levels of self-esteem in African Americans, as well as the emergence of psychiatric symptoms (Harrell, 2000; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Watkins et al., 2010). In part due to their experiences with discrimination, black men may be more likely to engage in anger-based reactions to strain, which may then manifest in deviant coping strategies (Jang & Johnson, 2003). For young black men, interpersonal racial discrimination is positively associated with increased crime, through hostile views of relationships and a disengagement from conventional norms (Burt et al., 2012; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). Discrimination has been linked to increased conduct problems and violence in this population as well (Burt et al., 2012; DuBois et al., 2002; Stewart & Simons, 2006). Recent work on African American females produces similar findings, with discrimination significantly increasing the likelihood of offending among black females (Burt & Simons, 2013).

Prior research’s focus on African American males is warranted; black men are six and a half times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts, and nearly 40% of imprisonment disparities cannot be accounted for, which indicates a strong presumption of racial bias (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011; Tonry & Melewski, 2008). These disparities do not go unnoticed among the black population; many African Americans believe that discriminatory policing practices and institutionalized racism
account for the distinct gap in imprisonment between black and white offenders (Unnever, 2008).

There are fewer studies regarding Hispanics and their experiences with discrimination (Araújo & Borrell, 2006; Rivera et al., 2010). Young black and Hispanic men are viewed as threatening and dangerous, and unemployed black and Hispanic male offenders are substantially more likely than employed whites to be sentenced to prison (Spohn & Holleran, 2000). Black and Hispanic Americans share a constellation of negative stereotypes, ranging from being perceived as poor and lazy, to uneducated and prone to violence (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). However, researchers should be wary of assuming that African Americans and Hispanics are discriminated against in precisely the same way. When Hispanics are mentioned in the news media, it is often accompanied by a specific rhetoric of fear regarding their perceived illegal status, and a belief that Hispanics resist learning English and are therefore choosing to be un-American; the media also posits that Latino/as are ‘taking over’ the country and will soon be a majority population (Markert, 2010). Given the historical and cultural differences between marginalized groups in the United States, it is vital to discuss the specific forms discrimination may take for each population and avoid the assumption that all minority groups are treated in one singular manner.

Similarly, discrimination cannot be assumed to affect males and females in the same way. Codina & Montalvo’s (1994) research on Latinas suggests that their experiences with discrimination do not affect life chances or mental health outcomes, whereas Hispanic males were deeply affected by discrimination. Similarly, Gómez (2000) found that having dark skin negatively affected wages for Hispanic men, but not
for women. This is contrary to findings involving black Americans, which link racial
discrimination to psychological distress and current depression across both sexes; for
black Americans, complexion is a more salient predictor of occupation and income than
parents’ socioeconomic status (Keith & Herring, 1991). This disparity calls for a more in-
depth examination of the discrimination Latinas face – discrimination levied at Latinas
may be less overt, or perhaps they are more likely to engage in coping strategies than
their male counterparts.

Latinos tend to report less discrimination than their African Americans
counterparts (Allen et al., 2000). Araújo & Borrell (2006) suggest that the existing
research methods may not capture the specifics of discrimination faced by Hispanic
populations – if measures do not include items that ask about immigrant status, language,
or acculturation level, Latino/a Americans may find themselves underreporting their
experiences with discrimination. This emphasizes the importance of qualitative research
for this population – it is necessary to understand how Latino/as perceive racial
discrimination, in their own words, to ensure that discrimination is not reduced to generic
scales that may not capture the complexity and nuance of discriminatory experiences
across minority groups.

This study aims to deepen our understanding of the specific types of
discrimination faced by Latinas, a group that is otherwise understudied in criminal justice
literature. As one of the fastest growing groups in the United States, the importance of
understanding racial discrimination’s effect on Latino/as is more salient than ever. This
study seeks to assess how Latinas internalize experiences of racial discrimination,
whether or not these incidences affect self-perceptions and behavior, and what coping
mechanisms they utilize when confronted with negative stereotypes of their race. It is vital to understand how Latinas define, understand, and experience racial discrimination before studying the ways in which it affects the entire group on a wider level.

**Review of Literature**

Racial discrimination has taken on a more insidious form in recent years, as illustrated by the existence of aversive racism. Aversive racism is defined as a less conspicuous form of bias that hides in the assumptions, beliefs, and values of mostly well-intentioned people, and is often difficult to identify (Dovidio et al., 2009). The existence of aversive racism may partially account for the stark divide in beliefs about discrimination between white and minority Americans. Due to aversive racism’s subtle nature, it can be invisible to white Americans, who have no experience with it themselves. Seventy-one percent of African Americans believe that racial disparities in the criminal justice system are due to biased policing, while only 37% of whites subscribe to this same belief (Unnever, 2008). Similarly, more than half of the Latinos in New York and New Jersey felt as though they had been discriminated against based on the language they speak, and over a third of Latinos in California and Texas reported discrimination based on their physical appearance (National Survey of Latinos, 2004). While training and education can lessen stereotypes and conscious bias, implicit biases tend to remain unaffected, and these biases can manifest in aversive racism (Boysen & Vogel, 2008). The white majority’s inability (or unwillingness) to recognize racial discrimination and its harmful effects contributes to the dismissal of it as a serious issue faced by people of color; this dismissal in itself can have serious effects on minority group members by invalidating their discriminatory experiences as trivial in nature (Sue,
Implicit biases and the invalidation of people of color’s discriminatory experiences by the majority population often result in a subtle form of discrimination referred to broadly as microaggressions, discussed below. The prevalence of microaggressions in the daily life of Latinas is a key theme of this study.

Microaggressions

Interpersonal racial discrimination broadly refers to the blatant, subtle, and covert actions that harm members of racial minorities and are supported by white racism (Essed, 1991). Racial microaggressions are a form of interpersonal racial discrimination that can best be understood through the lens of aversive racism – Sue (2010a) argues that the most detrimental microaggressions are usually delivered by well-intentioned individuals and appear outwardly benign.

Racial microaggressions are defined as commonplace daily indignities that communicate hostile messages toward people of color (Sue et al., 2007). These messages may invalidate, demean, threaten, or intimidate. Microaggressions can communicate to a person of color that they do not really belong with the majority group and/or that they are lesser human beings. Interpersonal racial discrimination, as discussed in this paper, encompasses all three types of microaggressions – microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007). It is important to recognize the different types of microaggressions, because each type contributes to a greater understanding of the depth of racial discrimination. It is possible that Latinas perceive microassaults differently than microinsults, and thus cope accordingly. If different forms of discrimination are internalized in separate ways, inquiring after each specific type in the interviews is necessary to understand the full extent of a subject’s experience with discrimination.
Types of Microaggressions

Microassaults are similar to what is known as ‘old-fashioned’ racism, for example, referring to a person as colored or Oriental. They differ from other forms of microaggressions because they represent a conscious bias toward the minority group in question. Some research suggests that minority groups may find outright discrimination easier to deal with than discrimination in its more ambiguous forms, because it can be easily identified (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007; Sue, 2010b). The person utilizing outdated and offensive language toward a member of a minority group is clearly in the wrong, and it would be difficult to argue otherwise. While racial slurs are still harmful and offensive to marginalized people, the explicit nature of microassaults removes the aspect of uncertainty. The inability to be positive that one has been discriminated against is a key factor in what makes microinsults and microinvalidations so difficult to deal with. The victim of a subtly ignorant statement is often unable to prove that the perpetrator was acting in a discriminatory manner. This results in paranoia and anxiety, in addition to the strain of the discrimination itself (Sue, 2010b).

Microinsults are unconscious cues that communicate slights against a person’s racial heritage. They tend to be invisible to the majority group, but are easily recognized by disempowered groups. Microinsults disguise the perpetrator’s racial bias and allow them to continue in their unconscious belief in racial inferiority (Sue, 2010a). These are perhaps the most dangerous form of microaggression, because they are quickly dismissed by the majority group. Examples of microinsults include statements like, ‘you speak English well’. This comment is likely to appear amiable to people in the majority group. However, to a Latina, someone expressing surprise at their English can signal that they
were expected to speak poorly, or with a heavy accent. If they choose to bring this up, the perpetrator is likely to grow defensive because they do not consciously view themselves as subscribing to racist beliefs. Consequently, the Latina who raised the issue is then labeled as paranoid or oversensitive (Sue et al., 2009).

Lastly, microinvalidations nullify the reality of a person of color (Organista et al., 2010). The perpetrator tends not to be aware of his or her slight, with statements like, ‘we all are human beings,’ or ‘I don’t see color’. While these statements seem innocuous, ignoring racism and privilege only serves to deny the experiences and realities of minority groups, who cannot so easily relate to the aforementioned statements (Helms, 1992). Microinvalidations allow members of the majority group to overlook issues of racial discrimination, perhaps accounting for their lack of belief in racism as a reality for many people of color. Sue (2005) refers to this as a conspiracy of silence, one which allows white people to avoid the topic of racism for fear that it will ‘open up a can of worms’. This avoidance by the majority group can be harmful for marginalized people. If something as salient as their racial background can be so quickly invalidated, their self-perceptions and self-worth may suffer as a result. An invalidation of racial differences can lead to feelings of frustration and an ultimate conclusion that the perpetrator does not care enough about the victim to learn about their reality (Constantine & Sue, 2007).

Examining the different types of microaggressions allows researchers to identify the internalization and coping processes paired with each. It is likely that being referred to as a ‘wetback’ (microassault) would provoke a different reaction in Latinas than hearing a person state that they do not see color (microinvalidation). Including each form of microaggression in the interviews allows respondents to be specific in their reactions
to racial discrimination, and more clearly identify the types of discrimination that they feel are most harmful to their self-perceptions as a Latina female.

The danger of microaggressions lies in their seemingly innocent appearance. The recipient of a racial microaggression is often encouraged to ‘let it go’ or ‘get over it,’ by the majority group. This, in itself, can constitute a microaggression because it trivializes the reality of racial biases (Sue, 2010b). If the recipient ignores the slight, he or she may experience a loss of self-esteem or a feeling of not being true to the self. However, pursuing the issue often results in defensiveness from the perpetrator, or other negative consequences, like the recipient being framed as paranoid. Sue (2007) calls this the ‘catch-22’ of responding. It is difficult for the recipient to know for certain that the comment was based in an unconscious belief in racial inferiority, especially when other explanations seem just as logical (Crocker & Major, 1989). A single thoughtless statement on its own may not affect a member of a marginalized group, but the cumulative nature of racial microaggressions can be quite damaging to people of color (Pierce, 1974).

Existing research supports the assertion that microaggressions are anything but harmless. Racial microaggressions can contribute to a hostile campus or work climate (Solórzano et al., 2000) and lower productivity and educational learning (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007; Sue, 2010b). Race-related stress has been shown to negatively affect the biological health of people of color; the perception of racism results in physiological stress responses, which can lead to heart disease and lower immune functioning in African Americans (Clark et al., 1999; Brondolo et al., 2003). Emotional effects are present as well, with racial discrimination producing anxiety, feelings of alienation, low
self-esteem, and general poor mental health (Harrell, 2000). Specific cognitive and behavioral effects can also emerge; when microaggressions are directed toward marginalized groups, it can result in hypervigilance and skepticism toward the majority group, forced compliance, rage, fatigue, and hopelessness (Sue, 2010a).

Racial Discrimination and Strain Theory

The effects of racial discrimination are not limited solely to poor mental and physical health; discrimination is also a strong predictor of delinquent behavior (Unnever et al., 2009). Caldwell et al. (2004) measured discrimination among African Americans by surveying the frequency of specific occurrences, such as invoking fear in others, being called a racial slur, or facing rejection from a job. Researchers found that experiencing racial discrimination is a strong predictor of violent behavior, regardless of gender. More specifically, Burt et al. (2012) found that perceived incidents of discrimination increase the likelihood of individual offending by augmenting hostile views of relationships, depression, and disengagement from conventional norms. Aggression is often cited as one of the best predictors of later violent behavior, and feelings of frustration linked to the experience of racial discrimination often manifest themselves in externalizing behaviors, such as physical violence and substance abuse (Bowman, 2012). Even for preadolescent black and Latino youths, research concludes that a reduction in perceived racial discrimination could reduce problem behaviors and mental health issues (Bogart et al., 2013).

Robert Agnew’s (1992) general strain theory offers an explanation of the link between discrimination and deviance; feelings of strain and anger are positively associated with violence (Agnew, 2006; Jang & Johnson, 2003). Strain theory focuses on
negative relationships with others, occasions in which the strained individual is prevented from achieving positively valued goals and/or presented with negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Types of strain include parental rejection, erratic discipline, child abuse, and homelessness (Agnew, 2006). Adolescents may cope with such negativity through delinquent acts, often leading them to utilize illegitimate channels of goal achievement, or lash out at the source of their adversity. Agnew (1985) further states that youth are often placed in aversive situations from which they cannot legally escape, such as a negative family or school environment. When an adolescent is placed in an aversive environment, he or she grows frustrated and angry. Feelings of anger may negatively affect the adolescent’s ability to consider the costs of crime, or to utilize effective problem solving, which may result in delinquent behavior (Agnew, 2006).

Many teenagers who find themselves in hostile family and school situations will manage to break away from these issues as they grow older and gain more autonomy. However, minority youth possess a unique form of strain that cannot be left behind at graduation – their racial background. If being in an aversive environment has been shown to lead to anger, it should be noted that minorities are exposed to their aversive conditions on a daily basis; their physical appearance as non-white singles them out for racism, and cannot be discarded nearly as easily as an old school or unsupportive family (Pierce, 1974). Participants in the current study are well on their way to obtaining a bachelor’s or doctorate degree, but it is likely that their success in higher education will do little to prevent outsiders from viewing them first and foremost as Latina and consequently engaging in value judgements about their race. Thus, even high-achieving people of color are unable to escape racial discrimination from their peers. A number of Latino/as in
higher education report having their achievements attributed solely to affirmative action, a statement which may suggest to Latino/as that they are undeserving of their accomplishments and were merely selected to fill a quota (Rivera et al., 2010). Others describe professors not taking them seriously based on their race, or being judged due to their accented speech (Solórzano, 1998).

The majority of research on racial discrimination and deviant behavior has focused on black Americans. Not only are African Americans exceedingly more likely than whites to experience discriminatory strain overall, they are more likely to experience it across a wide variety of situations, and even after they have achieved middle-class status (Forman et al., 1997; Feagin, 1991). However, perceived racial discrimination has been associated with depression for Hispanic groups (Hwang & Goto, 2008; Salgado de Snyder, 1987) and thus may still be relevant to strain theory. Simons et al. (2003) argues that depression promotes irritability and explosiveness in its own way; the individual is highly sensitive to his or her environment, and perceives even the smallest of slights as intense mistreatment. Again, there is a refusal to adhere to norms – the depressed individual adopts a hopeless attitude, often accompanied by a belief that the system is unjust. If a person believes that they are at the mercy of an unfair system and consequently feels they have nothing to lose, they may be more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Burt et al., 2012). Hopelessness is an example of a maladaptive thought process that may result from experiences with racial discrimination – if minority youth internalize negative messages about their race that appear immutable, it is reasonable to suspect that their self-perceptions would suffer. One method through which this may occur is stress – racial discrimination can provoke a stress response, leading to
aggression, anger, and hopelessness (Brondolo et al., 2003; Clark et al., 1999). Burt et al. (2012) conceptualize racial discrimination as a highly stressful occurrence akin to victimization. Examining discrimination as a unique stressor for minority youth, as well as understanding the pathways through which it affects respondent’s perceptions of self and resulting behaviors is a key focus of this study.

*The Role of Media*

The stress of discriminatory experiences may not be limited to in-person interactions. Popular media is a wide-reaching forum, one which effectively demonstrates who has power and who does not in present society (Kellner, 2011). Negative stereotypes of minority group members found in popular media can be dangerous; research suggests audiences often unconsciously perceive such misinformation as truth (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). Thus, the relationship of media to marginalized group members’ self-perceptions should be considered. If people of color are underrepresented in mainstream media, and reduced to stereotypes when they are included, such negative messages could take a toll on their perception of self.

Latinas rarely find themselves represented in pop culture, and when a Latina character is included, she is frequently oversexualized and cast as the exotic other. Being both Hispanic and female is a double-edged sword, wherein images of Latinas in the media are both racialized and gendered, and thus presented as less powerful than masculine images (Molina Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). Hudson (1998) posits that the media affects how black women see themselves, both singularly and collectively as an African American community. In this context, negative representation may be doubly destructive. Internalizing negative stereotypes can lead to poor self-perceptions, but may
also result in the minority group member utilizing such stereotypes against their own community. Marginalized groups exposed to negative representation may unconsciously look down on members of their own community who seem to fit the stereotype that they perceive themselves as trying to combat. This is referred to in the literature as the self-hating minority, who tends to subscribe to the negative tropes about their race perpetrated by society (Vandiver, 2001). Furthermore, Hudson’s (1998) research suggests that present day stereotypes of black women in pop culture can be traced back to nineteenth-century racism. The perceived endurance of negative stereotypes on television may present a hopeless picture to marginalized group members, who are not immune to the unconscious acceptance of such tropes as truth.

Negative stereotypes involving minorities can be utilized by the news media as well. Reporting in the wake of events like Hurricane Katrina further exemplified the powerlessness of marginalized groups; people of color were nearly always portrayed as helpless victims and perpetrators of looting behavior, while white people were shown in positions of expertise (Voorhees et al., 2007). In the case of Latino/a populations, popular media rhetoric often portrays them as ‘taking over’ the United States, in part by framing the Hispanic community as growing much more quickly than actual data suggests (Markert, 2010). Wang (2012) expands on this concept, finding that the perceived size of the undocumented immigrant population exerts a positive effect on the public’s association of immigrants as a criminal threat. In this case, perceived size had a stronger effect than the actual size of the immigrant population. This suggests that negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media can affect the manner in which the majority perceives minority groups. The effect of such stereotypes on the self-perceptions of
marginalized populations, and the ways in which these tropes may color experiences with racial discrimination, should be addressed in discrimination research.

Protective Factors

The detrimental effect of racial discrimination on internalizing and externalizing behaviors can be moderated by a number of protective factors. DeGruy et al. (2012) emphasizes the importance of these factors remaining culturally relevant. If racial discrimination is a culturally unique form of stress, conditioning should be similarly rooted in the culture of the minorities who experience it. Minority culture is not universal, and coping strategies that work for black youth may not be relevant to Latino youth. For example, Latino/a youth who were exposed to high levels of urban violence reported turning to specific cultural values for coping strategies. These included religiosity, an emphasis on maintaining strong family ties, and fatalismo – accepting one’s lot in life as God’s will (Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013). Furthermore, Mossakowski (2003) finds support for the importance of ethnic identity as coping resource – the strength of identification with one’s ethnic group was directly associated with fewer depressive symptoms in Filipino Americans. Phinney (1991) describes ethnic identity as a sense of ethnic pride, commitment to cultural values, and participation in ethnic practices. For Hispanic adolescents, a strong ethnic identity was positively associated with concurrent levels of self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2008). Identifying strongly with one’s ethnic group may provide a coping resource for Latino/as dealing with the stress of racial discrimination.

Racial socialization also utilizes culture as coping; it is defined as the process of transmitting history, values, and knowledge about culture and race relations from one
generation to the next (DeGruy et al., 2012). Positive messages about racial identity and a sense of pride in one’s race are associated with improved mental health outcomes and fewer externalizing behaviors (Hughes et al., 2009). Knowledge of shared cultural values and traditions promotes a collective identity, one which can be drawn upon in times of hardship. Caldwell et al. (2004) stresses the importance of a strong sense of collective group identity in moderating criminal outcomes. Racial group affiliation becomes a protective mechanism against systematic bias by the larger society.

Another important part of the racial socialization process is preparation for bias. Preparation for bias and prejudice from the majority group may help buffer the detrimental effects of racial discrimination on minority youth (Burt et al., 2012). Children who are not prepared for incidents of discrimination may conclude that their racial group deserved the slight; those who are capable of identifying racism are more likely to recognize that discrimination stems from an external – rather than internal – source (Cooper et al., 2008). Burt and Simons (2013) found that preparation for bias provides a protective effect among both male and female African Americans; female youth whose families prepared them for racism were much less likely to view the world as hostile and unfair. African American girls who were raised with preparation for bias may be more likely to open up to emotional support systems, coping through these ways rather than violent means. Merely being aware of the existence of racial discrimination has been related to better academic and social outcomes for African American youth (Caldwell et al., 2004).

Sue et al. (2008) utilized qualitative data to examine the specific ways in which African American respondents applied racial group affiliation and collective identity to
their experiences with microaggressions. One such method was the sanity check, wherein participants described speaking with other black friends to check on their perceptions of incidents as racism. A participant stated, “as opposed to being paranoid – I have people in my sphere of influence that I can call up and share my authentic feelings with, so that there’s this sort of healing, there’s just this healing circle that I have around myself, and these are people who I don’t have to be rational with if I’m battling racism,” (Sue et al., 2008; p. 332). In this situation, the respondent is dealing with racial discrimination by turning to people of her own race and finding comfort in the fact that she can talk candidly about her experiences and frustration. Sue et al. (2008) consider this to be a healthy coping method because it redefines negative paranoia into a collective, validating experience.

Sue describes another type of reaction, one which reinforces Burt et al.’s (2012) finding that black youth capable of identifying discrimination will be more equipped to correctly attribute it to external factors. This is referred to in Sue’s work as empowerment and validation of self; correctly identifying discrimination locates the blame and fault in the white aggressor. One participant responded, “I don’t blame it on myself; it’s not like, what’s wrong with me? It’s like, oh, that’s that White unconsciousness that they’re so well trained in,” (Sue et al., 2007; p. 332). Similarly, black students experience higher levels of confidence when they are encouraged to discuss race, or engage with other people of color in the classroom (Watkins et al., 2010). While the invalidation of racial slights may promote frustration, openly talking about issues facing marginalized groups increases confidence, perhaps by reminding people of color that they are not alone in their experiences.
Although most racial discrimination research has focused on African Americans, the importance of examining its effects on Latino/as cannot be denied. Latino/as possess the lowest educational attainment rate, with only 9.4% possessing a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and 82% of Latino/as believe that discrimination prevents them from succeeding in the United States (National Survey of Latinos, 2002). Rivera and colleagues’ (2010) research revealed eight major types of microaggressions applicable solely to Latino/as. These include: ascription of intelligence, second-class citizen, pathologizing cultural values/communication style, characteristics of speech, alien in own land, criminality, invalidation of the Latina/o experience, and other assumed Latina/o attributes. These microaggressions are not relevant across all racial groups, and exemplify the importance of minority-specific research across social science disciplines.

This paper will examine how Latinas evaluate their experiences with racial discrimination, in part by discerning how protective factors like racial pride and preparation for bias manifest in the Latina population. Furthermore, Latinas experience gender microaggressions in addition to racial discrimination – lowered expectations from professors may result from the double bind of being both female and Hispanic (Solórzano, 1998). Therefore, it is important to recognize how racial microaggressions may be gendered, what Latinas take from their experiences with discrimination, and how they cope in the face of adversity.
Methodology

The effect of racial discrimination on Latina populations has received insufficient attention in criminological research and thus benefits from a qualitative analysis. Before conducting surveys, it is vital to understand how Latinas perceive and define discriminatory experiences in their own terms. Qualitative methods are often employed in research on racial microaggressions with positive results (Watkins et al., 2010; Rivera et al., 2010). The nature of qualitative research allows participants to expand upon their experiences with racial discrimination and define what these experiences mean for their specific cultural identity. Latino/a populations in particular may underreport instances of racial discrimination because their specific challenges are not addressed; language skills, presence of an accent, and perceived residency status each possess unique ramifications for Latinos and need to be included in discrimination measures (Araújo & Borrell, 2006; Rivera et al., 2010).

Participants

To qualify for the study, participants needed to be over the age of 18, identify as female, and identify as Hispanic or Latina from at least one parent. Participants were selected through purposive sampling; the email address of the first interviewee was obtained through a fellow ASU student who was familiar with the nature and specifications of the study. After their interview, students were asked to provide the email address or phone number of a friend who met the study qualifications. Prospective interviewees were emailed or texted an approved recruitment script. If they expressed interest, an interview was scheduled at the place of the student’s choice. Interviews took places in coffee shops, residential areas, and courtyards on ASU campuses.
The final sample includes 12 females between the ages of 20 and 27. All were students enrolled and pursuing a degree at Arizona State University; 11 were undergraduates and 1 was a doctoral student. Participants were enrolled at several Arizona State University campuses: West, Tempe, and Downtown. All students identified Hispanic or Latino/a heritage from at least one parent. Countries of origin included the United States and Mexico. All respondents spoke fluent English, and the majority were also fluent in Spanish. The demographics of each respondent are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics (N = 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Year at ASU</th>
<th>Self-identified race/ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mexican American/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mexican American/Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giselle</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Latina/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylene</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Latina/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>White/Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mexican/Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Latina/Mexican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2nd year PhD</td>
<td>Latina/Tejana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvette</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Mexican American/Chicana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms supplied by respondents
Procedures

The interview questionnaire was divided into 8 sections (see Appendix B for full interview script). Participants were first asked about demographic characteristics, to ensure that they met the criteria for the study and to understand how they identified, racially and/or ethnically (i.e., Mexican, Chicana, mixed). Cultural background questions asked the participants to expand on their specific identity, as well as describe past living situations and family’s educational attainment. The interview went on to discuss the student’s language skills – whether or not they spoke Spanish, their feelings about the language, and the reaction of outsiders to their Spanish fluency, or lack thereof.

The racial discrimination section asked participants about their experiences with interpersonal racial discrimination, and more specifically, with microaggressions. Once the participant defined discrimination in their own terms, they were read the following textbook definition of microaggressions: “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership,” (Sue et al., 2007). Questions regarding microaggressions utilized concepts from Rivera et al.’s (2010) Latino/a-specific discriminatory experiences, such as being perceived as a second-class citizen (receiving differential treatment, unwelcoming responses) and ascription of intelligence (exception to race, accomplishments questioned). The open-ended nature of these questions on discrimination allowed participants to expand on their own experiences without being led to specific answers – many participants discussed experiences that paralleled Rivera et al.’s (2010) microaggression domains without prior knowledge of their existence.
Students were also asked for their opinion on microinvalidations, statements like “I don’t see color” and “we all bleed red.”

Questions in the deviant behavior section addressed whether or not the participants engaged in reckless or illegal activities, such as shoplifting and fighting. Opinions on police and the criminal justice system were discussed here, as well as the criminality often linked to Latino/a populations by outside sources, like majority groups and the media. Questions on racial pride/socialization followed, with the participants being encouraged to define Latino culture and pride. This section also discussed techniques employed to cope with racial discrimination, and how friends and family played a role in the subject’s support network.

The media portrayal section discussed issues of representation. Participants were asked to name positive and negative portrayals of Latino/as in pop culture and the news, as well as their respective reactions to such portrayals. The final section asked for any additional information participants wanted to include.

Participants were read a verbal consent script before their interview was conducted (see Appendix A). All consented to being interviewed, as well as being recorded for transcription purposes. Interviews ran from approximately 25 minutes to 95 minutes, with approximately 30 questions being asked. Each participant gave a pseudonym to be used in the final project, and accidental use of friend or family names were changed in the transcripts to protect privacy. Participants were given a $5 gift card to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for their time.
Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and uploaded to a personal computer; no identifying information was attached to media files or transcripts in order to maintain confidentiality, save for the pseudonym selected by the participant and the date of the interview. Interviews were transcribed by a third party, and all coding took place on a private, password protected computer.

**Results**

The results are divided into two sections. The first section examines student responses to each of the interview subsections: cultural background, language skills, racial discrimination, deviant behavior and the criminal justice system, ethnic pride and socialization, coping and distancing, and media portrayal and representation. The second section considers the unexpected themes that emerged from the interviews: solidarity with black Americans, gender roles, and skin tone. Specific emergent themes were selected due to their prevalence from interview to interview. These included themes that nearly every respondent discussed in detail, and which were relevant to understanding discrimination and coping.

**Interview Subsections**

*Cultural Background*

The diversity of Latino/a populations is rarely discussed in criminological research (Araújo & Borrell, 2006). Respondents chose to identify with a number of racial and ethnic groups: Latina, Chicana, Mexican, mixed (Puerto Rican and white), Hispanic, and Mexican American. Despite their varied racial identities, the participants presented a unified picture of what their heritage meant to them. To my respondents, being Latina
meant being part of a shared culture, speaking the same language, engaging in similar traditions. This is consistent with textbook definitions of ethnic identity. Nearly every respondent reported a sense of pride in their racial background, and all were happy to discuss various aspects of Latina culture. Across this sample, ethnic identification levels were high – respondents reported identifying strongly with their Hispanic background. Jaylene, a junior at ASU, describes being Latina as: “My culture and how I was raised, that’s how I identify myself. My history, my background, my parents, what I do, what I like to eat… it’s part of my everyday life.” Respondents were aware that their upbringing may have differed from the white majority. Sara explains that “I feel like there are different ways Hispanics are brought up versus (…) Caucasian families.” Perceived differences in white versus Hispanic upbringings tended to focus on family and respect: respondents felt that Latino/a culture emphasized strong family ties and respect for elders, and some felt that this same emphasis was less prominent in white families. Preference for certain foods, religiosity, and a focus on traditions were other perceived differences between white and Hispanic families. While this sentiment was echoed throughout a few interviews, recognizing a difference in culture from the majority group did not stop respondents from expressing pride and appreciation toward their upbringing in a Hispanic household.

The majority of respondents grew up in predominantly Latino/a neighborhoods. For some, this resulted in a sense of solidarity with their community. Roxanne describes growing up in southern Tucson alongside other minority groups: “We all very much (…) experienced similar things, so, if I (…) used certain vocabulary it was easier to communicate.” Roxanne went on to explain that her neighborhood experienced similar
poverty levels, which added to the solidarity among residents. Teasing based on neighborhood location was not uncommon among interviewees: “It was like ‘the ghetto,’ or that’s basically what they called it,” recalls Adriana. Growing up in Compton, California, resulted in similar judgements for Diane: “Everyone assumes that I'm like a gangster and (...) a thug.” Automatically equating Latino/as with criminals is a common microinsult; Diane is immediately assumed to be a ‘thug’ based on her race and neighborhood. Yvette also connected her upbringing with negative stereotypes placed on Hispanics: “When I say that I'm from East Los Angeles, people put a certain (...) veil over their eyes and (...) they start identifying me as the attitude girl, the crazy Latina girl.” This perception of the ‘crazy’ gangster Latina was generally reserved for Latinas who hailed from poor neighborhoods, suggesting that classism is an important concept for researchers to consider when examining racial discrimination.

Some students moved from predominantly Hispanic areas to white neighborhoods in their youth; this resulted in another set of issues. Living in an all-white neighborhood more clearly illustrated discriminatory experiences for some: Sophia mentions that she and her mother were mistaken for maids in the all-white neighborhood to which they moved. For others, their sense of ethnic identity was affected: Giselle explains that she grew up with mostly white friends in the United States, and consequently describes not being as attached to Hispanic culture as her parents are. A few respondents mentioned that their families moved to predominantly white neighborhoods for better schooling systems or safety – this often resulted in disparaging comments from other family members who chose to stay in majority Hispanic areas. Again, this could prove
detrimental to ethnic identity – Latino/as who move out of Hispanic neighborhoods may feel a loss of community.

More broadly, living in the state of Arizona caused some respondents to think about and solidify their Latina identity. Arizona’s war on immigration has been widely publicized in the United States, and all interviewees were very aware of this fact. Jaylene expresses a sense of solidarity with Latino/as in Arizona:

I personally haven’t had to deal with like, immigration struggles in regards to (…) [my] status here, but I have a lot of friends that have (…), so it definitely affects me because I can relate to a certain extent to their struggles.

Despite their actual citizenship status, a number of students reported being perceived as illegal based solely on their race. Adriana recounts, “People think that I’m going to be sent back to Mexico (…) just because I’m Hispanic when in actuality, I was born here.”

Although such assumptions by outsiders could be frustrating, many respondents expressed support for Latino/as struggling with immigration issues – support was not solely reserved for friends and family members, but was extended to the wider Latino/a community as well. This solidarity strengthened some students’ ties to their Latina identity; Diane mentions that she found pride in her Latina heritage when she moved to Arizona and specifically cites the immigration laws as a reason why.

Language Skills

Although African and Hispanic Americans may share similar cultural stereotypes, it is misleading to utilize the same discrimination measures for both groups. One of the most significant reasons why this is problematic is language – Latinas experience specific discrimination targeting their English proficiency and also draw strength from Spanish as
a cultural identity. While speech is a prominent arena for discrimination against African Americans as well, Spanish has taken on a particularly negative connotation for majority Americans; the visibility of Latino/as speaking Spanish adds to the overarching theme prominent in news media: that Hispanics are taking over and threatening the American way of life. Despite this, Spanish was comforting for many respondents. Sophia states, “[Speaking Spanish] actually helps me (…) feel like I fit in more here, (…) I don’t have family here, (…) it gives me a way of being part of a community and help strengthen it.” Sophia’s ethnic identity is strengthened through speaking Spanish, and allows her to feel connected with her family while attending school in a different state.

Many respondents reported having seen a Hispanic person struggle with the English language and the resulting negative responses from majority group members. Quite a few students recall their parents having trouble with English, and experiencing discrimination regarding their inability to communicate. Although watching their parents struggle was upsetting to respondents, speaking Spanish was ultimately viewed as a positive way to include culture in everyday life. Roxanne explains, “A true Latina (…) is identified to be true when they speak the language.” Natalie echoes similar sentiments, stating that, while Latino/a culture is varied: “It all comes down to ‘do you speak Spanish?’” No students reported serious discriminatory experiences based on their inability to communicate in English; all were fluent in English, regardless of whether or not it was their first language. While some recalled their accents being mocked, discrimination regarding a severe lack of English proficiency was limited to parents or Latino/a strangers in the public domain.
Language proficiency was related to strong family ties by a number of respondents. Patricia, who was not fluent in Spanish, expresses the importance of keeping language in the family: “One of the main reasons (...) why I love my boyfriend, he can speak Spanish fluently (...) and he’ll be able to teach that to our kids.” Roxanne described a similar scenario, stressing that Spanish fluency would be necessary for her future children: “If my children speak [only] English, how are they going to talk to my mom, who only speaks Spanish?” A number of fluent respondents sought out Spanish-speaking friends, citing language proficiency as strengthening their friendship. Being able to engage in a shared language can strengthen ethnic identity and provide a sense of community across the Latino/a population.

Students who could not speak Spanish reported poor reception from both their Hispanic peers and from the white majority. Audrey explains: “It’s (...) a con about myself. I wish I was able to speak Spanish.” Patricia relates being unable to speak Spanish as “part of an identity that I’ve lost.” Respondents who were not fluent in Spanish often felt like less of a Latina; they reported both Hispanic and white people as frequently expressing surprise at their lack of language proficiency. It was difficult for some students to fully embrace their ethnic identity as Latina if they were not fluent in Spanish. Sara puts it bluntly: “Latinas are supposed to speak fluent Spanish, so I’m not like them because I don’t speak fluent Spanish.” She goes on to say that people fail to take her seriously, and do not consider her a real Mexican, based on lack of language proficiency. Furthermore, if a respondent was not perceived as Hispanic by appearance, their ability to speak Spanish ‘proved’ their heritage. For Jean, a mixed-race respondent, looking white and being unable to speak Spanish led to outsiders openly invalidating her
racial background. Students were expected to prove their racial identity to outsiders if they failed to meet society’s vision of a Latina, and speaking fluent Spanish was an important part of that vision. All respondents who spoke Spanish reported pride in that aspect of their heritage, while all respondents who were not fluent expressed a desire to learn the language and regain that portion of their identity.

Racial Discrimination

Microassaults

Microassaults represent a conscious bias toward the marginalized group in question and include the use of racial slurs. While they were by far the least reported form of microaggression in this study, they were not nonexistent. Natalie reports being called a ‘wetback’ at only twelve years old, when she first emigrated from Mexico. Sophia posits that ‘wetback’ is a term more often applied to Hispanic males than females, which may account for its low occurrence in the interviews. Interestingly, racial slurs were not always poorly received by respondents, though this was highly dependent on the perpetrator and situation. Roxanne feels that being called a ‘beaner’ is not always negative, saying, “That means even being away from my home, because my mom lives in Tucson, (...) I’m still maintaining myself, [my] culture within a not-so Hispanic community (...) here out west.” Giselle was similarly unaffected by the term: “Maybe I’ve just heard it too much, (...) it’s just a joke.” Yvette also addresses incidences of old-fashioned racism, recalling herself and her Hispanic classmates laughing at an old film that relied on racist stereotypes of Mexican Americans shown in school. Such blatant racism was seen as clearly ridiculous, by both white and minority peers in Yvette’s class. Despite these lax responses to some microassaults, respondents did generally admit to
feeling more affected by racial slurs if they came from a member of the majority group, or from a stranger, Hispanic or not. Some interviewees felt that Latinas who were fifth and sixth generation were ‘removed’ from their culture, and thus attempts to reclaim racial slurs by these ‘Americanized’ individuals fell flat. Despite their belonging to the same community, their experiences were seen as quite different, and thus joking about slurs was not viewed as appropriate.

Microinsults

Respondents were well aware of the negative stereotypes associated with being Hispanic. Nearly all cited some variation on the following attributes: illegal, dirty, poor, vulgar, criminal, and uneducated. Sophia describes seeing these stereotypes associated with her father at a parent-teacher conference: “[The teacher] met my father and she made a comment about how he was dressed well and she didn’t realize that he was going to be educated.” This exemplifies the subtle nature of microinsults; commenting on Sophia’s father’s clothes and education may have appeared benign to an outsider, but such comments ultimately communicate the idea that Hispanics are generally not expected to dress well and have an education. Likewise, Roxanne recalls being followed at a mall on various occasions “because apparently Hispanics steal stuff.” When asked if she believes a white person would be similarly targeted, Roxanne responds with no. In this example, Hispanics are linked to criminality, despite the perpetrator having no concrete reason to do so aside from skin tone. Sara reports confusion from her peers regarding how she dressed: “You’re Hispanic, but you have nice clothes?” Most respondents were able to recall at least one microinsult they had experienced; however, racial discrimination was not always verbal. Yvette describes her experience traveling to
Chicago, “You look into their eyes, white people, and they just don’t like you. You can see it, (...) they just don’t like you.” Latino/as were often associated with menial labor as well: females with maids, males with construction workers or gardeners. Respondents stressed that the jobs themselves were not the problem, but the associations with the jobs – Latino/as were perceived to work such jobs because they were uneducated or conniving, looking to steal from their bosses and too lazy to better themselves. Patricia notes: “[People] see a white person (…) vacuuming like in a gym (…) and they feel weird, because that’s not supposed to be your job, [but] they don’t feel uncomfortable when there is a Mexican person there.”

Microinsults were by far the most commonly reported form of microaggression. Many respondents reported that their microinsults took place in the academic arena. As previously stated, Latino/as often suffer from stereotypes that regard them as uneducated and unable to succeed academically. Respondents reported feeling discomfort based on this stereotype in the university setting. Jaylene notes, “There aren’t many people like me in some of my classes,” and recalls one of her high school teachers heavily insinuating that college was not for her. Giselle mentions that she has not met many Hispanic women in college. The lack of Latinas in higher education may suggest to some that they do not truly belong in the academic world. Yvette describes being conscious of how she speaks, as one of the few Latinas in her class, and is often turned to as the sole speaker for her race:

I’m kind of pressured [when Mexico is mentioned] to think about it, rather than to listen and absorb what the professor is saying, (...) because I feel that a lot of the times when someone says the word Mexican in class, they all look at me and want to see like, what my reaction is to that.
When very few Hispanics are represented in higher education, they may feel pressure to represent their entire race; if they fail, their failure may be attributed to being Hispanic, and thus confirms a number of negative stereotypes in the eyes of the majority group.

Some respondents faced an even more blatant form of racial discrimination at their university. Sophia reports that professors unnecessarily reference her “upbringing” and how it might affect her chances at school, despite both her parents having attended college. Another professor informed her that it would be hard for him to take her seriously, because she was Latina. Incidents like these caused Sophia to conclude: “People are never going to see me as a scholar first; they are going to see me for a Latina, and then see me as a scholar.” She expresses that this was devastating to her self-esteem, reporting that she wishes her treatment could be attributed to anything other than race:

> It makes me wish that I could more easily hide my identity, but I can’t, (...) I look different compared to everybody else (...) [and] I have a different last name, (...) there’s just no way of getting around it.

This discrimination resulted in a sense of hopelessness for Sophia:

> It makes me feel like I’m so insignificant, and (...) I feel like I’m the dumbest person in that program. (...) No matter what I do, I won’t be as good as these other students, I won’t achieve anything (...) I’ve considered multiple times dropping.

She believes that universities utilize ‘token minorities’ to promote diversity without actually committing to it:

>[Tokens are] the one or two people that they let come in and (...) they’re usually attractive, they’re usually intelligent, they fit a mold that is okay, or is as close to white as they can allow, and they let those people in and it shows that we are inclusive and that we like everybody, but if you don’t fit that mold, you have a hard time.
Jean describes similarly overt academic discrimination from a peer: “When I told them that I go to ASU (...) they were like, ‘Well, aren’t you, I heard you were this, like, Puerto Rican,’ and then they expressed ‘well that’s a surprise,’ or just the little comments that mean so much more.” Jean’s remark about little comments meaning much more exemplifies the insidious nature of microinsults. These comments may seem small, but their cumulative nature is ultimately quite damaging to self-esteem. Jean goes on to assert that people are not used to Latino/as in a university setting, “especially being female.” Latinas pursuing higher education are doubly undermined, as both Hispanic and female students. When they voice concern about discrimination, they are often met with accusations of being oversensitive or paranoid. Jaylene recalls:

If I have a question and the professor doesn’t call on me, I automatically assume it’s because of who I am and how I look and how I identify myself. It’s like, ‘you don’t even know what they are thinking, you don’t even know if they ran out of time,’ and I’m like… I know that I can be overreacting.

Jaylene’s rush to admit that she is probably overreacting in such situations speaks to a larger phenomenon, wherein minority groups are expected to ‘lighten up’ or stop making everything about race, lest they make others uncomfortable. Bringing up racial discrimination may result in the marginalized person being viewed as the instigator, often perceived as unnecessarily exaggerating issues of race (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Jaylene later admits that the uncertainty surrounding her professors does bother her – Latina students can never be completely sure that perceived differential treatment is coincidental, or indicative of racial discrimination. This sense of uncertainty is referred to as attributional ambiguity, and produces negative effects in victims of discrimination. The discomfort and confusion that accompanies the ambiguous nature of microinsults in
academia can result in a loss of focus and decreased levels of psychological energy (Sue, 2010a).

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations, i.e., statements like, “I don’t see color,” provoked a heated response from some interviewees. While a few felt ambivalent or positive toward admissions of colorblindness, others found a refusal to see color as insulting. Roxanne calls color-blindness “easier said than done,” referring to the subliminal stereotypes she believes everyone possesses. Diane states, “I think it completely undoes the whole purpose of (...) diversity (...) because I think you should see color. You should embrace color.” A strong ethnic identity may preclude taking offense to not seeing color – if one is proud of their heritage, others erasing it may come off as offensive. Sophia even describes microinvalidations as often more harmful than outright discrimination:

It’s a damn lie [not seeing color], (...) I think people that say that are (...) probably the worst ones, because if I’m faced with a bigot or a racist, I know I’m being faced with a bigot or a racist, but if I have somebody that thinks they are more evolved and that they don’t see color, then they continuously push on these microaggressions to me, and (...) then they say ‘but I have Hispanic friends, I know this is okay.’ You know, you have to isolate yourself from them more so than anything, because what do you allow them to do? Do you allow them to think this is okay or do you say something and all of the sudden you are (...) an angry Latina? (...) How do you navigate that? You have to get away from them.

Sophia’s response illustrates the frustrating nature of microinvalidations. Color-blindness may have become an excuse for majority group members to fall back on when accused of racial discrimination, consequently allowing them to invalidate the reality of people of color while appearing outwardly tolerant. Yvette supports this idea as well: “Okay, so that is your way of saying you are not racist? So be it.” Many respondents felt that
colorblindness might work in theory, but is not applicable to real-life behavior; they recognized that implicit biases cannot be dismissed simply by professing not to see clearly visible racial differences.

Another common invalidating behavior addressed by numerous respondents was outsiders lumping all Latino/as into a singular category and ignoring their ethnic diversity. Jean described being referred to as a “salt-water Mexican” rather than a Puerto Rican, a term that signifies outsiders’ ignorance of the varied nature of Latino/a ethnicities. Sophia illustrates this: “We’re not even given our specific country identities, we’re all seen to be from Mexico (…) and we just crossed over a couple of days ago.” A number of respondents explained that they felt distanced from the majority when it came to discriminatory experiences – Sara describes this as being viewed as a “different species,” and Yvette explains that outsiders “look at us like (…) we are zoo animals.” This could result in dehumanization from the majority group, and provide a possible factor for why outsiders feel confident in dismissing and trivializing their Hispanic peers’ experiences.

There is some evidence that a few Latinas interviewed may unconsciously subscribe to this different species concept themselves. At least half the respondents referred to white majority culture as the ‘normal’ culture, or used ‘American’ to solely mean white people. Similarly, certain music genres, activities, and speech patterns were viewed as white, with negative connotations by some in the Hispanic community; some respondents reported being scorned by their Latino/a peers for engaging in “white people stuff,” as Yvette calls it. This was difficult to rectify for some students, who felt less Latina due to things as seemingly trivial as participating in beach bonfires, enjoying ‘nerd
culture,’ or listening to ‘emo’ bands. An ‘us versus them’ mentality may provide solidarity for some, but can negatively affect those who do not fit neatly into their specified area. Even if Latino/as ‘act white,’ it is unlikely that they will ever fully fit in with the majority group, due to racial biases. Ogbu (2004) refers to this as the ‘burden of acting white,’ a term which illustrates a catch-22 solely applicable to marginalized group members. While it may be necessary for people of color to assimilate into parts of white culture for survival reasons, this can be seen as a betrayal of their ethnic identity by fellow members of their minority group. Participants in the current study felt invalidated by outsiders and their Hispanic peers alike for failing to act like a ‘typical’ Latina. This theme will be revisited in the section on gender roles.

Deviant Behavior and the Criminal Justice System

No respondents engaged in serious deviant behavior; fights or reckless phases were mainly left behind in junior high school, and only three interviewees had engaged in schoolyard fights to begin with. According to the respondents’ accounts, junior high fights generally resulted from a desire to protect one’s reputation, or confront a student who was allegedly gossiping behind the respondent’s back. No students had ever been arrested or involved with the police, with the exception of a few who reported minor speeding or parking tickets.

Racial discrimination has been positively associated with risky externalizing behaviors; this was not found in the sample. Students reported enjoying risks, but most had a very specific definition of the types of risks they preferred to take. Risks were
about proving others’ perceptions wrong, and were decidedly pro-social. For example, Jaylene describes risks she takes as:

Doing things that haven’t been done, for example, (...) coming to college. I like a challenge, (...) challenges saying, ‘you can’t go to university, you can’t study abroad, you can’t do all these different things,’ which I have done, so I like to take on those challenges, which involve risks, and come back to those people and be like ‘hey, this is what I did.’

Sara echoes a similar sentiment: “Things that challenge me, I would say academically and socially, not anything dangerous. Testing my ability to do something.” This may tie in to the familial respect many respondents discussed – quite a few students reported strict parents and a desire to achieve academically for their family. If respondents hold family in high regard, they may be less likely to engage in deviant behaviors that could result in obstacles to their education. Sophia offers a more straightforward reason for wanting to avoid illegal behavior: “I won’t do anything risky in relationship to the law at all—uh-uh. I’m terrified of being accidentally deported, I feel like that’s a very real possibility.” While racial discrimination is generally viewed as a unique stressor placed solely on marginalized individuals, this form of strain did not result in deviant behavior in this sample. Although some respondents reported hopelessness and anger over their discriminatory experiences, this failed to manifest in a rejection of conventional norms or engagement in deviant coping pathways.

Nearly all respondents believed that Latino/as were wrongly associated with criminal behavior by society, in both everyday life and the media. Natalie explains, “If you see a Mexican, it's usually going to be a bias of (...) he's probably (...) a gang member, or he's selling drugs.” Sara describes a similar theme, stating that people assume: “That we’re part of gangs, that we do tagging, that we start fights, you know, just
unnecessary stereotypes of bad behaviors.” Adriana states, “I think a lot of people perceive us as criminals. Um, more criminals than good people…” Latino/as were also often associated with drugs; Yvette recalls people being shocked to discover that she had never smoked weed, while Diane posits that people automatically conflate drug cartels with being Mexican.

Several interviewees referred to outsiders’ tendencies to automatically link Latino/a individuals with illegal immigration status. Perhaps no news story exemplifies this concept more than the controversy around Arizona SB 1070. Legalized racial profiling by Arizona police officers in the wake of SB 1070 garnered national attention. The bill required law enforcement officials to ascertain an individual’s immigration status during a lawful stop or arrest if they had reasonable suspicion that the individual was not legally in the United States. The effect of SB 1070 and other current events regarding immigration reform on Latino/a consciousness and belief in the criminal justice system have yet to be widely discussed.

Despite a few students mentioning the bill in passing, the overwhelming majority of respondents professed trust in the criminal justice system. Audrey feels that police officers “do what they do for a reason,” while Patricia calls law enforcement a noble profession. Patricia continues: “If someone committed a crime, it really doesn’t matter what color they are.” Having respect for the police was a common theme across interviews. Natalie specifically addresses accusations of profiling:

If you're Mexican and you get stopped, and the officer tells you to do something, and he thought ‘oh you're only doing this to me because I'm Mexican,’ that's one of the things that I tend to scrutinize because a police officer might just be doing
his job, you know? (…) He might just be asking that to anybody, not just because they see you.

Respondents were much more likely to blame the news media for choosing to focus on criminal portrayals of Latino/as, rather than profess a belief in racial profiling by police officers. However, three respondents did admit to potentially biased opinions on police, due to close family members in law enforcement careers.

Although respondents generally did not share African American views on the frequency of racial profiling (Unnever, 2008), they referred to the black community a number of times throughout the interviews. Patricia reports that the 2014 events in Ferguson, Missouri, caused her to think about her own cultural identity. Adriana was one of the few to express concern over discriminatory policing practices toward black and Latino/a individuals:

I feel they go after more people when they are of color. Not necessarily just Hispanic, but even if they are black. I feel like they attack them [African Americans] more, or watch over them more… vs. someone who might seem like they are American.

‘American’ is once again used to mean white, but this time includes both black and Latino/a people as the criminalized other. Sara continues this line of thought when discussing her boyfriend:

My boyfriend is African American, but he’s both African American and Hispanic, fifty-fifty. But his skin color is (…) black, so he’s been pulled over multiple times and asked ‘where’s the drugs?’ even before they say anything else, and I’ve been in the car with him when that situation happened, which makes me feel sick, because I think ‘what if that were to happen to me?’ or ‘why are they assuming that?’
Sara admits that she has never personally faced discrimination from law enforcement, but concedes that if she had, she would likely feel less confident in their actions. This theme will be discussed further in the section on solidarity with black Americans.

**Ethnic Pride and Socialization**

Taking pride in identifying as Latina was a strong theme throughout the majority of interviews. Every respondent could describe a food, tradition, or holiday that positively connected them to their heritage. Nearly every aspect of Latina culture discussed by interviewees related back to the importance of family. Many participants drew strength from their supportive family network, often utilizing their close familial relationships for coping purposes. Sara explains:

> That’s one thing that Hispanic families hold true, that family is most important, they like to spend time with each other (…). Whatever is going on in the world, you have your family to come to at the end of the day.

Patricia expresses that showing pride in Latino/a culture is vital to her parents, who never want to lose touch with that specific part of themselves.

Very few respondents reported receiving a specific talk on discrimination from their parents. However, many affirmed that their family provided support and examples to live by, regarding incidences of racial discrimination. This can be viewed as implicit preparation for bias, which still manages to communicate useful messages and coping mechanisms from parent to child. Roxanne recalls seeing her mother struggle with speaking English in stores, often to the frustration and dismissal of the salespeople, who may flat out refuse to help a customer that does not speak the language. She mentions her mother adhering to a particular Spanish saying, which roughly translates to: “Whoever
gets mad loses.” This is an example of a culturally based coping technique utilized across generations; Roxanne can recall this saying when faced with discrimination, with the knowledge that it has been positively used by her mother in the past. Similarly, Jean’s father’s pride in his heritage provides her with a useful example to reference in stressful situations. Jean describes him as a Puerto Rican man raised by an adoptive white family in a time where such a situation was uncommon. Despite being subjected to discrimination, “his heritage was something he wanted to keep even though he could have lost it at any moment.” She goes on to say that he made a distinct decision to “be the Puerto Rican,” and often stressed the importance of keeping in touch with one’s inner self. Sophia cites knowledge of her family’s past struggles as a great source of pride, drawing strength from the recognition that they made it through extremely difficult times.

Perseverance and determination were common familial themes among respondents. Yvette cites the American Dream as inspiration for her family: “You work hard and you keep going and trucking and eventually you get there.” Yvette’s family addresses Latino/a solidarity as well; she mentions that her parents have expressed belief in the idea that: “It’s our job to teach each other if they want to learn and help empower each other.” Giselle echoes a similar theme of empowerment: “I want to (...) empower the Hispanic culture to be more than we (...) fall into stereotypically.” Natalie’s pride in her racial background stems from a similar place: “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, so whenever I hear these negative things about my culture or where I'm from or my heritage and my ethnicity, (...) I think it makes me (...) stronger.” Despite hardly any respondents reporting specific familial preparation for discrimination, parents still
provided important messages about identity and pride. Jaylene recalls her parents stressing:

Regardless of negative stereotypes or negative discrimination that I may receive or that I may see around me, (…) it’s something that no one is going to be able to take away from me, my identity and how I decide to be myself.

Although specific talks involving preparation for bias were largely absent from the sample, this should not suggest that parents were unable to communicate vital messages regarding the importance of racial pride to their children. The overwhelming majority of the sample expressed high levels of racial pride, and over half attributed this at least partially to their parents.

Messages involving ethnic-racial pride were not limited to family members. Natalie mentions that her friends always support her when she is faced with racial discrimination, in part by validating her experiences. Other respondents reported similar experiences, where they felt other Hispanic individuals were more receptive to issues involving discrimination, because they could relate and put themselves in their perspective. Adriana believes that her friends’ pride in Latino/a culture complements her own:

I feel like [we] probably wouldn't be as good as friends if they weren't as proud as I am, because they would (…) make me feel bad about who I am, so (…) I think it's affected me positively and I think that's one of the only reasons why we are friends.

Yvette explains that family ties are not limited to blood relatives in Hispanic culture:

“You’re in another area and you (…) see another Latino, (…) you come up to each other like ‘oh my family’ and it’s like, no, you’re not, but you’re still Latinos.” Over half of
respondents had many Hispanic friends; Jaylene speaks to why this may be the case:

“When you’re surrounded by other people who are proud, it just builds this (...) happiness and you feel so powerful, and (...) I feel like that’s why people surround themselves with people they are like.”

Giving back to the Latino/a community was another way for respondents to express racial pride and solidarity. Feeling like part of a group and being able to participate in Hispanic culture strengthens ethnic identity. Jaylene states:

I feel it’s important [to work with my community] because not only is it a relatable relationship that you build with the other people you are surrounded with because you understand where they’re coming from, they understand where you come from, but specifically working (...) with high school Hispanics, [you’re] giving them (...) the knowledge that there’s (...) a higher education for them to taste.

Yvette describes educating fellow Latinas on discrimination as a powerful experience, for both herself and the Latinas in question. She believes it is important for the Hispanic women she associates with to know their rights and recognize that they do not deserve to be discriminated against. This line of thinking solidifies a group identity and reaffirms that discrimination is ignorant and wrong.

The importance of education was addressed in nearly every interview; most respondents were first generation college students. While all took pride in their educational attainments, many reported feeling familial pressure as well – respondents were highly aware that their parents were counting on them to provide a positive role model to younger siblings, and to take advantage of opportunities their family may have previously been denied. Natalie explains one of the difficulties in being first to attend college: “I feel really proud, but (...) it’s been tough, because being the first, you do it all
by yourself, you have no help from your parents or siblings or anything.” Jaylene summed up familial pressure succinctly: “They immigrated here for their children, and you know, that’s me, so I have to make sure I’m doing well.” Patricia explains that her immediate family moved to ensure their children went to better schools, something her other relatives did not do:

I feel like sometimes (…) my family is set apart a little bit from the rest of my family (…) we moved away, like we went to a different school than everybody, so (…) there could be some resentment there.

Pressure to succeed and make family sacrifices count was a recurring theme in several interviews. Respondents emphasized the importance of familial respect; it is possible that this cultural value manifests itself in taking educational attainments seriously for the good of the family.

Despite the existence of academic microaggressions, a number of students found pride and strength in their schooling. Sophia intends to use her experiences with discrimination to further her research goals, telling people: “No, you really should be looking at this, because it does matter.” Previously discussed cultural values, like perseverance and strength through adversity, may provide a protective factor for Latino/as in academia. Others believe that educating oneself on discrimination and bias in a university setting is helpful in combatting it. Natalie says:

It’s (…) definitely easier because before you might not know a lot that goes on in the system, but now you do, and now you tend to (…) deal with it better, you tend to recognize it and (…) think of people, ‘they’re ignorant.’
This way of thinking locates the blame of racial discrimination in the perpetrator, rather than allowing the Latino/a to internalize negative messages. Diane agrees:

Especially with this new concept of microaggression… (…) If you ask someone who is uneducated – they've never thought about it or they have thought about it but they don't know how to name it… and when you don't have a name for something, it's hard to address it.

Educating people on racial discrimination may validate their experiences and encourage productive dialogue. This may ultimately open up a space where Latino/as can be reassured that their experiences with discrimination are not a product of paranoia or ‘playing the race card.’

Coping and Distancing

Respondents reported feeling trivialized when they spoke up about their discrimination; many were told that they were overreacting, that they needed to lighten up, or that such experiences were not really about race. This was an anticipated reaction – the subtle nature of microaggressions often encourages disbelief from outsiders, which can be detrimental to the person who experienced the discrimination and cause them to question their own thoughts. Although outsiders may have viewed issues of discrimination as inconsequential, many of the Latinas surveyed described emotional responses: from crying to being rendered speechless, it was clear that most of these students were affected by ignorance from their peers at some point in their lives.

There were a variety of coping mechanisms employed by respondents. Venting to friends was the most common, but boxing, drawing, and listening to empowering music were popular as well. Some respondents preferred to retreat from the situation, while others admitted to “crying it out” or seeking validation from family and friends. Sophia
states: “I also spend a lot of time on the phone with my mom, just having affirmation that (...) I’m not dumb, I’m not worthless.” Jaylene receives validation from having a group of Hispanic friends: “We can kind of go through things together and relate to things.” Sara reports a similar approach with her friends: “I think it’s just best for us to talk about it together, to talk it through, what happened, how you handled it, how you should have handled it, [and] why do you think people think that way.” Venting to friends was often humor-based; most respondents were able to identify the ignorance that accompanied their experience with discrimination, and correctly place the blame on the perpetrator rather than their racial group. Diane refers to coping as “making fun of the idiot who made the stupid comment.” Yvette explains that her friends cope with humor, venting, and then “preparing for the next situation.” Standing up for oneself, educating the perpetrator, and letting go of the situation were also common practices. Although many respondents found validation from friends, several also reported self-validation. Jean describes her confidence in spotting prejudice: “I think if you are Latina and you have been discriminated against, then it’s kind of very easy to pick out if you have been discriminated against.” She continues on to state that, while she listens to people who accuse her of overreacting, she ultimately recognizes that it was her experience and not theirs, and thus hers to draw conclusions on.

Not all respondents utilized these specific methods; Audrey stated that she believes there is no way of coping with the knowledge of negative stereotypes. While Roxanne professed to venting about discrimination, she explains that she is unable to use humor because she hates racial jokes. The majority of respondents who admitted to joking amongst themselves about race specified that this form of coping was only
acceptable among people of color – white people, whether male or female, who attempted to join the conversation were generally seen as disrespectful.

The most interesting finding was the amount of distancing behavior employed by respondents as coping mechanisms. Rivera et al. (2010) posit that being told one is “not like other Latino/as” is a microaggression, wherein the typical Latino/a is viewed in a negative light. While some respondents agreed with this assertion, most discussed not being like other Latinas as a source of pride. Jaylene professes:

I am not like the stereotypical Latina, who, for example, doesn’t go to college, stays home, gets married right away, ‘cause that is the typical view that people have on Latinas, and obviously I’m none of that, I’m here at school, I’m here getting an education (...) which the majority isn’t doing.

She continues, “You don’t want to be that teen mom.” Patricia describes a similar vein of thought: “I feel better about [the negative stereotypes] because I’m… not that.” Adriana confirms this idea:

I think the thing that makes me feel better is knowing that I'm not like that. So if they make negative comments, (...) I'll be, okay maybe some Latinas are like that but I'm not, and (...) that comforts me just knowing that I know that I'm not like that.

The ‘type’ of Latinas respondents distanced themselves from were seen as fitting the negative stereotype: they were often poor, aggressive, promiscuous, or cholo/as. It was these Latino/as who were seen by their peers as overreacting to racial discrimination. Roxanne explains:

When I think about (...) certain people in my high school that would say something, there would be the ones that would fall into the stereotype (..), the gangster, machista, (...) they’d be like, ‘What'd you say? You wanna do something?’
Responding to discrimination with the threat of violence was seen by a majority of interviewees as reinforcing the stereotype, and was looked down upon. Sara illustrates this idea:

Some of the girls in high school, when someone was racist or discriminated against them, they (...) blew it out of proportion, started cussing at them ‘oh meet me after school, we’ll fight.’ I’m like, is that really necessary? You’re going to fight and then what? What happens? Me personally, I’m like, okay, call me whatever names you want to in the book, but I’m still going to go on with my day. (...) I think sometimes, depending on the person, they could overreact.

When asked to clarify what kind of Latina tended to overreact, Sara explains that it was “some of the Hispanic girls that did portray themselves more ghetto.” Yvette refers to this concept as a “separation of classes” in Latino/a culture, wherein certain behaviors are seen as “ghetto” and should consequently be avoided. Patricia explains that it is easier to combat the negative stereotype when “you’re on the other side of it.” Latinas who were educated and Americanized would likely be seen as more valid by the majority community, because they could be held up as examples of succeeding despite their race.

Several respondents reported that this distancing behavior was condoned by their parents. While Natalie tried to remain impartial in such conversations, she admits:

[My parents] get mad sometimes because they do think that some groups (...) come here to only (...) get the welfare and the food stamps and things like that, so they do think (...) our own ethnicity takes advantage of what we do [to] come here to have the American Dream.

She refers to her father as hardworking, as “not the type of Mexican who would take advantage of that.” Sara reports a similar experience with her father, who told her: “Don’t ever come home pregnant, I don’t want to be that dad,’ and stuff like that, (...) it also has to do with stereotyping his own culture, unfortunately.” Giselle echoes the same
sentiment: “I love being Mexican but there are times when like Hispanics do inappropriate things and you’re like, ‘Why do you do that, that’s why people (...) are (...) against it.’” Yvette sums this concept up concisely: “When they [my parents] talk about other Latinas, it’s you’re either an educated one, an Americanized, educated Latina, or you’re a beamer. Point blank.” This may partially account for why higher education was so important among respondents’ families – a degree was a concrete symbol for not being like the rest of the Hispanic community.

Some respondents did recognize the problematic aspect of this type of thinking. While Sara’s family exhibited distancing behavior, Sara explains: “I don’t like to say ‘Don’t worry, I’m not one of the pregnant, in a gang, or this,’ because I have family members that are like that, so I’m not going to disgrace on them.” Not being like Latinas who fit the negative stereotype fails to comfort Sara:

If they’re [the majority] not thinking it about me they’re thinking it about somebody else who is Hispanic, Latina, similar to me, might not be like me or how I grew up, but they are similar in one way or another, because they are Hispanic.

While Roxanne admits that her mother raised her to be “better” than the stereotype, she does believe that “when it comes down to it, you will defend who you know. (...) Like if it was my cousin, yeah she’s pregnant but it doesn’t mean she’s wasting her life away.” Similarly, Yvette describes her line of thought when confronted with negative stereotypes, “That person still has the ability to thrive and they still have opportunities. (...) To me, as long as you have an opportunity to get out of there, you can…”
Media Portrayal and Representation

Nearly all respondents reported Latino/a characters as poorly portrayed in fictional media. When asked what role a Hispanic actor/actress would play, most students responded with some variation on the following tropes: drug dealer, *cholo/a*, prostitute, criminal, or gang member. The automatic conflation of Latino/as with criminal behavior is a microinsult, whether it occurs in real life or on television. These stereotypes suggest that Latino/as are criminals, and should be treated accordingly (Rivera et al., 2010).

Respondents recalled far more negative portrayals than positive ones, and most believed there were far more of the former. Even positive portrayals often came with confusion; Sara recalls a movie centered on a Hispanic girl’s *quinceañera*, where the main character was pregnant at fifteen. She wonders, “Are they trying to tell her story and how she became successful (…) or are they trying to say, ‘see look, all Latinas are pregnant and I’ll end up like this.”’ Lumping all Latinas together was once again a reoccurring theme; Sophia recalls being told she looked like Gloria from *Modern Family* after losing some weight. She explains, “Sophia Vergara is very beautiful and I’ll take that as a compliment, but (…) I don’t know if you should be saying this to me.” *Modern Family*’s Gloria was a contentious example among respondents. Although some were happy to see a Latina on primetime television, they also reported wishing for more variety than simply the spicy, sexy Latina trope. Roxanne explains her reaction to Gloria, “I kind of rolled my eyes (…) they think she’s funny because she’s so out there, but I feel like (…) some people are like, ‘Why does [she] have to be super flamboyant?’” Diane referred to representation on *Modern Family* as, “As positive as we are getting right now, which is (…) that we are acknowledging, hey, there's other people in this country.”
One of the main issues respondents had with Latino/a characters on television was that they were not relatable. For example, Patricia explains that she finds George Lopez to be funny because she gets what he’s saying – his skits on being Mexican are humorous because they address Hispanic culture and draw on experiences many Latino/as can relate to. Jaylene believes that the general public does not see Latino/as as the norm, which may account for the lack of representation on television. The white majority may be unable to relate to Hispanic characters because they find them difficult to normalize, while Latino/as find that Hispanic characters fall into lazy stereotypes that fail to address the complexity of their culture. The fact that several respondents could think of no other representation than Gloria from *Modern Family* is troubling when one considers prior research that suggests misinformation on underrepresented groups may be unconsciously taken as truth in the media (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). If white Americans only have one frame of reference for Latinas, Gloria may become representative of the wider Latina population; the fact that she is a highly sexualized character with a poor grasp on the English language – a trait often exploited for laughs – is problematic in this instance.

Negative portrayal of Latino/as was not confined to fictional media. The way the news media chooses to frame the immigration debate was brought up by nearly half the respondents. Jaylene reports hearing in class that the *Arizona Republic* estimates the number of illegal immigrants in the state as higher than the actual numbers, a sort of fear-mongering technique. She believes that the public is particularly receptive to these high numbers, because they reaffirm the public’s stance that “unauthorized immigrants don’t need to be here.” Sophia possesses a similar opinion toward the mainstream media. She believes that the poorly framed immigration debate has ensured that, “All Latinos,
regardless of generation here or citizenship status are viewed as an enemy.” She further notes:

Everything that I’ve heard [on immigration] has dealt with population and ‘that there’s so many of us,’ and I think that concerns the people, and (…) I think there’s the idea that if you make people feel uncomfortable, that they’ll leave.

Sara laments that “whatever is out there is what people are going to believe.” This is consistent with Markert’s (2010) argument that inflammatory immigration discourse – even with little basis in truth – is currently what dominates the news. Sara further explains: “I’m not saying (…) to just show all the positives, because not all Hispanics make good decisions, I get that, but give us a fair, equal chance of being represented.”

Respondents had a number of suggestions for positive media representation. They wanted to see Hispanic characters involved in political office,Latinas who were not sexualized, doctors, and just stronger female characters in general. Yvette describes wanting to see narratives like her mother’s story told: “I would love people to hear her struggle [with documentation] and what she went through.” She continues on to say that Latino/as deserve success stories too, and wishes that the media would “show the American dream within people who are not associated as Americans.” Most interviewees who brought up having seen positive portrayals of Latino/a characters reported feelings of excitement and pride. Sophia describes her reaction toward seeing a Latina playing a professor on television:

It came out right when I was beginning my Ph.D. program, and so, in an odd way, it made me comfortable with the idea that I could come from this family background, (…) like, it was acceptable, it was a dual role, and [I] could do it.
Giselle made a similar point: “Let’s say (...) the Hispanic does a lot of things, it’s just like, ‘oh that’s cool, I want to be like her.’” Positive representation was important to most interviewees; it was not seen as ‘just’ television, but as a sign that Latino/as were worthy of their stories being told. This may provide a positive reference for self-perceptions – Latinas may internalize negative portrayals, and positive ones can combat this. Audrey illustrated this concept when she brought up a recent film on Cesar Chavez: “The fact that they made it into a movie was like, wow, people actually do care.”

The lack of representation for Latino/as was addressed by participants in an academic context as well. Very few respondents reported learning about Mexican history in high school, and the conclusions they drew from this were concerning. Audrey suggests that Mexican history is overlooked because, “Mexicans or any Hispanic Latinas/Latinos haven’t done something to impact the world.” Once more, the exclusion of Latino/as from positive media and history books may result in Hispanic youth concluding that their race is insignificant, or that their stories are not worth telling. Diane believes that she was not taught Mexican history in school because it’s seen as “un-American.” For Latina American students, this concept is troubling – their racial background is viewed as inherently un-American, in school and on the news, regardless of citizenship status. This sends the message that their actual family history is unimportant – their skin color and perceived race will always mark them as un-American in the eyes of the majority. This dismissal of historical context may negatively affect Latino/as’ self-perceptions; ignoring Latino/a history can suggest that they as a people have not done anything to merit a history book. Natalie agrees: “Nobody really looks into
[Mexican history], and is it because people think it’s useless, or they don’t really care about it?” Both options she provides are bleak for Latino/as.

Emergent Themes

Solidarity with Black Americans

Several respondents brought up the African American community when discussing discrimination against Latino/as. Yvette addresses a feeling of solidarity between Latino/a and African American populations. She connects the Ferguson protests to past activism within the Hispanic community: “They have also treated us the same, at some point or another, whether it’s in Crenshaw or Watts or East Los Angeles, or during all our riots.” This understanding stems from a similar history that allows both groups to relate to each other. Yvette continues on to discuss similarities in the racial socialization process experienced by both black and Hispanic Americans:

Even within the black community, it turns out that their parents have had the same talk with them and (…) that talk is ‘don’t be the stereotype when you go to college, and be aware of who you hang out with, (…) try not to have too much attitude, (…) they are students and they are learning, they are not trying to attack you like when you are back home, so don’t be that stereotypical black girl, don’t be that stereotypical Latin girl, you know, you’re going to go and beat someone up once they do something to you…

Recognition from an outside group may help validate discriminatory experiences – if marginalized people faced with racial discrimination worry that they are paranoid or oversensitive, a fellow minority group member may be able to reassure them that they have gone through similar difficulties and confirm their thoughts as rational. Yvette
echoes this idea, using her mother as an example. When her Latina mother faced
discrimination in the Army, she found support in her African American friends:

   Her friends who were black would also experience that racism, and they would
   unite together to ignore them. So, there’s a lot of connection with a lot of blacks
   and Mexicans or Latins, because of the fact that racism was predominate between
   the both of them.

Acknowledging the prevalence of racial discrimination among black and Latino/a
Americans may provide them with a connection they can fall back on in times of stress.
However, it is important to avoid the assumption that marginalization works in precisely
the same ways across racial groups. For example, Patricia uses knowledge of her peers’
African American stereotypes to understand stereotypes placed on Latinas. She mentions:

   I’ve heard (…) my male friends (…) are really (…) against dating, like, black
   women because they are black, and people are always like, ‘Okay, the sexy
   Latina,’ and so I see (…) [it] as a symbol of desire, I think that is a positive thing.
   (…) Sometimes it gets a little bit objectified, but at the same time, I feel like it is a
   positive connotation versus what they meant with black women.

The oversexualization of Latinas is seen as positive to Patricia, because she has seen the
opposite with another marginalized group; if people vocalize a disinterest in dating black
women, men wanting a Latina girlfriend appears to be a positive thing, despite its clear
roots in objectification. This exemplifies the danger of using one group’s marginalization
to understand another’s without taking historical and cultural context into account. It is
vital to discuss the different ways discrimination may appear across minorities.

   Several respondents expressed admiration toward what they perceived as the
black community’s achievements in combatting racial discrimination. The growing
number of positive African American characters on primetime television was not lost on
the interviewees. Sophia explains, “Shonda Rhimes has given roles to African
Americans, but we don’t have anybody doing that for Latinas.” Yvette addresses a similar idea on pop culture:

I feel that if we had more (…) women who were Mexican, or Latinas who were (…) entrepreneurs, and seeing their stories, like a lot of African American people have their, you know, heroines and their stories brought up, I would love to see that with Mexicans.

Seeing a marginalized group’s relative success in the media may provide optimism to the Latina community, particularly given the fact that black and Latino/a Americans tend to be stereotyped similarly by the majority group. If television written and starred in by black women can receive rave reviews and popularity, perhaps Latinas can accomplish a similar feat.

**Gender Roles**

Respondents mostly corroborated previous literature that addresses the sexualization of Latina women (Rivera et al., 2010). Stereotypical attributes of Latinas included being overly sexy, curvy, and promiscuous, according to the majority of interviewees. A number of students discussed how these stereotypes affected their everyday lives. Sophia describes: “There’s been questions about whether or not I wear suggestive clothing, and I could just be in workout clothing or a t-shirt or something.” Patricia reports similar expectations placed on her: “I’m supposed to be like this hot mamí, and I’m like, uhhh. I don’t know, I feel like people do assume that I’ve had sex sometimes.” She continues: “People think that I am not embracing my Latina thing, because I’m not (…) curvy.” The idea that ‘real’ Latinas are voluptuous and overtly sexual influenced a number of microaggressions experienced by the interviewees. Giselle
recalls being told that she would be pregnant before she graduated high school. Roxanne mentions:

Guys have (...) this overgeneralization or this fantasy that Latinas are supposed to be like, overly curvy and loud and obnoxious. I think they just imagine Sofia Vergara and they assume that every person has to be like that, whereas myself, I’m kind of serious and I don’t think I’m like extremely curvy or anything. I think guys mainly, they’re like ‘oh, you’re not like other Latinas.’

This illustrates the aforementioned danger of a lack of representation. Outsiders expect Latinas to act like their sole frame of reference – Sofia Vergara and Eva Longoria were most frequently named by respondents – and if they fail to meet those expectations, they cannot truly be Latina. Participants felt trapped by these widespread stereotypes. Their experiences as Latina women were invalidated by the majority because they did not fit the narrow public perception of how a Latina should behave.

If Latinas are not viewed as conventionally attractive and appropriately curvy by the majority group, there are few other options for being accepted. Patricia explains:

I’ve heard a lot of people say their fantasies are the hot Latin woman who speaks Spanish in their ear, (...) really voluptuous and really sexy. (...) If they are not as pretty or they (...) are older or things like that, they can be like, housewife or a maid (...) or have a lot of kids.

The majority of respondents presented sexy Latina or submissive housewife as the only two options for Hispanic women; ideally, Latinas were expected to be both – sexual and fiery, yet aware of her place as subservient to her man, for whom she would gladly cook and clean. Students were aware of the apparent paradox between their statements: many used adjectives like “strong” and “empowered” to describe Latina women, alongside “submissive” and “ruled by men.” Latinas who were perceived as independent and tough without catering to men ran the risk of being labeled an ‘angry Latina,’ a trope with
negative connotations. Similarly, Latinas who were too obsessed with their men were referred to as the ‘psycho Latina.’ Diane explains this trope as: “Psycho, aggressive, ‘oh you're talking to someone [else]? Let me kill her.’” Adriana includes “crazy” and “super jealous” in her explanation of the ‘psycho Latina.’

Being unable to cook was regarded as ‘un-Latina.’ Adriana recalls people telling her, “You're Mexican. How do you not cook?’ Like you're not a real Mexican woman or something like that.” A high number of respondents reported being told they were not ‘real’ Latinas, by both their fellow Hispanic peers and outsiders, because they failed to live up to the image of the subservient and sexy Latin woman. Diane sums this up:

We submit to our male partner and to other people. (...) We don't want to go to college. Getting married is our goal, which is bullshit; I could care less. (...) You can see why if that's what a lot of people think are stereotypes as Latina, you can see why a lot of people don’t think I am.

Several respondents cited Hispanic culture as the reasoning behind these tropes. While most interviewees expressed an appreciation for the close family ties and respect promoted by Latino/a cultural values, they spoke to a negative side of culture as well. Many referred to aspects of Hispanic culture as “old-fashioned,” where the women was expected to stay home and serve the man. Diane explains:

[In] Mexican culture (...) the woman is submissive to the man. (...) I think that's the problem I have with my family. (...) I love being Mexican and (...) I like eating Mexican food, but I don't like the fact that as [a] Mexican, I have to serve my brother because I'm a female and he's a male.

Yvette describes another traditional aspect of Hispanic culture: “Looks are a big deal, especially with women, because it identifies us, (...) it shows our worth in a way, (...) our status.” She did not believe this applied to men.
Respondents who were uninterested in marriage or children were scrutinized by both older family members and outsiders, due to cultural values or belief in stereotypes, respectively. Yvette exemplifies this when she describes peoples’ reactions to her mother:

They don’t expect to hear (...) the content that she speaks about, or how she has a very educated opinion and outlook on situations, (...) it shocks people, ‘cause we are (...) a very traditional culture, so (...) it surprises people when she starts saying things like, ‘well she has a choice,’ and she believes that, that women have a choice.

Sophia reported similar views from her parents; she mentions that they opted to “get rid of” certain aspects of Hispanic culture, by promoting self-sufficiency and independence.

Respondents did admit that they often could not tell if pressure to have children and submit to a husband came from being Hispanic or being female. As previously described, many Latinas found solidarity in shared experiences of discrimination with their African American counterparts; this solidarity was not found with white women. Diane explains, “A woman is very different than a Latina woman.” Sophia recalls discussions with her Latina friends, “We’ll bring up how we might be treated differently than white women (...) specifically. (...) I think white people in general (...) are treated more…but it hurts when (...) you can’t say there’s solidarity with a gender.” Although several respondents reported discussing discrimination with friends from other racial/ethnic groups, none brought up a similar connection with white women on shared experiences of sexism. This may be due to the fact that sexism against women of color is often highly racialized; Patricia describes this in her experience with street harassment: “You don’t (...) say that to a white girl, like mamí or ay-yi-yi.”
Interviewees were not hesitant to describe the sexism they had faced from Latino men as well. “Narcissistic” and “unrealistic expectations for women” came up several times as descriptors for Hispanic men; a number of respondents saw Latinos as subscribing to traditional values, such as expecting their wives to cook and clean for them. While this was a recurring pattern throughout a few interviews, most also acknowledged the different forms racial discrimination may take for Hispanic men. Some suggested that more overt discrimination – such as racial slurs – may be more commonly experienced by men than women. Sophia even states, “I think it’s harder for people to accept a Latino excelling than it would to accept a Latina excelling.” Patricia describes a specific catch-22 relevant to Hispanic males:

A [Hispanic] male (…) might be [stereotyped as] poor depending on what that person is wearing. Sometimes if (…) a Mexican man is dressed really well, I’ve heard a lot of people assume they are in the drug business or drug lords, or do stuff like that.

In this situation, the Latino male is trapped – no matter what he wears, he will be negatively stereotyped by the majority group. Sophia acknowledges that both male and female Hispanic Americans are required to mute their personalities for fear of discrimination. She states:

[Latino/as] have to be a little bit more professional than everyone else, even when you’re just relaxing, you still have to be conscious of like, (…) for Latinas I would see them (…) having to (…) be less loud, um, as people think they are, (…) you know, you have to pull yourself in a little more for Latinas. For males, (…) I feel like they actually have to be a little bit more nice to women, in public, you know, being very respectful, [because] there is this idea that they are horrible to women, so.

She continues on to describe the consequences of failing to tone down one’s personality:

“If you’re not better, you’re viewed as ten times worse, and you know, you’re still not
viewed as good.” Latino/as must constantly check themselves to ensure they are not inadvertently promoting negative stereotypes about their race; this vigilance is likely quite stressful. The stress of racial discrimination can lead to potential health problems among marginalized populations (Sue, 2010a).

**Skin Tone**

All respondents who addressed issues of skin tone in the Latino/a community believed that darker-skinned Latinas experienced higher levels of discrimination. Growing up, Sophia recalls being told she was lucky to have light skin: “You didn’t want to look like you were a *negrita*.” Latinas with darker skin, Sophia remembers, were not considered pretty. Lighter skinned girls “wouldn’t have to do, like, scrubbing or anything, my hair was kinky but it wasn’t too kinky so I would be better off.” Diane expands on this: “Even in (...) Mexican television – the darker person is always the maid or the servant or from the poor country.” Most respondents who discussed skin tone in the Latina community described that being darker meant being seen as “more” Hispanic; since being Latino/a was associated with negative stereotypes by the majority group, this was not necessarily a good connotation. Natalie explains that darker skin has historically been negatively received by society, mentioning that people have generally subscribed to: “‘Oh my god, dark skin, I better walk on the other side.’”

Respondents who referred to themselves as looking more ‘typically’ Hispanic tended to believe that skin tone was a factor in their discriminatory experiences. Roxanne mentions that people have assumed she does not speak English, a microaggression she attributes to “my complexion.” She continues on to describe being followed at malls, “My little sister was with me all the time, but she’s a lighter complexion, so I felt like it
was always me that was being walked around because I was brown.” Respondents with Latino/a relatives and friends were able to specifically point to experiences where the darker person received poorer treatment.

Many interviewees also experienced outsiders guessing at their culture, and in some cases even challenging respondents’ own knowledge of their race. Roxanne speaks to the invalidating nature of these experiences, stating that to outsiders: “We’re all kind of a mesh of brown.” Patricia describes one of these guessing games:

‘Oh what are you, what are you?’ And I’m like, ‘Umm, I’m Mexican.” And they’re like, ‘Mexican and what?’ And I’m like, ‘Mexican, that’s all I am, you know.’ And they’re like ‘Are you sure?’ And I’m like, ‘Pretty sure,’ you know, and so, they’re like, ‘Oh, you look Asian, you look Hawaiian, and all this.’

In these instances, the respondent is invalidated when describing her own heritage, despite ultimately having the most intimate knowledge of her own racial background. She goes on to describe the effect of these invalidations:

Growing up and going out with guys (…) that were (…) like, ‘What are you?’ (…) It was like, ‘Oh, okay, this makes me feel weird, what do I look like? What do they think I am?’ It’s not annoying, it just makes me way more self-aware then I usually am.

This can lead to confusion over how one is ‘supposed’ to look, which Patricia illustrates:

My mom is very white and my sister doesn’t look like me at all because she got more of my mom’s skin color (…) so it just makes me look at other Mexican women and say, ‘Okay, what does that mean, what am I supposed to look like, what do Mexicans look like?’

Seemingly innocent statements inquiring after a person’s ethnicity may serve to remind the person that they are physically separate from the norm, and subtly indicate that they do not belong. Giselle describes a similar experience: “Sometimes they’re like, ‘Oh, what
are you?’ Because sometimes they don’t know if I’m like, you know, Latina or Middle Eastern, I mean they know I’m like, foreign…” Giselle exemplifies the danger in these guessing games with her statement – she is aware that people recognize she is “foreign,” and therefore does not belong with the majority, but also realizes that her specific heritage is unimportant to them. Respondents were often assumed to be mixed, and were challenged when they explained that they were full Latina. Yvette describes her experience with being mixed race: “It feels like they have more respect for me when they find out I have like, Italian and Jewish in my culture.” Respondents who could point to at least some majority culture heritage were given more respect – perhaps being partially white allowed outsiders to recognize that interviewees were not fully ‘foreign,’ and paint them as more relatable.

Although respondents acknowledged the privilege of being lighter skinned – a phenomenon referred to as ‘passing privilege’ – passing as white led to its own set of issues. Respondents who could pass as white experienced discrimination from both the majority group and their fellow Latino/as. Diane explains that, as a white-passing Latina, speaking Spanish is often the only way she can “prove” her heritage to people; for white-passing Latinas who lacked Spanish proficiency, their heritage was often questioned and dismissed. Jean describes:

I do predominantly look more (…) white than anything, so they feel like I don’t have a say in my background, so when I show them where I live, like, who I lived with, they think I’m joking or I’m playing with them.
Feeling like they do not have a “say” in their own heritage can be an extremely invalidating experience for Latinas; Jean recalls the way her father would comfort her when these situations arose:

He had to sit me down and say, ‘Yes, you do look white, you do look like your mom, but at the same time you are still Puerto Rican, and just because you don’t look like it, it is a part of you.’

Requiring an outside confirmation of heritage was common for white-passing Latinas; invalidation caused them to doubt their own experiences and decreased self-esteem. Using cultural values as coping mechanisms may become more difficult when one’s connection to their racial background is constantly questioned and dismissed.

Diane recalls the anger she felt at people – both outsiders and other Latino/as – doubting her own racial heritage:

I think what bothers me the most is when people try to tell me that I'm not, and then I'm like, ‘I think I would know my own race.’ Especially when it's other Mexicans and it's like, ‘kay. So I think I react the most angrily when they try to tell me that I'm not and they try to correct me on something that I was like, raised with.

Diane illustrates the frustration that accompanies being challenged on race; as she states, people feel comfortable correcting her on something she grew up with. This suggests that she is an unworthy source of information, even on something as crucial as her very own heritage. She explains that it is difficult for her to keep calm in these situations: “I have kind of raised my voice and been a little bit more aggressive with people because they will really sit there and tell me I'm not Mexican.” This raises concerning questions for the coping mechanisms employed by white-passing Latinas – if the Hispanic community finds comfort in their race and cultural values, will white-passing Latinas find it difficult
to relate to a community they are so often excluded from? Yvette exemplifies this: “In East Los Angeles I do look white, and they try to think that I am not part of their culture, I’m not part of the Latino culture.” She specifies that she is considered whiter in East Los Angeles than in Arizona, which speaks to another troubling aspect of passing privilege; it is often conditional. Latino/as who look white in one arena may find themselves singled out for discrimination in others, and it is difficult to know when or where this will occur. This may lead to a constant awareness of one’s race, which can be tiring.

White-passing Latinas who acknowledge their passing privilege often end up feeling guilty about this fact. Diane recalls seeing her fellow Latino/as experience racial discrimination right in front of her; she was not exposed to this same discrimination because of her perceived whiteness. She explains:

I felt guilty, because (...) it was when the whole immigration thing was really big, which was like a few years ago; (...) there's like the concept of white privilege, and I got to mooch off of it because I'm not – I don't look Mexican. I don't look Latina. So I felt like in a way, I was betraying my people because I wasn't suffering with them. So I wasn't discriminated against. I wasn’t stopped. I'm never asked, ‘Do you have papers?’ I'm never questioned. And I felt a lot of people (...) would feel angry towards me like, ‘Why does she get to pass as a Caucasian?’ Because I passed. I did it successfully a lot of times without trying, but I did.

Diane describes a difficult situation here: while she is shielded from some of the detrimental effects of racial discrimination by her passing privilege, she still experiences discomfort due to a sense of “betraying” her people. A sense of solidarity with other Latino/as was previously presented as a coping mechanism – this can be complicated when the Latina in question passes as white, because her right to identify as Hispanic is questioned and occasionally dismissed altogether. While other Latino/as may see a passing individual as practically white, it is likely that the majority group will still
manage to ‘other’ the Latina – whether due to identifiers like last name, accent, or prominent cultural values. This may result in a loss of self-esteem and a feeling of displacement – the individual may feel like they do not fully belong in any group, due to something out of their control.

**Discussion**

The goal of this study was to discern the specific ways Latina young adults experience, understand and react toward incidences of racial discrimination. As a previously understudied population, Latino/as are presently gaining attention for being unjustly criminalized and scapegoated, particularly in regard to issues of immigration (Markert, 2010). Latino/as are the minority group least represented in higher education, and the disparity between white and Hispanic prisoners in the criminal justice system is growing (Hartney & Vuong, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). These statistics have led some scholars to examine Latino/as alongside African Americans in research on racial discrimination, utilizing the same measures of discrimination for both groups. However, using measures created for African American populations to assess discrimination for Latino/as may be problematic as different historical and cultural experiences likely shape the form and content of discrimination, as well as their effects. While the two groups do possess certain similarities, the current study finds support for the importance of addressing culturally relevant factors when examining racial discrimination and coping mechanisms across minority populations. Discrimination varies across both racial and gender lines in a variety of ways, and it is vital to acknowledge this diversity in future research. Key findings and their implications are discussed below.
My sample was composed of 12 respondents who identified as both female and Latina. They were asked in their interviews to address any discrimination they had experienced, as well as discuss their Hispanic identity and any coping mechanisms they had previously utilized against discrimination. The current sample was notable for its extremely high levels of ethnic identity and pride. Eleven respondents reported feeling very proud of their heritage, with only 1 participant expressing a more ambivalent outlook. Spanish language proficiency was one of the most significant factors contributing to the strength of ethnic identity. Speaking Spanish provided fluent respondents with an automatic connection to their fellow Latino/as, and resulted in a comforting sense of community and solidarity.

However, not all participants were able to speak Spanish. The inability to access certain parts of their community was not lost on them, and every respondent who could not speak Spanish reported wishing that they could. Although they still expressed pride in their heritage, some interviewees – both fluent and non-fluent – subscribed to the idea that Hispanic individuals who could not speak Spanish were not ‘true’ Latino/as. This has interesting implications for ethnic identification. It is possible that fluent Latinas could consistently report stronger levels of ethnic identity than their non-fluent counterparts, because they are essentially deemed as possessing a more legitimate right to their heritage. This is especially problematic for white-passing Latinas. Participants who looked white were often challenged to prove their racial background, and speaking Spanish was usually the method of choice. White-passing Latinas who could not speak Spanish were left unable to prove their connection to their heritage. This can have a
negative effect on ethnic identity. The inability to speak Spanish may act as a barrier toward fully participating in the Hispanic culture.

Consistent with expectations, microinsults were the most common form of microaggression faced by Latinas in this sample. Many of Rivera et al.’s (2010) domains were present in respondents’ experiences with discrimination. These included being denied service, having accomplishments questioned, and being treated like a criminal. Perhaps due to the use of a university sample, microinsults in the academic setting were extremely prevalent. Respondents reported that such experiences fostered self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, and generated a constant pressure not to ‘be the stereotype.’ Participants noted the lack of Latino/as in their university classes, and were aware of the ‘lazy’ and ‘uneducated’ stereotypes associated with the Hispanic community. This recognition could ultimately result in stereotype threat, wherein marginalized individuals perform more poorly on a task once reminded of relevant negative stereotypes (Schmader & Johns, 2003).

Research suggests that the cumulative and insidious nature of microaggressions lends to their particularly damaging effects on mental and physical health (Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Anecdotes from interviewees support this assertion – many reported being dismissed when they described their experiences with racial discrimination, with outsiders frequently invalidating their experiences as ‘overreactions.’ This led to respondents being wary of expressing their belief that they had been discriminated against, for fear of being labeled oversensitive or paranoid.

One of the primary questions the study sought to answer was how Latinas deal with interpersonal racial discrimination. A key theme gleaned from respondents was the
importance of culturally specific coping mechanisms; indeed, a majority of respondents
drew upon such mechanisms to deal with racial discrimination. The Hispanic emphasis
on strong family bonds was mentioned by nearly all respondents as a resource they could
turn to in times of need. Notably, few respondents reported specific conversations with
their parents regarding preparation for bias from the wider society, a practice that appears
to be more common in black communities (Hughes, 2003). Instead, respondents indicated
that preparation for bias occurred tacitly, especially through modeling. Respondents
observed their Latino/a parents employing protective coping mechanisms in response to
discrimination, which became part of the coping repertoire respondents could draw upon
in similar situations. These mechanisms were often rooted in cultural values, which
allowed respondents to feel connected to their community. This resulted in a strengthened
ethnic identity and promoted positive self-perceptions of Latino/a culture.

Not all coping mechanisms utilized a positive view of the Hispanic community.
The majority of participants engaged in distancing behaviors, where they separated
themselves from Latino/as who were perceived to fit the stereotype and give the rest of
their race a bad name. This concept is referenced in Elijah Anderson’s (1999) *Code of the
Street*, where it is illustrated by “decent” and “street” families. Anderson describes this
divide as a type of social contest. Decent families strive for a better life, while street
families use aggression and violence to get by. The current sample was predominantly
composed of Latinas who viewed themselves as decent. Their parents had emphasized
education and hard work, and these participants took pride in the fact that they were not
like other Latinas. This was a surprising finding, as Rivera et al.’s (2010) domains
indicated that being referred to as a credit to one’s race was generally viewed as a
microaggression. Respondents mainly referenced girls from high school when describing street types. These girls, often referred to by interviewees as ‘ghetto,’ used violence to cope with racial discrimination rather than engage in the prosocial coping methods utilized by respondents. Several respondents felt that these girls were prone to overreactions when it came to racial discrimination. When faced with negative stereotypes, the majority of participants reminded themselves that they personally were not ‘like that.’ They were not teen mothers, high school dropouts, or drug dealers. The implications of this coping method are interesting, because it is solely applicable to ‘decent’ individuals. ‘Street’ Latinas for whom higher education is out of reach would be unable to distance themselves from the negative stereotype.

Identifying as both Hispanic and female puts Latinas in a particularly vulnerable state. The current study, as well as outside research, suggests that racial discrimination is often gendered (Burt & Simons, 2013). Nearly every participant addressed the ‘spicy Latina’ trope in some form, and about half reported feeling an uncomfortable pressure from outsiders to adhere to this sexualized stereotype. Latinas were expected to be both sexy and submissive, fiery while still conforming to traditional gender roles. Failing to meet these expectations resulted in accusations of not being a ‘real’ Latina, an insult that produced quite the negative affect toward the self-perceptions of respondents. Many wondered what specifically constituted a ‘real’ Latina, and about a quarter of participants addressed the fact that it was literally impossible for them to become the ‘typical’ voluptuous Hispanic woman, due to their body type.

Several respondents also spoke to the uncertainty of microinsults in the academic setting. They could never be sure if differential treatment was due to their race or their
sex. This is conceptualized as the double-bind of being both Hispanic and female.

Gonzales et al. (2002) refer to this phenomenon as the double-minority effect, wherein two marginalized identities interact and produce a more detrimental psychological effect than either identity would manage on its own. The racialized form of sexism experienced by Latinas in this sample may account for the lack of solidarity with white women.

Several respondents addressed the fact that street harassment against Latinas was often racialized. They reported being yelled at in broken Spanish, or being referred to by demeaning names associated with Hispanic women. Thus, it may be difficult for Latinas to view harassment experienced by white women as a similar phenomenon.

While racial microaggressions did negatively affect the self-perceptions of the Latinas in this sample, they were able to engage in numerous prosocial coping mechanisms to deal with the reality of discrimination, many of which were rooted in Hispanic cultural values. However, these findings are not without limitations. Utilizing a university sample suggests bias – respondents were able to distance themselves from negative stereotypes because merely being in college suggested that they were different from their peers. The effects of strain were less present, because interviewees were already well on their way to achieving conventional goals; coping with discrimination through deviance was not an option for many, because they had a lot to lose.

Hopelessness and aggression were infrequent, possibly due to the fact that respondents were nearing the end of their college career and thus felt capable of achievement. Utilizing purposive sampling meant that several participants were close to each other, potentially resulting in a lack of variability. All respondents were at least juniors at ASU. Freshmen and sophomores who were still learning to navigate the academic setting might
have provided different results. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide the information of an interested friend immediately following their own interview. It is probable that at least some participants divulged interview questions and answers to their friends prior to said friend’s interview. Again, this may have resulted in a lack of variability.

Perhaps the most relevant policy implication supported by this study is the need for Latino/a history in schools. The majority of the participants in this sample had never taken a Hispanic studies class, and this was generally due to the scarcity of such courses. Several respondents concluded that the lack of focus on Latino/as was simply because no one cared about their history. This suggested to some that their cultural and historical narratives were not worthy of being told, a concept which may promote negative self-perceptions. Several participants reported college as the first time they were presented with the option to take Hispanic studies courses. As the minority group with the lowest educational attainment rate, it is problematic that Hispanic students are expected to already be in college before a course on their own historical background is offered to them. Latino/a history classes in high schools would provide positive and easily accessible representation for Hispanic students, and may even promote ethnic identity and racial pride.

This study illustrates the mutability of Latina self-perceptions, and suggests that they can be affected by a wide variety of both positive and negative aspects. These range from representation in the media, relationships with family and friends, to interpersonal racial discrimination. Future research should expand to a larger sample, one which includes a diverse selection of both Latinos and Latinas from a variety of socioeconomic
backgrounds. To Latinas in this study, a lack of representation suggested apathy from the majority population. Qualitative research may then provide a venue for Latino/as to address discrimination in their own words and facilitate a discussion on understanding and combatting the racial discrimination affecting the Hispanic community.
References


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APPENDIX A

INFORMED VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT
Introduction: My name is Callie Barstow, I am a second year masters student in the ASU CCJ department. I am conducting this research as part of my studies. The faculty advisor on this project is Dr. Callie Burt.

Purpose: I am studying the effect of racial microaggressions on Latina students at ASU – how they react to racial discrimination, how they cope, and what role the media plays. You were selected because you are an undergraduate or graduate student at ASU who identifies as Latina. While there are no direct benefits to you, I believe this research has important implications for the Latina population and research on racial discrimination against minority groups.

Procedure and time limit: If you choose to participate, you will take part in a one-hour interview with me. I will ask you about 30 questions and your responses will be recorded. I expect approximately 10 individuals will participate in the study. You will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card as a token of appreciation for your time.

Your rights: You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any question, and still move on to the next one. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your student standing at Arizona State in any way. You have a right to ask me any question and to have your questions answered. You may also request a copy of this form, or any other documents associated with the research findings.

Identity protection: All answers you give me will be kept confidential. While I know your identity, this will not be shared with anybody else. Some of your direct quotations may be included in the final report, but this will not be connected to your name. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview, but this will be saved on a secure data storage system, not on a public network and will be used only for transcription purposes. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded. If you choose to not be recorded, I will take notes on the interview in a notebook. Recording is solely for personal ease.

Risks: I do not foresee any physical or psychological harm that may result from your participation, other than what you experience in everyday life. Remember, you may refuse to answer any question, and may terminate the interview at any time. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact me at cbarstow@asu.edu, or at (909) 560-4444. You may also speak with the Principle Investigator, Callie Burt, at chburt@asu.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at research.integrity@asu.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 participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Please let me know if you would like to participate in this study. Participation in the interview will be considered your consent to participate in this research.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
This survey is a confidential interview composed of seven sections. It is designed to examine the types of racial discrimination experienced by undergraduate Latina students at ASU, as well as the ways in which they cope and form their specific identities.

In order to maintain confidentiality, please do not use your real name or the names of others when responding to interview questions.

Demographic Characteristics

What year were you born?
What year are you in at ASU?
How do you identify, racially and/or ethnically? (i.e. Mexican, ethnically Hispanic, Dominican, half Puerto Rican, etc.)

Cultural Background

What does being Latina mean to you? Do you think about your race often? In what types of situations?
Growing up, did you live in a predominantly Latino neighborhood? How do you believe this affected your identity, if at all? Has anyone ever made any racialized or ethnic comments about the place you live? More broadly, has living in Arizona – a state often referenced in immigration debate – affected your identity at all?
Are you the first to go to college in your family? How do you feel about that? Did your family support your educational aspirations? Has anyone ever expressed surprise at your pursuit of higher education?

Language Skills

Do you speak Spanish? If yes- fluently? Do you speak it mainly at home? If no- do your parents? Your grandparents? Friends? How do your language skills (or lack thereof) shape your identity as Latina?

Have your language skills (or lack thereof) ever been commented on? Positively or negatively? Both inside and outside your family?

Has anyone ever assumed you don’t speak English or aren’t from America? Why do you think that is? Has anyone ever automatically assumed that you speak Spanish?

Have you ever had your Latina identity questioned based on your appearance? Why do you think this occurred?

Racial Discrimination

How would you define racial discrimination?

Have you heard of the term “microaggression”? (Read definition if they aren’t familiar)

Has anyone ever told you that you're not like other Latinas? What do you think they meant? What characteristics do you think people might ascribe to other Latino/as? (Both
positive and negative characteristics) Have you ever ascribed any of those characteristics to other Latino/a people in the past, whether consciously or unconsciously?

Do you believe you have ever been ignored/excluded/or received differential treatment based solely on your race or ethnicity? What led you to the conclusion that it was because of your race or ethnicity? How did you react? How did you feel?

How would you describe a ‘typical Latina/o’? What would they look like? How would they act? Why is this typical?

How do you feel about the phrase ‘I don’t see color’ or ‘we all bleed red’? Why?

Deviant Behavior

Have you engaged in any reckless behavior in the past? For example, shoplifting, tagging, speeding. Do you still do any of those things?

Have you ever been arrested?

Have you ever been involved in a fight?

Have you ever been suspended or received detention? Have you ever been reprimanded by a person in a position of power? (i.e. a teacher, storeowner, etc.) If yes, does this happen often?

Do you enjoy taking risks? What kind?

Do you smoke or drink? How often and under what circumstances?

Do your friends engage in any of the aforementioned deviant behaviors? About how many of your friends?

What is your opinion of police and the criminal justice system?

What are some stereotypes/tropes you believe people associate with Latinos? With Latinas? Do you think there’s any truth to these stereotypes? Have you ever associated other Latino/as with these stereotypes? Has anyone ever associated you with them? How? If no, how can you be sure you’ve never been associated with these?

Stereotypes involving Latino/as includes the gang member, the criminal, the teen mom. Why do you believe this is? Has anyone ever associated you with any of the aforementioned stereotypes?

How do you feel, knowing that these stereotypes are related to your race? Do you think this can change? Why or why not?

You are aware that people have negative preconceived notions about Latina/os. When confronted with this knowledge, is there anything you tell yourself that makes you feel better? Does anything make it easier to hear about these stereotypes?
Racial Pride and Socialization

What is Latino culture, to you? Does your family consider Latino culture to be important? Which specific parts of Latino culture? How do you feel about their presentation of culture? Why do you think they have the opinions they do?

What have your parents said to you about being Latina? Have they ever discussed “other Latinas”? Positively or negatively?

Has your family ever discussed discrimination with you? How?

Have you ever had someone judge certain aspects of your culture in a negative way? How did it make you feel?

Do you know much about Mexican history? Did your school teach it? Why do you think this is?

Are you proud to be Latina? Why or why not? How do you express your pride?

Do you have many Latina friends? Why do you think this is?

Do your friends discuss race and ethnicity often? In what contexts? Positively or negatively? Do you believe they’re proud to be Latino/a? Does this affect your own pride?

Do you think your friends have experienced microaggressions as well? Do you discuss them when they happen? Do you have any coping strategies?

Media Portrayal

Can you think of a time when you saw your race negatively portrayed in popular fiction media? Positively? What media? How did you react? Give examples of portrayals you’ve seen and your subsequent reactions.

Do you think the amount of Latino/a characters in movies, television, and books are sufficient? Should there be more? Less? Why?

Do you believe your race is fairly portrayed in the news? Do you think there’s any bias toward Latino/as? Give examples.

Do you believe the media affects peoples’ opinions of Latino Americans? Both popular fiction media and the news. Why or why not?

What kind of representation would you like to see for Latino/as in the media? (i.e. more Mexican scientists, fewer gang members, Latinas who aren’t promiscuous)

Conclusion

Think back to any of these microaggressions you’ve described. Do you have any others that don’t fit into these sections?

Has anyone ever told you that you were overreacting in these situations? Do you agree with them? Is there a specific type of person that usually believes you’re overreacting?
(i.e., is it fellow Latinas, white people, family) Have you ever thought other Latino/as were overreacting in similar situations?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

What is a fake name you would like to go by if I quote you in my final project?