

7-2020

Doing Latinidad While Black: Afro-Latino Identity and Belonging

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Doing *Latinidad* While Black:
Afro-Latino Identity and Belonging

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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July 2020
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

This study centers on the experiences of Afro-Latinos and how the racialization of Latino as a distinctly 'brown' identity—thereby excluding Blackness—shapes their identity and sense of belonging within Latino communities and spaces. Through in-depth interviews with eight Afro-Latinos, and using West and Fenstermaker's (1995) work, 'Doing Difference', I find that the invisibility of Blackness, being categorized as Black, and therefore not Latino, and the negative meanings attached to Blackness may make it difficult for Afro-Latinos to come into their racial and ethnic identity and feel like they belong in Latino spaces. However, these experiences are also an important step to developing the awareness and language necessary for Afro-Latinos to discover a new way of doing race that allows them to embrace their identity and assert their belonging in the Latino community.

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INTRODUCTION

Starting in the 1980s, ‘Spanish Origin’ peoples began being counted as ‘Hispanic’ by the United States’ Census Bureau (Mora 2014). This began the institutionalization of Latino panethnicity in state and federal governments, Latino organizations, and in academia (Mora 2014). Though it is a fairly recent construct, many Latin American immigrants and their descendants have come to identify as Latino or Hispanic and assert it as an important racial and ethnic identity due to their experiences with discrimination, racial profiling, exclusion, and commonalities of language and culture that exist across Latinos (Waters 1990; Stoke-Brown 2012; Flores-González 2017). While Latinos can be of any race, they have historically been discriminated against on the basis of appearance and racialized as an ethnic group that is not White (Newby and Dowling 2007). As such, Latinos have come to be seen as a group that can be identified through their ‘brownness’ (Rodriguez 2000).

The equivocation of ‘Latino’ with ‘brown’ has led to the erasure of diversity that exists among Latino people. Additionally, when Latinos immigrate into the United States, they bring along with them the racial ideologies of their home countries which informs the way Latinos ‘do’ race in the United States. One such ideology is *mestizaje*—the belief that Latinos are the product of the mixture between Spanish, African, and Indigenous peoples that once lived together in Latin America. *Mestizaje* posits Latinos as a racial group that exists outside of the United States’ Black-White binary. As such, there now exists an image of Latinos as one *raza*, one people, with similar issues, beliefs, and cultures that does not necessarily reflect the lived experiences of all Latinos, especially those that have historically experienced marginalization in Latin America, such as Black and Indigenous peoples.

History has shown that this marginalization continues well after immigration into the United States. For example, Afro-Latinos that immigrated to the United States sometimes found themselves separated from their lighter compatriots and lived, went to school, and worked alongside African Americans (Grillo 2010; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019), leading to unique experiences that cannot be understood when simply looking at them as Latinos. Work on the recent condition of Afro-Latinos in America has shown that Latinos that identified themselves as Black have more similar outcomes to non-Latino Black Americans in terms of income, unemployment, and residential segregation than they do to non-Black Latinos (Logan 2003). In addition to diminished outcomes in this sense, Black Latinos must also contend with an image of *Latinidad* (Latino identity) that, more often than not, does not include people that look like them while also living with the stigma of Blackness that is perpetuated by other Latinos, including family members (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). The treatment of ‘Latino’ as a singular group, however, has made scholarly studies on Afro-Latinos, their outcomes, and identity, extremely limited.

For this study, I interviewed Afro-Latinos and used West and Fenstermaker’s (1995) work, “Doing Difference,” to understand how Afro-Latinos engage in doing race, especially with other Latinos, and how this shapes racial and ethnic identity and the way these Latinos navigate Latino spaces. Results show that Afro-Latinos may have difficulty coming into their racial and ethnic identity and discussing their experiences with racism within Latino communities because Latinos do not talk about the racial differences that exist among Latinos, exclude Blackness from *Latinidad*, and attach negative meanings to Blackness. However, for many Afro-Latinos these experiences are the first step to developing an awareness about their identity and new ways of doing race that foster a greater sense of belonging within Latino spaces and community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race in Latin America

Although we would not guess it through the representations of Latin America, people of African descent constitute a considerable portion of the Latin American population. When we consider the history of Latin America and of Afro-diasporic people, however, Black Latin Americans are rarely included (Andrews 2004; Vinson 2006). Latin American countries with the largest percentages of people that identify as Black include, Brazil (about 50% of the population), Cuba (35%), the Dominican Republic (24%), and Colombia (10.3%). On the other end of the scale, countries with the least amount of Black identified people include, Guatemala (.0%), El Salvador (.1%), Bolivia (.2%), and Argentina (.4%) (Telles 2014). Scholars have noted that race is more fluid in Latin America than in the United States—running across several continuums, depending on the country, instead of having a strict White-Black binary (Andrews 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). Many countries in Latin America have a variety of racial labels that are associated with different racial mixtures and that carry with them different connotations of status as well. Which racial label is applied to a given individual does not solely depend on their racial heritage; skin color and occupation status can ‘elevate’ someone out of their race and ‘whiten’ them (Wade 1997). Despite this possibility for elevation, however, Indigenous and Black Latin Americans continue to be at the bottom of the racial order throughout Latin America (Wade 1997) and Blackness has been considered the most visible and obvious marker of low social class (Andrews 2004).

The association of Blackness with low social class and primitivism led to institutionally supported whitening regimes throughout Latin America—including Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela, where state funds were allocated to help pay for European passages to Latin America—as they

underwent modernization and jockeyed for a position among the ‘civilized nations’ (Andrews 2004). During this period, Black Latin Americans were relegated to slums in Cuba and Brazil, faced employment discrimination, and were forced to shake off the vestiges of their African past, such as traditional African names, religion, and drumming (Andrews 2004). Even after national projects of whitening were abandoned in favor of creating a national identity centered on ‘brownness’, whitening as an ideological concept has continued to persist and has migrated over to the U.S. context where Afro-Latinas’ bodies, in particular, continue to be policed by their families, such as when Afro-Latinas are reminded to stay out of the sun (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). Furthermore, Afro-Latinas, more so than Afro-Latinos, are seen as being the carriers of the stigma of Blackness. Comas-Diaz (1996) states, “having a LatiNegra daughter-in-law, as opposed to a LatiNegro son-in law, is often perceived as marking the decline of the family’s status and class” (p. 5).

As many countries in Latin America began to adopt a national identity centered on brownness, the concept of *mestizaje* was embraced and promoted as a racial system that set Latin America apart from the United States. Wade (1997) defines *mestizaje* as biological, as well as spatial and cultural mixture that results in new cultural forms and peoples. *Mestizaje* also works as an ideology that values racial mixing, while erasing the existence of Black and Indigenous peoples. Rivero (2005) states, “in many Latin American and Spanish Caribbean nations, *mestizaje*, or racial mixing, is a key factor in the construction of a racially integrated society, because everyone, regardless of skin color, is racially mixed, and hence, an equal member within the nation” (p. 13). Although *mestizaje* is often celebrated as being revolutionary because of its celebration of racial mixing, as opposed to racial purity (Anzaldúa 2012), what is often overlooked is the way *mestizaje* ideologies imply the eventual disappearance of Black and

Indigenous peoples into the mestizo race (Hernandez 2003), and a mixing *towards* Whiteness—biologically and culturally.

Haywood (2017) emphasizes that a belief in *mestizaje* racial ideologies implies an allegiance to whitening processes. *Mestizaje* ideologies in Latin America often take on an assimilationist approach to Black and Indigenous Latin Americans, expecting for these groups to eventually biologically and culturally mesh with the larger mestizo population by incorporating select elements of Black and Indigenous cultures into the commodified national image. These may include aesthetics related to music, dance, and clothing. However it is also expected for these groups to leave behind the parts of their culture that are deemed too Black or Indigenous; including certain religious elements and naming practices, and expecting for Black Latin Americans and Indigenous peoples to eventually racially mix into the mestizo population (Wade 1997).

Although *mestizaje* ideology relies on an image of inclusivity, and Blackness was eventually incorporated into the various national cultural identities that were adopted and exported—such as in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Brazil—this celebration of Black culture was mainly enjoyed in an appropriated manner by the upper classes. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s Afro-Cuban music was on the rise in Cuba and internationally. This was a result of Whites appropriating exotic elements of Afro-Cuban culture, however you typically would not see Black musicians in the orchestras that played Afro-Cuban music (Wade 1997). Furthermore, anti-Black discrimination and stereotypes has continued to be a regular part of life throughout Latin America where employment discrimination against Black Latin Americans persists (Andrews 2004). In several countries, Black Latin Americans continue to geographically live in the margins of society. This is the case in Mexico where Black Mexicans are relegated to

Costa Chica, along the southern coast of Mexico. The geographic relegation of Black Mexicans to the coast, makes it so that those that live towards the interior of Mexico often do not know about the existence of Black Mexicans in their country (Vaughn 2005). This mirrors the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Mexico who are also erased by the *mestizaje* narrative. Although the Aztec past is romanticized and embraced as central to Mexican identity, Indigenous Mexicans continue to be marginalized and discriminated against (Vaughn 2005). This contradiction between the incorporation of Black and Indigenous culture and history into national identities and the inherent erasure of these groups by *mestizaje* ideologies can be found in several countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, and Cuba (Wade 1997). When Latino immigrants enter the U.S., they must contend with a new racial order and figure out their position within it.

Latino Identity and Afro-Latinos in the U.S.

The perceived change in the racial order of Latin America from outwardly based on Indigenous and Black inferiority and White superiority, to *mestizaje*, marks a shift in the racial formation of Latin America that gets transferred over into the United States' context with Latin American immigration. Omi and Winant (1994) define racial formation as, "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed" (p. 55). Another example of a shift in racial formations is the creation of Latino panethnicity in the United States. Panethnicity refers to the consolidation of groups with previously distinct ethnic or national identities into a single ethnic group (McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004; Omi 1997). After immigrating to the U.S., Latinos are expected to adopt a panethnic label despite vast differences in the lived experiences of Latinos that are shaped by race, country of origin, and the conditions of their immigration.

For some Latinos, adopting this panethnic identity does not come easily and prefer to identify with their country of origin (McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004), but this preference changes with acculturation. As Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2001) state, “those individuals that are more embedded in the host society tend to accept the definitions of identity established by that society” (p. 239). As such, as Latinos spend more time in the U.S., they become more open to identifying as ‘Latino’ or ‘Hispanic’. Additionally, this panethnic identity holds salience for many Latinos because of the exclusion and racial profiling they experience in the United States, as well as the similarities of language, culture, and religion among Latino origin groups (Waters 1990; Stoke-Brown 2012; Flores-González 2017)

‘Latino’ is a recent example of the creation of a new racial category as a response to demands from Chicano, Cuban, and Puerto Rican advocacy groups (Mora 2014). Although Latinos are not recognized as a racial group on the census, since the addition of the Hispanic ethnicity question, this data has been used to construct Latino panethnicity as a racial analogy and is used to compare Latino outcomes to those of Whites and Black Americans (Mora 2014). As Mora (2014) states, “these analogies made Hispanic panethnicity seem like a racial classification and ultimately helped make the category feel more familiar to people who had always identified along other lines” (p. 198). This analogy has led to the construction of Latinos as a racial group with certain phenotypic characteristics that are used to identify individuals as being part of this group (Omi and Winant 1994; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Flores-Gonzales 2017).

Pairing the construction of Latinos as a racial group along with the *mestizaje* ideologies that Latinos bring from Latin America and pass on to their children, Latinos have come to be seen as a group that is not White, but also not Black—thereby excluding Afro-Latinos from

popular conceptions of *Latinidad*. Flores and Roman (2009) state that, “‘Afro-Latino’ has surfaced as a way of signaling the cultural and socio-economic diversity within the overly vague idea of ‘Latino’ and to call attention to the anti-Black racism in the Latino communities themselves” (p. 320). Many Afro-Latinos in the United States find that they are often mistaken as being African American, in part due to the “the foreignness of Blackness to Latinos” (Hernández 2003:153; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). However, according to the 2014 National Survey of Latinos, approximately 24% of Latino adults in the U.S. identify as, “Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean or of African descent with roots in Latin America” (López and Gonzalez-Barrera 2016). Interesting enough, of these Latinos, only 18% identified their race as Black when asked directly about it—highlighting the unique relationship Latinos have to race and the complicated nature of Black identity and *Latinidad*. Among Latinos, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans are most likely to identify their race as Black (Logan 2010).

Previous work has shown that these Latinos face diminished outcomes compared to lighter skinned Latinos. They face the highest rates of residential segregation, unemployment and poverty among Latinos and have lower reported income than the average Latino (Logan 2010). Though not about Black Latinos specifically, other work has shown that Latinos with lighter skin have higher earnings (Telles and Murguia 1990), occupational statuses (Espino and Franz 2002), educational attainment (Murguia and Telles 1996), and greater mobility into White, non-Latino neighborhoods than their darker skinned counterparts (South, Crowder, Chavez 2005), highlighting the privileged status of European phenotypes among Latinos in the United States. Additionally, Afro-Latinos often must contend with colorism perpetuated by their own families and communities, devaluations of their Black features, and social exclusion within Latino communities because of their race (Haywood 2017; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). As such,

Afro-Latinos not only face discrimination in the larger U.S. racial landscape, but also in their own Latino communities.

Doing Difference: Blackness and Latinidad

Although Latino panethnicity, and *Latinidad*, are largely seen as being inclusive of all Latinos—regardless of race, class, and country of origin—we see that for Afro-Latinos, reality does not always match this ideal. *Mestizaje* ideologies that see Blackness as inherently exclusive from *Latinidad* mean that Afro-Latinos must contend with being a part of a group that does not entirely recognize them as one of their own. Although scholars and the Census Bureau formulate ‘Latino/Hispanic’ as an ethnic label, it is applied based on appearances much in the same way a racial label is (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). As Latinos rallied behind ‘Latino’ as a panethnic category, they constructed the boundaries of Latino identity and posited themselves as a sizable and underserved minority by constructing racial analogies through panethnicity, making comparisons, and pointing out the similarities in the conditions of Latinos and Black Americans (Mora and Okamoto 2020; Mora 2014). This allowed Latinos to position themselves as a distinct minority but, “at the same time...the analogy revealed an important difference between the two underserved minority groups: Hispanics were like Blacks but each belonged to a different racial category” (Mora 2014: 198), thereby contributing to the exclusion of Afro-Latinos from *Latinidad*.

The exclusion that Afro-Latinos face becomes especially known through their interactions with other Latinos. For example, trying to navigate Latino spaces when others categorize them as Black—and therefore not Latino—leads to situations where Afro-Latinos may not feel comfortable being in Latino spaces—even characterizing Latino spaces as violent (Haywood 2017)—or feeling as if they have to overcompensate for their Blackness by speaking

Spanish or Portuguese publicly to assert their belonging (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). As such, West and Fenstermaker’s theoretical framework of ‘Doing Difference’ (1995) may be especially relevant for Afro-Latinos. West and Fenstermaker formulate gender, class, and race as differences that are ongoing, interactional accomplishments. We sort each other into certain racial categories and we do this categorizing based on the preconceived ideas we all have of, “what members of particular categories look like” (West and Fenstermaker 1995: 23). This is done regardless of how people identify themselves. People of color, however, are especially constrained to identify in certain ways due to how race is largely seen as a fact of nature. For example, even if they come from a mixed racial background, Black Americans are usually constrained to identify as Black (Waters 1990).

As both ethnic minorities within the United States, and racial minorities among Latinos, Afro-Latinos may face additional constraints on how they identify and when they posit themselves as Latinos by entering Latino spaces and their belonging in these spaces is challenged because of their phenotype. Through their ethnicity we would expect Afro-Latinos to identify as Latino, but their phenotype also rests outside of the constructed boundaries of *Latinidad*. Additionally, Latinos may have certain ways of ‘doing’ race that may differ from other groups and are informed by ideologies of mestizaje and panethnicity. This informs racial discourses and identity—as highlighted by the fact that over 40% of Latinos identified their race as ‘other’ on the 2010 census (Telles 2018)—and contributes to our conception of Latinos as ‘brown’. As West and Fenstermaker (1995) state, “the accomplishment of race consists of creating differences among members of different race categories—differences that are neither natural nor biological” (p. 25). The ‘essential distinctiveness’ between Blackness and *Latinidad* makes it difficult for Afro-Latinos to engage in ‘doing’ race with other Latinos and they risk race

assessment when they try to do so. It is then that Afro-Latinos often find themselves outside of the boundaries of who is considered Latino.

It is important to note here that my intent is not to downplay the harm that comes to many Latinos when they can be categorized as Latino because of their phenotype. The image of what Latinos look like propagated in the American media largely rests on being able to physically identify and racially profile Latinos as possible undocumented immigrants (Bustamante and Gamino 2018). As Omi and Winant (1994) state, “the selection of peculiar human features for the purpose of stratification is a social and historical process.” (p. 55). In the current climate of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments—especially anti-Mexican rhetoric and ideologies—there are certain features that we have come to recognize as Latino that make racial profiling for the purposes of immigration enforcement a daily struggle for brown Latinos and a daily fear for undocumented immigrants. Therefore, the purpose of this work is not to minimize the struggles that brown Latinos have to contend with, but to examine the unique experiences of Black Latinos that are often overlooked in scholarly work and rendered invisible in certain Latino cultural spaces.

Although we recognize the importance that race plays in structuring our lives, little work has examined the way Blackness affects the lived realities of Afro-Latinos. Hitlin, Brown and Elder (2007) contend that, “a large part of selecting one’s racial or ethnic designation involves where one aligns oneself in social space along societally-influenced dimensions of salient social groups” (p. 597). When it comes to understanding Latino self-designation, however, very few studies have specifically focused on Afro-Latino identity despite the emergence of this category signaling the importance of it and the unique experiences that have led to it.

Many Latinos that may be identified as Black by others may choose to not identify as such and may prefer to identify panethnically, either because they were not labeled as Black—and do not perceive themselves as such—in their home countries (Itzigsohn, Giorguli and Vasquez 2005), because of the stigmatization and continued devaluation of Blackness in both the Latin American and American contexts (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019), or simply because they feel that Latino as a racialized category describes their lived experiences best. Latinos of African descent are increasingly identifying as Black, however (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez & Velasco 2012), and emphasize the importance of Blackness in their lived realities (Haywood 2017; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019; García-Louis and Cortes 2020); therefore, this study examines different facets of how Latinos ‘do’ race and how this impacts the way Afro-Latinos make sense of the way their Blackness has shaped their racial and ethnic identity and how they interact with Latino spaces and communities.

METHODS

For this study, I recruited Afro-Latinos—including participants with two Latino parents or with one Latino and one non-Hispanic Black parent—over the age of 18 as a part of this study. Other qualitative studies on the experiences of Afro-Latinos have handled including Afro-Latinos with mixed ethnic or racial backgrounds differently (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019; Haywood 2017; Romo 2011). Although Afro-Latinos with two Latino parents and one Latino and one African American parent may have different experiences from each other due to differences in their cultural backgrounds, I have found no literature that explores the differential experiences of Afro-Latinos based on their background—though this would be a great direction for future research on the study of Afro-Latinos and the intersection of race and ethnicity in general. Furthermore, no matter their parents’ backgrounds, Afro-Latinos must ultimately

contend with being Black and Latino when many people—including other Latinos—see these two identities as mutually exclusive and do not recognize Blackness as belonging in Latino communities, which is ultimately the focus of this study.

Additionally, while recruitment materials for this study stated that I sought out participants that identify as Afro-Latino—suggesting that the participants I interviewed related to this term in some way—not all of the participants I interviewed used ‘Afro-Latino’ as a primary identifier. Some participants identified primarily as African American or identified more with their country of origin than panethnically, e.g. Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Peruvian, etc. Throughout this paper I use the term ‘Afro-Latino’ as shorthand to refer to those that are Black and of Latino descent. When participants identified otherwise, however, I refer to them accordingly in my results.

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview guide was constructed to include the three components of phenomenological interviewing: early context, experiential data, and reflection (Seidman 2013). For example, in the first component, participants were asked about how their parents talked about race growing up, then they were asked about their experiences within the Latino community. In the reflection section, participants were asked how they felt their experiences as Afro-Latinos shaped how they think about their Latino heritage and how they interact with Latino spaces.

Recruiting participants for this study was done through several avenues. First, I recruited participants locally around the Northwest Arkansas area by posting flyers and reaching out to higher education institutions. I was also put in contact with a Latino community leader in the Northwest Arkansas area that helped me get in contact with several Afro-Latinos interested in participating. More than half of my participants were recruited in Northwest Arkansas and

interviews were conducted face to face. Although I was hoping for this study to offer insight about Afro-Latinos in Northwest Arkansas specifically, trying to establish access to such a specific subset of people in an area that already lacks diversity was challenging. As such, I also recruited participants online, by sending calls for participants through listservs and social media. Interviews with these Latinos were conducted through video calls.

These results are based on interviews with eight Afro-Latinos. Six of these Afro-Latinos were from Northwest Arkansas and the other two were from Southern California. Although location is important when it comes to the identity construction process of Latino immigrants (Newby and Dowling 2007), and Arkansas and California have important contextual differences—especially considering that Los Angeles is a traditional gateway city and Northwest Arkansas is a relatively new destination (Jones 2019)—these two locations are similar in the sense that Mexicans make up the majority of the Latino community in these areas, and neither of these places have been a big destination for Latino origin groups with significant numbers of Afro-Latino immigrants (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas and Albert 2011), making Blackness an irregular part of Latino communities in both of these areas. Half of the Afro-Latinos were first generation immigrants; two of them were from Puerto Rico, one from Peru, and one from Brazil. The other half of my participants were second generation on, with heritage from Panama, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The majority of these Afro-Latinos were either pursuing higher education or already had an undergraduate or graduate degree. The Afro-Latinos I interviewed were equally split between men and women.

To protect participant confidentiality, all names were replaced with pseudonyms and identifying information removed or changed. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed and coded (Bailey 2018). I conducted two interviews in Spanish and these interviews were

transcribed in Spanish and then translated to English and coded. I then used a grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) approach to coding by first conducting line-by-line coding with each interview and then moving into focused coding by comparing codes that came up frequently and seemed the most significant across interviews through memo writing, and searching for the processes that were operating in the experiences that the Afro-Latinos I interviewed shared with me. Works on Afro-Latinos are incredibly limited, as such, this study was exploratory in nature and the themes noted here are meant to identify different facets of the experiences of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed that inform their identity and their sense of belonging in Latino communities that should be further investigated. These facets include invisibility of race and Blackness, being categorized by others, negative meanings attached to Blackness, and increasing sense of belonging through awareness.

FINDINGS

Most of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed grew up and navigated their lives not being recognized as Latinos. For many people, both Latinos and non-Latinos, there is a clear divide between Blackness and Latino identity—these identities cannot mutually exist. The lack of awareness of Afro-Latino identity seems to be due both to the limited visibility of Afro-Latinos in the media and to their lack of visibility in many spaces. Afro-Latinos often face extreme residential segregation in their home countries, and in the United States they tend to settle in the Northeast, though this is beginning to change with the increasing immigration of Afro-Latinos—and Latinos in general—into the South (Jones 2019). As such, the Afro-Latinos I interviewed often found themselves being categorized as Black by others in their everyday lives which informs the way others, including Latinos and non-Latinos interact with them. This category comes with certain meanings that shape how others interact with Afro-Latinos and in turn, Afro-

Latinos internalize these meanings; often times making it difficult for them to come to terms with their Black identity. However, the Afro-Latinos I interviewed noted that when they started gaining the awareness and language to talk about their experiences—including learning about the term Afro-Latino—they had greater sense of belonging and asserted the importance of this language in talking about the unique experiences they have among Latinos.

Invisibility of Race and Blackness

In Latin America, Black Latin Americans face erasure in the media and in discourses surrounding race. Outside of the *mestizaje* ideologies that emerged in many Latin American countries, there seems to be a stigma around talking about race that makes it difficult to confront anti-Blackness and for Black Latin Americans to discuss their experiences. These ways of doing race are then brought to the United States where Latinos are largely seen as being ‘brown’ and tends to lead to a lack of racial conversations among Latinos and little questioning of the racial order and the interpersonal racism and anti-Blackness that exists in Latino communities.

Arturo, a recent immigrant from Puerto Rico, told me about the racial segregation that exists in his home country, where most White Puerto Ricans live towards the interior of the island and Afro-Puerto Ricans live along the coast. Going on to discuss the racial attitudes of White Puerto Ricans that live in segregated villages, Arturo stated:

Those villages are villages of White people who are racists, but they do not know what ‘racist’ means because they are mixed. They are mixed White people, or they are Black too because we are all mixed. Here [in the United States], you can talk about how there are racists here, but in Puerto Rico, it’s a mix of races, but either way you find people there who are racist and ignorant, in my personal opinion.

Here Arturo touches on how ideologies of *mestizaje* make it difficult to talk about racism in Puerto Rico. It is easy for White Puerto Ricans to brush off accusations of racism by drawing on the national origin story of all Puerto Rican people being a mix of Black, Indigenous and White

racism. He compares this to the United States, where he feels it is easier to talk about racism. This may be due, in part, to the differences in racial ideologies in Latin America and the United States. While the United States historically maintained a clear dichotomy between Whiteness and Blackness, with Whites clearly being on top of the racial ladder; many countries in Latin America instead adopted ideologies of racial mixture and have a more fluid conception of race (Wade 2010; Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). This fluidity, however, does not protect Afro-Latin Americans against anti-Blackness, but it does make it difficult to confront and talk about. For example, Paulo—a Brazilian immigrant—discussed the lack of racial conversations that go on in Brazil, despite the clear anti-Blackness he had experienced:

In Brazil, you are socialized in a way that you actually don't question your racial identity, so you are supposed to overlook that. It's like, just, I guess, a fact of nature. So most people would try to avoid any conversation, and sometimes there is some awkwardness talking about racial issues, and so we, for the most part, pretend there is no issue and that's how kids are raised and so I always, obviously, saw the difference and lived the experience of being different and being treated differently because I was Black, but could never verbalize that, because there was no way, or nobody had ever told me, 'this is why'.

Paulo expressed that although he always noticed that he experienced differential treatment for the color of his skin, he was not able to put into words why he was experiencing these things because of the awkwardness that comes with trying to talk about racial issues in Brazil. Additionally, race being seen as a 'fact of nature' establishes race in Brazil as prediscursive (Butler 1999), leaving little room to engage in critical conversations about it.

In the United States, this lack of conversation about race continues. Other than ideologies of *mestizaje*, discussions about Blackness and anti-Blackness tend to be limited among Latinos because many simply do not know about the existence of Afro-Latinos due to the lack of visibility of Afro-Latinos in certain Latin American countries and in the media. When I asked Anna, a Peruvian immigrant, about how Latinos tend to talk about race, she stated:

Yeah, I mean, we don't. There's a lot of colorism and it was a really difficult moment for me to navigate because when I moved to the United States, I moved to L.A. which is very Mexican and Central American. Their understanding of Blackness is very different from mine or people from the Caribbean...I mean, there's not an understanding among the Latinos that I grew up with, at least here in the states, or in the West Coast, of what it's like to be Black and Latino; that there are Black people in Latin America. They had not seen that.

Like Anna, many of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed expressed that they felt that the reason that it was difficult for many Latinos to conceive of Black people as Latino was because of their lack of exposure to Afro-Latinos. When I asked Jonathan, a second-generation Puerto Rican American, why people often assume Black people cannot be Latinos, he stated:

I think it depends on the background they come from. Like I said, in Puerto Rico, some, like, 65% of Afro-Puerto Ricans live in one town so a lot of them aren't exposed to Latinos of different shades, and so I think...if they come from, like a Taino, or like a Euro-descended background, and then that's what they see growing up. That's what they identify as being Latino.

Like Arturo, Jonathan touches on the residential segregation in Puerto Rico and how it contributes to the invisibility of Blackness to many non-Black Latinos which, in turn, erases Blackness from conceptions of what Latinos look like. People make assumptions about what Latinos look like based on the representations of Latinos they see growing up. If they never see Black Latinos—whether that be due to residential segregation or because of their lack of visibility in both Latino and American media—then they have no conception of Latinos as Black. This separation of Blackness and Latino identity may make it difficult for Afro-Latinos to come into their identity and find a sense of belonging. Jonathan went on to discuss the experiences of Afro-Latinos on college campuses:

I think a lot of times, especially for like, the first-gen Afro-Latinos, you have no clue where you belong on a college campus. It's like, 'well can I be Black and Hispanic? Is that allowed? Like are people going to welcome me in both communities? Am I going to be seen as someone who just kind of assimilates to whatever's around me?'

Due to the “essential distinctiveness” (West and Fenstermaker 1995) that many believe exists between Blackness and *Latinidad*, many believe that it is, in fact, not possible to be both Black and Hispanic. For example, Veronica, a second-generation Dominican American, was explicitly told to stop claiming to be Latina because she was Black, and those two identities are mutually exclusive:

When I was younger, people would be like, ‘oh how can you be Latina? You’re Black. Black people can’t be Latinas. Stop thinking that you are’.

I asked Veronica why she thought this occurred and she stated:

Because, I guess, they never really grew up seeing a different color than them, because they were lighter toned and most of them were Mexican. A lot of the people that I grew up with didn’t even know the different Hispanic races. They would just always think Mexican, Mexican, Mexican, or brown, light brown, and they never saw Black Hispanics or Latinas ever.

Growing up in an area where the majority of the Latino population is Mexican, Veronica found that many people were not aware that Latinos could be from countries other than Mexico and this created a very specific image for many of what Latinos could look like and be from. *Mestizaje* racial ideologies that emerge in Latin America and are brought into the United States and the limited visibility of Afro-Latinos in both places makes race difficult to talk about in the Latino community, puts forth certain phenotypes as ‘Latino’ and leads to Afro-Latinos being categorized by their looks as Black, thereby automatically excluding them from *Latinidad*.

Identity Defined by Others

In their day to day lives, Afro-Latinos are often categorized as Black by others, both non-Black Latinos and non-Latinos, because of their phenotype, regardless of how they identify themselves. While many of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed stated that people were right to categorize them as Black, what this categorization also meant was that Blackness became their whole identity and they were automatically excluded from being Latino as well. For Alexis, a

third-generation Panamanian and African American, she found that her family members would harken back to the one drop rule in American history when they would consider her to be more Black than Latina:

My aunts and uncles would kind of go back to this idea of like, there's also the one drop rule too, where it's like if you have any mix of Black in you then you're more Black than you are anything else, basically. You are considered Black by societal standards if you even have one drop of Black in you, and so they would ignore the Latino side and forget it.

Though many Latin American countries have a more fluid construction of Blackness than we have historically seen in America with the one drop rule—with Black Latin Americans sometimes being able to 'elevate' themselves out of Blackness through being mixed or having a high occupational status (Wade 1997)—for Afro-Latinos in the United States, once they are categorized as Black, it excludes them from *Latinidad* in the eyes of many, even when they assert a Latino identity.

Alexis went on to describe the identity struggle she often finds herself engaged in and the dissonance between what labels people attach to her appearance and her ethnicity that is not immediately apparent. She stated, "I don't feel like I've always been able to outwardly say, like, oh yeah I'm African American but also I am Latino as well. I feel like I always have to stop at what people can see on the exterior..." Knowing that people would typically not identify her as Latina because of her phenotype also impacted Alexis' sense of belonging in Latino spaces:

Initially when I go into a Latino space, I kinda feel like I'm in the middle because, again, on the exterior if you look at me, um, some people are like, 'she's definitely Black'...And so, I think it kind of initially depends, I think, on how I get a feel for the room, how people look at me when I walk in, you know, um, or who I'm with when I walk into a Latino space...

Despite being Latina and having been immersed in that culture since a young age, feeling comfortable in Latino spaces did not happen automatically for Alexis since she knows she is categorized by others as Black, and therefore an outsider.

Kimberly, a second generation Mexican American, felt like she sometimes needed to qualify her Mexican identity to have it make more sense to other people and to assert her belonging:

When people ask me what my ethnicity or race is, I feel like I typically just say Mexican. Sometimes I'll say like, 'we're Afro-Mexican', but I think for the most part I just say Mexican. It really depends on how the person reacts. Most of the time they make a face like, 'oh I wasn't expecting that', and I feel like that's when I say 'oh I'm Afro-Mexican' to kind of give them a little bit of that extra information...

When Kimberly revealed her identity to others, because her phenotype does not match what we typically expect Mexicans to look like, they would be confused at times and she would have to specify that she is Afro-Mexican—confirming for others that, yes, while they are right to assume she is Black, she is also Mexican. Even when Kimberly outwardly performed her Mexican identity to assert her belonging, she found that it was not enough to ward off people's skepticism:

Growing up people always used to question my identity. When they used to ask me where I was from, I would say like, 'oh I'm Mexican. My family is from this place', and people would always question, like, 'oh, if you're Mexican', like, 'prove it to me', like, 'tell me something in Spanish'. So, I always had to prove myself to people so that they would believe me or a lot of people would be like, 'uh yeah you're not Mexican, you don't look Mexican', like, that whole thing of if it looks like a duck it quacks like a duck, so they would always say that I'm Black...

Previous research has discussed the importance of language in allowing all Latinos, especially the second generation and on, to assert their belonging in the Latino culture (Garcia 2020), however language is a tool especially important for Afro-Latinos to assert their ethnic authenticity (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). Despite this, however, Kimberly found that

because of her outward appearance, others had already categorized her as Black and that meant she couldn't possibly be Mexican as well, even when she entertained their tests and spoke to them in Spanish. Indeed, many of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed discussed the difference between what people see and racially categorize them as and how they identify themselves. For example, Jonathan stated:

I don't think commonly people will associate [Latino] with African culture. I think it's one of those things that needs to be more explicit. Me being Afro-Latino, while at home I practice Puerto Rican culture, when I'm out in the world, just on sight, I blend in with African American culture much more easily, right. When I'm walking around town, you know, other African Americans see me and say hi because there's like, you know, there's five of us.

Jonathan knew that although Puerto Rican culture was a big part of his identity, because of his phenotype, people would not see his culture and instead would categorize him as African American. Jonathan went on to discuss how this translates to trying to navigate Latinos spaces:

So, it's funny because when I first walk into a room that's, you know, like, a Latino space, like we have the Latino student organizations here, people assume I'm not Hispanic or Latino [laughs]. Um, they see me, they assume I'm Black—which, I mean, I am Black, but that's not all I am.

Even when entering Latino spaces, Latinos would categorize Jonathan as Black. Though they are right to do so, by categorizing him as Black that became his whole identity in their eyes. He went on to state, “sometimes it's kind of amusing. People talk about me in front of me assuming I can't speak Spanish”. West and Fenstermaker (1995) discuss how we treat appearances, “as if they were indicative of underlying states of affairs” (p.20) and in Jonathan's case, being Black also meant that he couldn't possibly speak Spanish.

To make sense of a Black Latino identity, people tend to formulate this identity as the result of a union between an African American and non-Black Latino—they do not typically associate Blackness with Latin America. As Anna stated:

I constantly had to explain to people that, that Black woman was my mom. Um, they always thought that I was, like, half Latina and then half Black, which I am, right, but they couldn't comprehend that my mom was Latina and spoke Spanish. To this day my mom speaks Spanish to people and she speaks perfectly good Spanish, you know. She was a journalist in Peru as well, but people refer back to speaking to her in English just because it doesn't register in their minds that she can be Latina.

Since, Anna herself is able to 'pass' as non-Black, others were always shocked to see her Black mother that was Afro-Peruvian and spoke Spanish. Anna highlights here that one of the ways people make it clear that they exclude Blackness from *Latinidad* is by automatically speaking to Black people in English instead of Spanish or Portuguese. For many people, Blackness and *Latinidad* are two essentially different categories. When Afro-Latinos are categorized as Black based on their outward appearance, even outwardly performing their *Latinidad* for others by speaking Spanish or Portuguese is not enough to move them in the 'Latino' category. For the Afro-Latinos I interviewed, not being identified as Latinos and the negative meanings attached to Blackness made navigating their identity as Afro-Latinos difficult at times.

Negative Meanings Attached to Blackness

With Blackness comes certain meanings of what Blackness is and who Black people are. These meanings are typically negative and are perpetuated by the limited representations of Black people in the media in both Latin America and the United States. For example, previous work has investigated the invisibility of Black people in Puerto Rican media and the simultaneous proliferation of blackface characters (Rivero 2005). In the United States, Patricia Hill Collins discussed stigmatizing controlling images and the role they play in justifying the domination of Black women while obscuring the true underlying causes of strife and poverty (Collins 2009). Additionally, García-Louis and Cortes (2020) noted that *anti-Afrolatinidad* among Latinos is a, "tool in safeguarding the Darwinian origins of *Latinidad*" (p. 11). For some of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed, the negative meanings attached to Blackness by both Latinos

and non-Latinos made coming into their Black identities difficult. For other Afro-Latinos, however, witnessing the devaluation of Blackness by others was an important experience that made them aware of their racial identity and the fact that they had different experiences from the rest of Latino community. Such was the case for Anna while growing up in Peru:

One of the places where I was really awakened to [my identity] was when I was really little. I was with a bunch of friends and, I don't know, we all got into a fight, like you know...the little fights that you get into and so, I must have been six or seven and I remember a friend just yelled at me, like, 'your mom is Black', like as an insult and I was just like, shocked that that was an insult... I don't know, it was just, like, the fact that I was Black or that my mom was Black and that was something that would be an insult made me realize that I was very much Afro-Peruvian.

This early instance of being othered because of her mother's Blackness and realizing that others saw Blackness as something to be looked down upon made Anna realize from a young age that she was Black and different from the Peruvians she grew up with. Paulo had a similar experience of being othered for his race in Brazil:

In your science and history books, in Brazil, we always have that chapter that talked about slavery and had pictures, and after that class is over, you have your classmates laughing at you because you are a—they would say the word 'slave' in Portuguese—and say 'you look like this one, so you are this one'. So, it was an easy way for them to approach the past. For us [Afro-Brazilians], because there was no space to talk about where we came from, because it was painful for us and uncomfortable for them, then there's this, I guess, black hole that you don't know how to fill because most people don't want to talk about it. It's almost invisible, but it presents itself all the times, I would pretend it's not there, but whenever we try to forget, somebody will do something to remind us.

For Paulo, one of the ways that his Brazilian peers othered him was by reminding him of the stigma associated with Blackness through the history of slavery. Here, Paulo touches on how it was hard to talk about race while growing up in Brazil because it was painful for Afro-Brazilians and uncomfortable for non-Black Brazilians, however even when Afro-Brazilians do not want to engage in these type of discourses, they are reminded of their race and the diminished status of

Blackness through experiences such as these. Similarly, Kimberly describes the negative views Latin Americans have of Black Latin Americans:

With my partner's family, his dad's side, they're Colombian and they do reference Afro-Latinos. They talk about, in Colombia, like on the coast, there's a big population of Black Colombians... They always kind of refer to them negatively, like, they're lazy, like the Blacks in Colombia are, like, really lazy, that they don't want to do anything for themselves. So typically, my experience has been that they mostly refer to Afro-Latinos negatively.

Though Kimberly told me that she typically did not hear Latinos talk about race, when she did hear it, it was usually at the expense of Afro-Latinos and, in this case, perpetuated images of Black people as lazy, a stereotype that seems to cut across borders.

In the United States, the negative representations of Blackness can play a role in how Afro-Latinos choose to identify themselves. Such was the case for Veronica:

In the past...I always just wanted to be identified as Latina, never Black. I never wanted to be associated with that, in the past, because, like...people looked at it as a bad thing and that's how I saw it too. I was like 'oh I don't want people to think I'm Black because it's bad' so I'd just be like, 'I'm Latina'.

When I asked Veronica why she thought being Black was seen as a bad thing, she stated:

Well, I guess because the history of how Black people were treated and how Black people are seen, like, in TV. They're always, like, the bad guy and stuff. So, you never really see good things about it.

Earlier in life, Veronica was uncomfortable with being identified as Black and did not identify herself as Afro-Latina because of the negative meanings attached to Blackness through portrayals of Blackness in the media and because of the history of violent anti-Blackness in the United States. When people asked her about her identity, Veronica would typically only assert a Latina identity, hoping that the mutually exclusive construction of these two identities for many people would disassociate her from Blackness.

Blackness is steeped in negative meanings to the point where some may see calling someone Black as an insult. Such was the case for Sergio, an immigrant from Puerto Rico, who found that even when he asserted an Afro-Puerto Rican identity, at times, other Latinos would choose to not acknowledge his Blackness because they thought it would be disrespectful:

Here [in the United States], a lot of people seem to be scared to call someone Black because they think it shows a lack of respect...but I think we need to break that stereotype, you know because, the way I see it, calling someone Black is not a lack of respect. It's my color, you know.

Sergio asserted that it was important for people to call him Black, not only because it is an important part of his identity but to help move away from the view of Blackness as an inherently bad thing. The colorblind ideologies of these Latinos were not sparing Sergio from racism, but instead, perpetuating negative meanings of Blackness without leaving any room for discussion.

For the Afro-Latinos I interviewed, they found that Blackness—both in Latin America and the United States—was viewed negatively. They were othered by Latinos by having their Blackness pointed out to them and being reminded of the negative meanings attached to their race. For some Afro-Latinos, this alienated them from their own identity and made them suppress their Black identity, but for others it was an important step forward in coming into their Afro-Latino identity. Afro-Latinos seem to further embrace their Black identity when they develop the awareness and language to talk about their experiences and their identity.

Empowerment Through Awareness

The tendencies for Latinos to avoid talking about race, whether because they turn to *mestizaje* ideologies to wave away any discussions about race and racism or because of the lack of awareness of the racial differences that exist among Latinos, makes it so that many Afro-Latinos do not have the language available to discuss their experiences and their identities. Once

they develop this language and awareness, however, it allows them to learn new ways of doing race, empowers them to fully claim their identities, and assert their belonging in Latino spaces. Such was the case for Veronica, for whom claiming the term Afro-Latina helped her feel more comfortable navigating Latino spaces and asserting her Latina identity, as highlighted in this exchange:

Vianny: So how comfortable do you feel being in Latino spaces?

Veronica: I think I'm comfortable. More comfortable than before.

Vianny: How come more than before?

Veronica: Because before I felt like I didn't really fit in, like with my Latino friends, because of my skin color. I thought I was different, so.

Vianny: So, then would you say coming to identify as Afro-Latina has helped you feel more comfortable in Latino spaces?

Veronica: Yes, 'cause like, I feel I'm more confident, like, 'yeah, I'm Black, what about it'. Like I tell my friends all the time, like, 'yeah I'm Black'.

Vianny: So, then that identity has helped you claim being Latina more?

Veronica: Yes, 'cause I figured, like, when I was younger I always thought something was wrong with me, right, because you never really see Afro-Latinas here...or even in TV, like you never heard of it. I never heard about it, so I never felt like I belonged somewhere and then when I heard that term and I looked it up and I was like, yeah...

Previous work has also noted that discovering the term 'Afro-Latino' can be life altering for Afro-Latinos who previously had no way to describe their identity and had never seen others like them (Hordge-Freeman and Veras 2019). Veronica not only felt like she finally fit in with her non-Black Latino friends, but proudly asserted that she was Black and that she belonged in Latino spaces nonetheless. Paulo states that the discovery of Afro-Latino identity may not always be by choice and highlights how the process of immigration can contribute to the development of an Afro-Latino identity:

I don't think most Latinos or Afro-Latinos think of themselves as Latinos. They are just maybe Black, or maybe White, maybe mixed in their own countries, but when they find themselves in this situation of immigrants in the United States, then the label makes sense

to them because now it's like, oh okay, I can still claim my nationality, but is that enough to account for all the complexities of my identity?...I'd say most mixed people will not even question their race, even if they come here, they'll say just Latino until they are in a situation where they are treated like a Black person...

Describing the transitions in identity that occur when one moves into the United States from their home country in Latin America, Paulo states that some Afro-Latinos may try to distance themselves from Blackness but once they are categorized as Black, are treated like Black people by others, and they experience anti-Blackness in the U.S., they may realize that just claiming 'Latino' or their nationality may not be enough to account for these experiences. It is these kinds of constraints that may inform how Afro-Latinos choose to identify.

Paulo went on to state that becoming racially aware made him proud of his identity and discussed how his identity cannot be understood without recognizing his Blackness especially when it comes to how certain meanings attached to Blackness influence the way he is treated in the United States:

I now can say that I'm racially aware, so I have this consciousness about who I am and I'm proud of who I am, and so, it's hard to think of myself in broader terms without acknowledging that [Blackness] is what gives sense to anything else that I add to my identity. So it is, I think, the element that is going to be fundamental to understanding anything else that I am...Yes, we are all Brazilian but if the police comes, we know who is going to go to jail or who will be accused of something. So, then we are not Brazilians. We are, but we are not, because there are some things that would be taken into account if we get to a point of, like, sameness and difference, so my racial identity would be one of those elements that would be used against me, so.

Throughout our interview, Paulo discussed the importance of education in helping him develop the language, awareness, and concepts necessary to help him make sense of his identity and his experiences of anti-Blackness growing up in Brazil. Although Paulo identifies as Brazilian, he noted earlier in the interview that he cannot just be Brazilian, he must be Black and Brazilian and Black and Latino. He also points out that even though he shares a common Brazilian identity with others, his Blackness makes his experiences unique to him because he will be treated as a

Black person and this includes heightened policing because of the way criminality is attached to Blackness.

For Anna, the process of immigrating to the United States and witnessing the struggle of African Americans helped her make sense of previous experiences of anti-Blackness she witnessed in Peru:

I was very cognizant at an early age that I was a minority even in my own country—right because, [Afro] Peruvians are only 10% of the population—and that I was Black and that was only heightened when I came to the U.S. and I heard about Black pride, you know...because my mom was subject to a lot of the prejudices and I witnessed them when I was little. But... I feel like, this sense of connection with [African Americans]. When my mom was pregnant with my sister, I remember she was accused of shoplifting in Peru, and so that was such a unique circumstance I had not heard of that happening anywhere in Peru but then, you know, obviously those are things that you hear a lot about happening in the United States.

Although Anna was always aware of her identity as an Afro-Peruvian, her sense of being Black was heightened after seeing that the anti-Blackness her mother experienced in Peru was also happening to African Americans in the United States. While, in Peru, experiences like the one she relayed were nearly unheard of and seeing that that has been an ongoing struggle for African Americans helped her make sense of her past experiences. This also fostered a sense of solidarity with African Americans.

Jonathan discussed how one of the important facets of Afro-Latino identity was that it allowed for him to meld his Black and Latino identity and helped him have the language to discuss how putting these two identities together creates a unique experience:

So, I think, for me, [being Afro-Latino] means that I don't have to pick and choose my identity. I can be a blend of two different things and that's fine and there is a community of people that, you know, share that with me. I think it also means that recognizing that while I am Latino and while I am African American when you put them together it's a different experience...I think it's important to have that because, like I said, growing up people didn't call me out because of my ethnicity, they called me out on my race all time...and having a community of people that understand what that's like is really

important. There's a lot of Latinos that are White-passing and they don't have to deal with explicit discrimination until they start showing their culture and they have the ability to choose that. I've never had that ability. When people see me, they know I'm something other... I—I can't ever hide that I'm a minority, you know.

Jonathan expresses that an important part of identifying as Afro-Latino is the comfort of knowing that there is a community of people that share similar experiences to his. Several of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed expressed a similar sentiment and stated that this helped them feel a stronger sense of belonging. Additionally, Jonathan states that he embraces an Afro-Latino identity because of the unique experiences with racism he has that non-Black Latinos may not necessarily experience. While White-passing Latinos may be able to hide their ethnic background, because of the color of his skin, Jonathan does not have that choice and will always be categorized as a racial minority and treated accordingly.

While it seems that Afro-Latinos are, in part, constrained to identify as such because of how others categorize them and treat them—as one participant, Paulo stated, “sometimes...you will identify some situations where people will show you what they think you are, even if you don't want to engage in any process of identification” —Afro-Latinos also embraced this identity as it allowed them to find new ways to do race in a way that allows them a greater sense of empowerment and belonging within the Latino community. Developing this sense of being Black and Latino and discovering the term ‘Afro-Latino’ helped the Afro-Latinos I interviewed realize that although they didn't see it in their day to day life, there is a larger community of Afro-Latinos that look similar to them and have similar experiences.

CONCLUSION

Latinos have certain ways of doing race that are informed by racial ideologies formed in Latin America and then transferred into the U.S. context that make it difficult for Afro-Latinos to come into their identity and feel like they belong in Latino spaces and communities. Ideologies

of *mestizaje* and the construction of Latino panethnic identity as an identity that excludes Blackness makes having conversations about the racial differences that exist among Latinos almost taboo and erases Blackness from *Latinidad*. This leads to both Latinos and non-Latinos categorizing Afro-Latinos as Black, therefore automatically excluding them from *Latinidad*, and this categorization shapes how others interact with Afro-Latinos. It is when entering Latino spaces or asserting their Latino identity that Afro-Latinos find that, because they have been categorized as Black, instead of being accepted, they confront exclusion from *Latinidad* and are told that they cannot be Latino even when they assert their belonging.

In addition to positioning Blackness outside of *Latinidad*, in Latin American and in the U.S., Blackness holds a second-class status with negative meanings attached to it. These meanings can harken back to the past and remind Afro-Latinos of their historical second-class status during slavery and reference current stereotypes that exist across contexts about Black people, including that they are lazy or that they are prone to stealing. The negative meanings attached to Blackness makes it difficult for some Afro-Latinos to embrace their Black identity but for others it was an important first step to racial awareness and discovering a new way of doing race that allowed them to embrace their identity and assert their belonging in the Latino community.

West and Fenstermaker (1995) describe doing difference as, “an ongoing interactional accomplishment” (p. 9). Included in the accomplishment of race is the creation of differences between racial identities that are used to “maintain the ‘essential’ distinctiveness of ‘racial identities’ and the institutional arrangements that they support” (West and Fenstermaker 1995:26). Since Latinos are largely seen as a racial group, we have established ‘Black’ and ‘Latino’ as essentially distinct racial identities. As such, when Afro-Latinos interact with others,

enter Latino spaces, or assert their Latino identity they risk racial assessment and are sometimes found to be lacking as Latinos because of their Blackness. Even when Afro-Latinos ‘prove’ their Latino identity by speaking in Spanish or Portuguese, others may assert that it is still not possible for them to be Latino because they are Black. Trying to interact with Latinos when many hold Blackness and *Latinidad* to be mutually exclusive identities leads to the exclusion of Afro-Latinos many times. However, once they have the awareness and language to talk about their experiences and identities, they are able to counter this exclusion, assert their belonging and build community with other Latinos. Thus, it is also through interaction that Afro-Latinos make their identity known and can help others learn about Afro-Latinidad—something that many of the Afro-Latinos I interviewed expressed was important to them.

These results point to a need to rethink the way we study Latinos. Although there is much work that examines the differences among Latinos based on their country of origin, little work has specifically focused on race and the way being a part of a racial subgroup while also being Latino shapes identity, everyday experiences, and outcomes on a variety of factors. It is important to note that these results are based on the experiences of Afro-Latinos in Northwest Arkansas, a majority White area that lacks diversity among the Latino population; and Southern California, a much more diverse area but one that is overwhelmingly Mexican. *Latinidad* will look different in different areas, and places that have historically been destinations for Afro-Latinos may have a broader idea of what Latinos can look like. For example, one participant expressed that being Afro-Latino in New York was easier than being Afro-Latino in Arkansas since there was greater diversity and more Latinos that looked like him, making the image of *Latinidad* there more inclusive. These results are also only based on eight interviews. Future

work is needed to further understand Afro-Latino identity and their experiences within the Latino community and in the United States at large.

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To: Vianny Jasmin Nolasco
From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee
Date: 10/23/2019
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 10/23/2019
Protocol #: 1909216916
Study Title: Afro-Latinos and Panethnicity

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Brandon A Jackson, Investigator