COLORFUL REFLECTIONS: SKIN TONE, REFLECTED RACE, AND DISCRIMINATION

Extended Abstract

Background

In the United States, there are a growing number of racial minorities. When people are believe they are not seen as their self-identified race, do they report less everyday discrimination than when they believe they are perceived as Latinx or Black? This study addresses a much-needed effort to better understand the connection between how people racially self-identify, how they think other people see them, their skin tone, and their reported experiences of everyday racial discrimination. Racial identity mismatch is the difference between an individual's racial self-identification and the racial identification they believe others assign to them (Gonlin, Jones, and Campbell forthcoming). I use Bonilla-Silva's theory of Latin Americanization of race to consider how Latinx are being incorporated into the contemporary U.S. racial system, and compare their perceptions of discrimination to those of self-identified Whites and Blacks, with a particular focus on the significance of skin tone.

Analyzing racial discrimination is useful for understanding the implications of anticipated racial changes in the U.S., as it is projected to become majority-minority (Colby and Ortman 2015). I demonstrate how racial identity mismatch is connected to racial discrimination, which continues to evolve in complicated ways that underscore transformations of the twenty-first century. I use racial identity mismatch to emphasize instances when an individual *believes* their race is identified in a manner that differs from their self-reported race. I do this to suggest that, while the reality of whether individuals are *actually* misclassified is important, this may not capture the full story. I expect skin tone to be an important factor in racial identity mismatch, which I believe will be connected to variations in perceived racial discrimination and provide

evidence for Bonilla-Silva's pigmentocracy theory of Latin Americanization. The literature emphasizes the connection between skin tone and discrimination, and racial identity and discrimination. My work ties all of these factors together to show how a mismatch in racial identity may be connected to discrimination, with an emphasis on skin tone.

Data & Methods

I use the Texas Diversity Survey (Keith and Campbell 2015) to analyze discrimination, skin tone, and racial identity mismatch. To address oversampling, I weighted responses in Stata using the svy commands with weights constructed from the 2014 American Community Survey by age, race and sex population estimates. I use data from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey to construct additional explanatory variables, such as percent Latinx in the ZCTA and median household income in the ZCTA. I included only the respondents who had valid information on all of the key variables, and used listwise deletion to drop any respondents with missing data. All OLS regression models are run as two-tailed tests.

Key Variables

Self-identified Race. Respondents were asked "What is your racial or ethnic background? Please choose ALL that apply." Their options included Black or African American, White or European American or Anglo, Hispanic or Latino/a, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Native American, and Other. Additionally, all respondents were asked "What race or ethnicity do strangers usually think you are." They were again provided the same set of race response options, but were asked to "Please choose just one."

Reflected Race. In order to compare the experiences of Latinx to those of Blacks and Whites, I use nine terms to refer to the identity variables tested. Please refer to Figure 1 below for a description of how these terms are defined.

Everyday Racial Discrimination. Self-reported discrimination was collected with two different question formats. Both formats ask whether the respondent experienced poor treatment in everyday situations, such as when shopping in a store or eating in a restaurant. Half of the sample was prompted to report experiences of racial or ethnic discrimination and the other half of the sample was asked about mistreatment in general, and were provided a follow up question about the primary cause of the mistreatment, with race and ethnicity as one of the options.

Additional Explanatory Variables and Controls. I control for the effects of gender, employment status, median household income in the ZCTA, percent Latinx in a ZCTA, percent Black in a ZCTA, education, first or second generation immigrant, and age.

Preliminary Results

I first run t-tests to analyze the connection between racial identity and reported discrimination, and find there is a difference in means of reported racial discrimination between unacknowledged and acknowledged Blacks and Whites. I then estimate OLS regression models, shown in Table 1, for Blacks, Latinxs, and Whites to assess the relationship between discrimination and racial identity mismatch, skin tone, and discrimination. I find that lighter skinned Blacks are less likely to believe others see them as Black, darker skinned Latinxs are more likely to believe others see them as Latinx, and skin tone is not significant for Whites. Blacks who believe others see them as Black tend to report more discrimination, and Whites who believe others see them as White report less discrimination than their co-ethnics. However, lighter skinned Blacks report significantly more discrimination than medium skinned Blacks. For Latinxs, racial identity match is not significantly connected to discrimination. Finally, skin tone is not significantly associated with discrimination for Latinxs or Whites, going against my application of the theory of Latin Americanization.

References

Colby, Sandra L. and Jennifer M. Ortman. 2015. *Projections of the Size and Composition of the US Population: 2014 to 2060*.

Keith, Verna M. and Mary E. Campbell. 2015. *Texas Diversity Survey [Computer File]*. College Station, Texas.

Gonlin, Vanessa, Nicole E. Jones, and Mary E. Campbell. Forthcoming. On the (Racial) Border: Expressed Race, Reflected Race, and the U.S./Mexico Border Context.

Figure 1. Racial Identity Mismatch Terms

	I identify as…	I think strangers see me as…
Acknowledged Latinx	Latinx	Latinx
Unacknowledged Latinx	Latinx	not Latinx
Perceived Latinx	not Latinx	Latinx
Acknowledged Black	Black	Black
Unacknowledged Black	Black	not Black
Perceived Black	not Black	Black
Acknowledged White	White	White
Unacknowledged White	White	not White
Perceived White	not White	White

Table 1. Racial Discrimination Reported by TDS Respondents, using Combined Coding of Discrimination

	Blacks (N=99)	Latinxs (N=79)	Whites (N=113)
Racial Identity Match	0.38***	0.14	-0.31**
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Skin tone (reference: medium skin)			
Light skin	0.19**	-0.08	0.04
	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.08)
Dark skin	-0.03	-0.32	0.05
	(0.05)	(0.38)	(0.20)

All models include control variables.

Standard errors in parentheses

** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$