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# Latin@ identity politics in higher education: unveiling representations of whiteness in Latin@ culture

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**Latin@ identity politics in higher education:  
Unveiling representations of whiteness in Latin@ culture**

by

**Michael Benitez Jr.**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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2015

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family for their ongoing support and love throughout the seven years it has taken me to complete this project. They have truly been there for me every step of the way. In many ways, I believe my doctoral degree should also carry their names along with mine. To my incredible and loving wife Arianna, whose unwavering support and love uplifted me many moments throughout this process, and whose sacrifice and selflessness made it possible for me to finish. To my children, Michael, Yazelyn, and Yanahli for their patience and understanding during the many moments when they knew I would rather be spending the precious time with them and they with me, but who understood the significance of my completing this project. They understood that this dissertation was not only about me, but about something bigger. I am grateful and thankful to have such a loving and supportive family and we all share in the claim and fruits of the completion of this project. I cannot say thank you enough.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, I have been provided with a plethora of opportunities to visit different educational institutions and conferences to present and lecture on issues around diversity and social justice, as well as to learn from my interactions. During my travels, some of the issues I often touch on relate specifically to and or have been situated around intersections of identity, and more often than not, race has served as the salient sociopolitical performer. In my work, I focus on racial formation and deconstruction, and interrogate the ongoing and complex processes related to racism, racial identity, and racialization within and across the geopolitical and transnational spaces that are Latin America and the United States (U.S.). More specifically, I am invited to present lectures and workshops that focus on critical examinations of race and racism in education and broader society. Through the work I do, I often engage administrators, faculty, students, and social justice activists and other intellectuals in critical dialogs aimed at exploring dynamics of race and racism individually, culturally, and systemically. One of the issues I am often called upon to address is how racial and ethnic identity formation informs organizational dynamics, leadership, and activism in higher education.

Through the work I have done on college campuses, and for many Latin@ identifying individuals I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with over the years, identity formation, race, and ethnicity within the varied Latin@ communities have always surfaced as salient issues. Many Latin@s with whom I have discussed racial and ethnic identity with voiced discontent and feelings of displeasure towards what they refer to as attempts by the U.S. to categorize them. Some Latin@s expressed feeling unable to define themselves or self-author as a result of racialization altogether. Self-authorship refers to individuals being able to define who they are for themselves,



thus allowing them to capture the fluidity, broadness, and complexity of Latin@ culture (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Racialization refers to the way race is created and imparted on people by institutions and social actions, not merely originated in people as their racial category (Martinot, 2003; Yancey, 2003). Steve Martinot (2003) explained, “race is something people do, rather than what they are” (p. 13), referring to race as cultural practice, whereby white dominant groups engage in racialized practices in order to assert and maintain power and control over groups who are socially and politically constructed as non-whites. Part of what I seek to mark throughout this project is the way in which whiteness shows up and is practiced among Latin@s in American higher education where Latin@ are not the white dominant group, but still embody ideologic, sociocultural, and phenotypic constructions of whiteness.

Culture, as theory and practice, is important to understand for this project. To be clear, I do not seek to study culture, but to theorize culture in a way that serves useful for readers to understand how I engage whiteness as cultural practice and representation within the contemporary Latin@ condition in the U.S. and related issues I will touch on throughout this theoretical work. Such issues include census racial/ethnic categorization, usage and meaning of the terms Hispanic and Latin@, racial/ethnic diversity within Latin@ culture, ethno racial cultural and identity formation, social relations within Latin@ culture and between Latin@s and non-Latin@s, and colorism and racilization within Latin@ cultures. Generally speaking, culture is often perceived as a set of norms and behavioral practices shared among individuals within, and in some cases, across social groups (i.e. across national borders as is the case for Latin@s), such as customs and traditions, activities, standards, principles, values and beliefs (Keesing, 1974). Conversely and precariously, culture also refers to the symbolic structures that give

human phenomena meaning (Connor, 1997; Geertz, 1973). For scholars and practitioners, the ways in which socially organized people and groups are influenced within and through, and the way relation dynamics of power and structures construct individuals' and groups' everyday lives, are essential to grappling with culture (Connor, 1997; McGowan, 2007). Culture is not a concrete deterministic way of being, but rather a fluid and and contested concept that can take on different meanings depending on political, historical, and contemporary processes and events that give culture, and by extension, cultural practices situated within, significance (Connor, 1997; Keesing, 1974).

Scholars across anthropological, sociological, psychosocial and cultural disciplines have theorized and offered varied epistemological understandings about the complexity of culture and the ways culture translates into or influences human practice and behaviors. Some scholars put forward adaptive understandings of culture anchored in ecological and evolutionary approaches privileging the interconnectedness between biology and environment (Harris, 1968; Rappaport, 1971). Others have posited ideational understandings whereby cultures serve as cognitive, structural, and symbolic system or a sociocultural approach where the varied ideational modes are interrelated (Geertz, 1973; Goodenough, 1971). For the purpose of this theoretical project, culture is theorized in the ideologic sense whereby “ideational designs for living, patterns of shared meanings and systems of knowledge, and belief are crucially important subsystems of ways-of-life-in-environments” (Keesing, 1974, p. 82). Such an understanding of culture accounts for semiotics and power dynamics, and considers the ways in which people interpret, adjust and respond to meanings associated with representation, signification and social expectations and the ways in which such functions shift and show up in contemporary culture (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Connor, 1997; McGowan, 2007) Further, such an understanding of culture makes it possible to

make visible whiteness as cultural practice within Latin@ culture, whereby representation, behavior, and ideology are interconnected and do not function separate from each other.

For example, racially and ethnically speaking, I identify as Puerto Rican, Latino, Afro-Taino and multiracial-ethnic, but I also understand that my fair, light brown skin tone signifies more than just skin color. My skin color symbolizes cultural meanings tied to the broader structures and complex histories I am situated in. Within the Latin@ community, I am described as Trigueño, a word used in Latin@ culture to refer to individuals who share my light brown phenotypic appearance/complexion. Hence, I have come to learn that there are times when my skin tone serves as a racial marker that disadvantages me, but it can also signify advantage in some instances. How I identify informs why I use the term Latin@ over Hispanic, although both have complex histories, are problematic, and can have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. Throughout the project I use the term ‘Latin@’ with an asterisk as opposed to ‘Latino/a’ to honor the complexity and fluidity within Latin@ cultures and refrain from using Latino/a as a gendered binary descriptor. For the purpose of this study, I use Gracia’s (2000) articulation of Hispanic/Latin@, politically situated in the United States to distinguish these identities. According to Gracia (2000), Hispanic is currently used to describe Spanish speaking inhabitants of Latin America as well as those who live in the United States. Latin@ on the other hand, refers to persons of Latin@ American descent regardless of their ancestry (Portuguese, French, Italian, etc.), and is inclusive of inhabitants from Latin@ America, irrespective of whether or not they speak Spanish, residing in both Latin@ America and the U.S. (Gracia, 2000). Latin@ in the context of the U.S. serves as a political identity that recognizes multiple and shared histories, though it is used in deterministic and essentialist forms. I will revisit these terms critically throughout this dissertation project.

While many Latin@s that I have met across the country have expressed choosing some form of racial/ethnic identity when completing the U.S. Census form as a way of being ‘counted,’ they have also expressed that they don’t particularly ascribe to current understandings of Latin@ identity. This I believe is in part due to how the term Latin@ is used to universalize many differing experiences, thus failing to speak to how differences among Latin@s are shaped by historical, cultural, and sociopolitical conditions. Some conversations pointed to why it is Latin@s identify within and across formulated racial/ethnic identities differently and what doing so means for them, with respect to family, social, professional, and personal relations. Formulated identities, refer to western, imperial, and social systemic racial disguises that do not allow for complexity in understanding identity (i.e., phenotypic appearance, values and beliefs, shared histories, relational issues of power and subordination, etc.), and is often utilized to determine who is Latin@, and what being culturally Latin@ means in the context of the U.S. (Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 2004).

Useful in helping to understand how I describe Latin@ness is sociocultural anthropologist Karen Brodtkin’s (1998) work on the racialization of Jews. She refers to the process of constructing ethnicity and race by dominant groups as ethno-racial assignment. Brodtkin (1998) also points to ethno-racial identity whereby people define themselves ethnically, and discusses the choice many Jews made to blur their ethnic identity by choosing to take a hegemonic identity plunge into cultural whiteness following World War II. Others who discuss how identities are formed in Latin@ culture point to the way these issues, rooted in historical and colonial legacies, that are in turn rooted in capitalism and cultural hegemony, influence present day and ongoing social relations within Latin@ and across non-Latin@ groups (Menchaca, 2001, 1998; Valdez, 2000; Vásquez, 2003). Scholars examining these issues across varied fields of

study, such as ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, psychology, cultural studies, and history maintain that these issues remain just as relevant to the structural make-up and cultural practice today, as they have historically (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Chanady, 1994; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Gonzales, 2000; Hernandez, 2003; Lopez, 2005; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Valdez, 2000). Mostly, the aforementioned dialogues in my visits to campuses reveal how Latin@s' identities, both imagined and real, lead to frustrations and challenges given the misperceptions and partial understandings around Latin@ness that don't quite capture Latin@s' broad-ranging histories and contemporary experiences. Much of the discussion I had with Latin@s on different campuses related to resisting structural racialization and deconstructing and reconstructing ethnoracial, gendered, and homogenized conditions of Latin@ness. Correspondingly, I also found many Latin@s to struggle with whiteness as identity and practice situated within Latin@ cultures. It is these experiences and ongoing conversations, along with my own subjective experiences and positionality within the Latin@ community, that inform the questions that I seek to grapple with in this dissertation project.

### **Background of the Problem**

Research studies and historical literature focusing on the intersections of whiteness, and Latin@ racial and ethnic identity (American Sociological Review, 2010; Behnken, 2011, Chabram-Deenersesian, 1997; Chanady, 1994; Gonzales, 2000; Garcia Bedolla, 2003; Hernández-Vázquez, 2003; Lee & Bean, 2007; Quijano, 2008; Uhlman, Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002; Telles, 2014) are minimally considered with respect to research discussions on the experiences of Latin@s in higher education (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cano & Castillo, 2010; Casas & Pytluck, 1995; Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Torres, 1999; Torres, &

Hernandez, 2007; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004 ). This absence of broader and deeper engagement across disciplinary bodies of work by higher education scholars with the cultural sociology and history of identity formation among Latin@s prevents new understandings about how Latin@ness functions in multiracial/ethnic environments such as that of higher education. A broader and more in-depth examination of Latin@ histories will help higher education scholars and practitioners better understand the Latin@ condition and better meet the needs of Latin@ students. Scholars examining racial and ethnic identity formation among Latin@ students speak to the importance of self-authorship among Latin@s and in so doing point to how the process of individual self-categorization can be problematic as it reinforces a society structured along racial and ethnic lines (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Torres-Saillant, 2002; Torres, 1999; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Thus, identifying how race functions within Latin@ culture and examining the role of whiteness as a subject matter, is in need of further unearthing.

A great deal of knowledge and understandings about the culture of whiteness has unbolted new insights and possibilities for understanding how white supremacy and racialization may shape ethnoracial identity in Latin@ culture (Frankenberg, 1997; Hernandez, 2003; Johnson, 1999; Lopez, 2005; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; Torres-Saillant, 2002; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004, Trueba, 2002; Uhlman, Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002; Valdes, 2000; Vázquez, 2003). Though some scholars acknowledge the importance of understanding Latin@ culture and ethnicity as a racialized identity, they have also either disregarded or opted to not critically examine how colorism and whiteness, more specifically, influence Latin@ ethnoracial identity within Latin@ cultures (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Felix-Ortiz de la Garza, Newcomb, & Myers, 1995; Golash-Boza, 2006; Rochmes & Griffin, 2006;

Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Still, this is not to say that there is a complete absence of literature examining how whiteness and colorism functions within and informs Latin@ culture (Montalvo, 1987; Montalvo & Codina, 2001; San Juan, Jr., 1993). Recent studies in higher education about Latin@s have been carried out utilizing Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano, & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) and theoretical Latin@ identity models that have provided a space for self-authorship (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012, Torres, 1999; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres et al., 2009). These studies have also helped educators gain valuable insight into the cosmic nature of Latin@ness as a culture. Cosmic identity is used to describe a hybrid (mixture) of races as a result of colonialism, miscegenation, and the histories and tensions that continue to shape and inform vast differences throughout Latin@ culture (Anzaldúa, 1987; Smith, 1997). Such theoretical frameworks and methodologies through which Latin@s are able to self-narrate, identify, and describe their experiences are important to advancing critical understandings of the Latin@ condition, but do not sufficiently capture the mechanics of racialization employed by Latin@s in the U.S. For example, on one hand cosmic identity aims to capture the varied identities and complexities existing in Latin@ culture that account for how gender, sexuality, race, and class intersect. On the other hand, cosmic identity is also referred to in ways that synthesize identities into a singular ethnic or brown race that do not account for racialization and colorism within and across Latin@ communities. More recently, whiteness among Latin@s has emerged as a critical project for further inquiry and focus warranting attention in education (Alemán, 2009; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; 2001; Garcia, 2015; Gomez, 2009; Loveman, 2014; Talles, 2014; Torres et al., 2009; Valdes, 2000; Vargas, 2014 ). However, research on identity development, and or individual experiences, does not emphasize enough the functions

Eurocentrism and whiteness have in shaping Latin@ identities and cultivating dominant/oppressive differences and relations with respect to color and intersecting identities such as gender, class, and religion (Bonnet, 2002; Branche, 2008; Hernandez, 2003; Hernández-Vázquez, 2003; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). Understanding intersectionality is important for this project given the complexity of Latin@ness. Osei Kofi (2013) refers to intersectionality as a descriptor that seeks to describe how different social categories such as gender, class, and race intersect in determining individual's social realities and as a paradigm that represents "a host of ideas that are informed by specific ideological perspectives and aims" (p. 13). Within Latin@ culture, identity may take on contextual and fluid meanings that permit for the suppression of certain aspects of Latin@ identity while honoring others (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). I am not implying that the literature does not consider Latin@ identifications of whiteness and the concept of race as part of their identity (Uhlman et al., 2002; Rochmes & Griffin, 2006; Torres, 2009; Trueba, 2002; Trianosky, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). Rather, I am pointing to the need to draw on antiracist and postcolonial lenses to dissect and examine racialized representations of Latin@ness in education more deeply.

### **Problem Statement**

While theoretical frameworks such as Latin@ identity models and CRT or LatCrit have been instrumental in furthering individual, cultural, and structural understandings of the function of culture, race, and ethnicity in shaping students' experiences in higher education, very little has been done among Latin@s to grant "critical attention to how whiteness offers a ground not only for the examination of white selves (who may indeed be white 'others' depending on the position of the speaker), but also for the excavation of the foundations of all racial/cultural positioning" (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). Thus, possibilities for unveiling whiteness to gain a varied version of



difference in how whiteness manifests and how it works through societal processes, beyond white bodies and local cultural practices, such as that of Eurocentrism and nation, are necessary (van Dijk, 2009; Giles, Williams, Mackie, & Rosselli, 1995). As Johnson (1999) notes, “the problem of race now includes those who are raced white” (p. 5), beyond white/non-white bodies.

Some related issues to consider surrounding the importance of this topic and project include the ways in which transnational, racial, ethnic, economic, religious, social, and geopolitical dynamics intersect to operate under the structural disguise of Latin@ness to reproduce whiteness, essentialist understandings of Latin@ness that obscure constructions of racialized differences within Latin@ culture and identities, and the ways in which deterministic understandings about Latin@s limit new understandings about Latin@ experiences in higher education. It is critical to consider these connections in order for Latin@s to be more accountable and to take more action in helping to facilitate social relations to help dismantle the marginalization that keeps many Latin@s at the periphery of institutions, or invites Latin@s to find a place of belonging under the disguise of racialized hegemony or Latin@ essentialism. A failure to more critically examine whiteness as a site of knowledge production and contention within Latin@ culture feeds the continued role Latin@s play in current practice and behaviors, such as religion, gender roles and class etiquette, that leave lurking in the shadows the role of imperialism in constituting subjectivities of both rulers and subjects, oppressors and oppressed (Prasad, 2005). Consequently, such cultural practices contribute to the continuation and further branding of ourselves with imposed representations that inform who Latin@s are as a pluralistic people, veiling the processes that implicate Latin@ness in a racialized shifting continuum by Spanish and Anglo European informed neocolonial structures of social, political, and cultural dominance (Subedi & Daza, 2008; Talles, 2014).

### Purpose

The aim of this research endeavor is to examine, more deeply understand, and make connections between whiteness and Latin@ culture and explore how whiteness might show up among Latin@s in education. I intend to reveal new understandings of Latin@ness, unveil representations of whiteness in Latin@ culture, and make visible how whiteness operates within Latin@ culture. The research questions that guide my study are:

1. What role does whiteness play among Latin@s in higher education?
2. What is significant about the influence of whiteness on Latin@s' understanding of their ethnoracial identities in higher education?
3. What is significant about understanding the influence of whiteness within Latin@s' ethnoracial identities and experiences for higher education professionals?

My intent with this project is to investigate critically how whiteness manifests in Latin@ culture and influences ongoing [re]formulations of Latin@ identity formation and cultural practices. Thus, I aim to create conversations between Latin@ cultural formation, Latin@ oriented theoretical lenses, postcolonialism, antiracism, whiteness and higher education, and contribute new rearticulated theoretical and conceptual understandings about the interrelationship between these bodies of scholarship that shape these discourses.

At the core of this project is the completion of three articles of publishable quality centering on the following three themes: (1) how whiteness shows up in Latin@ culture along dominant and oppressive lines; (2) the relevance of understanding whiteness in Latin@ culture in the context of higher education; and (3) the need to move toward a postcolonial understanding of how Eurocentricism and white supremacy operate within, flow throughout, and influence Latin@ culture and identity and its significance to higher education. My intent is to problematize and

complement how Latin@ student identity development theory and Latin@ Critical Theory are framed and used, and fuse different theoretical bodies of scholarly work that help reveal gaps in current literature based on my critical analysis to offer different understandings that fill a significant void in, and complement current literature and research on Latin@ identity, culture and whiteness in the context of higher education. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I synthesize and reveal newer theoretical understandings from Chapters 2, 3, and 4, discuss implications for such new understandings in higher education and present recommendations for further research and practice in the field of higher education. Potential limitations and issues in applying antiracist/postcolonial understandings about Latin@ cultural and identity formation in the articles are also addressed in the final chapter.

In the following section, I address approaches to theoretical inquiry and discuss why a theoretical approach is an appropriate research design for this project. As part of this section I offer insight into the theoretical influences that inform how I draw on and engage in a critical theoretical analysis to formulate an antiracist postcolonial whiteness understanding Latin@ culture and build on existing literature about Latin@ cultural identity development theories and LatCrit theory. Ensuing, I discuss the significance of my dissertation project along with limitations and delimitations, and provide an organizational overview where I present an outline of my dissertation, what I intend to accomplish with each article, and present titles and objectives for each article.

### **Theoretical Research**

A theoretical research dissertation is a study concerning the critique or analysis of existing theories and or of fluctuating definitions of concepts within a particular discipline (California Institute for Human Science, n.d.). The idea of a theoretical study is to embark on a

critical analysis that aims to identify gaps, weaknesses, problems, limitations, or biases in the existing literature in order to draw from current literature and research to develop new theoretical or conceptual understandings within a body or bodies of work and/or lay the ground for future research (University of Leicester, n.d.). Rooted in critical traditions, critical analysis aims to “examine social arrangements through the lenses of power, domination, and conflict” (Prasad, 2005, p. 109). Critical theory recognizes what came before as it breaks with the past, moving away from dominant representations of knowledge in history and raising questions that render visible issues previously absented, repressed or neglected (Teo, 2005). Critical theory also serves as a framework through which culture and society are analyzed (Bell, 2008), and is a form of self-reflective knowledge concerning understanding and theoretical explanation in order to minimize confinement within systems of domination or dependence (Bell, 2008). According to Sim and Van Loon (2001), "the essential idea for critical theory is that there is nothing accidental in a text" (p. 62). Thus, a theoretical dissertation requires a thorough summary and evaluation of existing body/bodies of work in a field(s) of study that complements existing literature(s) in a way that offers new insights. In doing so, it is important for the researcher to review the literature as it stands and further amalgamate more than one body of literature to see what one body of work can add to the other or where they might be related, comparable, or where diverse claims are being made (University of Leicester, n.d.).

My intention with this theoretical study is to employ critical analysis to draw from and fuse current literature and research about Latin@s in higher education (i.e., Latin@ identity development, LatCrit research), postcolonial studies, and whiteness studies to develop new theoretical/conceptual understandings that address how whiteness functions in Latin@ culture. Not long before his transition from the physical world to the spiritual, in his book, *Ideas and*

*Opinions*, the late Albert Einstein (1954) makes us aware that theories are necessary when encountering new information that cannot be readily explicated by existing theories. Through the creation and revision of theory, practitioners and scholars in higher education consistently seek to better understand students' development and gain insight into their experiences as a way of working toward continuously improving American higher education for college students (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Smart & Paulsen, 2011). Thus, doing a theoretical study is most appropriate for this dissertation undertaking. I will put forth a critical dialectic antiracist and postcolonial exploration of the relationship between whiteness and Latin@ culture with application to further academic research pertaining to whiteness and Latin@ students in the context of American higher education. Following, I provide descriptions of theoretical concepts pertaining to how I will critically engage literature on Latin@ identity politics and whiteness in education.

### **Theoretical influences**

Below I provide theoretical underpinnings for the purpose of this dissertation, which is to draw on existing literature, research, theory, and history to unveil functions of whiteness in Latin@ culture and the need to understand this cultural phenomenon in higher education. The six related, yet distinctive, key concepts that frame my project include: Antiracism, whiteness, postcolonialism, anticolonialism, polyculturalism, and transnationalism.

#### **Antiracism**

Antiracism offers both theoretical and practical responses to challenging questions about the nature of race, racism, and the intersections between power and difference (Sefa Dei, 2008).

Theories of antiracism challenge structures of knowledge production and interlocking systems of social oppression (Sefa Dei, 2000). Sefa Dei (2008) describes antiracism as “a discursive and

political practice to address the myriad forms of racisms and the intersections with other forms of oppression” (p. xix), and addresses systemic and institutional elements of racism revealing subtle forms of racism entrenched in individual actions, practices, and values. Further antiracism addresses racism and explicitly names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety, drawing on broad definitions of race and racism extending beyond skin color to include myriad manifestations of racism and racialization (Sefa Dei, 2000). Fused with postcolonialism, antiracism allows for the creation of new understandings about Eurocentrism and whiteness, and the pervasive influence of often veiled racialization and racism in Latin@ culture (Lopez, 2008).

### **Whiteness**

Similar to antiracism, whiteness as a theoretical framework seeks to mark white as a marked racialized identity whose precise meanings derive from national, racial regimes. However, it differs from antiracism in that whiteness seeks the invocation of white identities and may suspend other social divisions, linking people who share whiteness to dominant social locations, even though the actors are themselves in positions of relative powerlessness (Garner, 2007). Another difference is that whiteness has “no stable consensual meaning and has been conceptualized in a number of different yet not mutually exclusive forms...it is a lens through which particular aspects of social relationships can be apprehended” (p. 1). As an identity, whiteness exists only in so far as other racialized identities, such as blackness, Asian-ness, Latin@-ness, etc., exists. Whiteness is also a problematizing and analytical perspective that serves as a way of formulating questions about social relations (Garner, 2007).

Scholars have written extensively about whiteness in the legal realms, making connections between nation state and law and the geopolitical context through which whiteness

has been assigned scientific and legal meaning as rationale for intellectual and human superiority that has prevented non-whites from engaging in political activity and economic mobility, including; segregation, voting rights , ownership of land, and equitable opportunity, just to name a few (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-Lopez, 2006; Harris, 2006; Matsuda, 1993; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Roediger, 2005). Harris (1993) elaborates on such concepts by further challenging white supremacist cultural practices as structural components established by whites for whites, to positing the need to view whiteness itself as a property with cultural value and significance attached. Literature in Communication Studies points to whiteness as a plurality of communicative discourses, be it verbal, written, or behavioral that allows ongoing manifestations and representations of whiteness to fester within sub structures such as education, government, the media, religion, etc. (Dyer, 1997; Moon & Flores, 2009; Nakayama & Martin, 1999).

Within the literature covering whiteness, much scholarship looks to antiracist theory in attempts to dismantle whiteness (Roediger, 2001). Whiteness scholars utilizing an antiracist epistemology propose the need to critically examine whiteness, deconstruct, and reconstruct different meanings of whiteness that render visible how racialization (in the plural sense), intersect with other identities such as class, gender, and nation to work together to maintain structural dominance, power, and control that privileges whiteness. Antiracism seeks to map out the historical landscapes that demonstrate the fabrication of race and the politics behind racialization (Sefa Dei, 2000), and aims to construct a societal vision based on full and equal participation of all groups in any given community that is collectively shaped by practices of injustice and oppression. Sefa Dei (2000) defines anti-racism as an “action-oriented educational strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and interlocking systems of social

oppression” (p. 27). Thus, anti-racism challenges current representations of knowledge, acknowledges historical practices that over time shaped today’s academic landscape, recognizes that minoritized groups experiences and contributions as valid, and extends racialization beyond phenotype and biological racial construction to include language, politics, class, gender, culture, religious and social differences as well as issues tied to the construction of power relations and equity (Sefa Dei, 2000). An antiracist theory of whiteness offers both theoretical and practical responses to challenging questions about the nature of race, racism, and the intersections between power and difference (Sefa Dei, 2008) and addresses systemic and institutional elements of racism, revealing subtle forms of racism entrenched in individual actions, practices, and values.

### **Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism serves as a location of theories that helps critically interrogate and analyze the effect of colonialism or imperialism on contemporary culture (Young, 2003; Prasad, 2005). Scholars of postcolonial thought emphasize the need to illuminate the ways in which contemporary cultural practices in today’s social institutions are historically rooted in colonial structures (Prasad, 2005). Depending on the colonial processes and contexts where colonialism has taken place during particular moments of history, much of the colonial/postcolonial scholarship, layered with contradictive conditions and residues of being and relating along positionalities of power, “seeks to undo the binary thinking of colonizer/colonized and other such essentialized oppositional categories” (Lopez, 2008, p. 11). The Dictionary of Human Geography describes postcolonial thought as an:

intellectual movement originating in literary and cultural studies concerned with the diverse, uneven and contested impact of colonialism on the cultures of colonizing and



colonized peoples, in terms of the way in which relations, practices, and representations are reproduced or transformed between past and present, as well as between the ‘heart’ and the ‘margins’ of empire and its aftermath. (Gregory, Johnston, & Pratt, 2009, p. 561)

Broadly speaking, postcolonialism seeks to render visible ways in which constructed differences and discourses have been marked and categorized along systemic levels of importance to the colonizer’s values and aims: Constructions that function to propagate western cultural dominance and the continued marginality of the west’s colonized and once-colonized currently cohabitating under disguises such as that of nation, ethnicity, and race (Bush, 2006; Pels, 1997; Quijano, 2000; 2008; Young, 2003).

### **Anticolonialism**

Anticolonialism seeks to achieve multiple processes and methods of resistance, offering new philosophical insights that work to challenge Eurocentrism and deconstruct dominant discourses and epistemologies. Anticolonial thought raises questions about the character and degree of social domination in multiple localities where power and the relations of power, work to institute and maintain dominant-subordinate connections (Sefa Dei, 2006). For this project, anticolonialism provides an approach to “theorizing colonial and re-colonial relations and implications of imperial structures on the processes of knowledge production and validation” (Sefa Dei, 2006, p. 2). It offers an analytical process whereby absences in the formation of Latin@ identity are highlighted and allows for the problematization and deconstruction of essentialist conceptualizations about Latin@ness and racialized identities within the culture. Like postcolonialism, anticolonialism is also utilized to rupture understandings of Latin@ness and Latin@ identity to create new understandings around representations of Eurocentrism and whiteness in Latin@ culture and how these might influence Latin@s in higher education.

### **Polyculturalism**

Polyculturalism refers to the social entrenchment of multiple heritages by multi-bi racial/ethnic people due to the multiplicity of cultures in dialogue and the interacting histories, representation of cultures, the insecurity of boundaries around culture, and the complexity of culture (Kelly, 1999). Kelly puts forward that it is impossible to identify what is culture, whose culture, and who belongs to any particular culture. This concept is helpful in distinguishing and providing clarity between forms of whiteness that are characterized by phenotype, operating ideologies and social standards of communicating and relating to one another around representations of whiteness within Latin@ cultures.

### **Transnationalism**

Transnationalism refers to the concept of traveling culture(s) as “dynamic living phenomena that move beyond boundaries of time and space” (Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999, p. 200), convened through relationships with other cultural practices and ideologies across nation-state borders, which in turn acquire new meanings. Transnationalism is a useful concept for understanding how whiteness as a traveling cultural practice(s) serves as a foundation for kinship between U.S. American and Latin@centric whiteness, both anchored in Eurocentrism. This includes whiteness throughout Latin@ culture, operating locally in American higher education.

### **Significance of the Study**

My intent with this project is not to dispute existing knowledge around Latin@ identity development and Latin@ students’ experiences in education. Rather, I aim to problematize current understandings and contribute new antiracist, transnational, postcolonial, and polycultural understandings that complement existing knowledge about Latin@ cultural formations and experiences by focusing on whiteness and the role whiteness plays in informing

Latin@ students' experiences in higher education. This project is significant because it seeks to interrogate essentialist Anglo oriented understandings of the term Latin@ and representations of Latin@ culture that altogether dismiss Spanish Eurocentrism and whiteness, obscuring constructions of racialized difference that influence cultural practice and social relations in the context of higher education. In whole, I am interested in more deeply understanding echoed and obscured possibilities pertaining to the many shapes, forms, and fusions of whiteness and how whiteness materializes in Latin@ identity formation. van Dijk (2009) asserts the need for a more thorough process of inquiry on the pervasive roots of racism in the construction of whiteness in Latin America. He expresses that most studies of racism inclusive of Latin American culture focus on forms of socio-economic inequality and exclusion or on ethnic prejudice and attitude. He goes on to say "these studies do not tell much about the very roots of racism, nor about the processes of its daily reproduction... even when we agree that in Latin America racism is rooted in colonialism and in the subsequent forms of social, economic, and cultural domination by white(r) elites" (p. 4). The same can be said about the ways in which studies examining Latin@ culture fail to account for forms of social, economic, and cultural domination by white(r) elites within Latin@ culture and among Latin@s in the United States as a result of Spanish colonialism and white hegemony projects carried out as a result (Lazos Vargas, 2001; Montalvo, 1987; Montalvo & Codina, 2001; Montoya, 1994; Talles, 2014; Valdes, 2000; Vargas, 2014).

### **Limitations**

This theoretical project fills a gap in the literature about Latin@s' identity formation and experiences, significant for scholars and practitioners to understand and be aware of in the context of higher education. However, several limitations are present that need to be addressed.

First, this dissertation seeks to make connections between theoretical bodies of work as opposed

to carrying out an empirical research project that yields specific data based on subject responses. As a result, findings of this research project cannot and should not be generalized or assumed to hold true for an entire Latin@ identifying population in education. Rather, findings of this project are limited to understanding how whiteness functions within Latin@ culture and across Latin@ identities and the implications of not considering understandings of Latin@centric whiteness in higher education for research, practice and policy.

Secondly, this project sought to problematize how Latin@ identities are essentialized through the use of ethnicity and national culture of origin and is delimited to examining issues related to race, such as colorism and whiteness. It is important to acknowledge the roles intersecting identities and social constructions such as class, gender, and religion have had and continue to have on Latin@ identities and cultural formations, while focusing on whiteness and colorism as salient sites of analysis, knowledge production, and interrogation among Latin@s in U.S. higher education. Doing so aligns with the utilization of postcolonial whiteness as a framework of analysis. Thus, while Latin@ identity development theories and LatCrit offer extensive functions and orientations through which to understand Latin@s' ethnoracial identities and experiences, this project was delimited to theoretical components within each analysis related to racialization issues of colorism and whiteness as cultural practices.

### **Outline of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is theoretical in nature and critically examines Latin@ research and literature utilizing different critical lenses to assist in promoting alternative racial/ethnic views and understandings of Latin@ness in the context of higher education. It is organized in a non-traditional dissertation format which includes three publishable journal articles, an introduction, and a concluding chapter. The dissertation consists of three different, yet related articles situated

in critical analysis that seek to mark representations of whiteness in Latin@ culture in higher education.

### **Chapter One**

In this chapter, I introduced my research topic and statement of the problem I investigated in chapters 2-4, discussed background and main purpose of the dissertation, made clear limitations of my project, and highlighted the need and relevance of a theoretical analysis as an appropriate research design and methodological framework for my project. Following my argument for theoretical analysis, I offered a brief discussion on some of the key theoretical influences that I used to frame the subject matter of each article. Thereafter, I put forward definitions and discussed key theoretical influences that I used to frame the subject matter of my articles.

### **Chapter Two**

Chapter Two is the first publishable article in this dissertation and is titled, “*Towards A Postcolonial Whiteness Understanding Of Latin@ Identities And Cultural Practice: Eurocentric Latin@ness and Latin@centric Whiteness.*” This article employed theoretical analysis to critically engage a conversation that accounts for postcolonial relationships rooted in white supremacy as a result of Spanish and British colonialisms; each seeking to homogenize non-European peoples through colonizing strategies that shape much of identity formation in Latin@ cultures, transnationally, today (Mignolo, 2005; Quijano, 2008; Valdez, 2000). I utilized dialectic colonialisms as a presupposition that refers to a conversation between cultural histories, formations, and representations informed by Eurocentric imperialism and colonialism. More specifically, I examined representations of Eurocentrism and whiteness within Latin@ colonial histories of racialization across the Americas (excluding Canada) and offered a postcolonial conceptualization I referred to as ‘Colonial Dialectic’ to account for ideological, cultural and

physical transferability (polycultural ideoscape) of transnational whiteness (Appadurai, 1996; Kelly, 1999), and the ways in which colonialisms and coloniality of power inform Latin@ identities and cultural formation in the contemporary. My objective was to present a framework that can be used to guide, develop, and research issues with respect to Eurocentrism and transnational whiteness in Latin@ culture and identity formations. This article investigated how whiteness functions in Latin@ American history, provided a critical analysis that offers new understandings with regard to whiteness and Latin@ cultural formations and identities, and offers a conceptual understanding that addresses the influence of Spanish and Anglo Eurocentrism on whiteness functionalities on Latin@ness.

### **Chapter Three**

Chapter Three, titled, “*Beneath And Beyond Latin@ness: The Significance of Postcolonial/Antiracist Analysis On the Use of Latin@ Identity Development Theories In Student Affairs Practice*” represents a critical analysis of and engagement with Latin@ identity development literature utilized in student affairs (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, 1999; 2009; Torres et al., 2009; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). This article critically examines racial and ethnic identity formations among Latin@s. First, I presented an overview of identity development in higher education. In the overview, I provide foundational background on racial and ethnic identity development theory and discuss identity racial/ethnic formation in Latin@s. My intent was to critique foundations and identify gaps in student identity development literature related to Latin@s, and offer different understandings that fill a significant void in, and complement current literature and research on Latin@ identity development theory and whiteness in the context of higher education. Newer understandings about Latin@ identity formation and whiteness through an antiracist/postcolonial lens revealed

the importance for higher education scholars and practitioners to give serious attention to the continued role of colonial legacies that both Anglo and Spanish Eurocentrism play in Latin@s' identity formation and sociocultural experiences in the context of higher education, today.

#### **Chapter Four**

*“Mapping Invisibilities and Absences in the Use of LatCrit Theory in Higher Education: How Postcolonial Thought Can Help Uncover Latin@centric Whiteness,”* or Chapter Four, represents a review of and critical engagement with Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit) literature in higher education, utilizing antiracist and postcolonial thought. First, I provided an overview of literature on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit). In the overview, I provide a foundational background of critical race theory and engage in a critical analysis of LatCrit literature and research. LatCrit serves as an epistemological and methodological tool, theoretically, that grants insight into the marginalized positions and experiences of Latin@s (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso et al., 2009), and how power and privilege inform knowledge construction around identity (Torres et al., 2009). Following, I discussed whiteness and drew on postcolonialism to mark different understandings with respect to the invisibility of whiteness and the absence of non-mestiz@ identities in LatCrit research and literature (i.e., acculturation, resistance within critical research and methodology, absences within Latin@ identities) in the context of higher education. Two main critiques discussed in LatCrit literature and research are: (1) determinism and (2) validity. My intent was to offer a third theoretical critique around the invisibility of whiteness and absence of non-mestiz@ groups significant to more comprehensively understanding Latin@ identities and cultural formation. Issues I examined in this chapter include the history of racialization that privileges whiteness among Latin@s, functions of racialization within Latin@ representation, the lack of conversation

about racial differences and colorism within Mestiz@ identities and the absence of non-mestiz@ identities in LatCrit research. My objective with this article was to place LatCrit theory and research in higher education, in conversation with antiracism, postcolonial thought, and whiteness studies to unveil representations of Latin@centric whiteness as an emerging theme and location for further inquiry and focus among Latin@s in higher education.

### **Chapter Five**

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I synthesized Chapters Two, Three, and Four, and discussed newer postcolonial understandings about Latin@ culture, implications, and recommendations for further research in the field of higher education. Potential consequences and challenges related to applying new understandings about how whiteness informs Latin@ cultural and identity formations will also be addressed.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided context important to situate this theoretical dissertation. In this chapter, I made an argument for the need to move beyond current understandings of Latin@ cultural formations, identities, and whiteness, and to seek newer considerations about the significance and relevance for this work in higher education. My recollecting and situating interactions with Latin@s I met during my work with antiracism speaks to my personal experiences, interests and passion in addressing why Latin@centric whiteness and colorism matter in higher education spaces. In framing my project, I briefly discussed and theorized culture, ethnoracial identity and assignment, and Latin@ identity in the United States, given the importance of the understanding the role of culture as practice, ideation and symbolism for the purpose of, and for understanding this project. Following, I provided some background of the problem, including the limitations of how Latin@ students' cultural formations and identities in higher education are currently



addressed. As part of my problem statement I specifically identified the two theories, Latin@ identity development theories and Latin@ Critical Theory, I sought to problematize and build on by placing these in dialogue with postcolonial thought and whiteness. Thereafter, I discussed the purpose of this project, the theories I sought to juxtaposition, and engaged my argument as to why a theoretical analysis was the most effective approach for this dissertation.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Acculturation-** a psychological process, whereby individuals take on some cultural practices in addition to their own as a result of migration to a new cultural space or by coming into contact with members of a dominant culture.

**Assimilation-** the process by which individuals choose not to maintain their own cultural identity and take on the culture values and identity of the dominant group altogether

**Biculturalism-** refers to an individual's synthesis and ongoing negotiation of two different cultures and languages, resulting in evolution of a third culture not previously present.

**Coloniality-** the logical structure of colonial domination and Eurocentric indoctrination core to the Spanish, Dutch, British, and US control of the Atlantic economy and politics and from there on the control of the broader globe.

**Colonialism-** refers to specific historical periods and places of imperial domination and describe as the physical occupation and destruction of indigenous knowledge systems accompanied by the imposition and internalization of the colonizers' way of knowing by the colonized, aimed at homogenizing a diversity of people for purposes of imperial expansion.

**Colorism-** the process of skin color stratification that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark-skin pigmentation

**Cosmic identity-** a hybrid (mixture) of races as a result of colonialism, miscegenation, and the histories and tensions that continue to shape and inform vast differences throughout Latin@ culture.

**Enculturation-** the process of being socialized to conform to the values, beliefs, and behavioral standards of one's ethnic culture.

**Ethnicity-** multidimensional and shaped by commonalities of elements, such as histories, migrations, geography, cultural values (i.e. significance of family and kinship), and cultural practices (i.e. religion, language) that inform self-identification and attitudes relative to one's cultural group.

**Ideoscapes-** a postcolonial concept referring to the psychological and metaphysical spaces where globalized flows of western ideals and world views are shared, transmitted, and exchanged.

**Identity-** recognized as a social construction of beliefs about the self formed through interactions with the broader social context, where dominant practices by dominant groups determine cultural norms.

**Imperialism-** the governing body for colonial occupations that serves as the conduit through which colonial legacies resume in the contemporary.

**Nationality-** the status of belonging to a particular nation.

**Race-** a social construct that connects individuals and groups based on biological traits such as phenotypic characteristics and skin pigmentation,

**Racialization-** signifies how race is constructed and imposed on people by institutional social actions as cultural practice engaged by the white dominant group in order to socially and politically assert and maintain power and control over other groups constructed as non-white

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## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL WHITENESS UNDERSTANDING OF LATIN@ IDENTITIES AND CULTURAL PRACTICE: EUROCENTRIC LATIN@NESS; LATIN@CENTRIC WHITENESS

#### Abstract

Historically, whiteness was created by European colonizers who imposed their colonizing conditions unto the lands and peoples in what Mignolo (2005) refers to a “modern European invention restricted to Europeans’ view of the world” (p. 8). For hundreds of years, white Europeans waged war against Indigenous people of the Americas and imposed racializing classification systems onto spaces such as the United States and Latin America. Nonetheless, literature on Latin@ culture Latin@s in the U.S. fail to make visible ways global imperialism and neocolonialism inform a contemporary colonial dialectic that enables different cultural practices and of representations whiteness, such as colorism and racism aimed at gaining power and sustaining control, to converse and operate across borders within Latin@ cultures. This article engages a critical dialogue between postcolonial thought, whiteness studies, and Latin@ cultures across the Americas to fracture disregarded understandings about ways whiteness is obscured through ethnicity and nationality, influences Latin@ culture in the U.S., and what it signifies in the context of higher education.

**Target Journal for Submission:** *Social Forces* (The journal emphasizes cutting-edge sociological inquiry and explores realms the discipline shares with psychology, anthropology, political science, history and economics)

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Eurocentrism, Postcolonial, Whiteness, Latin@s, Colorism, Racialization

## Introduction

Literature on Latin@ culture and identities has drawn attention to the ways race as a social construct with power and subordination implications has been disregarded and absented within ethnic and national identities among Latin@ individuals and groups (Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; Wade, 2001). Scholarly engagement with Latin@ ethno-racial identity often relegates representations of whiteness as assimilative and acculturative practices to Anglo influenced American culture (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Ramos-Zayas, 2001; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009), discounting whiteness as representation and cultural practice already present within Latin@ identities as a result of colonialism(s) in Latin America (Smith, 1997; Telles, 2014). Such scholarship fails to examine more deeply how Spanish colonialism has and continues to influence whiteness, colorism and ethno racial differences within the Latin@ spectrum (Branche, 2008; Loveman, 2014; Martinez, 2000; Menchaca, 2001; Smith, 1997; Valdes, 2000), and how such varied understandings might show up in structural spaces such as education, in the U.S. (Behnken, 2011; Castillo, 2009; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Fergus, 2009; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Montoya, 1994): Even as scholars have written extensively about the varied ways manifestations of racial superiority and whiteness show up globally and structurally aimed at creating a system of difference for the maintenance of power and control. (Bonnet, 2010, 2000; Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999; Godreau, 2006; Levin-Ransky, 2002).

Much of the literature on Latin@ race and ethnicity in the U.S. stops short of addressing Eurocentric imaginations of racialized differences, historical foundations of racial formation, and varied cultural and hegemonic presentations of whiteness, beyond American Anglo culture. Stoddard (1920) reflects the following on global imperialism and colonialism by European nations:

Judge by accepted canons of state craft, the white man towered the indisputable master of the planet. Forth from Europe's teeming motherhive the imperious Sons of Japhet had swarnd for the centuries to plant their laws, their customs, their battle-flags at the uttermost ends of the earth. Two whole continents, North America and Australia, had been made virtually as white in blood as the European motherland; two other continents, South America and Africa, had been extensively colonized by white stocks. (p. 3)

His observance speaks to Europe's colonizing agendas and historical establishment of settle colonial societies throughout the globe that to this day continue to inform the representation of white racial subjects and whiteness as cultural practice. It is this invisible and unmarked space I refer to as Latin@centric whiteness, often relegated to Anglo identity orientations and obscured through Latin@ ethnicity and nationalities I seek to interrogate. I offer a postcolonial whiteness understanding I articulate as 'Colonial Dialectic' to serve as a framework that looks at the physical, and cultural transferability (polycultural ideoscape) of transnational whiteness (Appadurai, 1996; Kelly, 1990). Anchoring Latin@ness in postcolonial thought and whiteness illuminates how whiteness functions in Latin@ culture and identity formations beyond understandings of internalized oppression and Anglo assimilated tendencies in the U.S. (Golash-Boza, 2006; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010). More specifically, I intend to investigate how whiteness functions within Latin@ cultures to provide a critical analysis that offers new conceptual understandings that address how Spanish Eurocentricism influences Latin@centric whiteness.

In my theoretical analysis, I consider representations of Spanishcentric and Anglocentric whiteness as linked global colonialisms anchored in the same European thread that give meaning to, and privilege Latin@centric whiteness. My aim is to identify gaps, weaknesses, problems, limitations, or biases in the existing literature through theoretical conversation. I draw from



postcolonialism, whiteness, antiracism, and Latin@ histories and contemporary culture to identify gaps, limitations, and biases in the existing literature to uncover disregarded racial and colorist understandings I believe complement existing literature(s). This is especially significant and relevant given ongoing growth in Latin@ demographics in the U.S. (Rodriguez, 2000), the need for educators to have a deeper understanding about what social relations among Latin@s and between Latin@s and non-Latin@s in the U.S. mean, and the impact of immigration and education policy on Latin@s sociopolitical and economic realities (Bacon, 2008). My aim is to offer new insights and lay the ground for future research attempting to examine Latin@ identities and experiences in higher education.

While the subject matter discussed in this article extends well beyond the boundaries of what is traditionally discussed in relation to Latin@s in higher education, I intend to make these directly relevant to the study of higher education by demonstrating the significance of antiracist postcolonial theorization and relational positionality to an understanding of Latin@ness and whiteness in higher education. In the next section I theorize culture and introduce some background about colorism and racialization as culture practice. Following, I provide some background on postcolonial thought and whiteness, and thereafter historicize and engage a conversation between these different bodies of work and Latin@ histories, cultural representations, and identity constructions to present a framework that can be used to guide, develop, and research issues with respect to Eurocentrism and transnational whiteness within Latin@ cultural practice and identities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; 2001; Subedi & Daza, 2008). I conclude by offering remarks on implications and the significance of this work for higher education.

### **Colorism and Racialization as Cultural Practice**

Most literature about Latin@ cultural identities and experiences in American higher education suggests that Latin@s who identify within boundaries of whiteness do so through assimilation, referred to as the act of taking on the cultural values of the Anglo dominant culture. Or through an acculturation process signaling a shift in how Latin@s compromise aspects of their own cultural identities and cultural practices in order to navigate dominant Anglo culture (Torres, 1999; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres & Phelps, 1997). Eurocentrism is entirely dismissed and little consideration is given to similarities between Spanish constructions of racialized hierarchies, colorism, and the cultivation and reproduction of whiteness within Latin@ cultural practice, thought, and identities (Loveman, 2014; Martinez, 2000; Smith, 1997; Telles, 2014). Similar to how Anglocentric is used to signify English (British) European origins and historic influences such as settler colonialism and whiteness on American cultural orientations, I use Spanishcentric to describe ways cultural practices are rooted in Spanish origins that have historically molded, and continue to influence to this day, Latin@ culture, identity, thought, and favoritism toward Eurocentrism and whiteness. Some historical literature even makes clear how Latin@s fought about and for whiteness (Behnken, 2011; Menchaca, 2001). Abundant literature on Latin@ global, historical, and contemporary culture suggest a presence of existing relational/relative power dynamics that favor Latin@centric whiteness, beyond Anglo ordained American mainstream, and further marginalizes non-whites within Latin@ culture (Castillo, 2009; Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001; Gomez, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Vidal-Ortiz, 2004; Yancey, 2003), even as Latin@s collectively represent a marginalized ethnoracial body in the U.S.

Culture, as theory and practice, is an important concept to grasp for this article as it represents how groups understand and make sense of shared ways of thinking, behaviors, and activities within a given group, even across transnational and diasporic cultures (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, 2001). I do not seek to study, but rather theorize culture in a way that serves useful for readers to understand how I engage whiteness as cultural practice within the contemporary Latin@ condition. For this article culture is theorized in the ideologic sense whereby “ideational designs for living, patterns of shared meanings and systems of knowledge, and belief are crucially important subsystems of ways-of-life-in-environments” (Keesing, 1974, p. 82). Such an understanding of culture accounts for semiotics and power dynamics, and considers the ways in which people interpret, adjust and respond to meanings associated with representation, signification and social expectations, and the ways in which such functions shift and show up in the contemporary (Connor, 1997; McGowan, 2007). This understanding of culture makes it possible to make visible practices of whiteness, such as colorism and racialization, within Latin@ culture; whereby representation, behavior, and ideology are interconnected and do not function separate from each other. Engaging a dialogue between the commonalities of racialization within British and Spanish cultural colonialities make it possible for different yet similar, transnational representations and understandings of whiteness to emerge. Doing so unveils how Eurocentrism and nationalism have functioned as discursive processes that have historically informed, and continue to shape ethno-racial identity, and existing power dynamics and relations within Latin@ culture, both in Latin America and the U.S. Thus is it conceivable that white and or light skin Latin@s, could acculturate to American white culture without abandoning their own understands of what they have learned about what whiteness signals and signifies within Latin@ cultures and the production and privileging of Eurocentrism within.

Colorism refers to the process of skin color stratification that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark, resulting in the favorable or unfavorable treatment of individuals based on the skin color in areas such as income, education, and housing (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hunter, 2007). This is a persistent challenge for non-white minoritized people in the United States and yet most higher education scholarship addressing race and ethnicity within Latin@ culture fails to make visible how colorism and racialization interact to form a pigmentocracy that privileges whiteness and further marginalizes non-white identities among Latin@ groups and individuals (Telles, 2014). Racialization draws attention to how race is created and imparted on people by institutions and social actions, not merely originated in people as their racial category (Martinot, 2003; Yancey, 2003). From a cultural discourse standpoint, Martinot (2003) explains, “race is something people do, rather than what they are” (p. 13), referring to race as cultural practice engaged by the white dominant group in order to assert and maintain power and control over other groups socially and politically constructed as non-whites. (Menchaca, 2001, Yancey, 2003). The following section provides an overview of the theoretical bodies of work I place in dialogue to more deeply understand the persistent absence of Latin@centric whiteness in existing conversations about culture, identity and representation.

### **Postcolonialism, Settle Colonialism, and Whiteness:**

#### **Theorizing and Historicizing Cultural Practice**

Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1952), Loomba (1998), Hall (1997), and Quijano (2008, 2000) are postcolonial scholars who center notions of cultural formation as persistent conditions of postcolonial identity requiring global understanding of the influence of Eurocentrism and white supremacy on cultural identities. Bhabha (1994, 1986) places emphasis on the mutually dependent relationship between the colonizer and colonized and is often associated with the

postcolonial term hybridity, a concept he uses to challenge contemporary worldviews of multiculturalism and cultural binaries. Bhabha (1994) makes salient what he terms a third space of enunciation where histories and cultures constantly infringe upon the present, shaping and reformulating it.

### **Postcolonialism**

Scholars of postcolonial thought emphasize the need to illuminate the ways in which contemporary cultural practices in today's social institutions are historically rooted in colonial structures (Prasad, 2005). Depending on the colonial processes and contexts where colonialism has taken place during particular moments of history, much of the colonial/postcolonial scholarship is layered with contradictory conditions and residues of being and relating along positionalities of power (Loomba, 1998), and "seeks to undo the binary thinking of colonizer/colonized and other essentialized oppositional categories" (Lopez, 2005, p. 11). Postcolonialism serves as a location of theories that helps critically interrogate and analyze the effect of colonialism or imperialism on contemporary culture (Young, 2003; Prasad, 2005; Prasad, 2003). Prasad (2005) maintains that postcolonial theory "pursues the project of critiquing and resisting Western modernity... while also constantly emphasizing the West's relationship to its others—notably the peoples of its former colonies and the indigenous populations within its own geographical enclaves" (p. 262). The *Dictionary of Human Geography* describes postcolonial thought as an:

intellectual movement originating in literary and cultural studies concerned with the diverse, uneven and contested impact of colonialism on the cultures of colonizing and colonized peoples, in terms of the way in which relations, practices and representations

are reproduced or transformed between past and present, as well as between the ‘heart’ and the ‘margins’ of empire and its aftermath. (Gregory, Johnston, & Pratt, 2009, p. 561)

The critical attribute of postcolonial theory is that it destabilizes the western gaze. Thus, carving a space for the voices of the oppressed to be heard with possibilities for the [re] production and organization of alternative and new forms of knowledge (Prasad, 2003) based on the lives and experiences of those currently most oppressed and affected as the result of colonialism (Teo, 2005). Mignolo (2005) refers to colonialism as the “specific historical periods and places of imperial domination” (p. 7). Both Mignolo (2005) and Quijano (2008) describe colonialism as the physical occupation and destruction of indigenous knowledge systems accompanied by the imposition and internalization of the colonizers’ way of knowing by the colonized, aimed at homogenizing a diversity of people for purposes of imperial expansion. Similarly, Young (2003) and Pels (1997) describe colonialism as an ideology imposed on the colonized by the colonizers as well as a form of domination and control for the benefit of the colonizers. Hence, situated in postcolonial thought, and important to understand for this project, is the role settle colonial states play in perpetuating and enabling the continuation of cultural practices and formations situated in Eurocentrism.

### **Postcolonial Thought and Settle Colonialism**

Settler colonialism refers to the structural properties and residues of a settler colonial actions and politics that replaced indigenous forms of economics, culture and society with those of the colonialists (Lovell, 2007). Such colonial politics continue to inform structural, ideological, representational and social elements that have justified the eradication, deterioration, or assimilation of indigenous populations (Pearson 2001), and legitimizes contemporary ideology and cultural discourses about identity that privilege settler forms of systemic practices

such as government, law, and education. Settler colonialism, beyond historical description, serves as an analytical or explanatory conduit useful for understanding the U.S. and Latin-America as spaces that have institutionalized European settler colonial institutions and ideas as norms that influence Latin@ cultural practice and identities across national borders. Bottomore (1983) marks a significant distinction in how colonialisms have taken form, referring to colonialisms prior to European expansion as non-capitalist, and modern colonialism as a result of European westernization, the foundation of capitalism (Bottomore, 1983). Modern colonialism, launched in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century went beyond invading and conquering lands and the people native to those lands. It instituted a neocolonial relationship whereby western Europe altered the economies of the cultures colonized, pulling them into a dependent relationship with their own in order to sustain a back and forth “flow of human and natural resources between the colonised and colonial countries” (Loomba, 1998, p. 3).

Mignolo and Quijano’s scholarship on coloniality adds another significant piece to postcolonial identities geopolitically situated in the neocolonial relationship between Europe and Latin@ America. Mignolo (2005) refers to coloniality as “the logical structure of colonial domination” and Eurocentric indoctrination core to the “Spanish, Dutch, British, and US control of the Atlantic economy and politics” (p. 7), that serve as agency for imperialism and domination in the modern/colonial world in what Fanon (1963) frames as those who have been, and continue to be, subjected to the standards of modernity and from there on the control of the broader globe. Situated in coloniality, Quijano (2000) points to the pervasive roots of whiteness and racism in Latin America. Mignolo’s and Quijano’s contributions have carved an ideological space in the literature that interrogates how race functions and operates transnationally. Transnationalism refers to the concept of traveling culture(s) as “dynamic living phenomena that moves beyond

boundaries of time and space” (Drzewiecka and Wong, 1999, p. 200), conveyed through relationships with other cultural practices and ideologies across nation-state borders, which in turn acquire new meanings, and is useful for understanding how whiteness as a traveling cultural practice(s) serves as a foundation for kinship along racial terrains between whiteness(s) in the U.S. and Latin@ America. As part of the colonial strategy, colonizers created and manipulated such distinctions such as sex, class, and religion to build multiple machines imperative for global, political, economic, and imperial conquest (Gopal, Willis, & Gopal, 2003; Pels, 1997). Such systems created by colonization allow and enable these patterns to reinforce each other through ideological and categorical machines (structures) that serve as interlocking systems of oppression that shape, produce, and reinforce each other (i.e. colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism) (Gopal et al, 2003). Today, these colonial residues of being and relating along positionalities of power and oppression continue to subsist under disguises of westernization marked by settler colonial identity constructions and cultural practices such as gender and sexuality, nationality and citizenship, and race and ethnicity (Smith, 1997). Postcolonialism is necessary for this work as it seeks to render visible ways in which constructed differences and discourses such as nationality and race have been marked and categorized along levels of importance to the colonizer’s values and aims, and functions to propagate western cultural dominance and the continued marginality of the west’s colonized and once-colonized (Bush, 2006; Pels, 1997; Quijano, 2000; 2008; Young, 2003).

### **Whiteness**

Cultural formations and racialized practices that have come to be realized as contemporary representations and understandings of whiteness continue to provoke much attention and discussion among scholars and activists. Whiteness continues to signify manufacturing marker



for reimagining and producing Eurocentric ideological, phenotypic, and sociocultural constructs of race as a normal condition. A condition deeply embedded in the fabric of the U.S. and much of the rest of the globe which benefits and privileges white supremacy, superiority, and internalization (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; Garner, 2007; Winant, 2004). An extensive body of interdisciplinary work examining whiteness maintains a plurality of critical understandings about the meanings attached to the many forms whiteness assumes (Boucher, Carey, & Elinghaus, 2009; Levine-Ransky, 2002; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Warren, 2003). Whether whiteness is implicated in relationships and encounters or as a self-prescribed representation and identification, scholars assert that whiteness functions as a dominant and neocolonial strategy aimed at maintaining economic, psychological, social, and cultural dominance over those constructed and marked as non-whites. African American scholars and activists such as James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, W.E. B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells, among others, have critically examined what the ongoing legacy of whiteness means for non-whites in the context of the United States (Roediger, 1998), reflecting extensively on the consequences of whiteness (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001). Many white antiracist scholars attribute much of their learning about the white gaze to writings of dissent in African American literature (Roediger, 2001). Today, a broad range of scholars, writers, and activists, whites and non-whites alike, have written extensively about the different functions of whiteness (i.e. as terror, systemic supremacy, cultural capital, contingent hierarchies, absence, invisibility) (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2001). The past two decades in particular have witnessed an increase in whiteness scholarship aimed at examining power dynamics and cultural politics in relationship to different geopolitical, transnational, and discursive spaces and moments (Bonnet, 2010; Drzewiecka, & Wong, 1999;

Dyer, 1997; Frankenburg; 1997; López, 2005). Whiteness studies has evolved into an interdisciplinary field of scholarly and public interest in cultural studies where whiteness is marked as the subject of intellectual inquiry and interrogation (Arai & Kivel, 2009; Cook & Simpson, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-López, 2006; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Rasmussen et al, 2001), and aims to reveal and make visible the unmarked and often invisible white race (Boucher et al,2009; Garner, 2007; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Suchet, 2007; Sullivan, 2006; Warren, 2003). Similar to postcolonialism, the cultural study of whiteness as racial formation, like other social identities, is productively understood as a communication phenomenon (Garner, 2007; Johnson, 1999; Lopez, 2005). Whiteness represents a plurality of communicative discourses, be it representational, verbal, written, or behavioral that allows ongoing manifestations and representations of whiteness to fester within sub-structures such as education, government, the media, religion, etc. (Dyer, 1997; Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Whiteness scholars utilizing an antiracist epistemology propose the need to critically examine whiteness, deconstruct, and reconstruct different meanings of whiteness that render visible how racialization (in the plural sense), intersect with other identities such as class, gender, and nation to work together to maintain structural dominance, power, and control that privileges whiteness. Antiracism also seeks to map out the historical landscapes that demonstrate the fabrication of race and the politics behind racialization (Sefa Dei, 2000). As an identity, whiteness serves as a problematizing and analytical perspective for formulating questions about social relations (Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007), where scholars have shifted their focus from the ‘other’--the subordinate, the minoritized, often referred to as people of color-- to a more critical paradigm of thinking that further examines the construction of whiteness (Dyer, 1997). In the following sections, I frame and discuss and frame the colonial dialectic, mapping out formulations of whiteness in Anglo

and Latin@ cultures, and putting them in conversation to demonstrate the possibilities for whiteness as a multiple encompassing identity and ideology with varied visions/versions of difference of how it shows up and works through contemporary societal processes and cultural practice.

### **Limitations**

This article is limited to theorizing newer understandings about cultural representation and practice within Latin@ culture in the U.S. by engaging a theoretical conversation between Latin@ culture, postcolonialism, and whiteness. While mention is made to intersecting issues such as class, gender, and religion that influence race within Latin@ culture, the focus is delimited to examining constructions of transnational white racial identity among Latin@s in the U.S. to provide a postcolonial whiteness framework for future research and practice.

### **Towards a Colonial Dialectic: Mapping Out Postcolonial Transnational Whiteness**

All European colonial projects have been fused in ways that construct and manifest the practice of whiteness (Lopez, 2005; Valdes, 2000). Dispersed in the course of global histories, European nations have engaged in colonial strategies of racialization for power and control (Bush, 2006; Mignolo, 2005). Since the establishment of colonial settlements across the Americas in the 1500s different events have shaped and reformulated what it means to be white in the U.S.: Including who identifies as white, and what if any privilege, is present among groups and individuals who are perceived as or present themselves in a way that aligns with normalized understandings of whiteness. However, the form in which Eurocentric notions of whiteness has operated throughout, across, and within the different histories and national terrains has come into fruition differently. Historically, whiteness was introduced as a colonial concept by English colonizers in the U.S. during the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a way of justifying otherness in order to produce a subordinate

and inferior labor force for the purpose of ideational, economic, political, and territorial advancement, and as a legal signifier of difference utilized to impose segregated cohabitation directly linked to nation building and colonial agendas and (Hadjor, 2007; Hitchcock, 2002). However, such colonial and cultural practices of whiteness were already present in previous European colonizing ventures in relation to the peoples of the land currently known as the Americas (Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). As Mignolo (2005) points out, “the continent emerged as such in the European consciousness as a massive extent of land to be appropriated and of people to be converted to Christianity, and whose labor would be exploited” (p. 7). First, the 16<sup>th</sup> century defined the discovery (colonization) of the southern central portion of the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese. Thereafter, the English, French, and other European nations proceeded to colonize and territorialize these lands through imperial expansion known as the enlightenment and modernizing periods (Burkholder & Johnson, 2008; Mignolo 2005, 2000), imposing its colonizing conditions unto the lands and its peoples, creating what Mignolo (2005) maintains as the idea of America, a modern fabrication limited to Europeans perception of the world.

Quijano (2008, 2000) and Mignolo (2005, 2003) posit postcolonial understandings of racial formation in Latin@ culture, engaging a broader Euroethnic homogeneous project beginning in the mid-16th century when European interests moved away from extracting natural resources to trading in a much more readily available commodity. Namely labor and the enslavement of Africans, similar to that of the British empire later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Following the end of colonialism by way of military influence and economic dominance as the form of control (Marx, 1998; Stoddard, 1920), colonizing nations had to rethink how to maintain power and social control, such as the coloniality of power. Consequently, Europeans in the United

States and Latin@ America rationalized the concept of race through dominant cultural and intersecting systems of subordination. First, discrimination was imposed in the form of indentured servitude and slavery as structural practices of expansive imperialism (Shillington, 2005; Stoddard, 1920), and following the abolition of systemic slavery, Euroethnic occupiers, continued their dominance by transitioning into systems of racial hierarchy by way of de jure and de facto segregation (Frankenberg, 1997).

Two historic events significant to understanding the Spanish/British linkage and the beginnings of Latin@centric whiteness in the U.S. include the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* in 1848 and the *Treaty of Paris* in 1898. These historical treaties served as open doors that made it possible for Eurocentric Latin@ness, and in turn Latin@centric whiteness, to travel beyond Latin American borders and to Anglocentric geopolitical spaces. Thus, the U.S. and Latin@ America permit for transnational possibilities of traveling cultural practices as the basis for whiteness as a meeting location for collective identity construction through, “culturing individuals from affiliative identities that continually change” (Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999, p. 200). These affiliative identities obtain varied meanings across nation-state borders that privilege whiteness differently (Castro-Gomez, 2008; Chabram-Deenersesian, 1997; López, 2005), and it is precisely the invisibility and absent presence behind neocolonial processes and connections that continue to inform complex social, cultural, and political thought. Racial identity formations premised on whiteness and or ‘whitening’ across the aforementioned geopolitical spaces have resulted in contemporary lingering residues of ‘othering’, referred to as the process of labeling and classifying other human beings to positions of disempowerment and dependency. (Graham, 1990; Hall, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000). Latin@ America and the U.S. were similar in that they relied on the befriending and eventual subjugation of Indigenous people, and the enslavement

and import of African bodies. Like the Spanish colonized most what is now Latin America, the British colonized what is now known as the U.S. Europeans travelers conquered, displaced, and imposed their values on the natives, though strategies used to subordinate the native people of each respective lands differed.

Hernández-Vázquez (2003) contends that “both peoples share a common history of struggle, against the British and Spanish crowns, respectively” (p. 88), referring to the ways both, Latin@ and American identities and contemporary culture, are situated in the colonial dialectic history of European conquerors. By colonial dialectic I refer to relationships rooted in white supremacy such as Spanish and British colonialisms, each seeking to homogenize non-European peoples. I utilize dialectic colonialisms as a presupposition to mark a conversation between cultural histories, formations, and representations informed by Eurocentric imperial ideas and cultural practices that I argue shape whiteness and racialization across continental, national and cultural terrains, and continue to influence neocolonial representations of Latin@ culture and identities (Mignolo, 2005; Quijano, 2008; Valdes, 2000). Adler (2000) refers to dialectical conceptualization as a method of debate rooted in the practice of a dialogue between two people who hold different ideas and wish to persuade each other, where even if they do not agree, they share at least some meanings and principles of inference. The linkage between these eras is significant because it was this temporal historical space referred as the Atlantic Slave Trade (or the middle passage) that served as the space whereby colonial occupation evolved into capitalism and the signification and commoditization of bodies (Mignolo, 2003, 2000). It is in this geopolitical and historic space that contemporary U.S. and countries in Latin America began their colonial linkage and dialogue. It is this space where Europeans throughout the Americas

went to purchase and trade, and where the idea and invention of whiteness as superiority and as cultural hegemon, was conceived even if primarily unmarked.

### **Racialization, Whiteness, and the Spanish/British Postcolonial Intersect**

The U.S., and by extension, its educational spaces, fails to make visible a colonial dialectic informed by global imperialism that encompasses the evolution of Spanish and Anglo cultural practices and racializing processes. Suchet (2007) notes, “it is important to understand that whiteness is not only about race and racism. Whiteness is a lived experience. It is an ideology, a system of beliefs, policies and practices that enable white people to maintain social power and control” (p. 868). Though Latin@centric whiteness has been shaped differently than it did for Anglo American whites, both have resulted in postcolonial representations of whiteness culturally entrenched in Latin America and the U.S. For Anglo-Saxons who participated in British colonialism, and over the years, members of other European groups (Celts, Scandinavians, etc.) who migrated to the newly formed United States thereafter in pursuit of citizenship, the concept of whiteness, has served as a differentiating, hegemonizing, cultural, and political signifier of the postulated standard stretching nearly three centuries (Gracia, 2000). At first, whiteness was used to refer to English settlers. Later, whiteness was expanded to signify all Anglo Saxons, and eventually all Europeans (Frankenberg, 1997; Hitchcock, 2002). Following emancipation in the U.S., the Jim Crow era ensued whereby separate but equal laws continued to function and manufacture policies and practices directly informed by race and racialization and whiteness was identified as a racial marker of place and position. Overtime, and throughout the course of U. S. history, whiteness has continuously been altered by whites in power to include other groups, and today, the term whiteness has expanded to include other ethnic nationalities such as Latin@s, Asians, Middle Easterners and so on (Lee & Bean, 2007; Yancey, 2003).

Like the U.S., European travelers also conquered, displaced, and imposed their values on the natives of what we know as Latin@ America. The abolition of slavery in Latin@ America did not assume some transitional strategy aimed at solidifying race as an official category of difference where scientific and biologic evidence served as the mechanism through which distinctions of race were made (Wade, 2001, 1997). Cultural practices and discourses of Spanish eurocentrism in Latin America continue to be present through absence and unmarked in ways that perpetuate preference for and identification with whiteness, for many Latin@s. An absence that has enabled whiteness, inhabited by this self-unconscious sense of absence around race, to seem to cease to exist “so that one’s cultural practices are not seen as being white-specific but universal to all human beings” (Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999, p.198). Thus, the lack of visibility around whiteness and political racialization in Latin@-America, although endemic in practices of racialization and colorism used to distinguish ethnoracial hybridity and mixed biological backgrounds for purposes of hierarchic categorization, veils discourses of race and racism that privilege whiteness as cultural practice similar to that of the U.S. in ways that bind Eurocentric national identity formation and whiteness as symbiotic (Wade, 1997, 2007; Appelbaum, Macpherson, & Roseblatt, 2003).

In most Latin American nations the colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese did not bound whiteness to legal stone, but did create a pigmentocracy based on gendered and class bloodlines that situated whites at the top and blacks at the bottom (Smith, 1997; Telles, 2014). Nations situated in Latin@ America differed in how racialization was practiced from that of the U.S. Gendered and class meanings assigned to colorism and ethnic miscegenation as a form of systemic control were solidified at the top of the sociopolitical spectrum (Graham, 1990). Skin color and miscegenation served as political signifiers in Latin@ America and the Caribbean,



directly linked to the legal politics of nationhood and citizenship as opposed to how the demarcation of race serves this same function in the United States (Appelbaum et al., 2003; Graham, 1990; Wade, 1997). For example, racialization or any form of miscegenation in the U.S. did not signify a classed and gendered caste system that defined a hierarchy of status that positioned whites at the top and blacks at the bottom, with people of mixed blood falling along different power continuums in the middle. The U.S. implemented a system whereby only whites had privilege, position, and power. Ware & Back (2001) refer to multiple epistemologies of whiteness as “different kinds of knowledge relating to the patterns of thinking and acting that flow from a belief in white supremacy” (p. 61). Whiteness as a racial identity that takes on different representations of meaning depending on the colors of the people white supremacy oppresses could be seen not only across and within academic bodies of work, but also across and within the plurality of nations coerced to take on Eurocentric cultural practices. Loomba (1998) contends that the global “imperial mission, based on a hierarchy of races, coincided perfectly with the economic needs of the colonialists” (p. 127). Hence, class formation depended on the racialization of non-whites by white Europeans from both the Spanish and British Empires seeking a labor force, and ideologies of race along with the construction of racial hierarchies were a direct result of capitalist venturing, with one dependent on the other (Miles, 1980).

Much literature has contested notions of a white identity and put forward critical understandings of whiteness as a global, imperial, and homogenizing project and a socially constructed identity that legally, culturally, and socially benefits those who identify as white and or can pass as white (Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007; Gopal et al, 2003; Lopez, 2005; Roediger, 2005). Critical engagement with race makes clear racializing processes and histories throughout the countries in Latin America and among Latin@s in the U.S. (Behnken, 2011; Branche, 2008;

Graham, 1990; Gomez, 2009; Gracia, 2011, Lazos Vargas, 2001; 2000; Millán & Velásquez, 2011; Telles, 2014 Valdes, 2000), demonstrating a favoritism towards European physical features such as whiteness or lighter skin and cultural practices of white modernity. First, through the privileging of blood lineage, and following emancipation, the whitening of the populace through intentional appeals for European migration to Latin American nations (Smith, 1997; Telles, 2014).

**Eurocentric Latin@ness; Latin@centric Whiteness: Postcolonial Whiteness as Spanish Oriented Latin@ Cultural Practice.**

Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1952), and Quijano (2000; 2008) interject notions of race and whiteness as obstinate persistent conditions of postcolonial identity requiring global understanding of Eurocentrism necessary to carve an ideological space useful for interrogating how the problem of the color line, tendered by W.E.B. DuBois, functions and operates across and through transcontinental geographic terrains. This includes the existing plurality of Latin@ cultures and identities represented throughout Latin American nations and the U.S. Though the idea of race has served a scientific illusion used to explain behavioral and psychological difference based on phenotype and other biological differences, scholars have for some time contested the biological reality of race (Wade, López, Beltrán, Restrepo, & Ventura, 2014).

For Latin@s in the U.S., colonial and postcolonial enterprises remain the underlying culprits at the heart of what whiteness signifies and how it takes on different relational and relative understandings given the cosmic space they make-up. Smith (2005) describes this cosmic space as a hybrid (mixture) of races as a result of colonial practices incessantly corresponding with the shifting constructions and ideologies always at play that inform cultural formation and transformation. Anzaldúa (1987) describes cosmic people as a varied

representation of Latin@ Mestiz@ness across the U.S. and Latin America as a result of Spanish imperialism, colonial miscegenation, racialization, and colorism. Shaped by Eurocentrism and non-European resistance colonial projects, it is this cosmic space that enables similarities and tensions situated in the relationship and dialogue between Spanish and English colonialism(s) that continue to inform varied racialized understandings within Latin@ culture, and mold how Latin@centric whiteness function across national borders. Historians and scholars make clear Latin@s' white heritage began in Spain, where much of the Spanish culture (class status, language, religion, and gender) is retained by its neocolonial subjects, even in the U.S. Lopez (2005) asserts that "one does not make whiteness as a malignant colonial ideology go away by simply showing how it deconstructs itself, any more than one can do away with the concept of the subject itself" (p. 13). Using a postcolonial lens, Lopez refers to the need to understand how whiteness has shifted since its social construction situated in colonialism as a way to create difference between the colonizer and colonized, and how whiteness continues to this day to signify privileges for those who can pass as white at the expense of others. Johnson (1999) adds that, "the problem of race now includes those who are raced white," beyond tangible and physical limits of white/ non-white bodies.

### **Latin@centric postcolonial whiteness: Representation.**

Over the last century, Latin@s in United States have been categorized and labeled by the Census Bureau in different ways. Prior to the 1970's, groups and individuals from Latin America were classified as 'Spanish speaking' or Spanish-Americans. In the 1980's the bureau adopted 'Hispanic' as an option by which people of Latin American decent can identify. Today, Latin@s are provided the option in the census form to identify as Latin@/Hispanic with the option to also select a race (Rodriguez, 2000). By extension, institutions operating within the United States,

such as the education system, also rely on census data racial and ethnic categories such as Hispanic/Latin@ to identify and mark the myriad of racialized identities. Currently, Latin@s constitute the largest minoritized group in the U.S., accounting for 16% of the population, and half of the total increase of the U.S. population during the first decade of the 21st century population (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Most Latin@s are of Mexican descent, followed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans, with many identifying as white Hispanic or Latin@ (Rodriguez, 2000). Out of the near 48 million Latin@s, one-third chose 'some other race' to describe their racial identity. Among the one third, 44% identified as Mexican or Mexican-American and 30% wrote in their ethnic identity as their race (23% Hispanic and 10% Latin American or Latin@). For individuals who selected Latin@ as 'other' most Latin@s identified with their national country of origin. This is inclusive of all domestic born and migrating populations. The numbers also showed a 3% representation of Latin@s who identified as Black and a smaller portion who identified as Asian or of Indigenous roots (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

On the racial end, Census data also revealed that Latin@s in the U.S. are increasingly identifying as white (*American Sociological Review*, 2010). Close to 60% of Latin@s identified racially as white, having the option to select race in addition to ethnicity, resulting in a 6% increase in the U.S. white population (Hixsin, Hepler, & Kim, 2011). Three-fourths of the increase in white demographics between 2000 and 2010 from 216.9 to 231 million was a result of white identifying Latin@s (Humes et al., 2011). These numbers point to a shift rarely engaged related to this increasing trend, and implications are rarely considered by educational enterprises. Making efforts to better understand racialization and colorism within Latin@ communities in the U.S. helps illuminate how Eurocentrism, nationalism, and ethnic identity have functioned as

connected discursive processes that have historically informed, and continue to shape racialization, racial identity, and existing power dynamics and relations within Latin@ culture both in Latin America and the U.S.

**Latin@centric postcolonial whiteness: Cultural practice.**

Alongside representation are ongoing events and different disciplinary and public canons that have rendered more visible intersections of whiteness and Latin@ culture (Fears, 2003; Fergus, 2009; Garcia, 2015; Ramos-Zayas, 2001; Vargas, 2014). In his acclaimed book, *Down This Mean Streets*, Piri Thomas (1967) recounts how his experience in the 1960's as a Latin@ in New York differed from other Puerto Ricans, including some of his family members. Thomas specifically writes about his struggles with being perceived as 'negro' while Puerto Ricans with lighter skin and white phenotypic appearance were regarded as Puerto Ricans and/or perceived as white. His experiences align not only with how racialization and colorism function within Latin@ culture, but the ways in which non-white appearing Latin@s are relegated to non-white racial identities while white appearing Latin@s are perceived as white or marked by their respective nation of origin. Garner (2007) posits that whiteness has no steady consensual meaning and is conceptualized in a variety of different yet not conjointly exclusive forms, serving as a lens through which particular relationships can be apprehended. Garner highlights different sociopolitical and racialized understandings of whiteness, whereby those who identify as or wish to identify within the racialized constraints of whiteness "may suspend other social divisions and link people who share whiteness to dominant social locations, even though the actors are themselves in positions of relative powerlessness" (Garner, 2007, p. 3).

Additional works also point towards the ways in which race matters in Latin@ culture. For example, in literature examining interpersonal and relational racial tensions present within

Latin@ communities in the U.S., several writers highlight how race shows up. In an essay examining the disconnects between Puerto Ricans from the mainland and in New York, Luciano (2001) reflects on the ways which race and class informed by Spanish Eurocentric thought enables relational tension between non-white Latin@s and white bourgeois Latin@s. William Garcia (2015) poignantly speaks to the disregard and marginalization of Afro-Latin@ and black culture both in United States and in the Caribbean by the guaynabit@s/ blanquit@s, also referred to as white Puerto Ricans with money. Garcia describes some of the cultural practices he observed, stating that many “were dressed in different styles: some were dressed like hipsters, others dressed like yuppies, followed by west coast-looking surfers while others dressed in European fashions. Most of them were the whitest Puerto Ricans I had ever seen in all my life and had no problem in taking pride in their whiteness.” Garcia specifically speaks to many Latin@s’ proudly situating themselves within, and preference for, whiteness, associating whiteness with class, while also denying whiteness. The demographic representations and examples provided highlight ways national origin and ethnicity camouflage or make invisible whiteness, even as Latin@s privilege Spanishcentric cultural values and privileged phenotypic traits.

Whiteness as absence and invisibility often deals with how whiteness in itself is invisible to white identifying subjects who are most likely to be privileged in relation to non-whites (Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007). Some scholars speak to the ongoing lack of awareness about race and power among white individuals (Frankenberg, 1997), while others write about the ways white people assume colorblindness. Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes colorblindness as a cultural practice whites undertake to not recognize racialized difference, electing to treat everyone as an individual as opposed to recognizing the individual as part of a group. Garner (2007) adds that

part of the dilemma around the invisibility of whiteness is the very same presence of whiteness as a dominant representation in itself. Dyer (1997) puts forward that “whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and white as power is maintained by being unseen” (p. 45). This suggests that beyond the color that is white, whiteness embodies underlying meanings that serve as cultural currency that communicate such values as normalcy, trustworthiness, civility and rationality, to name a few. Similar to Anglo American culture, such values and ideals tied to Spanish Eurocentricism are present within Latin@ culture, though not attached to non-whites situated within Latin@ (Smith, 1997).

Relatedly, Vargas (2014) notes the ways in which similar to Anglo whites, white Latin@s often deny whiteness and racism in Latin@ culture and make claims that black Latin@s are treated the same as white Latin@s as if white Latin@s do not enjoy privileges afforded to them as a result of being perceived as white. Prevailing literature highlights how blackness and or dark skin is viewed as an exception in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba and other parts of Latin America, and makes visible the ways in which cultural practices rooted in African tradition are appropriated and celebrated, while Afro (black) Latin@s are undervalued or generally marginalized altogether (Andrews, 2004; Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Godreau, 2006; Sue, 2013). For example, in a case study about gated communities in Latin@ communities, Suárez Carrasquillo (2011) makes evident how affluent gated communities lack Afro-Latin@ representation. Similarly, Davila (2010) speaks to the ways in which contemporary politics of race make for skewed representation of the Latin@ condition and accounts for polarizing consequences between Latin@s and other minoritized individuals as well as among Latinos themselves along the lines of citizenship and class.

Within the legal cannon of LatCrit scholarship, examples of such phenomenon whereby whiteness is privileged among Latin@s are provided as well. In his LatCrit analyses on Latin@s in entertainment, Johnson (2001), renders visible the ways in which white or white perceived Latin@s benefit from whiteness or from being perceived as ‘closer to white than not’. Johnson specifically points to the ways in which music represented by or performed by white appearing Latin@s is more easily consumed, appreciated and accepted by Anglo whites who perceive white or light skin Latin@s as able to embody ideals associated with American whiteness such as liberalism and meritocracy (Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2001) and Lazos Vargas (2001) also offer legal jurisprudence analyses by pointing to the ways in which mostly white middle class Cuban Latin@s were provided refugee status in the United States. As Johnson (2001) makes clear, the historic event known as the Mariel boatlift, where boats were sent to Cuba in hopes to bring to the United States relatives and family members “brought many poorer, Afro-Cubans to the United States; media characterization of the Marielitos as criminals, mentally ill persons, and homosexuals provoked public concern, even within the Cuban American community in south Florida” (p. 650). Such examples are reflective of the conversations I have had with many Afro-Latin@s and dark skin or non-white Meztiz@ students, staff and faculty on college campuses over the course of my fifteen years serving in higher education, as well as in representations observed in Latin@ popular culture.

### **The Significance of Situating Latin@ Culture and Identities in Postcolonial Whiteness:**

#### **Implications for Higher Education Professionals**

Scholars such as van Dijk (2009) and Quijano (2008) posit the need for a more thorough process of inquiry on the pervasive roots of racism in the construction of whiteness in Latin America.

They posit that most studies of racism, inclusive of Latin America, focus on forms of socio-



economic inequality and exclusion or on ethnic prejudice and attitude, but rarely do studies examine whiteness, colorism, and racialization to make visible representations of dominance and oppression within Latin@ culture. Such representations, when left unexamined, prevent higher education professionals from gaining deeper understandings about Latin@ students they serve and colleagues they work with. My dialogue between colonial histories, whiteness and Latin@ cultural practice reveals several sites of potential implication for Latin@ identities in higher education. Implications include the dehumanization of migrating Latin@s, continuous privileging of whiteness as cultural practice, ongoing absences and invisibilities in the production of knowledge about Latin@ students' experiences, and the repression of contributions based on struggles for equity among Latin@ peoples.

Colorism and racialization are important concepts and practices that need to be understood (Wade, 1997; Branche, 2008; Castro-Gómez, 2008), but little has been done in the context of higher education to examine the significance to this phenomena for Latin@s in higher education. A dialogue between Spanish- and Anglo- centric whitenesse(s) suggest it is possible, and in many cases likely, that many Latin@s already have different understandings of a whiteness(s) situated within Latin@ culture. These understandings influence values and morals, and informs social perceptions and conditions where Latin@s are positioned differently to Anglo American whiteness, transcending cultural similarities and ethnicity, without jeopardizing ideas of whiteness entrenched in Eurocentric neocolonial thought. Such learned practices and understandings span generations that to this day maintain a dialectic relationship that privilege whiteness physically, culturally, socially, and ideologically.

Newer understandings of Latin@centric whiteness calls for further attention beyond awareness, and point to a significant need for higher educational professionals to be mindful

about how Latin@ students are served, and implications for how issues and challenges related to Latin@ representations and culture on college campuses are considered and engaged. More specifically it is critical that scholars and practitioners have a better understanding and grasp of Latin@ students' experiences with respect to the ways in which colorism and race function within the Latin@ condition. Though many implications exist, this article points to two particular implications for practice. The first implication rests in the use existing frameworks used for research and practice such as Ethnoracial Latin@ identity development theories. Such models can be useful for practitioners working with Latin@ students on college campuses, but can limit research and practice when solely consumed with an Anglo lens or orientation in mind. Representations of the ways in which Latin@s negotiate and navigate whiteness appear in the commonly used work of ethnic and identity development by scholars Gallegos & Ferdman (2012) and Torres and Phelps (1997). These scholars suggest that Latin@s in the U.S. are likely to define themselves along Latin@ cultural and orientation understandings, where the former accounts for Anglo oriented whiteness and the latter, Anglo centered cultural practice. Neither model accounts for understandings of Latin@centric whiteness within Latin@ culture discussed in this article that give voice to sentiments of anti-blackness and the erasure of non-Mestizo identities such as African, Asian and Indigenous representations. It is important that attention is given to the ways in which Indigenous, Asian, and African ancestries and influences are absented from Latin@ conversations, and the ways in which higher education professionals so easily disregard observed or perceived whiteness in Latin@ culture as an Anglo oriented whiteness.

A second implication involves the utilization of national and ethnic markers for Latin@ students to inform how decisions are made with respect to how campus resources such as cultural spaces and funding are allocated. Existing literature points to ways many Afro-Latin@s

are more likely to find belongingness within the African-American constituency than within spaces often relegated to Latin@s such as Latin@ cultural centers. Additional literature also points to differences in how dark and light skin Mestiz@s experience life. This paper suggests that the concept of Mestiz@ in itself also requires further interrogation. This is in part due to distinctions in how white and non-white Latin@ students experience Latin@ness within Latin@ culture and how they are perceived by members of non-Latin@ communities.. While terms such as ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latin@’ make it easier for institutions to take count of numbers, both descriptors, serve as conduits for racial invisibility that prevents Latin@s from culturally looking within to identify the varied ways colorism, racialization, and whiteness inform Latin@ culture and identity formation. This in turn leads to false and essentialist understandings about culture and identity, and undermines the privileging of whiteness, within Latin@ culture.

No accounting for postcolonial understandings of whiteness in Latin@ culture prevents institutions to better understand and act on issues related to campus climate such as differences in how white and non-white Latin@s experience college, and what if any differences exist in areas related to retention, persistence, belongingness, and ability to navigate college life, on college campuses. Not considering implications associated with the newer understandings in this article not only enable a continued lack of awareness that inform culturally irrelevant practice, and it leads to the silencing of many Latin@ students’ voices at the same time Latin@ student enrollment in higher education is increasing. In conclusion, this article conveys the need for higher education scholars and practitioners to engage newer conceptualizations that account for the relative and relational privilege, or lack thereof, among Latin@s on their respective campuses. Latin@ student bring a varied representations of experiences tied what it means to be Latin@. Whether it is students who come from families residing in the U.S. dating back several

generations, Latin@s who may have moved from western and eastern Europe to Latin America, Latin@s who may be first generation U.S.-born, Latin@s who have married Anglo white partners whose children share Spanish and Anglo whiteness, and or Latin@s who come from families who have recently migrated to the U.S., such experiences operate within an umbrella of neocolonial empire influenced by white hegemony not only present in Anglo American culture, but learned within Latin@ culture. Within these populations exists a racialized system present where Eurocentric ideas are shared across culture, and psychosocial and cultural meaning is ascribed to the lighter and or darker complexity of peoples' phenotypic appearance (Behnken, 2011; Menchaca, 2001). Considering newer postcolonial understandings of Latin@centric whiteness not only unveils how whiteness functions in Latin@ culture, it also makes visible ways current structures absent non-white voices within Latin@ cultures. Understanding the significance of this work in higher education is a first step in venturing into more effective ways of practicing inclusive excellence that enable scholars and practitioners to address the challenges of an increasing Latin@ constituency in higher education and assuring all Latin@ students feel acknowledged and validated.

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### CHAPTER 3

## BENEATH AND BEYOND AND LATIN@NESS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POSTCOLONIAL/ANTIRACIST ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF LATIN@ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THEORIES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE

### Abstract

The past several decades have witnessed a growth in student affairs literature on the importance of racial and ethnic identity among Latin@ students in higher education. Yet, much research fails to consider Latin@ efforts to fight for white rights in the U.S., as well as whiteness and non-mestiz@ racialized identities within Latin@ness forged by Eurocentric agendas over hundreds of years (Omi & Winant, 1994; Talles, 2014). Through critical dialectic engagement between postcolonial whiteness, antiracism and existing literature in higher education, this theoretical analysis sought to unmark absences and interconnections, and provide dimensions of whiteness often dismissed or not discussed in Latin@ identity development models. Doing so filled a significant void in, and complemented, current works on Latin@ cultural formation, development theory, and whiteness. Concluding, I discussed the implications of newer understandings and what they signify for academic and student affairs practitioners who utilize Latin@ identity development theories with students in higher education.

**Target Journal for Submission:** *Journal of Higher Education* (Leading scholarly journal on the institution of higher education. Articles combine disciplinary methods with critical insight to investigate issues important to faculty, administrators, and program managers)

**Keywords:** Colorism, Ethnicity, Identity Development, Latin@s, Postcolonialism, Race, Racialization, Whiteness

## Introduction

During a 2012 fatal shooting of a young black teenager by the name of Trayvon Martin in Florida by a white appearing Latino male, Jorge Zimmerman, tensions surrounding Zimmerman's racial and ethnic identity surfaced as pundits and scholars chimed in on the case (Nishime, 2013; Thompson, 2013). Media reporters and news writers began to use the term white Hispanic to describe Zimmerman out of confusion about his ethnicity and race. The media inquiry into Zimmerman's identity was done to gauge the extent to which racial motivation contributed to the crime. Meanwhile, writers in critical media outlets, such as *Colorlines*, provided perspectives demonstrating how Zimmerman's Peruvian and American white identity was leveraged in fluid extremes with Zimmerman garnering much support from White supremacist groups highly unlikely to support Latin@s, while also drawing attention to the extent to which the shooting could not have been racially motivated (Hing, 2013).

In a different article in the *Huffington Post*, Moreno (2012), a white identifying Hispanic author, writes about his preference to racially identify as white as a result of assimilation, phenotypic appearance, and American acculturation. Other articles in media and news outlets, including *The New York Times*, *Uplift*, *CNN*, and *Buzzfeed* have also wrestled with the complex intersection of race, ethnicity, and nationality within Latin@ identities in the context of the U.S. Some writers offered a pan-cultural lens to Latin@ness, privileging ethnicity and cultural practice while minimizing the saliency of race (Palacios, 2014; Navarro, 2012), while others made an intentional effort to highlight racialized differences within Latin@ identities (Moreno, 2012; Vargas, 2014). Vargas (2014) notes "people talk so much about Latinos denying their Blackness, but bring up the term 'white Latino' and you will see an extreme reaction, visceral attack from white Latinos themselves." Vargas adds that White Latin@s often deny whiteness

and racism in Latin@ culture, make claims that Black Latin@s are treated the same as White Latin@s and “love to pretend they don't enjoy privileges afforded to them when they identify as Latino or Hispanic.” Yet, these articles did not offer historical and political understandings that lead to the deeper connection between whiteness and Latin@ness and how whiteness culturally, shows up among Latin@s.

### **Latin@ Student Representation and Experiences in Higher Education**

Research on Latin@s experiences considers how race and ethnicity influence Latin@ students' identity formation within pan-ethnic representation in American higher education and the broader society (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2007; Torres, 2004, 2003, 1999; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Scholars have written extensively on how Latin@s come to understand their ethnoracial identity, and how identity dynamics in turn shape and inform their experiences, social relations, and relationship to their surrounding environments (Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter-Magolda, 2004). An extensive body of literature has been produced addressing academic, social, cognitive, and cultural understandings about Latin@ students and considers complex understandings along racialized ethnic continuums regarding how Latin@ students come to make sense of and [re]formulate their identity (Castillo, 2009;; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Torres & Phelps, 1997). Nonetheless, much of the research stops short of examining racialization, colorism, and whiteness with respect to representations and the experiences of Latin@s in higher education and fails to consider whiteness as a globalized, salient, and potent site for understanding white and non-white racialized identities within the spectrum of Latin@ness.

Even as conversations about whiteness and Latin@ identity formations have surfaced in the public social interface over the last several years, this intersection has not been critically considered. Literature about Latin@ racial and ethnic identity development falls short of examining how whiteness operates within Latin@ culture in the context of higher education and what it may signify with respect to how educators consider and respond to issues and challenges faced by Latin@ students. Such gaps beg scholars and practitioners to ask some questions. Where exactly are Latin@s living into the United States from, and how do they identify racially within their national locale of origin? How about Latin@s with ancestral heritage situated in the U.S., formerly Mexican territory? Asking such questions irradiates ways colonial events and historically forced migrations inform how national, transnational, and racialized identities intersect with other identities such as religion, gender, class, and additional identities to shape racialization and colorism within Latin@ culture (Graham, 1990; Telles, 2014; Wade, 2007). Racialization signifies how race is constructed and imposed on people by institutional social actions as cultural practice engaged by the white dominant group in order to socially and politically assert and maintain power and control over groups constructed as non-white (Martinot, 2010; Yancey, 2003). Colorism refers to the process of skin color stratification “that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market” (Hunter, 2007, p. 237), and is a persistent challenge for non-white minoritized people in the U.S. Making efforts to better understand racialization and colorism within Latin@ communities helps illuminate how Eurocentrism, ethnicity, and nationalism have functioned as discursive processes that have historically informed, and continue to shape racialization, racial identity, and existing power dynamics within Latin@ culture both in Latin America and the U.S.

This article represents a critical analysis of and interdisciplinary engagement with, Latin@ racial and ethnic identity development theories in student affairs, and the study of whiteness to better understand how whiteness might inform Latin@ students' experiences within the Latin@ community in the context of higher education. More specifically, I aim to create a conversation between Latin@ identity development models and postcolonial/antiracist thought, and contribute new rearticulated theoretical and conceptual understandings about the interrelationship between these bodies of scholarship. My resolve is not to dispute existing knowledge, but to problematize current conceptualizations and contribute new understandings that complement existing knowledge. It is critical that policy makers, practitioners, and scholars alike delve deeper into the cosmic complexity of Latin@ identities beyond ethnic and cultural markers in order to effectively address racialized identity politics and needs present within this population in higher education. Jose Vasconcelos (1925) refers to cosmic identity as a hybrid (mixture) of races as a result of colonialism, miscegenation, and the histories and tensions that continue to inform vast differences throughout the Latin@ sociocultural and geopolitical landscape. Seeking to further interrogate and reenvision cosmic identity, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) contributes a feminist intersectional framing of cosmic identity, that renders more visible gender and sexuality, beyond Vasconcelo's framing of the cosmic race. This requires critically delving into existing scholarship about Latin@ identity development theories to further uncover what, if anything, is not being considered that may provide more profound understandings about the Latin@ condition.

Ensuing, I provide an overview of foundational literature about identity development and ethnoracial oriented theoretical lenses utilized to address the experiences of Latin@s, and discuss the underpinnings used to situate and interrogate these bodies of work. I then offer an analysis

illustrating how interactions between cultural, ideological, and phenotypic representations of Latin@ identity formation interact with whiteness and colorism in ways that contribute unique representational and conceptual understandings about the interrelationship between these bodies of scholarship. I conclude with a discussion of implications for what these new understandings signify for educators in higher education as a result of my analysis.

### **Foundations of Identity Development Models used in Higher Education**

Most research on student development pertaining to identity stems from the field of social psychology where human development as a subject matter is explored (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Evans et al. (2010) describe development as “the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their life” (p. 42). Identity is also recognized as a social construction of beliefs about the self formed through interactions with the broader social context, where practices by dominant groups determine cultural norms (Quintana, 2007; Torres, 2003; Torres et al., 2009; Torres & Phelps, 1997). Theorists such as Erikson (1959, 1980) and Piaget (1950), were the first in psychology to pioneer theories that would serve as platforms for the eventual growth in interest and research aimed at examining psychosocial and cognitive dimensions of identity development (Evans et al., 2010).

Erikson (1980) described identity development as ever changing, from the beginning of one’s life to the very end, and stressed the important role that both the internal self and external dynamics play in shaping an individual’s identity. Erikson also granted importance to the roles history, social context and environment play in identity development. Erikson described his theory of human development in eight stages, each pertaining to a particular age range in a person’s life. But it is stage five, which he refers to as ‘identity vs. identity diffusion’ that

focuses on individuals transitioning from adolescence into adulthood where they are faced with challenges such as navigating self-perception, how they view and perceive others, how others view them, how they come to define themselves, and how they fit into the broader context while staying true to their personal growth. Building on Erikson's theory, psychosocial theorists Marcia (1966), Josselson (1978) and Chickering (1969) sought to study identity development among young adults. Marcia (1980) added to Erikson's work by establishing identity statuses as a way to identify how adolescents navigate challenging situations faced, and Chickering (1969) chartered a psychosocial theory specific to college students' identity development. Chickering's development theory comprises a set of psychosocial elements referred to as vectors that influence identity development in college students. These vectors include emotional, intellectual, ethical, and interpersonal aspects of human development and are influenced by the institutional environment and functions such as faculty, students, curriculum, teaching, and services (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

Foundations of student identity development in college have been instrumental in addressing psychosocial issues such as developing relationships, maturity, and competence, but fail to consider the dominant lens under which these theories were created and the roles historical, systemic, and societal oppression play in the development of minoritized racial and ethnic students (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001). Dating back to the late 1980s researchers have found that racial and ethnic minoritized students are more likely to think about and reflect on their identities than their white peers (Stewart & Healy, 1989). Thus, race and ethnicity are central cultural and sociopolitical domains that highly inform both white and non-white identity formation, though developmental processes do differ (Quintana, 2007).



### **Racial and Ethnic Identity Development Models: An Overview**

Scholarship addressing identity development in young adults has also focused on issues of race (Cross, 1991; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So- Lloyd, 2005; Pope, 2000) and ethnicity (Branch, Tayal, & Triplett, 2000; Phinney, 1993; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) on identity formation. A plethora of literature is available addressing racial and ethnic identity development for both, white and non white students (Evans et al., 2010; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). Primarily, scholars in such fields as psychology, counseling, and education created binary models addressing white and black racial identity development (Cross, 1971, 1991; Hardiman, 1994; Helms, 1984, 1990; Jackson, 1976). Such models vary and are comprised of stages, with each stage dealing with individuals' connection with a larger racial group, and how parts of that racial group's culture influences his or her racial identity (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

Some early racial identity models stemming from racially marginalized individual and group experiences include Cross's Nigrescence (1971) and Jackson's (1976) Black Identity Development (BID) models. Both focus on the experiences of people who identify as Black or African-American, and center on Black identity formation where individuals move through developmental stages illustrating heightened awareness about, and growth in, one's respective racial identity. Other foundational frameworks such as Hardiman's (1994) white identity development (WID) model and Helms (1990) model of white racial identity development (WIRD) focus on white identity formation. WID focuses on whites' responses to racism in their development from naïve to aware, while WRID engages with the process by which whites recognize and understand race as a psychological state of being. Such models have been useful in recognizing cultural differences in how individuals and groups differ, and racial identity formation within the context of the U.S. Nonetheless, these models do not address cultural

influences such as ethnicity and nation on identity formation along a comparative racialized continuum (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998), where ethnic identity is relinquished for whiteness as cultural practice and nationality is paralleled to cultural hegemony such as that of white identity formation (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997; Ignatiev, 1995; San Juan, Jr., 1992). Moreover, frameworks such as the Asian American Development and American Indian identity models (See Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012), and Latin@ identity development models (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres, 2003; Torres & Phelps, 1997), have also been theorized to address ethnic/ racial formations among groups that do not easily fit into racial binaries (Evans et al., 2010; Wijeyesinghe and Jackson, 2012). Ethnicity and race are often used interchangeably but many scholars regard race and ethnicity as different yet related concepts (Evans et al., 2010; Helms & Talleyrand, 1997), Rodriguez, 2000; Torres 1999; Trueba, 2002). While race is broadly perceived as a social construct that connects individuals and groups based on biological traits such as phenotypic characteristics and skin pigmentation, ethnicity is conceptualized as multidimensional and shaped by commonalities of elements such as histories, migrations, geography, and cultural practices (i.e. religion, language significance of family and kinship), that inform self-identification and attitudes relative to one's cultural group (Evans et al., 2010; Phinney, 1995). Atkinson et al. (1998) conceive ethnicities as representing distinguishing multidimensional differences of any particular groups based on national and cultural characteristics.

Related to ethnicity and important to understand about ethnic identity formation are enculturation and acculturation. Enculturation refers to the "process of being socialized to conform to the values, beliefs, and behavioral standards of one's ethnic culture" (Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, & Cota, 1993, p. 222). Torres (1999) distinguishes acculturation from ethnicity,

referring to acculturation as how individuals perceive and respond to majority culture, whereas ethnicity deals with how culture of origin is maintained. Padilla and Perez (2003) describe acculturation as a psychological process whereby individuals take on some cultural practices in addition to their own as a result of migration to a new cultural space or by coming into contact with members of a dominant culture (i.e., Latin@s migrating to the U.S.). Unlike acculturation, assimilation describes the process of choosing not to maintain one's own cultural identity and taking on values and identity of the dominant group altogether. These differ from racial identity in that individuals are faced with having to negotiate how they perceive themselves and their sense of ethnic identity while faced with conflicting value systems and subjected to cultural prejudice and stereotypes based on their perceived ethnic group in contrast to race (Torres, 2003, 1999; Torres & Phelps, 1997).

Both acculturation and enculturation facilitate understandings about and influence the work on ethnic identity, and have served as psychosocial and sociocultural conceptual underpinnings that inform existing models linked to understanding bicultural and ethnic identity formation. Biculturalism broadly refers to an individual's synthesis and ongoing negotiation of two different cultures and languages, resulting in evolution of a third culture not previously present (Torres & Phelps, 1997). The bicultural frameworks include: a two-dimensional model of acculturation focused on the degree to which individuals acculturate to the majority culture (Anglo culture) and or retain characteristics from the culture of origin (Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1980); a model of bicultural/ multicultural identities that account for how persons negotiate contextual and individual processes involved in the integration of two or more cultural identities (Ramirez, 1984), and; a cultural identity model that accounts for one's familiarity with culture and identity (Felix-Ortiz de la Garza, Newcomb, & Myers, 1995).

Developmentally similar to bicultural models but distinctive in focus is Phinney's (1993) model of ethnic identity development, which consists of three successive stages indicative of how individuals come to know their ethnic identity: 1) Unexamined Ethnic Identity; 2) Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium, and; 3) Ethnic Identity Achievement. This model is applicable across ethnic groups and is theoretically based on Erikson's work. It is also congruent with Marcia's (1980) model of identity development and other models of ethnic identity development (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990; Kim, 2001). Phinney's model (1993) examines the ways individuals understand how their ethnicity is implicated and make decisions about its role in their lives, irrespective of their level of ethnic involvement. The first stage is one of unexamined ethnic identity and is characterized by a lack of interest in ethnicity where individuals resign to the dominant majority cultural values. The second stage, Identity Search/ Moratorium, comes about when individuals experience moments that compel them to explore their ethnicity/ethnic background. The final stage, Ethnic Identity Achievement, describes individuals with a clear and secure sense of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1993; Torres, 2003). Thus, Phinney's ethnic identity model examines students' identity development based on shared commonalities within ethnic groups as opposed to cultural identity models that focus on bicultural formations.

### **Latin@Racial and Ethnic Identity Models**

#### **Hispanic bicultural orientation model.**

A Hispanic Identity model created by Torres (2003, 1999), the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM), engages ethnic identity development along understandings of acculturation among Latin@ individuals by focusing how Latin@s conceptualize and make choices between two cultures: their own and the majority culture. A study by Torres (2003) examining influences on ethnic identity for Latin@ college students found that the environment where they grew up,

family influence and generational status, and self-perception and status were conditions that greatly influenced their ethnic identity. Given that Latin@ students' identity is highly influenced by how they situate their ethnicity, she points to college environments as starting points of identity development that influence how Latin@s' identity formation undergoes change over different periods and moments (Torres, 2004, 2003). Her findings suggest that the presence, or lack thereof, of diversity in environments where students grow up in the U.S. strongly influence how Latin@ students self identify ethnically and how they orient culturally. Torres et al (2009) found that Latin@ students from diverse contexts tend to maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity, whereas those who grow up in majority white European communities identify more with geographic location (i.e. American) than their culture of origin (Torres, 2004, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). To describe how Latin@ students experience identity formation differently, four cultural orientations are posited by Torres (1999).

***Bicultural orientation.***

In the first orientation Latin@ students feel a sense of comfort with both cultures, have successfully acculturated and enculturated, and are able to participate in and navigate two different cultures. Latin@s in this orientation consist of individuals who have experienced living in a diverse environment where they have grown up learning to navigate dominant American culture and their own Latin@ culture (Torres, 2004, 1999), and may come from a family who has remained culturally connected to their national heritage through practices such as traveling to their Latin@ country of origin, speaking Spanish in the household, attending Latin@ cultural functions, living in a community with a strong presence of Latin@s, and comprise a range of experiences with generational status (Torres, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Within this orientation Latin@s do not have a preference for one culture or the other, have integrated aspects

of both their respective culture of origin and American (Anglo oriented) culture, are likely to be fluent in English and Spanish, and have developed a strong sense of belonging and self-perception (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

***Latino/Hispanic orientation.***

The second, Latino/Hispanic Orientation, indicates a greater comfort with one's own culture of origin. Latin@s situated here find it difficult to acculturate and prefer to remain within their own cultural space. Individuals situated here prefer not to acculturate or take on the values and practices of the dominant culture, and are likely to grow up in an environment with a strong Latin@ presence. They have the option to not negotiate two cultures and maintain a strong connection with Latin@ peers who share national culture of origin and or ethnic identity (Torres, 2003). Within this orientation, Latin@s are likely to have migrated to the United States while young and often maintain a strong sense of loyalty to values and traditions associated with Latin@ culture. A preference for speaking Spanish and celebrating events and holidays aligned with one's respective national culture of origin are examples of such values and traditions. Thus, Latin@s situated in this orientation experience challenges acculturating to dominant American (Anglo) culture and are likely to feel alienated uncomfortable, and marginalized.

***Anglo orientation.***

Like assimilation, Anglo orientation implies a higher level of comfort with the dominant culture. Torres (2003) explains that the longer Latin@s are exposed to and reside in a predominantly white (Anglo) society, the less culturally aware they become of their own ethnic background and are more likely to assimilate. Latin@s situated in this orientation likely come from families with a lengthier generational presence in the U.S., are more likely to care about how they are perceived by their American peers or individuals from the dominant group, change their self-

perception as a function of their environment (Torres, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), and are less likely to speak Spanish. Within this orientation, Latin@s experience cultural dissonance, described as “the experience of dissonance or conflict between one’s own sense of culture and what others expect” (Torres, 2003, p. 540). Their preference for and comfort with dominant culture in the U.S. makes it challenging to navigate two cultures and prevents higher comfort level within Latin@ culture. Latin@s situated here are vulnerable to external influence, lack awareness of their own ethnic values and social identity, likely define themselves by Anglo cultural standards, and lack an internal compass for Latin@ ethnic and cultural practice (Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

***Marginal orientation.***

The remaining bicultural orientation reflects tension and discomfort with both cultures, where students experience internal struggle and disconnectedness with their own culture and that of the majority (Torres, 2003, 1999). These individuals are caught between the expectations, traditions, and knowledge from the dominant culture and their respective culture of origin (Torres, 2004). Latin@s situated in this orientation can range across multiple generations, likely to be multiracial/ethnic where one of their parents is of Anglo (American) descent or from a non-Latin@ cultural background, and may be perceived by family and social peers as not fully belonging in either dominant majority or ethnic culture or origin. Latin@s sense of disconnectedness with both cultures could be attributed to several factors that include, but are not limited to, preference to identify with national origin (i.e. Mexico, Cuba), experiencing cultural mindfulness at a later point of their lives, or struggling to meet expectations of both cultures.

**Latino/a ethno racial identity model.**

Another model describing different identity orientations among Latin@s is Gallegos and Ferdman's (2012) Latino/a ethnoracial identity model. One major difference between both models is that this model considers race (color), racial hierarchy, and ethnic values in how Latin@s choose to identify-- that is to say it represents an ethnoracial model as opposed to a bicultural one. Going beyond the psychosocial and cultural in their identity model, Gallegos and Ferdman (2012) account for whiteness. Within this framework, orientations are non-linear and refer to the lenses employed by Latin@s who "come to define themselves in a society that often disparages their identity and seeks to impose definitions rather than allow self-identification" (p. 49). Unlike the bicultural model, Latin@s can jump in and out of multiple orientations as this model is cyclical and permits for fluidity, circularity, and interconnectedness. The orientations are: Latino-integrated, Latino-identified, subgroup-identified, Latino as other, undifferentiated/denial, and white identified, with race being framed differently across each orientation.

***Latino integrated.***

Latin@s in this orientation view Latin@ness as an important collective identity in the context of the U.S., perceive being Latin@ as positive, prefer to be viewed as individuals within a larger group, and are aware of the ways identities such as gender, religion, class, etc. intersect to influence Latin@ identity (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Race is viewed as dynamic, contextual, and socially constructed, and whiteness as complex. Situated in this orientation, Latin@s are able to connect with different dimensions of themselves as well as those of Latin@ groups that share ethnic markers, but differ along national cultures of origin. This orientation is the most complex whereby Latin@s are likely to be exposed to varied experiences and geographic regions across Latin@ America. As result, Latin@s situated here have learned to adapt to fast changing environments, are open to ambiguity and contradiction, and intentionally avoid stereotypes, but



are less likely to make connections across subgroup (culture of nation origin) differences for political and collective advancement (Gallegos and Ferdman 2012).

***Latino identified.***

Within this orientation Latin@ness is viewed as a dynamic and different race altogether. Race is elusively framed along broader pan-Latin@ understandings, and whiteness is looked at as an identity that could hinder or benefit Latin@s (Gallegos and Ferdman, 2012), suggesting that Latin@s perceive race as a fluid concept that takes on different meaning across national cultures of origin. Whiteness is viewed as an identity outside the scope of Latin@s pertaining only to Anglo Americans, and white people are perceived as either barriers or allies to collective Latin@ struggles and political movement (Ferdman, 1997). Latin@s in this orientation have a positive view of Latin@ness, prefer to identify as Latin@, and are knowledgeable about Latin@ cultures, histories and shared values across subgroups. Individuals situated here place emphasis on Latin@s as a collective, yet are limited by a lack of deeper understandings about existing differences and complexities within and between Latin@ subgroups.

***Sub-group identified.***

Within this orientation, Latin@s identify with and have strong cultural ties to their respective national origin (i.e. Mexican, Cuban) and maintain a positive view of their own subgroup, but do not view other Latin@ subgroups as positively. They place emphasis on differences between Latin@ groups, pass negative judgments, and hold on to stereotypes about Latin@s subgroups outside their national origin (Gallegos and Ferdman, 2012). Latin@s within this orientation are likely to reside in communities with a homogenous representation of Latin@s and view race as secondary to culture and nationality. Whiteness is perceived as American (Anglo) and social relations with whites could serve as potential barriers to preserving their culture.

***Latino as ‘Other’.***

Within this orientation Latin@s lack awareness about Latin@s’ complex histories, culture, and identity politics and fail to make connections between themselves and how these complexities inform them. Latin@s situated here understand they are connected to a broader Latin@ constituency, but do not identify with any particular subgroup. Latin@s in this orientation are likely to come from diverse contexts with large representations of Latin@s of different backgrounds, accept external categorizations of identity imposed on them by the system in which they are located (i.e. minority, person of color), frame race as binary white/non-white, and perceive white persons as negative without consideration to racialization and colorism within Latin@ culture.

***Undifferentiated/denial.***

Latin@s situated here view themselves as people or human beings and adopt a colorblind lens, which often leads to them adopting dominant cultural practices and values, and rendering whiteness as invisible. Within this orientation, Latin@s lack self-awareness about how race and ethnicity influence them, are likely to not connect to other Latin@s or acquaint themselves with Latin@ peers, prefer to be viewed as individuals and claim not having either positive or negative views towards Latin@s and other groups. Latin@s oriented this way prefer to or are used to living in homogeneous cultural environments while maintaining relational harmony with dominant group members, and experience cultural confusion or dissonance when they are situated in diverse contexts where cultural mindfulness among Latin@s is the norm.

***White identified.***

Within this orientation, Latin@ness is perceived negatively while whiteness along phenotypic characteristics is viewed positively. Race is important for those who associate themselves in this

orientation. Latin@s who identify as white perceive themselves along Eurocentric standards, share a preference for whiteness and are more likely to engage in practices that work towards improving the race. Coincidentally, Gallegos and Ferdman (2012) also posit that those within this orientation have “assimilated into dominant American culture and ideology” and “view the environment from the White perspective and in the context of White, European American culture” (p. 66). Latin@s situated here choose to marry into European heritage, take on values of dominant white culture, and are less likely to develop a positive sense of Latin@ identity due to different experiences, such as being exposed over one’s lifespan to negative images of Latin@s or not seeing themselves and their cultural attributes valued and positively reflected in their broader context.

Although processes of acculturation and enculturation are present in both models, Latin@s ability to self-identify across orientations and the consideration of both race and ethnicity as endemic to Latin@ identity development, distinguishes Gallego & Ferdman’s ethnoracial model from Torres’s bicultural model. The bicultural model orientations (Torres, 2003, 1999) do not address identity formation as a racial marker altogether, erring on the side of cultural and ethnic formation. Other scholars examining acculturation from a diasporic perspective posit more critical understandings of acculturation, describing acculturation as a “method that individuals use in responding to stress-inducing new cultural contexts” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 141), in order to help them navigate oppressive conditions. Their theorization points to the importance of understanding how acculturation may be influenced by individuals’ ability to navigate dominant culture and can look different across racial lines in societies that privilege whiteness and light skin. Following, I provide an overview of the theoretical underpinnings from which I will draw to unveil functions of whiteness in Latin@ culture

necessary to understand this cultural phenomenon in higher education and outline limitations of this study.

### **Limitations**

This study utilized a theoretical lens to explore what if any unique understandings about whiteness and Latin@ identity formations exist by putting different theoretical bodies of work in conversation with each other within the context of the U.S. This is necessary to point out as newer understandings about Latin@centric whiteness revealed are limited to identity development and should be used to inform how models are conceptualized and utilized. Secondly, though this analysis engaged conversation about the significance of understanding more critical understandings about the relationship between whiteness and Latin@ identities in higher education, imperial research that employs postcolonial whiteness and antiracism to examine Latin@centric whiteness is necessary to uncover the practice of colorism and racialization within Latin@ culture(s) in higher education. A delimitation of this project includes the suspension of intersecting identities such as gender, class, religion and other social identities that historically and culturally are directly linked to racial and ethnic identity formations in Latin@ culture. Plenty of research across varied disciplines provide thorough analysis of the role of intersectionality in Latin@ culture and identity formation, but for this project suspending these intersections was necessary in order to focus on whiteness as a site of knowledge production and contention and to have a deeper discussion about whiteness as culture and representation.

### **Latin@ Identity Formation and Whiteness: Postcolonial/Antiracist Thought**

Postcolonialism serves as a location of theories that help critically interrogate and analyze the effect of colonialism or imperialism on contemporary culture (Young, 2003; Prasad, 2005),

while antiracism offers both theoretical and practical responses to challenging questions about the nature of race, racism, and the intersections between power and difference (Sefa Dei, 2008). Postcolonial thought seeks to render visible ways in which constructed differences and discourses such as race and nationality have been marked and categorized along systemic levels of importance to the colonizer's values and aims, and functions to propagate western cultural dominance and the continued marginality of the west's colonized and once-colonized (Bush, 2006; Pels, 1997; Young, 2003). Scholars of postcolonial thought emphasize the need to illuminate how contemporary cultural practices in today's social institutions are historically rooted in colonial structures (Prasad, 2005), while theories of antiracism challenge structures of knowledge production and address systemic and institutional elements of racism (Sefa Dei, 2000). Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1952) and Lopez (2005), interject notions of race as obstinate persistent conditions of postcolonial identity requiring global understanding of Eurocentrism and white supremacy in order to carve an ideological space that interrogates how the problem of the color line once tendered by W.E.B. Du Bois functions and operates through transcontinental racial Latinamericanisms (including Latin@ representation in the United States) (Mendieta, 2007); a term used to describe existing plurality within Latin@ness within and across national geopolitical spaces. Quijano (2000) points to the pervasive roots of whiteness, racism, and racialization in Latin America and puts forward the idea of coloniality, which he refers to as an agency for imperialism and domination in the modern/colonial world.

In cultural studies, whiteness, like other social identities, is productively understood as a communication phenomenon (Garner, 2007; Martinot, 2010; Yancey, 2003). As an identity, whiteness exists only in so far as other racialized identities are present. Whiteness is also a problematizing and analytical perspective that serves as a way of formulating questions about

social relations (Garner, 2007), and is marked as the subject of intellectual inquiry and interrogation (Garner, 2007; McLaren, 1998; Nakayama & Martin, 1999). As an academic field whiteness studies aims to reveal and make visible the unmarked and often invisible white race. Postcolonial scholar Alfred Lopez, asserts that “one does not make whiteness as a malignant colonial ideology go away by simply showing how it deconstructs itself, any more than one can do away with the concept of the subject itself” (p. 13). Lopez refers to the need for understanding how whiteness has shifted since its construction during colonial histories and how it continues to shift today to signify privileges and racialized positionalities. Hence, whiteness is not solely a racial marker of difference among White (Anglo) Americans, it also serves as a marker of difference for Latin@s (Darity, Dietrich, & Hamilton, 2005; Rochmes & Griffin, 2006; Vidal-Ortiz, 2004; Yancey, 2003), who are of Spanish descent residing in the U.S., where whiteness signifies a racialized marker of difference in the form of colorism already woven into the fabric of Latin@ cultural practice and representation. This whiteness, or as Frankenberg (1997) refers to it, “white selves (who may indeed be white ‘others’ depending on the position of the speaker)” (p. 1), propounds an interdisciplinary canonical site of critical analysis and the interrogation of white others, and the uncovering of different foundations linked to racial/cultural positioning in the U.S. Thus, possibilities for unveiling varied versions of difference in how whiteness manifests and travels through societal processes, inclusive of and beyond white bodies and local cultural practices such as that of Eurocentrism and nation (Anderson, 2009; van Dijk, 2009), are necessary to show how interactions between cultural, ideological, and phenotypic representations of Latin@ identity formation interact with whiteness in ways that contribute newer conceptual understandings about the interrelationship between these bodies of scholarship.

Utilizing Latin@ness as a space of cultural and ethnic common ground has been instrumental in driving political thought, making visible differences that expose racially driven oppressive/dominant conditions (Castillo, 2009; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Hitlin et al., 2007; Ono, 2002; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), but has not probed further into the Latin@ spectrum of nationality, ethnicities, and identity formations inter and cross racially, politically, relationally and transnationally to unveil how whiteness is represented, learned, and performed within Latin@ culture. Existing models offer conceptual possibilities into culture and identity, but are dressed up in cultural and ethnic foundations that relegate whiteness as an Anglo characteristic, and without intending to, further conceal racialized understandings among Latin@s. For this project, postcolonial antiracist thought makes possible the marking of whiteness among Latin@s as a site of knowledge production and contention, the deconstruction of essentialist Latin@ oriented conceptualizations, and the unveiling of non-white racialized identities.

### **Latin@ Bicultural and Ethnoracial Identities:**

#### **Making Whiteness Visible; Discerning Whiteness**

Interrogating bicultural model orientations through a postcolonial antiracist lens reveals much about how Eurocentric whiteness operates among Latin@s. While I harmonize with Torre's articulation of Hispanic identity formation, the very notion of being comfortable or uncomfortable in, and being able or not, to negotiate racially dominant spaces as a result of having the ability to assimilate or acculturate, is itself indicative of how whiteness informs Latin@ identities nationally, transnationally, and transcontinentally. This includes individuals with multigenerational presence and histories in the U.S. as well as recently migrating Latin@ families, both having been exposed to cultural practices and racialized conditions informed by whiteness situated in Spanish Eurocentrism (prior to being exposed to or living in a society that

privileges whiteness differently) and Anglocentric Eurocentrism. Histories of imperialism and colonialism suggest that whiteness may not signify full privilege and access for all Latin@s in the U.S., but does influence how those who perform whiteness coupled with lighter appearing complexion (or appear white), perpetuate Eurocentric hegemony through processes such as assimilation, acculturation, and internalized racial oppression and supremacy (Gomez, 2009; Hattam, 2007; Hernandez, 2003; Yancey, 2003); and are granted a relative/relational privilege that Latin@s who are not white, do not ascribe to whiteness as cultural practice, or embody a darker phenotypic appearance, do not have.

Delving into the historical processes that inform modern day Latin@ness suggest an existing ideological presence of colorism and racist ideology entrenched in Latin@ culture that influences identities beyond cultural and ethnic markers. Among Latin@s who select to identify within bicultural and Anglo orientations, Latin@centric whiteness makes it possible for some Latin@s to feel comfortable, successfully navigate two distinct cultures, or cultivate a preference for dominant Anglo culture: Latin@ identities that have been forged over the course of 500 years due to ongoing shifts in Latin@s' ethnic and racial constructions and reconstructions and changing power dynamics throughout South, Central and North America (excluding Canada) (Graham, 1990; Mendieta, 2007; Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 2004). A study by the American Sociological Review (2010) revealed that more recently a significant amount of Latin@s in the U.S. identified as white. Nonetheless, the act of white identifying Latin@s dates back to the mid 1800's (Loveman, 2014), and white appearing as far back as the Spanish imperial conquest (Menchaca, 2001), in Latin America. People from Latin America, and Latin@s who have been forced to migrate to, and who have been born or have a long family history in the U.S. as result of miscegenation, can be situated within conceptualizations of bi/-multi racial and ethnic



identity, even before their ascribing to the U.S. appropriated redefined terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latin@’. Historian Martha Menchaca (2001) makes clear in her historical analysis of the experiences of Mexican American’s ancestors in Mexico and the U.S., “Mexican Americans are a people with a multiracial prehistorical past. Their white heritage began in Spain, the Indian in Mexico and the U.S. southwest, and the Black in West Africa” (p. 19). Historical scholarship examining race makes clear similar racializing processes and histories throughout the many countries in Latin America as well as the history of Latin@s in the U.S. (Alcoff, 2000; Behnken, 2011; Branche, 2008; Chanady; 1994; Graham, 1990; Gomez, 2009; Millán & Velásquez, 2011; Telles, 2014).

Postcolonial antiracist understandings reveal an awareness present among Latin@s in Latin@ America and the U.S. of the privileges and benefits afforded to whiteness and lighter skin appearing complexion as well as an awareness of anti-black and dark skin sentiment. This understanding makes it possible and easier for many Latin@s to navigate both distinct cultures and choose to shed away their Latin@ heritage in place of a more privileged whiteness in the U.S. Questions also need to be raised about Latin@s more likely to identify within the Latino/Hispanic and or Marginal orientations. The former a space where people feel more comfortable among others who reflect one’s own culture of origin while the latter represents tension and disconnect, culturally and nationally. Latin@s who orient towards Latino/Hispanic culturalism are likely to be mestiz@s and feel more comfortable around others who share in the values and practices associated with their culture of national origin, but still hold on to learned negative perceptions and stereotypes about African Americans (Vaca, 2004). In contrast, non-white Latin@s and Latin@s with darker skin complexion such as Afro-Latin@ or Latin@ indigenous are likely to identify within the Marginal Orientation. They understand very well the

consequences of race and colorism as result of continued coloniality and whiteness (Quijano, 2008; Telles, 2014). Whereas individuals more likely to feel at home among others reflecting one's own culture of origin are likely to identify along Pan-ethnic understandings (Hispanic and or Latin@), but also have relative or relational privilege as a result of their whiteness and/or lighter skin complexion.

With the exception of Latin@s who orient towards Anglo Orientation, Latin@s across all other orientations have some salient connection to their cultural heritage anchored in Spanish Eurocentrism. With the exception of Latin@s situated in the Marginal Orientation, all benefit from relational or relative light skin privilege as a result of Latin@centric whiteness. Just because some orientations indicate greater or less comfort levels does not denote such Latin@s cannot identify with whiteness: Even for those who feel marginalized due to differences in cultural practices such as religion and language. Moreover, for Latin@s who identify within boundaries of whiteness, doing so does not have to conote assimilation to Anglocentric Eurocentrism, where Spanishcentric Eurocentrism is entirely dismissed without consideration for how Spanish empire cultivated practices of Latin@centric whiteness in the form of colorism. I am not implying such cultural practices situated within specific groups do not draw marginalization, but rather infer that whiteness in Latin@ culture does matter and carries political and social weight. Such implications create a distance of relational/relative power that privilege whiteness and further marginalizes non-whites within Latin@ culture as well as the Anglo ordained American mainstream (Castillo, 2009; Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001; Gomez, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Vargas, 2014; Yancey, 2003).

I appreciate Gallegos and Ferdman's ethnoracial identity model accounting for whiteness and considering race as part of the identity equation, but offer some complimentary analysis that

may account for invisibilities beyond which the model does not present. I do not contest the need to understand Latin@ identity as an ethnoracial quandary that is complex and fluid. Both race and ethnicity are important to Latin@s' understandings of self and groups they belong to. Situating this model in postcolonial whiteness and antiracism uncovers different understandings about how whiteness shows up in Latin@ identity and culture, and ruptures the universal fashion in which Latin@ is utilized to represent multiple orientations. Though race and ethnicity are both social constructions and cannot be examined as separate categories (Grosfoguel, 2004; Torres-Saillant, 2003), putting bodies of work in conversation suggest that Latin@centric whiteness (not Anglo) also serves a unique and unexplored space for grappling with postcolonial whiteness within Latin@ identity formations. Such mapping helps prevent the continued veiling of the inherent influence Spanishcentric whiteness has on Latin@ identity formation and unmask the very white supremacist assumptions, whether situated in Latin America or the U.S. that cannot be divorced, since the entire diaspora itself was founded on systemic premises of Eurocentrism, racialization, and colorism. As posited by Gallegos and Ferdman (2012), whiteness represents a limited, and though not intentional, essentialist understanding of Latin@ness where whiteness is attributed to American Anglo assimilation or acculturation, as opposed to, or in combination with, Spanish oriented whiteness as a racial marker (Quijano, 2008, 2000). Hence, both the BOD and Latin@ ethnoracial identity models in conversation with whiteness reveal similar postcolonial beings suggesting Latin@s are aware of what having light or darker skin signifies within their own historical genealogy, practices, and representations.

### **Discerning Eurocentrism: Towards an Understanding of Latin@centric Whiteness**

Existing literature combined with recent events and reported trends draw attention to the need to probe further into intersections of whiteness and Latin@ identities. Literature on Latin@

students' experiences suggest that in some cases, Latin@s find more in common with cultural attitudes and practices of whites than other Latin@ peers (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Darity et al., 2005; Romero & Roberts, 2003), and again, essentialist assumptions are being made about Latin@s as an ethnic group with preference for Anglocentric whiteness without affording attention to the role Spanish Eurocentrism plays in shaping Latin@ identities. Hence, throughout the cosmic diaspora that is Latin@ cultures, which Latin@s are likely to find more commonality with white American peers? Is it Latin@s who also appear as white or have fairly light skin complexion? What about Latin@s who share in European cultural and representational dominant ideational commonalities tied to whiteness as practice? If ideological, to what extent could those who do not appear as white, pass for or be perceived as white? Situating Latin@ ethnoracial identity in a postcolonial antiracist framework makes it possible to render visible how colorism influences Latin@ identities, where white identifying Latin@s who share European cultural and physical dominant commonalities (language may or may not be present), are more likely to comfortably exist in and negotiate dominant culture. One can go as far back as the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* to identify the beginning of a political shift with respect to who was and was not able to identify as white for economic, social, and political gain at the expense of racialized non-white 'others' (Behnken, 2011; Menchaca, 2001).

Important to discern is how different understandings of cultural whiteness inform relational/relative privilege, where Latin@s benefit from Spanish Eurocentrism coupled with white appearance. Gallegos and Ferdman's (2012) model itself demonstrates this relational positionality by granting attention to ways whiteness is perceived across Latin@ ethnoracial orientations while not making visible non-white Latin@ identities and Latin@centric whiteness. As a result, all non-white persons, by default, become part of an essentialized Latin@ 'other'.

Since this model is non-linear, Latin@s are able to travel in and out of orientations, though this process does not account for who is able to and how exactly Latin@s position themselves, for those who maintain a strong connection to their African, Indigenous, and Asian ancestral roots. For example, across the different orientations Latin@s encompass multiple understandings of race, and whiteness is perceived as an Anglo social entity external to identity that Latin@s need to consider as part of their social and communicative adaptive strategies in a non-Latin@ dominant culture (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Through a postcolonial antiracist lens, however, whiteness is not only an elusive concept relegated to Anglo culture in the U.S., it is a globalized whiteness that informs racialization and race among Latin@s along processes of dominance and marginalization that marks whiteness, but fails to specifically mark non-white identities.

The white identified orientation, while in concert with many Latin@s' experiences, does not consider which Latin@s have the privilege and ability to negotiate their surrounding context or the extent to which both U.S. and Latin American spaces conceive racialization and colorism in ways that oppress Blacks, Indigenous people, and Mestiz@s with darker complexions and non-European phenotypic features. Since Latin@s in this orientation favor whiteness as a desirable racial marker the assumption is that they have a preference for or assimilated to American cultured Anglo whiteness. This orientation operates under the assumption that Latin@s do not encompass cultural practices and representations of whiteness within and across the many nationalities that make up Latin@ cultures. It is important to account for the different ways whiteness is represented and the forms of whiteness that manifest within Latin@ culture. Postcolonial antiracist whiteness makes it possible for Latin@s to be connected to their national culture of origin while maintaining a preference for Latin@centric whiteness informed by Spanish coloniality in Anglo dominant spaces where individuals ascribe to Eurocentric

standards, share a preference for whiteness, and are more likely to work towards improving the race through valuing of white culture (Campbell & Rogalin, 2006; Fergus, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Lopez, 2005; Quijano, 2008). This begs attention regarding the extent to which darker skin appearing Mestiz@s, Indigenous, and Afro-Latin@s negotiate racialized perceptions and social constructions of race in different ways than lighter skin Latin@s such as white, Mestiz@s and Crioll@s are able to.

Related, Gallegos and Ferdman (2012) assert that Latin@s in the undifferentiated orientation view themselves as human beings and adopt a colorblind lens, leading them to adopt dominant cultural practices and values. This again neglects to capture cultural practices and representations of whiteness that manifest and are sociopolitically present as an extension of Spanishcentric whiteness and European coloniality (Quijano, 2008; 2000), where Latin@s who embrace and identify with non-white identities are subject to marginalization within Latin@ culture in addition to the oppressive experiences faced in American society. Hence, non-white and darker skin pigmented Latin@s also experience prejudice, disconnectedness, and lack of belongingness among Latin@s who maintain strong ethnic identity (Darity et al., 2005; Garcia Bedolla, 2003; Gomez, 2009; Telles, 2014). Unlike assertions posited by scholars that describe preference for and identification with whiteness as assimilation or internalized racism (Golash-Boza; 2006; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010), postcolonial antiracist theory opens a door for understanding a Latin@centric whiteness situated in cultural colorism.

### **Rupturing Latin@ness: Reorienting Whiteness and Making Visible Non-white Latin@ Ethnoracial Identities**

Another way whiteness manifests in Latin@ culture is in its invisibility, where race is silenced and or relegated as secondary to a preferred connectedness to nationality or Pan-Latin@ identity

(i.e. Hispanic, Latin@). This orientation may occur among Latin@s situated in the sub-group and Latin@ identified orientations. Anchoring these orientations in postcolonial whiteness and antiracism illuminates how Gallegos and Ferdmans' (2012) model fails to account for non-white identities, and reveals an absent conversation about race as a structural and systemic issue within Latin@ culture, where whiteness is intentionally unmarked and a relationship to whiteness, though it may be present, is not made. Such silencing of colorism and racialization makes it possible for Latin@s to refrain from positioning themselves racially and fails to explicitly name race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety (Sefa Dei, 2000).

For example, Latin@s who orient towards Latin@ identified view Latin@ness as a different race all together, but are also aware of the ways American Anglo whiteness could hinder or benefit Latin@s. This suggests Latin@s share an awareness of whiteness and do not assume colorblindness, but fails to acknowledge racial hierarchy within Latin@ culture. Latin@s who orient towards nationality are likely to disregard race as salient marker influencing identity formations present within Latin@ cultures within and beyond Latin America (Anderson, 2009; Telles, 2014). Similarly, Latin@s oriented towards Latin@ as 'other' take on an essentialist group identity. Latin@s in this orientation ascribe to systemic imposed group identities as a result of lacking Latin@ historical and cultural awareness and fail to account for racialization and colorism. Here, Latin@s choose instead to resist whiteness, without examining what whiteness may signify irrespective of how it affords a portion of Latin@s relative/relational privilege in a U.S. context when positioned along whites (Hurtado, 1996), and how relegating Latin@centric whiteness invisible or as an Anglo dominant cultural asset, reinforces whiteness as a racial marker (Garner, 2007; Lopez, 2005). Frankenberg (1997) maintains that "in

examining whiteness, in seeking to account for its variable visibility, one must recognize how continual processes of slippage, condensation, and displacement among the constructs of race, nation, and culture continue to unmark white people while consistently marking and racializing others” (p. 7). Hence, suspending Latin@centric whiteness as site of contention does prevent the uncovering and unmasking of how whiteness is entrenched in Latin@ culture, but with relational/relative positionality to how whiteness is situated in the U.S. (Anglo culture).

These manifestations of whiteness are unlike the more explicit, visible, and preferred identifications with and for whiteness assumed by Latin@s in the white and undifferentiated orientations. For example, Latin@s with darker skin complexion do not have the privilege to gauge the extent of their whiteness nor negotiate their light skin as non-white Latin@s in order to understand and experience white supremacy and colorism within Latin@ culture. For Latin@s who situate themselves in such orientations, history has shown, both in the U.S. and Latin America, that race has meaning for Latin@s (Behnken, 2011 Branche, 2008; Graham, 1990; Telles, 2014), where some do not have the privilege to negotiate their racialized positionality (value or lack thereof of their racial make-up), while others are able to identify as white, perform whiteness, fight for whiteness, and function under cloaks of whiteness that perpetuate anti-blackness, colorism, and racialization.

The remaining orientation, Latin@ integrated, most closely aligns with postcolonial thought as it accounts for the recognition of intersecting and complex non-fluid identities, but also fails to account for a visibility of whiteness and marking of racialized non-white identities. Even as Latin@s situated here view race as dynamic and whiteness as complex, they do not delve deeper into their racial markers. Newer postcolonial antiracist understandings enable an honest conversation about Latin@centric whiteness, offer the possibility to consider racialized



markers beyond whiteness, and includes individuals who orient towards more specific cultural and ethno identities. For example, out of the near 48 million Latin@s in the U.S., one-third chose ‘some other race’ to describe their racial identity. Among them, 44% wrote in Mexican, Mexican American, or Mexico in the box provided, merging ethnic origin and race. Thirty percent wrote in their ethnic identity as their race, with 23% writing Hispanic and 10% writing in Latin American or Latin@). For those who selected Latin@ as ‘other’, the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau reported that most Latin@s elected to identify with their national country of origin. The numbers also showed a 3% representation of Latin@s who identified as Black and a smaller portion of Latin@s who identified as Asian, and/or of Indigenous roots (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Thus, a postcolonial antiracist whiteness analysis makes evident that many Latin@s cannot negotiate their darker skin complexion and phenotypic non-European characteristics in societies that privilege whiteness and how Eurocentric representations and ideologies influence whiteness among Latin@s in the U.S. Imperial research on colorism has also made visible outcomes associated with privileging light-skin and favoring Latin@centric whiteness (Fears 2003; Loveman, 2014; Montalvo, 1987; Telles, 2014), and demonstrating a clear hierarchy and relational positionality that places white or light skin Latin@s at the top, those who identify as ‘others’ (i.e. Latin@ as race, national country of origin) in the middle, and black identified Latin@s at the bottom (Telles, 2014). Literature also makes visible this relational positionality where Latin@s, who identified as ‘others’, fared better across the U.S. and Latin America than Black identified Latin@s, but not as well as white Latin@s (Darity et al., 2005; Garcia Bedolla, 2003; Telles, 2014). My analysis makes clear how Latin@ ethnoracial identity orientations do not make clear how racialization and colorism manifests culturally, structurally and socially within the contemporary Latin@ condition. This includes many Latin@s’ being perceived

through behavioral manifestations that remain ambiguous and bounded to relational and relative positionality to whiteness.

### **The Significance of Understanding Latin@centric Whiteness:**

#### **Implications for Higher Education Professionals**

This theoretical analysis suggests a need for academic and student affairs administrators to consider implications for more complex understandings about Latin@ representation and culture in higher education and discontinue to engage essentialist positions that honor culture and ethnicity, but fall short of understanding how colorism shapes Latin@ identities and experiences. Ferdman and Gallegos (2012) assert that race and color are important, but remain secondary to culture, and maintain that although Latin@s cannot be categorized along simplicities of race, cosmic identities remain a significant issue warranting further attention. This theoretical conversation suggests a need to unravel how whiteness manifests within identities, and works through ideoscapes and local cultural practices within and beyond white bodies. This includes representations of Latin@centric whiteness operating locally in American education. Latin@ness as an essentialized identity veils how whiteness in Latin@ culture informs what postcolonial scholar, Lopez (2005), refers to as postcolonial whiteness or the need to understand how whiteness has shifted and continues to shift its construction during colonial histories and through today's cultural practice to signify different privileges at the expense of others. As long as Latin@ identities are uncolored and racially essentialized and without a serious interrogation of how Eurocentric coloniality (beyond Anglo assimilated understandings) and globalized whiteness influence Latin@ identities (Lopez, 2005; Quijano, 2008), Latin@centric whiteness and non-white Latin@s will remain unmarked along national and pan-ethnic conceptualizations,

and continued structural patterns and social reformulations will emerge in the U.S. that render whiteness invisible among Latin@s.

These newer understandings invoke further implications about challenges relative to power, privilege, and marginalization with respect to Latin@ culture and identity formation in the U.S. In higher education this holds particularly true for academic and student affairs practitioners, but leans heavily on the administrators whose role includes advising, counseling, and mentoring requiring a student development knowledge base, such as student affairs professionals (Evans et al., 2010; Evans, 2003; Lozano, 2010). This means becoming familiar with and aware of the psychosocial, ecological, and sociocultural dimensions that influence Latin@s students' experiences on college campuses (Casas & Pytluck, 1995; Dovidio et al., 2001; Fergus, 2009; Hurtado, 1992; Rendón, García, & Person, 2004; Torres, 2004, 2003). This is especially pertinent for those called upon to work with Latin@ students and Latin@ student-focused groups and organizations.

One way Latin@centric whiteness might show up on college campuses is in the form of presumed alliances and misunderstandings of unity along ethnic and cultural spaces of relating without considering how colorism and race function, and racialized perceptions represented within Latin@ culture as a transnational group. Not considering racialized intragroup dynamics hinders higher education professionals' ability to consider the extent to which Latin@s with darker skin complexion experience college differently than their light-skin and white-Latin@ counterparts. Such a tension can stifle Latin@ students' ability to politically organize and mobilize, to engage campus efforts, to create paths for critical spaces such as Latin@ cultural organizations and centers to be dominated by Eurocentric ideologies that overlook whiteness,

and can hinder organizational and social dynamics as I have observed and experienced over the past fifteen years in higher education.

Another implication to account for given these new understandings around functions of Latin@centric whiteness is the extent to which educators engage conversations about inter- and cross-cultural unity across cultural, racial, and ethnic markers beyond Latin@ness without first grappling with how these very same issues of divide are embedded within Latin@ identities. Without familiarity about how racialization, colorism, and race operate within Latin@ culture, efforts to cultivate Latin@ solidarity will remain a daunting task since the same whiteness that informs perceptions of race within takes a turn outward and serves as a lens through which Latin@s culture's inheritance of pro-white/ anti-blackness inform how they perceive race in the U.S. (Castillo, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Trueba, 2002). Particularly around topics such as black and brown relations. Lastly, not critically considering the Latin@centric white gaze in addition to Americentric (Anglo) assimilation shepherded through European cultural ideology, will continue to foster essentialized understandings of difference that work against the enabling of conversations and actions that address varied cultural and processual constructions of whiteness, privilege, and marginalization within Latin@ groups and between Latin@ groups and non-Latin@ groups that sustain white dominant structures (McLaren, 1998). Amplifying the need to better understand Latin@centric whiteness on college campuses is research suggesting differences between the experiences of light-skin and dark-skin Latin@s in education (Fergus 2009), and the growth in white identifying Latin@ in the United States (Lopez, 2014). According to Census data, the U.S. witnessed a 6 percent increase in the white population in 2010 due to a 56 percent increase in Latin@s who identified as white (Hixsin, Hepler, & Kim, 2011). Three-fourths of the increase in the white demographics was a result of growing numbers

by way of white identifying Latin@s with Latin@s accounting for 70 percent of the growth of the White alone-or-in-combination population between 2000 and 2010 (Humes et al., 2011). Supporting new Latin@centric whiteness understandings and considerations put forward, Keefe and Padilla (1987) contend that pride and self-association in one's sense of ethnicity can remain intact even when strong components of Latin@ ethnicity, such as speaking the language and celebrating traditions (i.e. food, music, family rituals) are absent. Moreover, scholars such as Vidal-Ortiz (2004), Wade (2007) and Torres (2003) contend that identifying racially as blanco white, (negro) black, mestiz@ or any other racialized categories does not have to make them any less or more Latin@centric. Hence, it is absolutely possible, as scholars suggest, for Latin@s to identify as white and or perform whiteness while remaining culturally intact.

In conclusion, what my critical analysis reveals is a need to accord further attention to how these new understandings influence social relations between Latin@s who identify differently racially, psychosocial development and racialized dynamics between Latin@s and non-Latin@s, organizational dynamics and relations within student groups and organizations aimed at meeting the cultural and sociopolitical needs of Latin@s, and how white privilege and oppression, along lines of relational/relative positionality, shows up in ways that rupture student affairs practitioners' ability to fully grasp Latin@ students' college experiences differently. Giving more thought and attention to these issues will provide higher education professionals a more critical understanding of how colorism, racialization, and ethnicity intersect to operate under the structural disguise of Latin@ness to reproduce structural and cultural whiteness, and provide the understandings necessary to both, challenge and the meet needs, of Latin@ students in education in today's higher education landscape.

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## CHAPTER 4

### MAPPING INVISIBILITIES AND ABSENCES IN THE USE OF LATCRIT THEORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT CAN HELP UNCOVER LATIN@CENTRIC WHITENESS

#### Abstract

Studies in higher education utilizing Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit) have provided a space in the academy for counter-narratives that expose structural mechanisms impacting Latin@ students from their respective positionalities (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). LatCrit serves as a theoretical and methodological tool that grants insight into the marginalized voices and experiences of Latin@s. However, literature utilizing LatCrit in higher education falls short of examining Latin@centric whiteness and non-mestiz@ identities that serve as valuable sites of knowledge production that reveal different understandings about the Latin@ condition, and create opportunities to illuminate Latin@s' varied sociopolitical, historical, and racialized experiences. In this chapter, I situate LatCrit literature in a postcolonial framework to reveal representations of whiteness among Latin@s as an identified, yet disregarded theme and site for further inquiry and focus among Latin@s in higher education. In my conclusion, I discuss the implications for my findings based on critical analysis and what new understandings may signify for how critical research about Latin@s is carried out in higher education.

**Target Journal for Submission:** *Latino Studies* (critically engages the study of the local, national, transnational, and hemispheric realities that continue to influence the Latin@ presence in the U.S. to advance interdisciplinary scholarship about the lived experience and struggles of Latin@s for equity, representation, and social justice).

**Keywords:** Colorism, Critical race theory, Education, Latin@s, LatCrit theory, Postcolonialism, Whiteness

## Introduction

Reported trends of continued increase in Latin@s pursuing higher education and an increased enrollment and presence of Latin@s on college campuses require scholars and practitioners to be more mindful and attentive to increasing representations of Latin@s in the United States. The United States comprises many Latin@s of partial European origin, most of who are of Mexican descent, followed by Puerto Rican and Cubans. Many of whom identify as white Hispanic or Latin@ (Rodriguez, 2000). Between 2000 and 2010, Latin@s have grown to represent about 16% of the U.S. population and are estimated to represent 30% of the U.S. population by 2050 (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Census data also indicated a growth in U.S. white population as a result of Latin@s increasingly identifying as white in 2010 when compared to 2000, representing three-fourths of the increase in the white demographics (Hixsin, Hepler, & Kim, 2011; Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). This includes a 6 percent growth in the white population due to a 56 percent increase in white identifying Latin@s. California and Texas account for nearly half of Latin@s who identify as white (Hixsin et al., 2011).

These data is important to consider given the increased representation of Latin@ students in education. A mini-brief in the *Huffington Post* highlighting student data from the Pew Hispanic Center reported a growth in, and record number of, Latin@ students attending pre-K through 12th grade public schools at 24 percent of all students (Gamboa, 2012). Another report indicated a growth in Latino@ student enrollment in higher education, showing that Latin@ students made up the largest underrepresented group on college campuses with over 2 million students enrolled since 2011. Between 2009 and 2011, Latino undergraduate enrollment increased by 22% (Yeado, 2013). What is unknown about the data collected in higher education is, what if any racial differences exist among Latin@s advancing on to higher education. These

numbers point to a shift rarely considered in conversations about Latin@centric whiteness. Most literature often relegates representations of whiteness among Latin@s as cultural practices of assimilation and acculturation to American Anglo culture (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Ramos-Zayas, 2001; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009), without examining more deeply how Spanish colonialism has influenced and continues to influence colorism and ethno racial differences within the Latin@ spectrum (Behnken, 2011; Branche, 2008; Martinez, 2000; Menchaca, 2001; Telles, 2014). By extension, this failure to account for whiteness in Latin@ culture is also prevalent within institutions situated in the U.S. such as education (Castillo, 2009; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Fergus, 2009; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Montoya, 1994).

### **Latin@s and Education**

The landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a significant moment in the history of education in the U.S. for racial and ethnic minoritized people historically and structurally relegated to segregated schools (Bell, 1995).. The past 60 years have witnessed a reevaluation of how diversity is viewed and a move beyond the traditional discriminatory and exclusionary practices such as overt racism (Bell, 1995; Haney-López, 1997; Tate IV, 1997; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Academic leaders have been driven by the rise of historically and politically marginalized voices to address the subordinating policies and ideologies that inform race and racism, culturally and structurally, beyond the individual person (Gillborn, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Scholars from the fields of legal scholarship and education have questioned the extent to which *Brown v. Board of Education* and the plethora of additional landmark cases ensuing really addressed equity and inclusion for minoritized and excluded ethnic and non-white groups following the civil rights movement (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2009; Kennedy, 1989; Ladson-Billings,

1998; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Russo, Harris III, & Sandridge, 1994). Such cases that focused on eliminating racial segregation in the school system include *Mendez v. Westminster* in 1946 (Wollenberg, 1974), *Goss v. Board of Education* in 1963 (Caldas, Growe, & Bankston, 2002), *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 (Russo et al., 1994) and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* in 1971 (Bell, 1995), to name a few. However, these cases differ geopolitically and ideologically in how they were resolved with respect to cases involving the exclusion of African Americans when compared to Latin@s (i.e., Mexican Americans). Cases involving African Americans dealt with legal definitions of race constructed by Anglo whites that relied on Science and character to argue for racialized phenotypic differences, whereas cases involving Mexican people and or Mexican Americans in the southwest and west of the U.S. dealt with race, language, and ethnicity (Haney-Lopez, 1997). There was a time period during the 1800s where persons of Spanish heritage from Mexico, in selective occasions, fought in the legal courts to pass as white and citizen, particularly in situations where they embodied a European phenotypic and racial appearance (Behnken, 2011). This begs us to ask several important questions related to how Latin@s were perceived, defined, and racialized differently, and the extent to which legal jurisprudence resulted in different outcomes, intra-culturally, for Latin@s in the U.S. Even though African Americans were extended citizenship a century earlier, processes such as acculturation and assimilation were not practices Latin@s whose alterity was marked as black or embodying dark skin could embrace, even if they wanted to. Thus, questions about the extent to which Latin@s experience racialization and marginalization differently need to be asked given the broad racial and cosmic representation inherent in Latin@ culture.

As a result of education reform and the growing composition of Latin@s in education, the past two decades have witnessed an increase in different critical and methodological approaches such as LatCrit (Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2004, 2003; Yosso et al, 2009) and ethnic and racial identity development theories (Gallegos and Ferdman, 2012; Torres, 2003, 1999) used to examine and understand Latin@ students experiences. Much literature in education has helped educators gain valuable insight into this cosmic space and phenomenon, and exposed the possibilities for newer understandings about Latin@ness through race and ethnicity (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Rochmes, Griffin, & Elmer, 2006; Torres et al., 2009; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004, 2003). However, the same literature has not granted enough focus to the influence of Spanish Eurocentrism as a form of whiteness and colorism imposed on Latin@ representation, thought, and cultural practice. This article serves as a bridge to different and newer understandings about race in Latin@ culture and how educational researchers and practitioners contextualize race (i.e., socio-culturally, politically, and ideologically) and the footings that grant meaning to race and color with respect to Latin@s.

Today, much critical research in higher education on Latin@s has been carried out utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), or a combination of both (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Sólorzano, 1998; Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Sólorzano & Yosso, 2000; Villalpando, 2004, 2003; Yosso et al., 2009) as well as theoretical identity models (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres, 2003, 1999; Torres et al., 2009). Such theoretical understandings and methodological processes through which Latin@s dissect, interpret, and transform their experiences are important to further advancing newer understandings of the Latin@ condition (Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Umaña-

Taylor, Diversi & Fine, 2002). The same literature also suggests that distinctions between race and ethnicity do not sufficiently capture categorical racialization employed by Latin@s in the U.S. and Latin@-Americans, historically and culturally speaking. It is precisely this absence which gets at the inherent Eurocentrism centrally located in Latin@ness (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Ramos-Zayas, 2001; Valdes, 2000, 1996; van Dijk, 2009; Vázquez, 2003), that absences Spanish informed whiteness and negates non-mestiz@ and white Latin@ identities.

A major systemic strategic ill aimed at sustaining racial invisibility around whiteness, Bell (1995) suggests is the notion of local autonomy, a white liberal and interest-convergence tactic challenged by critical race scholars that allows those in power control over local jurisdictions for educational policy and access. Such an approach shapes policy and practice to continuously meet agendas aimed at sustaining systemic differences that privileges some over others and fails to address conceptualizations of whiteness (i.e. legal, ideological, physical, social, cultural) that to this day subordinate racial and ethnic minoritized people while rendering invisible cultural practices associated with whiteness (Haney-Lopez, 2006; Harris, 1993; Gillborn, 2009). This includes the composite of actors, agencies and ideas that serve as formulas, and have been historically guided by the constructions and reconstructions of race to inform institutions (i.e. education, law, healthcare, labor, and employment) and how this nation functions. The following section provides an overview of CRT through which LatCrit emerged, and further discusses LatCrit literature.

### **Limitations**

This project is limited to a critical dialogue between LatCrit theory and postcolonial whiteness that seeks to fill a theoretical gap in existing literature about Latin@ racial and cultural representation and practice. Further, this theoretical analysis is delimited to examining in the



invisibility of Latin@centric whiteness and how not doing so absences non-white Latin@ identities. In doing so, I utilize postcolonial whiteness lens that seeks the invocation of white identities and may suspend other social divisions, linking people who share whiteness to dominant social locations, even as the actors themselves may be in positions of relative powerlessness (Garner, 2007). Hence, though I touch on how intersecting identities (i.e. gender, class, religion, etc.) contribute to racialization, why intersectionality matters, and the centrality of intersectionality to LatiCrit work, the focus of this project is on colorism and whiteness.

### **Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory: An Overview**

Both CRT and LatCrit are anchored in the critical legal realms, but were later extended to education in the United States with the aim of addressing issues of social justice and racial oppression (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Since the eradication of Jim Crow laws, which assumed a separate but equal understanding of race relational politics, a portion of the U.S. citizenry, has assumed that racism is no longer prevalent in our day-to-day lives. However, legal scholars and activists such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Kimberlie Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams, contested the extent to which critical legal studies and conventional civil rights thought engaged in social action aimed at truly dismantling racism and advancing material transformation and racial equity (Kennedy, 1989).

#### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is based on particular tenets related to sociopolitical actions and decisions that give voice to, and legitimize the experiences and racial realities of historically marginalized groups (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1998; Patton, McEwan, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). CRT, as a theoretical and social justice oriented movement, is rooted in the experiences of racial and ethnic minoritized individuals and aims to analyze,

critique, and challenge the construction of law and legal jurisprudence, as well as the sociopolitical implications for oppressed groups in the U.S. in accordance with legal doctrine and resulting social implications (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT surfaced within the field of law, but has expanded into other disciplines such as education. CRT critiques the growing liberal ideology formed around the civil rights and ethnic studies movements that have for some time now obscured any real progress or lack-there-of pertaining to the issue of race in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), the movement considers issues of race and racism, “but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self- interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (p. 3). A major goal of the critical race theorists and practitioners is to dismantle racial oppression, with a broader endeavor to eliminate all forms of oppression (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Tate IV, 1997). CRT challenges ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American culture and society (Crenshaw et al, 1995), and is based on a series of assumptions centered on the legal construction of race in U.S., and how it continues to manifest in our everyday lives and reproduced through existing institutions.

A major assumption CRT is grounded in is that race is a manufactured invention of social thought and relations that has through dominant western narrative been normalized and ingrained into every aspect and function of American society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Since its inception, race has become a norm packed with oppressive consequences for those not deemed white. In legal discourse, scholars refer to this process as ‘whiteness as property’, where whiteness not only has social meaning, power, and privilege for those marked white, but goes hand-in-hand with how whites mark those deemed not white or black (Haney-López, 2006; Harris, 1993). Moreover, CRT assumes that liberal claims of

neutrality, objectivity, and color-blind ideology should be challenged and critiqued in order to unveil altruistic motivations of individualism tied to dominant group representation (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The validation of these voices are of dire importance as they serve as counter-narratives that challenge abstract conceptualizations of liberalism, ambiguity, universalism, and equality that ignore the systemic and structural ‘nurture’ (as opposed to nature) of racism (Delgado, 1989).

Since the 1970’s, CRT has expanded into a broader framework that attempts to expose subtle and hidden dynamics of race and racism in its many forms. This is not to say that CRT captures the very essence of racism in every form, but that CRT scholars work across multiple disciplines to decipher the varied mutations of racism and the role these play within and across institutional spaces (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001). For example, CRT contests how racism continues to manifest itself within educational policy and discourse, takes into account contexts in which discourse is created, and makes visible how racism functions to privilege white self-interest. Utilizing a critical race perspective is a useful educational tool for “unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings in Patton et al., 2007, p. 43). Scholars also add that CRT seeks to promote equal power among all involved in the process of knowledge construction (Ladson-Billings, 1998), with consideration and respect to epistemologies that are raced and gendered, and thus recognize racially and ethnically minoritized individuals and groups as holders and creators of knowledge (Calmore, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Villalpando, 2003). Out of CRT, additional theories have brewed that go beyond black/white binaries to address differently situated racialized positionalities, including LatCrit, Asian Crit, Tribal Crit, and Critical Race Feminism (Tijerina Revilla, 2001). All evolving theories are important and necessary

frameworks used to better and more deeply understand and challenge intersecting oppressions, but it is LatCrit that serves as the focal point of this article.

### **LatCrit Theory**

Expanding on CRT, critical Latin@ or LatCrit Theory surfaced in the 1990s, intending to focus on issues beyond race, to include nationality, ethnicity, gender, and language that legal scholars believed warranted further exploration and analysis with respect to Latin@ civil rights issues such as bilingual education, immigration, and laws restricting the use of Spanish language, etc. (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tijerina Revilla, 2001; Urciuoli, 1997; Valdes, 1997a, 1996; Villalpando, 2004). More than a racial movement, LatCrit is considered to be a political movement that urges the contributions by any and all scholars who share a commitment to social justice (Aoki & Johnson, 2008). This level of inclusiveness more closely aligns with the cultivation of coalition building appropriate and necessary to the success of the movement's commitment towards dismantling all forms of subordination and bringing about equity and change in the U.S. (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Montoya & Valdes, 2008; Valdes, 1997a, 1996). This includes moving away from the black/white paradigm offered by CRT to a multifaceted and multi-issue analysis grounded in intersectionality more applicable to historic processes and complex understandings that shape how marginality shows up within Latin@ culture(s).

LatCrit serves as an epistemic theory and methodology that grants insight into the marginalized experiences of racial and ethnic minoritized people with respect to Latin@s' racial positionalities in majority white spaces (Solórzano, & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2003). Like CRT, LatCrit is a useful tool for interrogating how power and privilege, through the normalization of race, inform how Latin@ students make sense of their experiences in spaces

where they are a minority, such as higher education (Chávez, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2010, 2009; Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009). Both CRT and LatCrit posit that there is no such thing as colorblindness and that all policy and research needs to recognize the endemic roles race and racism play in the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sólorzano, 1998; Taylor et al., 2009). Thus, LatCrit also challenges traditional white liberal assertions by educational institutions that claim race neutrality, objectivity, and equal opportunity (Calmore, 1992; Valdes, 1996). Both CRT and LatCrit consider the centrality of race to research, but LatCrit seeks to also emphasize ethnicity as an inseparable construct tied to race (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Montoya & Valdes, 2008; Torres et al., 2009; Valdes, 1997a). Four foundational principles essential to understanding LatCrit include: (1) the expansion of connected struggles; (2) coalition and community building; (3) the advancement of transformation, and; (4) knowledge production.

### **Extended and connected struggles.**

LatCrit is concerned with the intentional cultivation of community across intersecting and multidimensional struggles (Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1997a; Villalpando, 2003) and the need for different oppressed and subordinated groups to make connections across knowledge, processes undertaken for transformation, and the ways individuals belong to different groups (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994). Valdes (1997a) posits that LatCrit's functions include "actively nurturing a community of scholars who share a similar approach to legal theory, and who share a similar commitment to collaboration" (p. 1094). Similarly, Valdes (1997b) asserts that to "illuminate and navigate sameness/difference divides, LatCrit analyses must cross-interrogate constructs like color, race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, ancestry, gender, class, and sexuality" (p. 55).

Connecting anti-subordination struggles makes it possible for a more sustained human, political, social, collective, inclusive, self-critical, democratic, and egalitarian movement to occur where the focus of dismantling is on the structural conditions that oppress all marginalized groups as opposed to individuals within groups (Valdes, 1998; 1996). Hence, central to LatCrit scholarship is the need to be attentive to and operate from a space of intersectionality and multidimensionality that extends beyond the borders of legal scholarship and takes into account intersecting identities within and outside Latin@ identities and legal jurisprudence (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Pérez Huber, 2009; Tijerina Revilla, 2001; Valdes, 1997; 1996).

#### **Community and coalition building.**

Though scholars are adamant about LatCrit theory's commitment to uplifting and empowering Latin@s and the Latin@ condition in the U.S., they also emphasize the usefulness of LatCrit theory more broadly for Latin@s not confined to U.S. borders, also seeking to challenge domestic/foreign dichotomies and cultivating a progressive sense of coalitional Latin@ pan-ethnicity (Johnson, 2001; Lazos-Vargas, 2001; Sólorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 2000; 1997a). Within Latin@ culture identity takes on contextual and fluid meanings that allow for the recognition of political and economic components of European influence through white supremacy, patriarchy, religious indoctrination, and gendered identity constructions, causing individual and collective struggles for self-understanding among Latin@s, and in some cases causing suppression of certain aspects of their identity while honoring other parts (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Haney-López, 1998; Pérez Huber, 2009; Valdes, 2000, 1997b; Vázquez, 2003). LatCrit acknowledges and addresses race and ethnicity more broadly, exploring how these interact with each other to form different layers of subordination where Latin@s are both

privileged and oppressed, and accounts for social and historical understandings where issues of ethnicity, race, citizenship, class, language, gender, are interconnected inseparable identities (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). LatCrit theory rejects unidimensional, deterministic, and single issue understandings.

### **The advancement of transformation.**

LatCrit is committed to the idea that struggles for social justice within Latin@ communities must connect to other anti-oppressive theories and struggles employed to resist all forms of subordinating conditions and providing a critical space to advocate diverse Latin@ struggles (Montoya & Valdez, 2008; Valdes, 1996). LatCrit is grounded on notions of social justice and action aimed at remedying structural inequity within institutions impacting Latin@s and any other subordinated and oppressed groups (Montoya & Valdez, 2008; Valdes, 1997a, 1996; Villalpando, 2004). Osei-Kofi, Shahjahan, and Patton (2010) conceptualize social justice as “a process and an objective of ending oppression and domination at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels” (p. 329), whereby scholars and practitioners work towards transforming dominant and oppressive institutional policies and practices to reflect equitable processes and discourses. Valdes (1996) makes clear that not only should those who engage LatCrit theory commit to the advancement of transformation in discourse and rhetoric, they should also seek to produce practical social change and transformation that equitably and materially enhances the lives of Latin@s and other subordinated groups, and transform the structural barriers that limit the advancement for all.

### **Production of knowledge.**

LatCrit relies on the centrality of experiential knowledge as a methodological research tool and resource (i.e., storytelling, family history, biographies, cuentos, escenarios, chronicles, etc.) that

helps produce counter-narratives to dominant representations about Latin@s' lived experiences (Chávez, 2012; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Delgado, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Sólorzano, & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2003). Researchers and scholars using LatCrit to better understand challenges faced by Latin@ students often rely on counter-narratives to provide insight and more accurate understandings about Latin@s' experiences as a result of systemic inequities, where findings contradict dominant perceptions about Latin@s in education and their lived realities in the broader landscape of American society (Chávez, 2012; Delgado, 1989; Montoya, 1994; Montoya & Valdez, 2008; Pérez Huber, 2009; Sólorzano, & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Sólorzano & Yosso, 2000; Villalpando, 2003). Studies using LatCrit theory conclude that utilizing narrative demonstrates Latin@ how students think critically about and make sense out of their experiences, which in turn lead to transformational resistance, as opposed to other forms of resistance that might be reactionary or self-defeating (Sólorzano & Bernal Delgado, 2001). Scholars assert that much research about Latin@s fails to see how Latin@s utilizing experiential knowledge in education provides a space where Latin@s make sense of their experiences within and in response to oppressive contexts, reflect on and examine the ways in which intersecting identities influence Latin@ culture, engage in self-preservation when faced with continuous marginalization, and how they themselves are producers of knowledge. (Sólorzano & Bernal Delgado, 2001; Sólorzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009).

The functions central to LatCrit described command and require a sense of contention to essentialist assumptions and conceptualizations about Latin@ culture and Latin@s as a cosmic people, and resist dominant discourses that refer to Latin@s in essentialist and deterministic ways (i.e., U.S. Census Bureau). However, while utilizing a critical race perspective could be a useful educational tool in unveiling and revealing racism in its varied permutations (Patton, et



al., 2007), it has also been critiqued for essentializing racial/ethnic identity among non-whites (Kennedy, 1989). One critique includes the extent to which LatCrit can be easily translated into praxis and action or what scholars refer to as material transformation. Scholars emerged in the work of social justice view material transformation as a necessary function of LatCrit theory particularly important to the ways in which theory is translated into practice, and the role those who engage LatCrit have in carving out practical and utilitarian spaces for the interrogation of power and privilege in legal and educational policy and discourses (Aoki & Johnson, 2008; Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Gillborn, 2009; Ladson Billings, 1998; Valdes, 1996). A second critique involves validity, or the extent to which subjective realities experienced and described by Latin@s are reliable forms of knowledge useful for broader application and acting upon. A third critique deals with structural determinism, or the extent to which structural elements and factors predetermine the outcomes, events, or processes that cause individuals belonging to subordinate groups to be marginalized even as CRT contests notions of structural determinism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Delgado and Stefancic assert that “our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary cannot redress certain types of wrongs” (p. 26), specifically signaling racism as a complex phenomenon that takes place in many forms and in most cases goes unnoticed.

### **Mapping Disregarded Invisibilities and Absences:**

#### **Situating LatCrit in Postcolonial Thought and Whiteness**

Much LatCrit research in education over the past decade frames Latin@ positionalities as Mestiz@ bodies encompassing intersecting identities which bear the brunt of racism that in turn negatively impacts them. Some scholars go as far as implying that no matter the European influence on Latina@ identity, even for those who identify as white, Latin@s can never be white

(Haney-López, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Martinez, 2000; Rochmes & Griffin, 2006). LatCrit frames the discussion on Latin@s' experiences in such a way that demonstrates challenges faced by Latin@s in a predominantly Anglo white society, and how Latin@s are informed to some extent by European heritage, but still do not more deeply examine the experiences of Latin@s who identify as white. More specifically, Latin@s' positional/relational racial privilege relative to other Latin@s as well as other racialized groups and individuals, as a result of how they are situated in relation to whiteness and other dominant identities (Hurtado, 1996; López, 2005).

I seek to offer another critique beyond structural determinism and validity that focuses on the invisibility of whiteness and absence of non-mestiz@ Latin@ identities in a geopolitical and social context where whiteness is learned by way of Spanish influenced Latin@ indoctrination. My intent is to place LatCrit theory and research in conversation with postcolonialism to offer a unique site to unveil representations of whiteness as a disregarded, yet emerging theme for further inquiry and focus among Latin@s in higher education. I utilize postcolonial thought to make connections between racializing and homogenizing European histories that continue to privilege whiteness among Latin@s and how such functions within Latin@ representation makes invisible Latin@centric whiteness and absences non-white and non-mestiz@ identities in LatCrit literature. Based on my critical analysis and identified gaps, I offer newer understandings that fill a significant void in, and complement current literature and research on LatCrit theory and whiteness. Interrogating LatCrit through a postcolonial lens reveals much about how Eurocentrism and Latin@centric whiteness operates among and within Latin@ circles in Latin America and the U.S. (Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). Postcolonialism serves as a location of theories that helps critically interrogate and analyze the effect of colonialism or imperialism on contemporary culture, and emphasizes the need to illuminate the ways in which practices in

today's social institutions are historically rooted in colonial structures (Young, 2003; Prasad, 2003). Depending on the colonial processes and contexts where colonialism has taken place during particular moments of history, much of the colonial/postcolonial scholarship, layered with contradictory conditions and residues of being and relating along positionalities of power, "seeks to undo the binary thinking of colonizer/colonized and other essentialized oppositional categories" (Lopez, 2005 p. 11). Broadly speaking, postcolonialism seeks to render visible ways in which constructed differences and discourses have been marked and categorized along systemic levels of importance to the colonizer's values and aims, which function to propagate western cultural dominance and the continued marginality of the west's colonized and once-colonized currently cohabitating under disguises such as that of nation, ethnicity, and race (Bush, 2006; Pels, 1997; Quijano, 2000; Young, 2003).

Combined with whiteness as a problematizing and analytical perspective that serves as a way of formulating questions about social relations (Garner, 2007), postcolonialism provides a site of contention for the ways in which Latin@s are implicated in western colonialities' existing locations and processes that continue to subjugate and attempt to hegemonize identities in the realm of western culture and ideology (Lopez, 2005). In this sense, whiteness has no stable consensual meaning and is "conceptualized in a number of different yet not mutually exclusive forms. It is a lens through which particular aspects of social relationships can be apprehended" (Garner, 1997, p. 1). Postcolonialism, thus, offers a lens to examine this precise contradiction that is Latin@ cultural formations and how LatCrit as a research tool in higher education fails to account for Latin@centric whiteness. More specifically, the ways in which the contradictory acknowledgment of, and yet, disregard for Latin@centric whiteness, functions to maintain a

present invisibility of whiteness that informs the absence of non-mestiz@ identities situated in Latin@ cultural formations and practice.

### **Postcolonial Whiteness and the Idea of Hispanidad**

LatCrit theory, more often than not, focuses on the residual and lingering effects of colonialism that continue to marginalize Latin@s in the U.S. (Lazos Vargas, 2001; Valdes, 2000; 1998; Vázquez, 2003). Scholars such as Valdes (2000) and Lazos Vargas (2001) posit a site of contention referred to as ‘Hispanismo’ or ‘Hispanidad’, described as a people of or partially of Spanish ancestry and transnational racial ideology present among and across Latin@s within and beyond the U.S. whereby Latin@s construct the “essential Latina/o, namely, the “Hispanic” Latina/o: Evoking a real but often exaggerated connection to Spain, and hence, to Europe” (Valdes, 2000, p. 310), where whiteness and white supremacy have been constructed in Hispanicized social settings. This condition of Hispanidad is at the root of the disregarded and unexamined whiteness within Latin@ ethnoracial formations. Very little literature examines racialized positionalities within Latin@ culture whereby Latin@s seek to interrogate the ways in which whiteness is privileged in multicultural contexts where colorism and phenotypic appearance matter within Latin@ culture as well as externally and in relation to the broader society (Darity, Jr., Dietrich, & Hamilton, 2005; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Fears, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Loveman, 2014; Martinez, 2000; Telles, 2014; Tijerina Revilla, 2001). This includes the U.S. and most nations in Latin America, given the transnational, polycultural, historical and colonial thread that bonds countries across these geopolitical spaces of culture, nation, and race through ideoscapes as well as the critical composition of Latin@s/ Hispanics that reside in the westernized lands now known as the Americas (Valdes, 2000).

While LatCrit has been instrumental in furthering individual, cultural, and structural

understandings of the functions of culture, race, and ethnicity in shaping students' experiences in higher education, very little has been done to grant "critical attention to how whiteness offers a ground not only for the examination of white selves (who may indeed be white others depending on the position of the speaker), but also for the excavation of the foundations of all racial/cultural positioning" (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). The possibilities for unveiling postcolonial whiteness to gain a varied version of difference in how whiteness manifests, and how it works through societal processes beyond white bodies and local cultural practices, such as that of Eurocentrism and nation, are necessary (Lopez, 2015; Telles, 2014; van Dijk, 2009). As Johnson (1999) notes, "the problem of race now includes those who are raced white" (p. 5), beyond white/ non-white bodies, and what can only be seen as limited understandings to cultural practices in national spaces marked by and for whites, to understanding constructed ideals and practices with relational racialization with whiteness, transnationally (Chabram-Deeneresian, 1997; Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999; Lopez, 2005; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; Winant, 2004; Yancey, 2003). This includes Spanishcentric whiteness present in Latin@ culture, operating locally in American education.

Not all Latin@s identify as white or benefit from whiteness, but Latin@ness often takes the form of an all-encompassing lens that more often than not veils Latin@centric whiteness, even as LatCrit theory makes clear its anti-essentialist position and the needed presence for contradiction. Most research utilizing a LatCrit lens often disregards non-mestiz@ identities and those who situate their identities outside Mestizaje, such as Latin@s who may identify as White Latin@, Afro-Latin@s or even privilege their Asian or Indigenous ancestry (Andrews, 2004; Choy, Chui, & Sío Wong, 2005; Gomez, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Menchaca, 1998; Telles, 2014). Yet, many Latin@s choose not to engage Europe's role in

shaping the invisibility of race and whiteness, as well as the absencing of non-mestiz@ identities and how historic Mestiz@ or ‘La Raza’ movements have pushed for cosmic embrace while disregarding colorism (Telles, 2014). Postcolonial scholar Alfred Lopez (2005) points out this gap within literature on whiteness and speaks to the need to understand how whiteness has shifted since its construction during colonial histories to signify different privileges, always at the expense of others; or what Sociologist George Yancey (2003) refers to as the black/nonblack divide. Sefa Dei (2006) adds that while formal colonialism has ended, imperialism, which he refers as the governing body for colonial occupations, has served as the conduit through which colonial legacies resume.

### **Marking Whiteness in Latin@ Cultural Formations: Invisibility as Presence**

While I harmonize with LatCrit theory’s functionalities and appreciate the epistemic framework it offers to understand contemporary racialized subjects, there is abundant historical, sociopolitical, and theoretical bodies of work indicative of a culture of white others among Latin@s in postcolonial contexts (Behnken, 2011; Chabram-Deeneresian, 1997; Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Darity et al., 2005; Duany, 2013; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Loveman, 2014; Martinez, 2000; Menchaca, 2001; Montoya, 1994; Telles, 2014; Valdes, 2000). Placing LatCrit and postcolonial thought in conversation brings to the forefront the ways whiteness takes form within Latin@ identities and experiences along notions of race and empire. In his call for a more thorough examination of whiteness as a category, Lopez (2005) points to the ways in which “whiteness in the postcolonial moment continues to retain much of its status and desirability” (p. 2). He further posits contrary to claims that Latin@s cannot be white due to complex histories and intersecting influences, a need for a “broadening of the comparative focus of the debate on whiteness beyond a strictly U.S. model” (p. 16). Hence, LatCrit literature in higher education

needs to dig deeper into the ways many Latin@ students, like their Anglo counterparts, experience relative privilege as a result of their white appearance or represent an inherited intracultural compass that points to how racialization and colorism show up within Latin@ culture, privileging whiteness. Such understandings are not new. Existing scholarship demonstrates how Latin@s ascribe to understandings of a cultural whiteness informed through European Spanish influence (Behnken, 2011; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Menchaca, 2001; Quijano, 2008; Telles, 2014; Valdes, 2000), how white and non-white Latin@s themselves understand the significance of whiteness as a desired trait and property, and the ways in which racism is produced and learned across Latin America nations (Darity et al., 2005; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; van Dijk, 2009). The issue lies in that much scholarship addressing Latin@centric whiteness disregards this space as a unique site of knowledge contention and production where existing power and privilege influences social dynamics within Latin@ culture situated in the U.S.

It is this invisible presence of whiteness in LatCrit research in higher education, and the insight it could offer into how Latin@s experiences differ along racialized lines, I posit should serve as a ground of interrogation and knowledge production important to more accurately grappling with Latin@ cultural formations. It is important to recognize how whiteness is situated in a broader Eurocentric transnational framework that accounts for the multiple ways race and empire has helped shape power dynamics and social relations within the postcolonial contemporary (Bonnet, 2002; Lopez, 2005). This absent whiteness must be viewed as a postcolonial condition not dictated solely by westernization and empire, but by a globalized whiteness situated differently across geographic landscapes that shape non-whiteness in relation to whiteness, informs how differently positioned Latin@s perceive whiteness within their

respective culture, how this latent complexity creates varying conditions that influence how Latin@s are able or not to play with whiteness, and the extent to which dominant whites (Anglos in the U.S.) racialize Latin@ bodies and the ideas carried within these bodies, differently (Duany, 2013; Millán & Velásquez, 2011; Valdes, 2000).

It is important then to ask questions about how disregarding whiteness as a small part of a fluid and ambiguous sum allows for the invisibility of Latin@centric whiteness and how this invisibility in turn influences LatCrit's challenge with addressing the absence of non-mestiz@ identities within the Latin@ condition. This Latin@ cultural condition remains deep within the political space and imperial fabric that make up coloniality of power for Latin@s in the U.S. (Quijano, 2008), and by extension, its microcosmic institutions and ideoscapes represented within, such as higher education. Mignolo (2005) refers to coloniality as "the logical structure of colonial domination" and Eurocentric indoctrination core to the "Spanish, Dutch, British, and US control of the Atlantic economy and politics" (p. 7), and from there on the control of the broader globe, serving as the agency for imperialism and domination in the modern/colonial world. Hence, engaging a dialogue between LatCrit and postcolonial whiteness makes it possible for higher education professionals to not only understand the varied ways whiteness surfaces in Latin@ cultural formation, but makes it possible for Latin@ students who don't identify within limited and prescribed understandings of Mestiz@ Latin@ness to feel like their lived realities matter and are acknowledged. This includes individuals with multigenerational presence and histories in the U.S. and recently migrating Latin@ subjects, both having been exposed to cultural practices and racialized conditions informed by whiteness situated in Spanish Eurocentrism (prior to being exposed to or living in a predominantly white society that privileges whiteness differently) and Anglocentric Eurocentrism (Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). Histories



of imperialism and colonialism suggest that whiteness may not necessarily signify full privilege and access for all Latin@s in the U.S. but it does inform how those who identify as, appear white, or perform whiteness coupled with lighter appearing complexion, perpetuate Eurocentric hegemony through processes such as assimilation, acculturation, and internalized racial oppression and supremacy (Golash-Boza, 2006; Gomez, 2009; Hattam, 2007; Hernandez, 2003; Lee & Bean, 2007; Tafoya, 2004; Torres & Phelps, 1997; Valdes, 2000; Yancey, 2003), and are granted a relative/relational privilege that Latin@s, who are non-white or embody darker phenotypic appearance, do not have. One particular study points to Latin@ students' acknowledgement that lighter skin afforded them the privilege of not having to identify as Latin@ until they were ready or felt that the majority (referring to American whites) students would not judge them (Ramos-Zayas, 2001). Further, bodies of work across disciplinary canons point to an honest and yet hesitant recognition among Latin@s about postcolonial whiteness, where perceived white appearance or ideological traits often relegated to what is deemed white or white norms (i.e. working hard, high achievement, non-threatening, acting proper, etc.), provides a relative privilege informed by a culture of white hegemonic intentions (Bonnet, 2002; Darity et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2003; Irizarry & Raible, 2014; Montoya, 1994).

Situating these discoveries within a postcolonial white gaze are indicative of what Lopez (2005) calls whiteness as a cultural hegemon, where "the idea of whiteness as a cultural aesthetic norm combines with the idea of whiteness as a desirable and even necessary trait" (p. 17). This provides Latin@s, intentionally or not, a relational convergence that enables the flow of racialization and colorism to play out in different ways. On one hand, light skin or even white appearing Latin@s are able to leverage whiteness to their advantage. On another, whiteness doesn't have to signify they identify as white, but they understand the benefits attached to being

perceived white. Yet, on a third hand, whiteness shows up in ideological formats tied to European westernized understandings of performing in such ways that relays a seeking of uniformity aligned with whiteness, or in the case of the U.S. American. Black or Afro identified and or appearing Latin@s don't share this relational convergence, and in most cases their appearance and experiences are limited to a singular blackness they share with non-Latin@ blacks, but without the cultural relevance of identifying with both- Afrocentricity (black culture) and Latin@ cultural practice.

### **Marking Latin@ Colorized Identities: How Postcolonial Whiteness Can Help Uncover Racialized Absences**

Growing up in Puerto Rico it did not take much for me to notice how whiteness or light skin is privileged among Latin@s. This is a dynamic I learned to also be present in the U.S. following several years of residence here after moving from Puerto Rico to New York and later Pennsylvania, my teen years. This experience is similar to that described by Piri Thomas (1967) in his acclaimed book, *Down These Mean Streets*, where he recounts how his experience as a black Latin@ in New York differed from family members perceived as white. Examples of such phenomena whereby whiteness is privileged among Latin@s are provided by LatCrit scholars. In his analysis on entertainment, Johnson (2001) renders visible how white perceived Latin@s benefit from being perceived as closer to white than not. Johnson specifically illustrates how music represented or performed by white appearing Latin@s is easily consumed, appreciated, and accepted by Anglo whites who perceive white or light skin Latin@s as able to embody ideals associated with whiteness.

Johnson (2001) offers additional legal jurisprudence analyses by signifying how mostly white middle class Cuban Latin@s were provided exile in the U.S. He makes clear that the

historic event known as the Mariel boatlift, where boats were sent to Cuba in hopes to bring family members to the U.S., brought many poorer Afro-Cubans to the U.S. who were then characterized by the media as “criminals, mentally ill persons, and homosexuals” and “provoked public concern, even within the Cuban American community in south Florida” (p.650). Afro-Cubans, were not extended the same opportunity to find refuge in the U.S. Strengthening the disregard for Latin@centric whiteness, Behnken (2011) posits that “Mexico had a racial make-up similar to that of the United States. Mexico’s racial hierarchy positioned white Mexicans at the top of the socioeconomic ladder and mixed-race or dark skinned Mexicans at the bottom. White racial privilege and anti-black racism in Mexico proved just as virulent as racism in the United States” (p. 7). Latin@, in U.S. context, serves as a political identity that recognizes multiple and shared histories, though it is used in deterministic forms. Conversely, within higher education in the U.S. the term Latin@ continues to be utilized to universalize varied racialized and colorized experiences, failing to speak to how differences among Latin@s are shaped by historical and sociopolitical conditions given many Latin@s partial European origin. Consequently, Latin@s with lighter skin are perceived highly, while those with darker skin (i.e. those with stronger and more visible Indigenous and African appearance) are looked down upon as a result of western and modernizing social systems that do not allow for more complex understandings within Latin@ culture in the U.S. (Darity et al., 2005; Duany, 2013; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Fears, 2003; Hernandez, 2003; Telles, 2014).

Whiteness and non-whiteness among Latin@s are not only real, these are highly entrenched ideas and cultural practices demonstrating Latin@s are capable of racism and colorism, and hold on to learned negative perceptions and stereotypes about non-white Latin@s, similar to the ways African Americans are perceived in the U.S. (Hernandez, 2003; Johnson,

2001; Telles, 2014). As result, Latin@s with darker skin complexion, and Latin@s who specifically identify as Afro-Latin@ or Latin@ Indigenous are more likely to experience exclusion, both within and outside of Latin@ cultures (Andrews, 2004). They understand very well the consequences of race, racialization, and colorism as result of coloniality of power and reproduction of whiteness (Lopez, 2005; Quijano, 2008; Yancey, 2003; Telles, 2014) and the relative/ relational privilege as a result thereof. Understanding the invisibility of whiteness and absence of non Mestiz@ identities as sites of knowledge production and interrogation within Latin@ culture, and by extension, the varied racialized realities Latin@ individuals experience, is an appropriate step in helping to further unveil the Latin@ condition and advancing social and material transformation.

### **Demarcating Eurocentrism: Accounting for Latin@centric Whiteness in LatCrit Theory**

Placing LatCrit in conversation with postcolonial whiteness enables educators to map how social relations function in racialized ways and brings to the forefront newer understandings about how whiteness operates as cultural hegemon within and across Latin@ cultures. (Lopez, 2005; Telles, 2014). Moreover, I would posit that Latin@s who identify within boundaries of whiteness do not necessarily reflect assimilative tendencies of Anglocentrism where Spanishcentric Eurocentrism is entirely absent. The Spanish empire itself cultivated practices of racialization and Latin@centric whiteness as colorism still in play in the postcolonial contemporary (Menchaca, 2001; Telles, 2014). Vargas (2014) notes the ways in which similar to Anglo whites, white Latin@s often deny whiteness and racism in Latin@ culture and make claims that black Latin@s are treated the same as white Latin@s as if white Latin@s do not enjoy privileges afforded to them as a result of being perceived or identify as white. Thus, whiteness in Latin@ culture does matter and has sociopolitical and cultural implications,

irrespective of racialized and cultural marginalization experienced within Anglocentric spaces. Such implications foster a distance of relational/relative power that privilege whiteness and further marginalizes non-whites within Latin@ cultural practices similar to the subordination many Latin@s are subjected to within the Anglo ordained American mainstream (Castillo, 2009; Campbell & Rogalin, 2006; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Gomez, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Vargas, 2014).

In an essay on Chican@ Indianism, Menchaca (1998) makes reference to Latin@s who have a deep generational history in the U.S. going as far back as the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* in 1848 where Mexican whites were offered the option to identify as U.S. white given their geopolitical relations stemming from Spain of Europe. Some chose not to relinquish their Mexican heritage, but still fit the European white imagery. Those who identified as Mexican Indians, were of darker skin, or continued to resist western imperialism, were denied any possibility of citizenship. As Menchaca (1998) notes, “under the law Mexican-origin people of predominantly Caucasian ancestry were ostensibly allowed to exercise the full political rights of citizens” at one point (p. 393). Many embraced the American route that offered them a space of hegemonic whiteness by the Anglo-Whites. Over the course of U.S. history whiteness has continuously been altered to include other groups, and today, the term whiteness has expanded to include other ethnic nationalities such as Latin@s (Lee & Bean, 2007). These neocolonial processes have overshadowed ethnicity and nationality and cultivated racialized societies with interlocking systems that legally, socially, politically, and culturally privilege whites over non-whites (Yancey, 2003). Understanding the history behind whiteness in Latin America is necessary in order to understand how whiteness shows up among Latin@s in the U.S.

### **Significance of Postcolonial Thought and Latin@centric Whiteness:**

#### **Implications for the Utilization of LatCrit Theory in Higher Education**

For educators utilizing LatCrit, not accounting for Latin@centric whiteness presents challenges in their ability to effectively achieve transformative action in higher education. One implication includes efforts to cultivate Pan-ethnic alliance without accounting for how colorism and race function within Latin@ culture and the vast amount of racialized representations across Latin@ culture as an intra-transnational group (Loveman, 2014). Not considering intragroup dynamics, histories, and material data discussed (Fears, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Telles, 2014) hinders researchers and practitioners' utilization of LatCrit in ways that limit Latin@s' differed understandings and experiences more deeply. Even as gender, class, sexual orientation and religion, among other social constructs that inform Latin@ identity formations exist and intersect, racialization and colorism is more common than the recognition given to ways anti-dark phenotype sentiments manifest (Menchaca, 2001; Telles, 2014; Yancey, 2003). This creates a condition whereby those who seek to leverage LatCrit in impactful ways fail to consider how Latin@s with darker skin complexion do not experience college the same as their lighter-skin and white-Latin@ counterparts, even within Mestiz@ identities (Andrews, 2004; Darity et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Menchaca, 1998; Millán & Velásquez, 2011; Tijerina Revilla, 2001; Telles, 2014). Such absence triggers an invisibility that inhibits LatCrit's aim to cultivate Latin@ Pan-ethnic collectivism.

A second and related implication to consider in the utilization of LatCrit when not accounting for Latin@centric whiteness and colorism is efforts to connect across struggles that hinders Latin@s ability to organize and mobilize across different movements against subordination. Conversely, such an absence makes possible the cultivation of intersecting

coalitions at the expense of not addressing racialization and colorism within Latin@ culture that continues to exclude many Latin@ students in higher education. This disregard or lack of awareness leaves lurking conditions whereby critical spaces such as Latin@ cultural organizations and centers, could be dominated by Eurocentric ideologies that hinder the advancement of intercultural, organizational and social relations. For example, educators who have engaged much needed conversations about Latin@/Black relations and solidarity as a form of resistance to white supremacist ideology point to the problematic nature of essentialist and presumed black and brown (i.e. African-American and Latin@) alliances given both groups experiences with racial subordination (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Vaca, 2004). Literature on Latin@ cultural experiences and racialized identities suggest a need to account for Latin@centric whiteness whenever efforts are made to cultivate and sustain movements across cultural, racial and ethnic lines, and reveals that race relations and disparities present between Anglo whites and Latin@s are also an issue of divide embedded within Latin@ cultural formation along racialized lines, even in the U.S. (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Fears, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Telles, 2014). Lacking awareness about the racialization and colorism functionalities within Latin@ culture will make cultivating Pan-ethnic coalition and multi-struggle alliances a formidable undertaking. Beyond functions of Latin@centric whiteness and colorism within Latin@ culture and across Latin@ nationalities, this analysis suggest, is the need to uncover how neocolonial practices take an outward turn, whereby Latin@ cultures' inheritance of pro-white/ anti-blackness and anti-darker skin sentiment inform how they perceive race relations and color in the U.S. (Fear, 2003; Telles, 2014).

Supporting epistemological Latin@centric whiteness understandings and considerations, Keefe and Padilla (1987) contend that Latin@ individuals sense of ethnic pride and belonging

can remain unaffected even when cultural practices, such as speaking the language, celebrating traditions (i.e. family rituals), and colonial ties to religion are absent. This presents a third implication, and begs of LatCrit scholars to ask in what ways does not considering Latin@centric whiteness influence knowledge production. More specifically, many Latin@s struggle with the self-implication necessary that enables critical understanding into how postcolonial whiteness informs relative privilege tied to the coloniality of power and the cultural white hegemon project (Lazos Vargas, 2001; Lopez, 2005). Such understandings about how whiteness functions in Latin@ culture stand in partial tension to the hyper association with Spanish culture Valdes (2000) puts forward, as do theorizations of racialized ethnicities put forward by Grosfoguel (2004). I agree with claims that race and ethnicity are both social constructions and cannot be looked at as separate categories when attempting to understand any aspect of Latin@ culture (Grosfoguel, 2004; Torres-Saillant, 2003), but maintain that whiteness serves a significant ground of knowledge production and representation that is acknowledged, but goes unexamined. Such mapping helps prevent the continued veiling of the inherent influence Spanishcentric whiteness continues to have on the Latin@ condition and unmasks white supremacist assumptions (Behnken, 2011; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Menchaca, 2001, 1998; Rochmes et al., 2006; Valdes, 2000), whether situated in Latin America or the U.S., that unlike Torres-Saillant (2003), I believe cannot be disregarded entirely, since the entire diaspora itself was founded on systemic premises of Eurocentric imperial imaginations of miscegenation, racialization, and colorism.

Anchoring Latin@ students' experiences in postcolonial whiteness and delving into the historical processes that inform modern day Latin@ness, suggest an existing ideological presence of entrenched colorism and racist ideology that influence Latin@s understandings of racial formation beyond cultural and ethnic markers forged over the past 500 as a result of



dominant racial groups' imperializing sociopolitical agendas imposed onto people (Omi & Winant, 1994; Winant, 2004), and resisting anticolonial struggles that ensued (Branche, 2008;). Cultural practices of colorism and racialization dates back to the Spanish imperial conquest of what is now Latin America, and the act of White (blanc@) identifying Latin@s, the mid 1800s (Graham, 1990; Loveman, 2014). People from Latin America, as well as Latin@s who have migrated to the U.S., along with Latin@s who have a long family history in the U.S., cover a broader racialized pigmented cultural landscape employed by Latin American nations due to miscegenation long before their ascribing to the U.S. appropriated terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latin@' (Gracia, 2011; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; Valdes, 2000). Historical writings and analyses examining race, make clear similar racializing processes and histories throughout the many countries in Latin America as well as the history of Latin@s and whiteness in the U.S. (Behnken, 2011; Branche, 2008; Graham, 1990; Gomez, 2009; Hattam, 2007; Loveman, 2014; Menchaca, 2001; Telles, 2014; Valdes, 2000; Wade, 2007).

Postcolonial thought and whiteness in conversation with LatCrit reveals several challenges and consequences demonstrating the need to account for Latin@centric whiteness for higher education scholars and practitioners- particularly educators vested in furthering LatCrit, to be mindful of the impact not doing so has on reproduction of absence and invisibility on educational pedagogy and praxis. More specifically, this project calls upon higher education professionals employing LatCrit for knowledge production and material transformation to consider how not accounting for Latin@centric whiteness limits LatCrit from fulfilling its call to antiracism, anti-essentialism, and social justice. As currently utilized in higher education, LatCrit assumes a Mestiz@Crit agenda as opposed to a LatCrit project, and falls short of interrogating Latin@centric whiteness, which results in the undermining of existing colorism that influences

social relations and power dynamics within Latin@ students' experiences: Even as Latin@s drink from similar ponds of cultural and ethnic sociocultural politics and histories, that relatively privilege and benefit whiteness and/or lighter skin appearing complexion and enables anti-black or dark skin sentiment in Latin@ American culture, transnationally (Duany, 2013; Fear, 2003; Hernandez, 2003; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). Such understandings make it possible to account for how white and lighter skin Latin@s navigate whiteness in both distinct European cultures, which in turn calls upon a deeper examination of Latin@-centric whiteness. For example, recent literature on colorism among Latin@s points to how many Latin@s, trans-continently, continuously deny whiteness and racial inequity within Latin@ culture and are likely to deny privilege and economic positionality as a result of colorism (Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014; Vargas, 2014). Hence, questions need to be raised for the ways in which LatCrit can be leveraged to examine colorism as an important intersect, beyond much of the present research and literature about Latin@s experiences in higher education, currently limited to Mestiz@ identities (i.e. Mexican, Mexican American and/or Chican@) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Villalpando, 2003), and Caribbean Latino@ identities (Duany, 2013; Fergus, 2009; Urciuoli, 1997).

Much of the ongoing conversation regarding Latin@ students' experiences, reflects an acknowledgment of whiteness and or speaks to the complexity of embodying Spaniard and Indigenous roots, but fails to acknowledge the ways in which African enslavement and migrations from Asia, both due to reasons of imperial and economic expansion, also influence Latin@ cultures (Andrews, 2004; Choy et al, 2005). I am appreciative of and value LatCrit's challenge of dominant constructions about Latin@s. Nonetheless, the need to address cultural tension and disconnect along racialized continuum with Latin@ culture and explore how

whiteness operates within is dire. When situated in postcolonial whiteness, the varied representation of Latin@ness and the ways in which whiteness, racialization, and colorism show up in Latin@ culture become apparent. This is important as LatCrit continues to garner interest and is increasingly used for critical research that seeks to be action-oriented and transformative while also considering the cultivation of community within Latin@ cultures, across national identities, and intersecting oppressions. Though LatCrit serves as a powerful vehicle that helps scholars and practitioners better understand Latin@ students' experiences, it falls short of maximizing its potential for uncovering more nuanced racialized particularities within Latin@ culture(s) and the ways being racialized is experienced differently among Latin@ individuals and groups.

LatCrit theory and research in higher education is plentiful and substantial, and will continue to have a significant role in reshaping how Latin@s experiences are situated and understood, exposing the ways in which curriculum and policy impact Latin@ students, making clear the importance of understanding intersectionality within Latin@ culture, and uncovering ways Latin@s resist oppression while cultivating collective capacity for empowerment and liberation (Montoya & Valdez, 2008; Pérez Huber; 2010). However, the very same work simultaneously and unintentionally reinforces the same essentialist practices it seeks to part ways with when disregarding Latin@centric whiteness. This is most evident in how LatCrit research rarely accounts for non-mestiz@ identities and colorism within Mestizaje and perpetuates essentialists positions that honor culture and ethnicity, but fall short of further exploring and interrogating racialized and colorized functions that shapes Latin@s' experiences, similar to Gallegos and Ferdman's (2012) assertion that race and color are secondary to culture. This theoretical project suggests that disregarding Latin@centric whiteness leads to a failure in

illuminating varied consequences that require intentional mapping and limit shifting and newer understandings that contribute to knowledge production.

Placing LatCrit and postcolonial thought in conversation brings about an honest exchange that confronts how Latin@centric whiteness limits, manifests, and operates in pedagogic spaces, social relations within and beyond white bodies, and contextual cultural practices in American higher education that Lopez (2005) refers to as continuous shifts and constructions of whiteness dating back to colonial histories present in the cultural contemporary to signify differing privileges at the expense of others. As long as Latin@centric whiteness is disregarded as a piece of the puzzle that makes the sum, it will remain unmarked and non-white and non-Metiz@ Latin@s lived experiences will continue to remain functional in latent ways that prevents educators from understanding necessary knowledge important to achieving LatCrit's functions fully. Without a serious interrogation of how Eurocentric coloniality (beyond Anglo assimilated understandings) and globalized whiteness influence Latin@ cultural formations (Quijano, 2008), continued structural patterns and social reformulations will emerge in the U.S. that render whiteness invisible among Latin@s.

In conclusion, these newer understandings around Latin@centric whiteness invoke further implications about challenges relative to power, privilege, and marginalization with respect to Latin@ cultural formations and practices in the U.S., and further, its educational institutions. This means scholars should embrace postmodern and postcolonial framings of race and whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998), by becoming familiar with and aware of the historical, sociocultural, and political dimensions that influence Latin@ cultural contemporary. For higher education scholars and practitioners, the challenges present in how LatCrit is utilized leans heavily on those who carry out and utilize LatCrit research, pedagogy and praxis to engage

complexities and consequences for Latin@ faculty, staff and students whose work includes: (1) efforts to push and strengthen Pan-ethnic solidarity; (2) attempts to cultivate alliances and mobilize multi- and cross-struggles movements and intersections; and; (3) and production of knowledge that speaks to Latin@centric whiteness and colorism as cultural practice and phenomena that influence the higher education constituency. Though LatCrit is a powerful theory and methodological tool, it remains a young cannon in higher education. As currently utilized, scholars have done very little to examine broader and varied racialized experiences among Latin@s beyond Mestiz@ identities that reveal intersecting issues present, and fails to interrogate how Latin@centric whiteness and colorism inform Mestiz@s' (as a Latin@ sub-group) lived realities and experiences within in the context of higher education.

Existing data on student enrollment adds to the obligation and responsibility educators have in accounting for Latin@centric whiteness and colorism in LatCrit projects. This includes a continued increase in Latin@ student enrollment in higher education (Gamboa, 2012); literature pointing to the perception of Afro-Latin@s as foreigners to Latin@ culture (Hernandez, 2003); education gaps between light-skin and dark-skin students (Hughes & Hertel, 1990), and; the persistent challenge of colorism, for non-white minoritized people in the U.S. (Fear, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Telles, 2014). Hence, putting LatCrit in conversation with postcolonial whiteness carves multiple spaces that examine and interrogate the varied ways Latin@centric whiteness and colorism intersect with nation, ethnicity and culture to operate under the structural disguise of Latin@ness to reproduce structural and cultural Latin@centric whiteness, which in turn influence how Latin@ students experience college, and what if any unique impact such varied realities signify and mean for research, policy and practice as these relate to Latin@s varied experiences represented in higher education.

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## CHAPTER 5

### FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This dissertation project sought to unveil and make visible the varied ways which whiteness influences Latin@ culture and identity formations in the United States and the significance of these understandings in higher education. My aim was to examine, more deeply understand and make connections between whiteness and Latin@ cultures and explore how whiteness might show up among Latin@s in education. I employed critical analysis to draw from and fuse current literature and research about Latin@s in higher education (i.e., Latin@ identity development, LatCrit research), and theoretical understandings such as postcolonial thought, antiracism, and whiteness studies, to develop newer theoretical/conceptual understandings that address how whiteness functions in Latin@ culture, beyond conceptualizations of Anglo orientation and biculturalism offered in existing literature (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres & Phelps, 1997; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Revising these bodies of work in conversation with each other not only revealed newer understandings about how whiteness shows up in Latin@ culture. It also showed that existing literature addressing Spanish influence on Latin@ culture in the United States either disregards the varied ways in which whiteness and colorism are present within Latin@ culture as a result of Spanish imperialism and colonialism, or relegates whiteness within Latin@ culture as Anglo-oriented cultural practice.

Evident throughout my theoretical analysis was the extent to which many scholars in disciplinary bodies of work outside of higher education have presented in their writings a call for further examination about the roots and production of racism in Latin@ communities given the history of colonialism and colorism used to justify social, economic, and cultural domination

(Branche, 2008; Telles, 2014; van Dijk, 2009; Wade, López Beltrán, Restrepo, & Ventura Santos, 2014), whether by white(r) elites in trans-continental Latin America (vanDijk, 2009), blanquit@s in the Latin@ Caribbean (Garcia, 2015; Godreau, 2006), or light skin and white identifying Latin@s in the United States (Fears, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Darity, Dietrich, & Hamilton, 2005). Some scholarship touches on Spanish influence (Hernández-Vázquez, 2003; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Valdes, 2000), and whiteness and skin color among Latin@s (Chabram-Deenersian, 1997; Garcia, 2015; Montalvo, 1987; Montalvo & Codina, 2001; Montoya, 1994), but very little literature engages Latin@centric whiteness and even less so in the educational arena of higher education. Few scholars within the field of education, broadly speaking, have pointed to preference for white skin, acting white and whiteness among Latin@ students. Even fewer make a connection between revelations of whiteness among Latin@s and the practice of racialization and colorism within Latin@ culture, without attributing whiteness to internalized oppression and/or self-hatred as psychological and sociocultural responses to dominant Anglo White culture.

### **Towards an Understanding of Postcolonial Latin@centric Whiteness**

Chapter 2 engaged a dialogue between theoretical orientations, including postcolonial thought, antiracism, and whiteness to provide some historical and contemporary contexts to draw from and situate Eurocentric Latin@ness and Latin@centric whiteness. In this chapter I provided some discussion about the ways in which race, whiteness and colorism show up in Latin@ modern thought, and provided some national data illustrating a growth in Latin@s identifying as white in the United States; so much so that the white population witnessed a growth in numbers as a result. In chapter 2, I presented an overview of whiteness studies and whiteness as a theoretical framework, with particular emphasis placed on whiteness as invisibility. An overview

of postcolonial theory and thought is also offered with emphasis on theoretical understandings about culture, race, and whiteness that helped bring together an antiracist postcolonial whiteness theoretical framework necessary to understanding the ways in which whiteness shows up in Latin@ identity formation and cultural practice. In the overview, I spoke particularly to Mignolo's (2005) and Quijano's (2008, 2000) theoretical conceptualizations of coloniality of power and the significance of understanding how coloniality of power functions and helps maintain neocolonial relationships within Latin@ culture and between Latin@ culture and Anglo dominant culture.

Based on the theoretical undertaking, chapter 2 suggests that whiteness in Latin@ culture has been obscured through ethnicity and nationality, preventing insights about white others to emerge that are significant to more deeply understanding Eurocentric and transnational cultural, racial, social, and ideological dynamics present in western thought that inform Spanish and Anglo informed whiteness. The Spanish and Anglo colonial processes and theoretical bodies of work addressed in conversation with each other propound a necessity for deeper examination about the ways whiteness functions in Latin@ culture as result of global imperial movements and white cultural hegemony (Lopez, 2005). Lopez (2005) asserts that "one does not make whiteness as a malignant colonial ideology go away by simply showing how it deconstructs itself, any more than one can do away with the concept of the subject itself" (p. 13). Hence, I proposed using postcolonial lens and found it to offer a space of interrogation whereby whiteness in Latin@ culture is not disregarded simply because Latin@s in the United States no longer comprise the majority of dominant culture or because to many, Latin@ is in itself, is perceived as a race.

Further, the idea that Spanish and Anglo colonialisms have a historical relationship

bound to the negotiation of whiteness through racialization, racism, and colorism amplifies the need to consider alternative understandings of whiteness situated in Spanish Eurocentric thought and racializing histories that influence how Latin@s learn and practice whiteness (Behnken, 2011, Johnson, 2001; Menchaca; 2001; Lazos Vargas, 2001), even when Anglo influence is not present or central to Latin@centric whiteness. Thus, whiteness as culture takes on different shades of connotation depending on the colors of the people white supremacy subjugates stemming from colonial practice aimed at maintaining control and power over non-whites, as opposed to white as a fixed racial identity limited Anglo Americans, even in the U.S. All things considered, my analysis pleads an importunate need to bring to light how Spanish European Latin@centric understandings of whiteness among Latin@s influence, disregard, or privilege certain Latin@ students' identities and experiences in American higher education. And in turn, how foundations of Anglo whiteness in American higher education invites the transferability of whiteness among Latin@s that disregard and veil understandings about varied ways whiteness influences Latin@ culture and identities in the United States, while enabling whiteness to serve a cultural space of sociocultural, material, phenotypic, and ideological relational positionality.

### **Latin@centric Whiteness and Cultural Identity Formations**

Chapter 3 represented a critical analysis of and engagement with Latin@ identity development literature utilized in student affairs (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Torres, 1999; Torres et al., 2009; Torres & Phelps, 1997; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007), anchored in postcolonial thought (Lopez, 2005; Prasad, 2003) as well as critical whiteness (Frankenberg, 1997; Garner, 2007) and antiracism (Sefa Dei, 2006, 2000). The article provided an overview of identity development in higher education and a foundational background on racial and ethnic identity development theory, offered a critical examination of existing

theoretical lenses into Latin@ identity formations, and suggested newer understandings about Latin@centric whiteness. As part of the theoretical analysis, I examined, wrestled with, and contested how racial and ethnic identity development theories among Latin@s are epistemologically situated and used to understand Latin@ students' experiences through an Anglo-oriented lens. The theoretical dialogue revealed how colonizing, modernizing, and racializing histories have resulted in colorism, and over time, cultivated anti-black sentiments within Latin@ culture and contemporary racialized dynamics demonstrating how whiteness is learned and practiced within Latin@ culture (Behnken, 2011; Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Hernandez, 2003; Menchaca, 2001). Anchored in postcolonial whiteness, these revelations align with current literature with respect to practices of assimilation and acculturation (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Golash-Boza, 2006; Torres & Phelps, 1997), but also exposed newer understandings that supplement existing bodies of work indicating that Latin@ acculturation does not have to reflect an embrace of Anglo whiteness, but could instead represent a transnational connection to Anglo whiteness as a result of the subjects' understanding of whiteness in his/her cultural location (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; 2001; Drzewiecka & Wong, 1999; Frankenberg, 1997; Lopez, 2005). Both are prompted by a combination of Eurocentric enabled racialized conceptualizations of white cultural hegemon, as a result of Spanish and Anglo colonialisms. Newer understandings about Latin@ identity formation call attention to the importance for scholars and practitioners to grant serious consideration to the role Spanishcentric colonial legacies continue to have on whiteness, culturally, phenotypically, and socially, in addition to Anglo-oriented understandings of Latin@ identity formations and sociocultural experiences anchored in Anglocentric theorization in the context of higher education.

More specifically, chapter 3 suggested a need for academic and student affairs

administrators to consider implications for more complex understandings about the Latin@ representation and culture in higher education so as to not continue to engage essentialist positions that honor culture and ethnicity, but fall short of understanding race, racialization, and colorism within Latino@ culture and identity formation and how these shape Latin@s' experiences. Beyond Gallegos and Ferdman's, (2012) assertion that race and color are secondary to culture within Latin@ culture, this analysis evokes a need to consider what postcolonial whiteness can offer as a site of knowledge contention and production in order to have broader and more encompassing understandings of Latin@ students' experiences (Lopez, 2005), instead of maintaining bicultural models that disregard race altogether or ethnoracial models that on one hand consider a spectrum of political, national, transnational, and pan-ethnic understandings, while on the other hand, relegating whiteness as an Anglo orientation. This analysis on Latin@ student development theories suggest the need to further consider and examine; how ancestries and historical processes inform the cosmic identities that constitute Latin@ cultures and the Latin@ condition, the varied ways Latin@centric whiteness continues to act under the guise of invisibility and is informed by legacies of Spanishcentric Eurocentrism, and the need to be more attentive to absented identity formations in Latin@ culture as result of unintended essentialized discussions that veil signifiers of race and racialization. This includes, but is not limited to Afro-Latin@s, Latin@s who identify with their indigenous roots, Asian identified Latin@s, Afro-Indigenous Latin@s (known as Zumba in many places Central Latin America), and the variety of racialized Mestiz@, Creole, and Mulatto identities within Latin@ culture.

### **Unmasking Whiteness in Latin@ Culture: Present Invisibility and Absence**

Chapter 4 represented a critical review of and engagement with Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit) literature and research in higher education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001;



Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) utilizing postcolonial whiteness (Lopez, 2005) and antiracist thought (Sefa Dei, 2006; 2000) to map invisibilities of whiteness and absences of non-mestiz@ identities, within LatCrit. In the article, I provided an overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and discussed Latin@ Critical Theory (LatCrit) at length. Literature on LatCrit touched on four functionalities foundational to understanding LatCrit theory, including community and coalition building, extended and connected struggles, the advancement of transformation, and the production of knowledge. Following, I further interrogated the ways LatCrit research fails to mark different understandings within Latin@ culture that render whiteness invisible. In doing so, this very same absence and invisibility around whiteness and lack of recognition for how racialization and colorism show up in Latin@ culture absents possibilities to look more deeply into the ways Eurocentric culture by way of Spain or Hispanidad (Gracia, 2011; Lazos Vargas, 2001; Valdes, 2000) facilitate Latin@s' lack of self-awareness about Latin@centric whiteness, Afro-Latin@ and other non-mestiz@ Latin@ identities and experiences in the context of higher education. To be clear, my aim with chapter 4 was not dispute the usefulness of LatCrit as a critical theoretical and methodological tool, but to bring light and make visible the varied understandings of Latin@ness that LatCrit literature fails to account for. Existing literature utilizing LatCrit, I believe, demonstrates thoroughly, the ways in which LatCrit makes it possible to account for marginalized positions and experiences of Latin@ students (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso et al., 2009), but fall short of examining whiteness and other non-mestiz@ identities in Latino@ culture.

Putting LatCrit in conversation with postcolonial thought (Lopez,2005) and critical whiteness (Frankenberg, 1997; Garner, 2007), unveiled how Latin@centric whiteness as an

absent yet present cultural practice, and as a site of knowledge production, has real consequences and implications for Latin@ individuals in the context of higher education. Hence, this theoretical analysis represents a critical call to scholars and practitioners who utilize and value LatCrit theory to put LatCrit theory in conversation with postcolonial whiteness in order to further advance newer understandings about the ways in which inquiry about Latin@ students' experiences are sought excavated and examined. Doing so allows a space for scholars and practitioners to be able to delineate between the ways Latin@ students understand racialization, whiteness and colorism within Latin@ culture and how Latin@s understand and respond to conditions in a society premised on Anglocentric white supremacist understandings. In general, this theoretical analysis suggests a need to intentionally seek to account for racialized and racializing varieties within mestiz@ identities (Spanish and Indigenous) as well as Latin@ identities and experiences more closely aligned with whiteness, or white others, as suggested by Lopez (2005) and Frankenberg (1997), and non-metiz@ identities as suggested by scholars who point towards the ways colorism absences and negatively impacts Afro-Latin@s, darker skin mestiz@s, mulattos, and Asian and Indigenous Latin@ identities (Andrews, 2004; Choy, Chui, & Sío Wong, 2005; Dzidzienyo, & Oboler, 2005; Hernandez, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Fears, 2003; Sue, 2013; Wade, et al, 2014).

More specifically, this theoretical dialectic analysis suggests that the concept of whiteness and non-whiteness along racialized lines for Latin@s is not only real, it is a highly entrenched idea and cultural practice where Latin@s are not only capable of acting in colorist ways that resemble racism, but also develop and learn negative perceptions and stigmas about Afro, indigenous (also referred to as Ameri-Indians) and dark skin Latin@s similar to the ways African Americans are perceived in the U.S. (Darity et al., 2005; Dzidzienyo, & Oboler, 2005;

Hernandez, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Loveman, 2014). As result, non-white Latin@s, Latin@s with darker skin complexion, and Latin@s who specifically identify as Afro-Latin@ or Latin@ indigenous are more likely to experience racism and exclusion, both- outside of and within Latin culture (Dzidzienyo, & Oboler, 2005; Loveman, 2014; Telles, 2014). They understand very well the consequences of race, racialization, and colorism as result of settler colonialism and continued coloniality of power through the reproduction of whiteness (Lopez, 2005; Quijano, 2008; Yancey, 2003) and the relative or relational positionality and privilege certain Latin@ identities, are afforded as a result of racialized dynamics (Hurtado, 1996).

### **Emerging Themes for Further Analysis in Future Research**

Understanding the relationship between the absent presence of whiteness (Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007) and the invisibility of colorism (Hunter, 2007) as sites of knowledge production and experiential interrogation within Latin@ culture, and the varied racialized lived realities and experiences of Latin@ individuals and groups, my analysis suggests, helps advance broader and deeper understandings about how Latin@s make sense out of their college experience in a way that accounts for, as opposed to disregard, racialized intragroup dynamics (Castillo, 2009; Castillo, Conoley, Brossart, & Quiros, 2007). One final and important note I would like to point out about what my theoretical examination of LatCrit revealed is a need for scholars and practitioners in higher education who seek to utilize LatCrit as a theoretical framework for research and practice to gain a more holistic understanding of foundation in LatCrit theory as discussed in LatCrit legal thought. Currently, most research carried out in higher education utilizing LatCrit does not mark Latin@s' experiences outside of Mestizaje, how such experiences point to distinct lived realities that make clear the challenges faced by Afro-Latin@s and other Latin@s who don't identify within Mestiz@ understandings. Doing so points to ways in which

LatCrit does account for transnational understandings of whiteness as a result of Spanish colonial legacies in Latin@ culture. Unfortunately however, LatCrit scholars of legal jurisprudence, in efforts to address the importance of intersectionality central to comprehending Latin@ identity formations and cultural experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-López, 1998; Torres-Saillant, 2003), perhaps intentionally or not, disregard the value Latin@centric whiteness offers as a site of interrogation for Latin@s who reside in the United States (Behnken, 2011; Campbell & Rogalin, 2006; Duany, 2013; Fears, 2003; Gomez, 2009; Hernandez, 2003; Hunter, 2007; Menchaca, 2001; Vargas, 2014). This analysis also suggests possibilities whereby a portion of Latin@s, depending on how they identify racially, choose not to engage with the roots of Spanishcentric Europe and its role in shaping the invisibility of race and whiteness, as well as the absenting of non-mestiz@ identities in Latin@ culture and identities as part of today's Latin@ condition, similar to the ways Anglo whites struggle to acknowledge the continued role of whiteness in American culture. Some themes requiring further inquiry that emerged for Latin@s in higher education through the utilization of an antiracist postcolonial whiteness lens of analysis include: (1) social intragroup relations within Latin@ identities who identify differently racially; (2) organizational dynamics within groups aimed at meeting the cultural and sociopolitical needs of Latin@s; (3) the ways in which language and discourse (i.e. Hispanic/Latin@) veil racialization and colorism among Latin@s; (4) the extent to which white privilege exist in Latin@ communities; (5) oppressed/ oppressor dynamics within Latin@ culture, and, (6) essentialist understandings about Latin@ identity formation and culture that informs cultural practice.

### Recommendations

Engaging a dialogue between Latin@ and Latin@ American history, postcolonial thought, whiteness and research and literature about Latin@s in higher education helped uncover gaps in current literature and offers different understandings that fill a significant void in, and complement, current literature and research on Latin@ identity, culture and whiteness in the context of higher education. This analysis brought to light the varied ways in which whiteness within Latin@ culture has real social, cultural, psychological and material implications along dominant and oppressive lines both intra-culturally among groups and individuals within Latin@ culture and inter-culturally between Latin@s and non-Latin@s. Further, the analysis suggests a necessity for higher education professionals to gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the varied ways Latin@centric whiteness might function in college contexts. Chapters 3 and 4 specifically reveal the limitations of not accounting for whiteness and of engaging essentialist pan-ethnic understandings around Latin@ness to understand Latin@s experiences more likely to account for mestiz@ identities, while not engaging white, Afro, Indigenous and or Asian Latin@ identities.

Often in higher education, professionals who work closely with students assume that students who share similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as Latin@s, also experience life in similar ways. Examining these bodies of work in theoretical conversation makes clear how research pointing to intersecting identities such as how gender, race, nationality, class, and religion reinforce each other and challenge essentialist assumptions about students' experiences, but do not account for ways in which Spanish informed Latin@centric whiteness can serve as a site of knowledge contention and production. This critical analysis suggest that higher education professionals need to more deeply understand and account for Latin@centric whiteness and how

it influences Latino culture in order to understand the varied and complex identity politics and dynamics present within Latin@ culture in higher education. In conclusion, I offer the following section as recommendations for higher education professionals given what my theoretical project makes evident about whiteness, racialization, and colorism within Latin@ culture and across bodies of scholarly work about Latin@s in higher education.

### **Latin@s and Presumed Latin@ Intragroup Alliances**

Higher education professionals should seek interdisciplinary understandings that will assist them gain a broader understanding of the ways Latin@centric whiteness ruptures and prevents possibilities for Latin@ solidarity and unity across national and pan-ethnic lines. One way Latin@centric whiteness might show up on college campuses is in the form of presumed ethnic alliances and misunderstandings of unity along ethnic and cultural spaces of relating without considering how colorism and race function within Latin@ culture and the vast amount of racialized perceptions represented within Latin@s as a transnational group. Not considering this intragroup dynamic can hinder higher education professionals' ability to understand Latin@ students more deeply, causing them not to consider the extent to which Latin@s with darker skin complexions may experience college differently than their lighter-skin and white-Latin@ counterparts. Such a tension can also stifle Latin@ students' ability to politically organize and mobilize, to engage campus efforts, to create paths for critical spaces such as that of Latin@ cultural organizations and spaces, can allow Latin@ students to be dominated by Eurocentric ideologies that overlook whiteness, and can hinder organizational and social dynamics as I have observed and experienced over the past fifteen years working closely with Latin@ students in higher education. My analysis revealed that social relations between Latin@s who identify differently racially and the varied racialized experiences within Latin@ culture matter and

should be accounted for in order to deal with racialization and colorism as a way uncover more authentic ways to cultivate solidarity and unity.

### **Latin@s and Intercultural Relations.**

Higher education professionals should seek to engage in deeper learning about the ways in which Latin@centric whiteness, particularly, anti-blackness and colorism, is historically rooted, learned and practiced in Latin@ culture. Gaining a greater understanding about functions of whiteness in Latin@ culture will enable higher education practitioners to engage conversations about inter- and cross-cultural unity across cultural, racial, and ethnic lines beyond Latin@ness. Without first understanding how issues of racialization, colorism, and whiteness operate within Latin@ culture, attempts to cultivate intercultural alliances will remain a daunting task as the very same whiteness that informs how race is perceived within Latin@s takes a turn outward and operates as a lens through which Latin@ culture's inheritance of pro-white/ anti-blackness inform how Latin@s perceive, within and beyond Latin@ cultures, other Latin@s and non-Latin@s in the United States. This makes it more difficult to nurture and sustain solidarity across racial divides, particularly around topics such as black and brown relations. Similar to the first recommendation, my project suggests that higher education professionals attend professional development sessions that provide opportunities to examine Latin@ history and racialized dynamics between Latin@s and non-Latin@s in the United States. This is particularly useful for practitioners who oversee multicultural and intercultural centers/organizations whose work is aligned with cultivating organizational dynamics and relations within student groups and across organizations aimed at building coalitions across struggles of subordination and intersecting identities.

### **Latin@ Identity Politics and the Oppressor/Oppressive Paradox.**

Higher education professionals should seek to better understand how white privilege and oppression, along lines of relational/relative positionality, physically and ideologically, show up in ways that rupture scholars' production of knowledge about Latin@ individuals and group experiences, and how Latin@s experience college differently along markers of whiteness and colorism. Not critically considering the Spanishcentric white Latin@ gaze, in addition to Americentric (Anglo) assimilation shepherded through European ideology culturally, ideologically, and socially will continue to foster essentialized understandings of difference that will work against the enabling of conversations and critical research that address varied cultural constructions of whiteness and marginalization within Latin@ groups and between Latin@ groups and non-Latin@ groups that maintain and sustain white dominant structures. Lastly, giving more thought and attention to these issues will provide higher education professionals a more critical understanding of how colorism, nation, racialization, and ethnicity intersect to operate under the structural disguise of Latin@ness to reproduce structural and cultural Latin@centric whiteness and provide the understandings necessary to more deeply understand and research varied racialized experiences of Latin@ students, staff, and faculty represented in higher education.

As I noted throughout chapters 2-4, through the creation and revision of theory, practitioners and scholars in higher education consistently seek to better understand students' development and gain insight into their experiences as a way of working toward continuously improving American higher education for college students (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Smart & Paulsen, 2011). Thus, these newer understandings around Latin@centric whiteness invoke further implications about challenges relative to power, privilege, and



marginalization with respect to Latin@ culture and identity formation in the United States, and further Latin@ representation in educational institutions. In higher education, understanding identity politics in Latin@ culture is important for academic instructors, advisors and student affairs practitioners, but lean heavily on the administrators whose role includes advising, counseling, mentoring, and/or overseeing areas of student development. Practitioners situated in student affairs more so than others in higher education, are called upon to work closely with students from a development standpoint (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). For student affairs professionals in higher education this means becoming familiar with and aware of the historical, psychosocial, ecological, and sociocultural dimensions that influence Latin@ culture, identity formation, and more broadly, their experiences on college campuses. For scholars who carry out critical research projects that aim to advance knowledge and new understandings about Latin@ culture, my project suggests a need to intentionally account for Latin@centric whiteness so that racialization and colorism within Latin@ culture is accounted for when examining Latin@ students' experiences and lived realities. The call to more deeply understanding the possibilities Latin@centric whiteness offers to unearth newer understandings about Latin@s and Latin@ cultural representation is especially pertinent for all called upon to research about, teach, work with, counsel, advise, and engage Latin@ individuals, groups and culture in the context of higher education.

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