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The Color Paradigm: The Impact of Colorism on the Racial Identity and Identification of Latinas

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Existing research has provided scant analysis on the impact of colorism or skin color privilege and stigma on racial identity and identification among Latinas/as. This article explores the dynamics of colorism and the impact on racial identity and identification among Latinas/as of varying phenotypes. The experiences of a subset of eight Caribbean Latinas and one Chicana are used to illustrate how Latinas negotiate their racial identification and survive experiences of both stigma and privilege within the U.S. context. The article concludes with implications for social work research, practice, and pedagogy.

Keywords: Latinas, colorism, racial identification, culture

INTRODUCTION

The influence of skin color privilege and stigma on the lives of Whites and Blacks in the United States has been explored in the existing literature (Clark & Clark 1940; McIntosh, 1988; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Collins, 2000; Hunter, 2002, 2007), but less attention has been given to the privilege and stigma experienced by Latino/as who can be either white, light- or dark-skinned (Hernandez & Rivera-Batiz, 2003). Research using umbrella terms such as *Latino/a* to study the experiences of such diverse groups have overlooked important differences in privilege and stigma experienced by white and dark-skinned Latino/as (Gracia, 2007). Based on phenotype variations, some lighter-skinned individuals are able to maintain an ambiguous racial identity and straddle the racial divide and are able to pass for White, while others are assigned a Black or Afro-Latino racial identity based on phenotypic features and, typically, skin color (Vaquera & Kao, 2006; Quiros, 2009). The experience of stigma or privilege based on phenotype can affect the experiences of Latino/as in the United States, resulting in lighter-skinned Latino/as experiencing access and privilege while darker-skinned Latino/as experience marginalization and discrimination resulting in negative psychological and socioeconomic outcomes (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Ore, 2003). In fact, discrimination among dark-skinned Latino/as has been associated with lower wages, job prestige, and higher rates of depression compared to White or light-skinned Latino/as (for review, see Araujo & Borrell, 2006). Unfortunately the aforementioned literature is most often focused on the Mexican American population and is quantitative in nature, overlooking the experiences and voices of other Latino/as such as those from the Caribbean.

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Understanding the role racial hierarchies play in structuring and representing the social world and the disadvantage and perceived privilege experienced by diverse populations is essential to understanding the experiences of Latino/as in the United States (Omi & Winant, 1994). In this paper, the definitions of racial identity (personal, chosen, racial self-understandings) and racial identification (how others view them) are adopted from the work of Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) and extended to include multiethnic people (Shih & Sanchez, 2009).

Therefore, the present paper will explore the impact of colorism or skin color privilege and stigma on the racial identity and identification of Latinos/as, which calls for qualitative inquiry, as this type of research allows the researcher to explore the complexity of color and identity within social contexts while paying careful attention to detail and nuance in an effort to communicate the women's reality in their own terms (Patton, 2002). The voices of a subset of Caribbean Latinas and one Chicana of varying phenotypes will be examined to illustrate their experiences with colorism and subsequent negotiations of racial identity that are intimately linked to darkness and whiteness in a U.S. context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COLORISM

In order to understand how skin color or phenotype shapes the racial identity and identification of Latino/as in the United States, the present paper will utilize colorism, which is defined as "the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin" as a theoretical framework (Burke, 2008, p. 17; Hunter, 2002, 2007). Colorism has its roots in the colonial ideology where lightness is associated with White Europeans and is therefore preferred and viewed as superior to darkness, which is associated with indigenous and Black African people (Fanon, 1952; Hunter, 2002). Within this ideology, Blackness/Brownness is socially constructed to mean primitiveness, laziness, and ugliness whereas Whiteness represents civility, intelligence, and beauty (Fanon, 1952; Hunter, 2002). The colonial value system, as Fanon reminds us, has been imposed on the colonized and internalized. For example, the ideals of beauty are entrenched in the colonial value system and exist across ethnic groups and class. More specifically, we see this play out in the denigration of African hair and skin color and the subsequent efforts to look more European. While traditional forms of colonialism may no longer exist, the high value and systemic privileges and rewards afforded to White or light-skinned individuals remain among communities of color and in the United States (hooks, 2005).

Furthermore, the influence of colorism on the existing racial hierarchy in the United States is evident in the way that race is constructed. For example, the construction of race has shifted from the one-drop rule, which mandated that any person with any Black ancestry identify monolithically as Black during the Jim Crow era in U.S. history, to a tri-racial system in which "White" and "honorary whites" and thus "assimilated" Latino/as are more likely to be accepted and provided with more access and privileges compared to darker-skinned Latino/as who are marginalized (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Hollinger, 2003). Despite the changing constructions of race, in line with colorism, racial classifications in the United States began and continue to be a tool for colonial and economic exploitation of those labeled as Black, constrains their choice of identity, and carries with it stigma and disadvantage while assimilation into the dominant White culture is unattainable for some racial minorities (Glenn, 1998; Kaufman, 2003).

Although Latino/as participate in a wider racial classification system that consists of *indio/a*, *trigueno/a*, and *moreno/a*, notions of colorism remain evident in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin America's view of race (Rodríguez, 2001; Duany, 1996). These racial categories encompass the skin color variation ranging from fair skin to dark skin, respectively, as well as facial features and hair texture, which are direct results of the African, Spaniard, and indigenous ancestry of Latino/as, particularly among Caribbean Latino/as (Rodríguez, 2001). Similar to the

United States, within Latino/a communities' power and privilege are assigned to those who are closer to looking White, with some privilege assigned to individuals who are categorized in the intermediate shades of brown (i.e., *trigueno*, *indio*; Rodriguez, 2001). Therefore, in the United States, racialized Latino/as may be ascribed a Black identity while, among Latino/as, the same individual may be labeled a racial category other than Black such as *indio* or *trigueno*. Just by the nature of the language used to describe these individuals, these labels carry fewer stigmas than a single Black label. Yet, note that the commonality remains that is, a preference toward White skin both within the United States and within and among Latinos/as.

Therefore, how one is racially stratified in the United States can potentially affect the agency and subsequent freedoms Latino/as have to negotiate their racial identity and how they go about doing so (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). In other words, the privilege certain light-skinned Latino/as have to orchestrate the fluidity of identity and choose the labels they use to identify themselves (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). For example, while White and light-skinned Latino/as have the ability to move in and out of racial and ethnic categories depending on the context of the situation, negotiation of identity is limited for dark-skin Latino/as whose ethnicity is more likely to be silenced and conflated because race trumps ethnicity (Rodriguez, 2001; Quiros, 2009). Even more, Latino/as with the darkest skin tone and most ethnic features are more likely to experience anti-Black racism, while Whites and "honorary" Whites can more easily pass and assimilate and are more likely to benefit from White privilege. In other words, as previously discussed, skin color serves as endemic capital (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004). Unfortunately, little is known about the intimate experiences of Latino/as, as they negotiate tensions of colorism in the United States. The following section of this paper cites examples in the literature of privilege and discrimination assigned to skin color. We draw attention to this literature because these examples illustrate the impact of colorism as it relates to the welfare of light- and dark-skinned Latinos/as. We argue that such experiences shape one's connection to his or her racial identification and how she or he chooses to identify within the U.S. construction and categorizations of race, that being White, Black, or other.

In fact, based on the existing literature, it appears that colorism may also influence how Latino/as racially identify given that some Latinos/as adhere to U.S.-based constructions of race while others adhere to Latin American constructions of race. A recent study by the Pew Hispanic research center found that most Latino/as do not identify with the existing racial categories utilized in the United States. In fact, 51% reported their race as "some other race" or chose either Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, 36% identified as White and 3% as Black (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012). Additionally 51% of participants reported using national terms or their family origin to identify themselves (i.e., Dominican, Puerto Rican). Thus, it is plausible that how race is constructed and viewed in the United States and Latin America may influence how Latino/as identify racially or ethnically. Therefore, Latino/as' emphasis on an ethnic identity and use of varying racial and ethnic labels among Latino/as may be related to a distancing from blackness and essentially their African roots (Rodriguez, 2001; Torres-Saillant, 1999).

Colorism among Latinas

Although the existing qualitative research on Caribbean Latinas is limited, there are several studies that explain how colorism has shaped their experiences. In fact, researchers have made the connection between White standards of beauty and social capital (Collins, 2000; Brunson & Rockquemore, 2001; Hunter, 2002; hooks, 2005). That is, light skin operates as a form of social capital for women because it represents beauty and, conversely, beauty is a form of social capital. Light-skinned women convert their beauty, defined by European aesthetics, into social capital in the forms of economic, educational, and general prestige (Hunter, 2002). For example, Moraga (1983) vividly describes her experience as "la guera"—a fair-skinned Chicana—and the

privileges and acceptance into the dominant society granted to her because she was born with the skin of her Anglo father. These examples illustrate the internalization of colonialism and specifically how blackness is associated with deeply held beliefs of stigma and inferiority while, in contrast, whiteness represents power and privilege (Aspen Institute, 2004). Unfortunately, there are a limited number of studies illustrating the personal accounts of privilege and stigma among Latinas. The current paper will help fill this void.

Latina Voices

This research involved the collection of data through in-depth interviews with 31 self-identified women of color between the ages of 30 and 40 in the New York City area. The women in this study had at least a bachelor's degree, were born in the United States, and were currently living in the New York metropolitan area. The initial recruitment began by posting flyers in common areas in New York City universities, including graduate schools. Women enrolled in higher education in diverse city universities would be likely to meet the study criteria. In addition, the recruitment flyer was sent to the office of the New York City chapter of the National Association of Social Workers New York City office and the Puerto Rican Family Institute and were posted on the Women of Color Policy Network website. Contact was also made with the facilitators of the RACE project at the Liberty Science Center in Newark, New Jersey. The initial recruitment strategy expanded when women who had been interviewed generated additional informants by sending out an electronic copy of the flyer to their network of friends and family. Women were invited to participate if they were interested in the study and if they felt they met the criteria indicated on the flyer. Participants answered questions regarding their experiences based on their skin color in the United States. The experiences shared by these women in this present paper help to illustrate the impact of colorism as it relates to the negotiation of racial identity and the experiences of privilege and stigma experienced by Latinas in the United States. These women identified as Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Ecuadorian, and Chicana, and all report varying experiences based on phenotype.

Racial Identity and Identification

The stories presented below highlight the awareness of color and subsequent negotiation of racial identity (that is, their self-understandings of race) and racial identification (that is, how they are perceived by others) experienced in daily interactions. For one Dominican participant, her identification as "Hispanic" is void of race. Yet, as she explained during the interview, she is ascribed a White racial identity because she has "fair skin":

I never identify myself by a color; I identify myself as a Hispanic. When I say I am Dominican that's when the color issue comes up but I never say that I am White. I don't know why this is difficult. Growing up and hearing "Oh you are so fair skinned," and comparing myself to my sister or my cousins, I guess that's why I would check off White. I think when I say Hispanic, I would put that into colored woman, just the term Hispanic even though again, my skin is fair, I don't consider myself White, it is so weird to say that. I don't consider myself White; I am just the pale one.

Similarly, another Dominican participant, a first-generation Puerto Rican participant, and a participant who identified herself as "Chicana," openly discussed their racial experiences and their personal meaning of race in different contexts. As the Dominican woman shared:

That I find tricky because sometimes you will just see Black or White. I do not think I am either. I mean, I think I have influence from both so I find that confusing. There is a lot of confusion, not

so much confusion but it depends who you ask because every country has their feelings about what race and ethnicity means. It's not a clear-cut area. I have always said I am tan. Growing up I was like "why isn't there tan on the census?" I am not Black or White, why not tan? That was my word I used as a little kid and it continued as I got older.

As stated by the Puerto Rican woman, "If DNA tests were done on all Latinas to determine racial makeup the vast majority of us would be considered mixed race."

At the end of the interview, the Chicana thoughtfully reflected aloud on the questions that were asked:

The race question really stuck with me. It is essentially because there is no racial term to identify Latinos. If your skin is White, then they—government applications, etc.—call you Hispanic of White heritage, if your skin is Black . . . well then your Black with Hispanic heritage. There is no, "Latino with Hispanic heritage" or something of that nature. Further, I do not identify as White or Anglo. I don't consider myself White and I know Mexican isn't a racial group. I am *brown*.

In yet another example, a second-generation Puerto Rican woman shared that racial awareness is most present when she is asked to complete forms:

I am aware of my race whenever I have to fill out a government form. I always check off Latino or Hispanic descent. I am not Black, it's not who I am. Yes there is African and Taino in me but that was years ago. I don't have African American features; I am a Puerto Rican woman.

As the data indicate, the majority of women from Latin ancestry, eight of the nine, expressed ambiguity and "confusion" about racial identity in the context of U.S. society. Physically, these women fell between the color spectrum and, as a result, their racial identity remained a nebulous issue, with the exception of one woman. As a White Latina, a Cuban American participant did not question her racial identity—she identifies as White based on her skin color.

It is important to note that, although the majority of the women in this study reported that they do not identify with the White culture, those with fairer skin did benefit from White privilege in that they experienced less prejudice and experiences with discrimination. Yet, for many of the women, "White privilege" did not feel like privilege, as the external perception of White connected them to a culture that they do not feel a part of and distanced them from their Latin culture. Society might grant certain advantages for looking White, but internally this label and association presented a conflict.

Experiences of Colorism

Colorism—that is, experiences of white skin privilege and dark skin stigma—was a prevalent theme throughout the interviews. For example, the women in this study reported that the physical dissimilarities found among siblings were loaded with messages of skin color advantage, with White being perceived as more desirable.

One woman, who identifies as Mexican American and describes her skin color as "very light," irritably shared the comments she received from strangers regarding the difference in skin color between her and her sister.

People would say that must be your fake sister, and I'm like, no that's my sister. She's short and thicker, I'm taller and very light, she is very very dark. My father is very dark and my mother is very fair. She is of Spanish descent so she has light skin. You say the word sun and she burns.

Another participants' experience speaks to the color gradations within the Dominican community that cause confusion to outsiders. Susan's parents are both from the Dominican Republic, yet her

family ranges from very fair to what she describes as “tan”: “My family is from mainly my color to very fair skinned and light hair. Sometimes people are like ‘how are you family?’ because we look so different. You have to almost discover it on your own that it’s okay to come in different colors.”

The women in this study reported that the physical dissimilarities found among siblings were also loaded with messages of skin color advantage, with White being perceived as more desirable.

Another woman shared that she noticed as a child how her mother’s brother “received the worst treatment because he was the darkest.” She stated how women from Latin ancestry with dark skin were given nicknames such as “Negrita” and “La India” in reference to their skin tones. A Puerto Rican woman spoke about her experience growing up as the “darker” one in her family: “It’s really weird because growing up you see like the color divide in the family, so my younger brother thought that I was ‘Negrita,’ or people in my family would call me ‘La India.’”

Another participant, who also identified as Puerto Rican, showed her pain when she recited her childhood nicknames and recalled memories of her mothers’ rejection of her curly hair. She vividly described missing out on playtime to endure her mothers’ employment of chemicals and hard-tooth combs in an effort to look Whiter:

I always felt like the brown one, my sister is light skinned and we are really close. My father is my complexion, my brother is my complexion, my sister is light skinned they would call her “Leche” and she has a Spanish nose and I came out like this so my mom will call me “La India.” I wondered why do you have to buy these chemicals and endure this and my mom would give me Tylenol after she would wash my hair and then she would start combing my hair, and my brother and sister would be playing outside and they said that they could hear my screaming.

A light-skinned Dominican recalled the accolades she received as a child in contrast to her darker skinned sister:

My sister always got “Oh you are darker than the other two.” I always got the “Oh you are so fair.” It was always, “You’re Dominican, you are so fair.” My building was pretty much Cuban and they were all very fair skinned, they would always tell my mom, “Your daughter is so pretty, look at her, how White she is.” My mom was like, “Yeah, Susan is a little darker.”

The same woman who suffered through the arduous task of her mother’s grooming in an effort to straighten her hair reflected on the ridicule she tolerated as a child because of her brown skin tone:

In my building this older woman, my parents always said she never meant any harm by it, but one day she would say “Hi” to me and she would say “Hola fea” [hello ugly]. As a kid you just swallow it because you feel fea, they are calling you fea and your parents are walking with you and they are not saying a word. Every time I would see her I would say, “Oh no, I have to endure her saying this.” And I was brought up to be respectful so I don’t talk back, so it’s all of this, you are fighting with all these things. Your parents are enduring it and you have to shut up because you have to be quiet and submissive and you are supposed to be raised this way.

These findings highlight the stigma and subsequent rejection associated with darkness and the privilege and beauty linked to lightness. In addition, the findings suggest that phenotype and features played a crucial role in the experiences of Latinas of various skin tones, which had implications for their early formation of racial and ethnic identity as well as how women were identified and treated within their families of origin. Consistent with the literature, women perceived their skin color and interpreted their appearance through the eyes of others (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001).

In yet another example of the implications of color and the complexity of racial identity among this population, one participant who self-identified as Dominican is ascribed a White identity based on her physical appearance:

I took a cab today and the cab driver said, "Oh, I thought you were White." I took a cab at 125th street. And I'm like, well actually my parents are Dominican so I consider myself Dominican. And he was like "You are not Dominican, you are American, cause you were born here." And I was like, "Yes I was born here but I always say I am Dominican, whenever someone asks where I am from I say, 'I'm Dominican.'" I'm not sure what it is but people think all Hispanic people are dark brown and they can't be anything else.

Two other participants reported being constantly queried about their identity. One woman did not fit the stereotypical mold of a "Puerto Rican" and, as a result, she was often questioned about her identity or falsely classified.

DISCUSSION

Understanding the role colorism plays in structuring and representing the social world and the disadvantage and perceived privilege experienced by diverse populations is essential to understanding the racial experiences of Latino/as in the United States (Omi & Winant, 1994; Hunter, 2002). Perhaps most glaring from these interviews is the colonial mindset that has been passed on through the generations. The interviews included in the present paper reflect the variations in racial identity and racial identification and experiences based on skin color and ethnic features among Latinas and how they are shaped by constructions of race in the United States and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin America (Omi & Winant, 1994; Gracia, 2007). For example, all nine women from Latin ancestry reported that they are aware of their racial identity in their daily interactions based on how they are perceived by others in different environments. An internal awareness also occurs when they are asked to check off boxes or fill out a form that asks for their racial identity. For eight of these women, awareness of their racial identity meant being aware that as Latinas they are constantly negotiating their racial and ethnic identity. For some of these women, racial and ethnic identity merged, while others discussed the distinction between a White Latina and a Black Latina. The data suggest that for these eight women, racial identity remains a fluid, dynamic, and complex topic of discussion. We witness the fluidity of identity in how race is socially constructed within and outside of the Latino communities. In their Latino/a communities, the Latinas were racially classified and experienced either stigma or privilege based on whether they were classified as White or dark-skinned as well as based on the texture of their hair. This practice is consistent with the existing literature that posits that individuals are perceived and classified based on cultural representations of physical attributes (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Therefore dark-skinned Latino/as may simultaneously be stigmatized by larger society and other Latino/as (Hall, 2006) and privilege is afforded to those who do not identify as Black.

Additionally, the present paper illustrates that these experiences also affected how Latinas of varying phenotypes negotiated their racial identity. For example, although the light-skinned Latinas experienced privilege, they do not always claim whiteness as their racial identity. For example, for some Latino/as, being identified as White was not perceived as a privilege and, in fact, has been found to distance individuals from their ethnic identity (Moraga, 1983; Quiros, 2009). Therefore, the social construction of whiteness as a privilege may not be internalized as a privilege for Latino/as who choose to identify with their ethnicity rather than with their perceived race. This brings into question how the way one chooses to identify may conflict with how one is identified by others and also warrants further exploration into the perceived privilege associated with whiteness.

Social Work Implications: Research, Practice, and Pedagogy

Race, ethnicity, and difference have become paramount in understanding the complexities of human behavior, particularly in a world that is increasingly diverse. Identities are dynamic and fluid and are constantly being negotiated and legitimized based on history and social context (Daniel & Quiros, 2010). More specific to this paper, the ways in which Latino/as choose to identify differ across cultural groups depending on history, the context of their environment, their skin color, and their experiences with discrimination (Landale & Oropesa, 2002). Therefore, racial and ethnic identity is understood to be a malleable, flexible, and fluid process that changes throughout a person's life course depending on his or her history and daily experiences (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Furthermore, this paper situates racial identity and identification in the person-in-environment framework that fits with the foundations of social work research, practice and pedagogy.

Research

Understanding the simultaneous impact of negotiating varying social constructions of race and its impact on racialized Latino/as is complex and requires consideration of multiple factors specific to the Latino/a experience. First, it is important to study Latino/a groups separately rather than assuming that ethnic groups are homogeneous and can be lumped together. Such practices overlook differences among the members of the groups and sometimes of subgroups within the groups (Gracia, 2007). For example, for Meso Americans such as Mexicans and South Americans, race is constructed differently compared to Caribbean Latino/as who are darker-skinned. Therefore, future studies on Latino/as should be mindful and inclusive of the group they are studying and understand their particular historical background and not assume that all Latino/as have the same experience in the United States. Additionally, future studies of this nature should be expanded in the social science literature to inform our understanding of the factors that impact the racial identification development of Latino/as from diverse countries. Given the present paper, it appears that Latinas are negotiating dual lenses of race based on their own perceptions and are choosing identities that may provide them with more access and privilege. Subsequently, research confirms that dark-skinned Puerto Ricans are often identified as Black, yet they are hesitant to assume a Black identity because of the way Black people are stigmatized in the United States (Roman & Flores, 2010; Landale & Oropesa, 2002). Furthermore, in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and in Latin America since slavery, there has been anti-Black sentiment among Latino/as that has contributed to a denial of African ancestry as well as a mistreatment of darker-skinned Latino/as who are often considered Black (Torres-Saillant, 1999). Therefore, future studies are needed in order to further understand the contextual factors that shape and contribute to racial identification among racialized Latino/as. Additionally, how we study race and racial identity needs to include alternative definitions beyond U.S. constructions of race. The present paper highlights how racialized Latinas in the United States are forced into confined categories and struggle with negotiating their identities in their social and cultural environments. How race is constructed in empirical studies needs to incorporate the complexity and nuances of racial and ethnicity identity and be both flexible and inclusive of more global perspectives.

Practice

Understanding the racial landscape of Latino/as has implications for social work practice and education. First, recognizing the effects of colorism on the Latino/a population is essential for culturally sensitive practice and, therefore, the experiences and needs of Latino/as should be included in social work curricula (Vidal de Haymes & Kilty, 2007). As new immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin America arrive in the United States, it is imperative to acknowledge

the impact of colorism and the U.S. conceptualizations of race, which may be very different from their homelands. In addition, given that power and privilege are more likely bestowed on individuals with lighter skin tones, it is imperative that social workers be aware of the history of racial classification and racialization as it relates to the lives of Latino/a clients. More specifically, understanding the role that phenotype plays in shaping how Latino/as negotiate identity as well as cope with oppression and privilege is crucial. The racial experience of Latino/as emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive assessments and interventions and active self-reflexivity among practitioners where normativity is questioned and the discussion is broadened to include issues related to immigration and the political and economic aspects of colorism. Understanding of these experiences is central to social work's mandate of social justice and diversity and, therefore, warrants integration into social work education and practice.

Pedagogy

Last, social work education must make room in an already crowded curriculum to incorporate multidimensional frameworks that move past race, class, and gender for analyzing oppression (Daniel & Quiros, 2010), for example, frameworks that cover the ability to deal with multiple oppressions and color-blind policies and a deeper look at how all different aspects of oppression intersect and reinforce each other and change over time. For example, the use of intersectionality theory in social work education is essential to helping students understand the simultaneous experience of privilege and stigma radicalized Latinas may experience. Intersectionality theory can be essential in helping us understand the role racial identity and identification play in the lives of Black Latinas given that intersectionality theory highlights the importance that both race and gender can simultaneously play in one's life (Cole, 2009). More recently, theorists have extended this framework to highlight how women of color often experience discrimination based on their gender and/or race, which is referred to as "double discrimination" or the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex women (Crenshaw, 1989/1993). For example, Crenshaw argues that women of color can experience the additive or combined effects of discrimination as Black women (1989/1993). Unfortunately, research applying the intersectionality theory to understand the experiences of Latinas is limited, but it is plausible that Latinas experience similar experiences of discrimination as African American women depending on their racial features. For example, darker-skinned Latinas may experience discrimination similar to African American women, while light-skinned Latinas may experience sexism but be afforded privileges based on their "whiteness." Therefore, we suggest that racial identity and gender may serve different functions for Latinas.

In conclusion, given that colorism among Latino/as has implications for one's racial identity, well-being, and acceptance by the host society and home culture, it is imperative that social workers have an understanding of how Latino/as negotiate this racial heterogeneity and subsequent experiences of privilege and stigma in varying contexts. As these relationships are more systematically documented, understood, and enhanced by further research, initiatives and frameworks developed by academics will be more effectively informed.

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