

2016

Deconstructing Latinx racial paradigms : cross-cultural constructions of race and their impact on Dominican-American racial identity

Jacqueline I. Cosse

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cosse, Jacqueline I., "Deconstructing Latinx racial paradigms : cross-cultural constructions of race and their impact on Dominican-American racial identity" (2016). *Theses, Dissertations, and Projects*. 1710.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1710>

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu.

Jacqueline Cosse
Deconstructing Latinx Racial
Paradigms: Cross-Cultural
Constructions of Race and their Impact
on Dominican-American Racial Identity

ABSTRACT

Conversations in the United States around Latinx populations often discuss Latinx racial identity as a singular entity. Though Latinx is a gender-neutral term for Latino and Hispanic populations, the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” have slowly become umbrella terms for the racial and ethnic identities of people from over 20 different countries and cultural backgrounds. The amalgamation of these varying cultures and communities into a singular racial categorization results in a reductive framework: one that limits individualization within Latinx-American racial identity. These limitations were looked at via qualitative research with specific reference to Dominican populations: a community whose racial categories reference Spanish, African, and Indigenous roots, and are contextualized by a history of anti-blackness and Spanish/white supremacy. Twelve participants took part in semi-structured, guided interviews regarding their experiences living in both the Dominican Republic and the United States, and discussed how racial constructs in both countries impacted their racial self-identification. Findings in this study showed that each participant’s racial self-identification was incongruent with the ways participants were racially identified in the United States. Furthermore, eleven of twelve participants expressed feeling their racial identity shifted upon immigration, and eight participants expressed feeling forced into American constructions of race. Lastly, participants reported feelings of anxiety, fear, isolation, and depression as a result of stereotyping, bullying, harassment, and race-based discrimination as Latinx immigrants to the United States.

**DECONSTRUCTING LATINX RACIAL PARADIGMS:
CROSS-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACE
AND THEIR IMPACT ON DOMINICAN-AMERICAN RACIAL IDENTITY**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Jacqueline Cosse

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the contributions of many individuals and communities in my life whose impact, influence, and guidance is invaluable

I first want to give thanks to my thesis advisor Liz Johnston, whose support and guidance allowed me to finish a project I often thought wouldn't be possible; to my secondary advisor Maria Torres for the ways her support and faith inspired me to think on how this project could and can grow into something that can impact the field in a much larger way than I initially anticipated; to my Smith family and chosen family for standing by me in this work—and in a program that forced so many of us to come to terms with the detrimental impact of institutionalized racism on one's mental health.

Lastly, I have to thank my beautiful, and brilliantly brave immigrant family. To you all, to my extraordinary mother, to Mamiguelita, to Nena, to Titi and Max: *son mi inspiración y la luz constante que me guía a seguir adelante*. I could not have done this without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
III. METHODOLOGY.....	21
IV. FINDINGS	26
V. DISCUSSION	47
REFERENCES	58
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Consent Form.....	60
Appendix B: Human Subjects Review Board Approval Letter.....	63
Appendix C: Amendments to HSR Approval Letter	64

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Racial Categorizations in the Dominican Republic.....	10
2. Participant Demographics.....	27
3. Racial Self-Identification vs. American Categorization.....	41

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In the Dominican Republic, there is a dish known as a *sancocho*. While the dish itself has its own meaning—a stew that is an assortment of varied ingredients and spices—the word *sancocho* is often used to describe an event. *Sancochos* are places that celebrate mixture, and coming together and intermingling of families; a process that is also represented in the multiple relatives that contribute to cooking the stew. However, this word is often used in a third way. In the Dominican Republic, *sancocho* is often used as analogous to the racial variety and mixture within the Dominican people.

Race in the Dominican Republic has always been a mix, one that is rooted in the Indigenous Taíno of the original island prior to Spanish colonization, as well as the Spanish colonizers and enslaved Africans colonizers brought to the island. Various Taíno names of the island are cited within research, however the island is often known by its colonial name: Hispaniola. Though the island would later split to include both the Dominican Republic and Haiti as countries separate from European colonial influence, these original ethnic origins were the source of several different constructions of race that referenced Dominican's white, black, and indigenous racial origins.

Dominican structures of race allow for more of a continuum rather than a black/white dichotomy. The Dominican mixture of Spanish, Taíno, and African dates back to the

colonization of the 1400s: Spanish colonizers quickly mixed with the original Taíno population upon their initial arrival. Following the death of the larger part of the Taíno population due to disease brought to the island by the Spanish, the Spanish brought in enslaved Africans as a means to increase productivity through additional slave labor (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014). This new population brought about a new mixture, as many of the Spanish had children with the enslaved Africans brought to the island. In spite of this shift in the population's racial make-up, colonial influence still maintained a culture of white supremacy, and the rapidly developing mixed population was consistently seen as inferior to the white Spanish.

Much of the culture surrounding white supremacist colonial influence stemmed from Western European thought. These initial constructions of the first racial categories structured race as a hierarchical system: one in which white individuals were seen as superior to other races. Though conversations surrounding race in the Dominican Republic have shifted, white supremacist influence in constructions of race continued throughout the country's history. Nearly three hundred years after Spanish colonization, the Dominican Republic's relationship with Haiti following Haiti's 22-year occupation in 1822 left a legacy of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness; one that was further ingrained into Dominican consciousness by the 30-year dictatorship of Spanish and white supremacist Rafael Trujillo.

This culture surrounding anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism was incorporated into Dominican thought around what it means to be black. Even racial classifications shifted as a result of this anti-black sentiment: the racial category *mulato*, meant to be an indicative of one black parent and one white parent, was removed from the Dominican census and replaced with the word *indio* (Simmons, 2009). This was done in an effort to remove *mulato* from racial categorization, as Trujillo wished to dispose of a term that clearly referenced African ancestry.

Indio, which literally translated to Indian, was provided as an alternative as it referenced the coloring of lighter indigenous ancestry (Simmons, 2009). However, in spite of the anti-blackness present within Dominican culture, Dominican racial categories do still acknowledge its mixed population. Various categories and potential identifiers for mixed Dominicans are both discussed in Dominican culture and provided on Dominican documentation.

In contrast, American constructions of race for the Latinx individual are virtually non-existent. “Latino” and “Hispanic” in the United States are constructed as a larger placeholder for racial identity, ethnic identity, as well as language in one’s country of origin. Because racial discourse on Latinx in the United States is scarce, many mixed Dominican-American Immigrants often struggle to place themselves in the American racial framework. Latinxs as a whole are forced to try to adopt an American racial paradigm wherein all Latinxs are seen as a homogenous grouping.

Black Dominicans in particular are additionally left without a space for both their racial and ethnic identities to be distinctive within American racial categorizations. Black in the United States is consistently used as synonymous to “African American.” This conflation of race and ethnicity largely assumes false knowledge regarding the origins and ancestry of varied black individuals within a larger collective. This limits the ability of black Dominicans entering the United States to put a name to their identities, as American constructions of “black” differ from the way the United States uses “Latino” and “Hispanic” as a racial placeholder (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009; Simmons 2009).

Narratives of Latinxs, and of Dominicans in particular, are often absent from dominant American discourse surrounding race. This absence of conversation extends to the research as well: conversations surrounding cross-cultural constructions of race and the impact competing

cultures may have on immigrants is scarce. This study was designed to explore these issues further, by looking closely at Dominican populations. Dominican populations were chosen specifically due not only to their history as a mixed-race population, but additionally due to the complex histories that informed the ways in which this mixed-race population developed. Additionally, a central purpose of this study is to deconstruct the heterogeneity in and racialization of “Latino,” “Hispanic,” or “Spanish:” placeholders that reduce all Latinxs to one singular, all-encompassing identity.

To address these issues, this study will explore both countries’ histories and constructions of race, and examine the ways immigration from the culture of the Dominican Republic to the United States culture impacts Dominican-American racial self-identification. This study was conducted through qualitative research utilizing semi-structured, guided interviews that asked participants about their experiences living in both the Dominican Republic and the United States. Participants answered questions regarding the ways in which racial constructs in both countries may have impacted their racial self-identification. Questions also encouraged participants to share the context of their experiences growing up in the Dominican Republic based in both their self-identified and perceived race, and how that may have shifted upon immigration to the United States.

Though this topic has been addressed in prior anthropological and sociological research, research within social work often does not speak to the ways in which cross-cultural constructions of race may impact racial self-identification. Despite this scarcity, some studies do address these issues, and show that Latinxs often take on a “Hispanic or Latino” identity in place of prior ethnic or racial identities from their countries of origin (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Bailey, 2012). Thus, this research hopes to address potential gaps in social work literature

concerning Latinx populations and racial identification. This small study is the beginning of focused research on one specific Latinx population and thus will counteract the dominant cultural paradigm of generalizing about the Latinx population.

Due to their complex history and large mixed population, it is especially important to examine the impact of cross-cultural, white supremacist constructions of race on the Dominican-American population. While this is largely rooted in the difficulty immigrants experience adjusting to American constructions of race, the competing cultures between the two countries can cause feelings of displacement, as well as immense difficulties surrounding both personal identity and sense of self. Thus, a core hypothesis of this research study is that reductive American constructions of race for Latinx populations lack nuance, and force Dominican immigrants to make choices that negate their self-identity. Thus, this study will examine the ways in which social work practice, pedagogy, and curriculum can address the issues facing clients struggling with reconciling dual cultures. When a client moves between two cultures that classify race and racism differently, it is important to address the ways in which this culture clash both impacts racial self-identification and disrupts core concepts of self identity.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Much of the historical context surrounding Dominican histories of race and racism show that transitioning into the American racial paradigms of “Latino” and “Hispanic” can cause uncertainty surrounding Latinx racial identity. Because Dominican constructions of race are embedded in a history of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness, constructions of race are linked strongly with ancestry: many of these constructions carry negative cultural connotations.

However, when Dominicans move to the United States, it seems that they frequently choose to associate with a larger “Latino” or “Hispanic” identity, and are willing to utilize generalizing American racial categories as a means to self-identify. Though the research is scarce, it does seem that this cross-cultural impact results in American constructions superseding Dominican constructions of race.

Global and American Constructions of Race

Constructions of race for the Latinx individual vary immensely between the United States and the Dominican Republic. While both Dominican and American racial categories reference skin tone and ancestry, American constructions of “Latino” as a race compartmentalize multiple skin tones and countries of origin into a larger, homogenized category (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009; Oboler, 1995).

The very beginnings of constructing racial categories originated from European colonial influence. As Spanish and English colonial influence began to gradually spread, leaders in both

England and Spain sought to find justification for the displacement, enslavement, rape, and murder of both indigenous and African peoples. Though Spain and England shared a separate colonial rivalry wherein the Spanish, who did not predominately speak English, were also seen as inferior, both white communities shared similar views on race (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009). Philosophers and scholars from Europe began to develop the idea of differing categorizations based upon skin tone and facial features; blacks were set aside from whites as inferior due to their coloring, features, and even personality characteristics (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009). One German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, extended his definition of the “negro” race to include characteristics such as “lazy, soft, and dallying” (Mikkelsen & Kant, 2012, p. 67).

Kant’s essay that classified black individuals in this way was among the first texts to create racial categorizations and lay down the foundations for global constructions of race. Though Kant represents the German viewpoint, his perspectives were shared across Western Europe and further perpetuated within European colonial influence. Though constructions of race differed throughout time dependent upon each individual country’s cultures, the differentiation between white and black—as well as the superiority rooted in original definitions of white—still exists globally today (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009; Duany, 1998; Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). This can be seen in both the Dominican Republic and the United States, as they share the same Spanish colonial influence that perpetuated ideas of white superiority as a means to justify colonization.

While Kant and many others following him often discussed race within the context of a white/black dichotomy, there was an initial acknowledgment of the potential of a mixture, and the ways in which constructions of race would need to extend to include these individuals. Kant described two additional races outside of “negro” and white: “hun,” used to identify those

typically of East Asian descent, and “hindu,” likely in reference to those of Southeast and Western Asian descent (Mikkelsen & Kant, 2012). These definitions began to shift as western colonial influence expanded to the United States. As with the colonization of Hispaniola, Spanish colonizers in the United States mixed with the indigenous populations and enslaved Africans, creating a mixed population.

Though this diversified the population’s racial make-up, the culture of the time was still deeply rooted in white hegemony. Even following American independence from British colonial rule, Civil-War era American slavery was rooted in colonial beliefs that reinforced white supremacy, and thus validated the practice of enslavement (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009).

Latinxs predominately began to enter American racial discourse following the influx of a large Mexican population in the mid-1800s: the result of American colonial expansion into Mexico after the earlier Mexican-American War (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009). Though the larger Mexican presence further diversified the racial make-up of the United States, from the beginning Mexican emigrants were still seen as inferior to white citizens. Mexicans were seen as mixed and thus not able to be categorized into the prevailing black/white racial dichotomy.

This process began to generate conversation within American culture around Latinxs as mixed: unable to be placed into current/pre-existing racial categories, while still classified as “inferior.” However, when the first census took place in 1790, the racial categorization of Latinxs began to be codified by the demands of the bureaucracy. The American government began to shift into the categorization of all Latinxs by using a more ethnic identity-centered term: “Hispanic” (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009).

Though the ways in which Latinxs were and are coded according to census data vary, with some occasionally coded as “white” prior to “white non-Hispanic” distinctions in census

data, Latinxs have consistently been categorized into a larger, all-composer “other:” one that reduces people of varying countries, backgrounds, and immigration histories into a singular homogeneity. This brought about the development a larger culture that validates the use of “Hispanic,” as well as the later-popularized term “Latino,” as a singular racial and ethnic identity for all Latinxs in the United States.

Dominican Historical Context and Constructions of Race

Though colonial constructions of race in the Dominican Republic parallel those in the United States, the Dominican Republic subsequently constructed several specific racial categories for those who were mixed race. While each of these categories also highlights an individual’s skin tone (and assumed ancestry based upon skin tone), categorizations were formed within a spectrum that expanded upon the black/white dichotomy. Categorizations did include *blanco* (white) and *negro* (black), but further developed to include categories such as *mulato* and *mestizo* to describe those of mixed parentage. Today’s categorizations have expanded to include *indio* (loosely translates to mixed race), *indio oscuro* (*indio* but darker-skinned), and *indio claro* (*indio* but lighter-skinned). The table below outlines the varied racial categories that have been cited in research as those commonly used to refer to race in the Dominican Republic (Bailey, 2001; Candelario, 2007; Duany, 1998; Itzigsohn, J. & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Oboler, 1995; Simmons, 2009; Torres-Saillant, 2000).

Table 1. Racial Categorizations in the Dominican Republic

Category Name	English Translation	Origins
<i>Blanco/a</i>	White	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Mestizo</i>	Mixed race: Typically one Taíno parent one Spanish parent	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Mulato</i>	Mixed race: Typically one African parent one Spanish parent. Often translated in English to “mulatto.” At times used pejoratively in the United States.	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Trigueño</i>	Mixed/Tri-racial: Reference to combined Taíno, African, and Spanish roots	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Indio/a</i>	Mixed; Literal Translation is “Indian”	Trujillo era: Reference to Taíno
<i>Indio Claro/a</i>	<i>Indio</i> but lighter skinned	Trujillo era: Reference to Taíno
<i>Indio Oscuro/a</i>	<i>Indio</i> but darker skinned	Trujillo era: Reference to Taíno
<i>Moreno/a:</i> Pre-Haitian Occupation	Darker skinned	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Moreno/a:</i> Post-Haitian Occupation	Darker skinned; at times used in place of <i>Negro</i> to identify as black and Dominican without Haitian roots.	Post-Haitian Occupation and Trujillo Era
<i>Negro/a:</i> Pre-Haitian Occupation	Black	Spanish Colonial Era
<i>Negro/a:</i> Post-Haitian Occupation	Black; Often synonymous with Haitian. At times used as racial slur.	Post-Haitian Occupation and Trujillo Era

It is important to note that these first terms originated from pre-colonial Spanish writings on race that later influenced Dominican constructions of race as a result of Spanish colonization; writings that were ingrained in racist stereotyping that associated skin tone and ancestry with negative attributes (Mikkelsen & Kant, 2012). Thus, though these initial categories acknowledge mixture in the racial make-up of the Dominican population, constructions of these categories were still rooted in histories of race- and color-based violence and discrimination (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

As the original island was entirely indigenous prior to colonization, Dominican constructions of race began with the presence of Spanish colonial rule. These constructions were based on global constructions of race, but expanded upon Kantian constructions to incorporate the large indigenous population on the island. As the Spanish mixed with the indigenous Taíno, and later with the enslaved Africans they brought to the island, the racial categorizations were necessarily extended past references to the three populations on the island to incorporate those that were mixed. To further understand the ways in which race was constructed post-Spanish colonization and prior to the establishment of the Dominican Republic as a nation, it is important to understand the history between these two points in time.

As Spanish colonial rule progressed throughout the fifteen and sixteen hundreds, Spanish focus on Hispaniola as a source of production and capital began to shift towards the Americas, leaving the island more vulnerable to other colonizing forces. Though the French established an informal territory on the island in the late 1600s, the Spanish later gave a third of Hispaniola to the French as the result of a peace treaty (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

While this French presence initially split the island into two colonized territories, French colonizers were later forced out by a revolution started by the enslaved Africans brought to

Hispaniola. This slave revolution and newfound independence led to the formation of a new country, Haiti. The new country of Haiti in turn colonized the Spanish controlled two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola. This colonization continued for 22 years until that part of the island was able to regain its independence. This new republic was named La Republica Dominicana: The Dominican Republic (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

The fight for Dominican Independence from Haiti not only created anti-Haitian sentiment, but also newly informed the ways in which Dominicans thought of those who were black. *Negro* in the Dominican Republic had initially been constructed as a reference to the enslaved Africans brought in by Spanish colonizers: the very same slaves that were brought into Haiti by both the Spanish and the French. However, after the Haitian colonization, many people in the Dominican Republic associated blackness negatively with the Haitian occupation of their country. *Negro* similarly became synonymous with Haitian identity, and new identities developed as a placeholder for being black and Dominican (Duany, 1998).

In contrast, Dominicans had a more positive view of Spanish colonial influence. Despite lack of independence through both Haitian occupation and Spanish colonization, many Dominicans viewed the Spanish more favorably. Spaniards in the Dominican Republic were seen as entirely separate from Haitians, as the Spanish benefitted from centuries of their whiteness seen as superior within internalized global constructions of race. Thus, pre-conceived negative stereotypes inherent within the construction of blackness were conflated with negative colonial influences (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

This anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic became further entrenched into Dominican culture several decades later in the 1930s. President Rafael Trujillo, who began his presidency in 1930, campaigned for office on a platform of white supremacist values centered on

anti-black and anti-Haitian sentiment. Trujillo's regime—which very quickly evolved into a dictatorship—capitalized on prior culture and attitudes that denigrated Haitians due to their history of colonizing the Dominican Republic (Crasswaller, 1966; Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

This culture of white supremacy and racism was epitomized in 1937 when Trujillo ordered the murder of tens of thousands of Haitians at the Dominican-Haitian border (Crasswaller, 1966). Those assassinated were largely killed solely due to the blackness of their skin; but were oftentimes asked to pronounce the word parsley (*perejil*). This was used as a method of differentiating between those who were Dominican or Haitian: the “r” in *perejil* was pronounced differently for Dominicans and Haitians, as the French influence in Haiti brought about the pronunciation of the “r” as a sound that came more from the throat, rather than the Spanish pronunciation where it came more from the tongue. Those who refused were sometimes asked to provide papers providing Dominican ancestry or citizenship, but more often than not, were immediately killed. This was the largest massacre of Haitians in the country's history (Roorda, Derby, & González 2014).

Though Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, the end of his dictatorship did not signify the end of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic. In the Dominican Republic today, there is a culture surrounding a phrase known as *mejorar la raza*. The saying translates to “improve the race” and means that one contributes to a whiter next generation in order to “improve upon” its value. This process of “improvement” occurs by marrying someone light-skinned: thus bringing in an “improved” lighter generation (Simmons, 2009). Culture around *mejorar la raza* began during the Trujillo era, but is still prevalent today. This larger

cultural value of viewing white as superior and “improved” symbolizes the current environment in which racism currently impacts how Dominicans choose to self-identify.

Thus, in summary, white hegemony globally established through 15th century colonization was the foundation for a larger culture of white supremacy that still persists today. While these white supremacist structures are inherent in both Dominican and American racial categorizations, in the United States, these structures contribute to the ways in which mixed-race individuals are not allowed space for racial self-identification. Furthermore, research as a whole supports the theory that convergence of both of these cultures and histories surrounding race greatly impacts Dominican-American racial identification.

Research on Dominican-American Racial Identity

Various studies have highlighted both racial and ethnic identity erasure of Dominican immigrants upon arrival to the United States (Bailey, 2012; Duany, 1998; Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Torres-Saillant, 2000). While some address the adoption of “Hispanic” or “Latino” as a new racial self-identification upon immigration (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000), others discuss the ways in which Dominican-Americans struggle to place themselves in non-Dominican racial categorizations in general, due to the lack of categories in the US for mixed individuals (Duany, 1998). These studies are further informed by the work of Gina Candelario, who further examines constructions of blackness in the Dominican Republic through interviews with Dominican-American immigrants regarding the ways in which hair and facial features inform racial identity (Candelario, 2007).

Dominican racial identity following immigration. One study in particular researched Dominican racial identity in the context of both the United States and Puerto Rico, and argued that the transition from the Dominican Republic to countries with varying cultures surrounding

racial/ethnic identity redefined immigrant racial self-identification (Duany, 1998). This study did initially argue that both North Americans and Puerto Rican culture predominately categorized Dominicans as black. However, the author additionally expressed that because constructions of race in Puerto Rico were somewhat more similar to those in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Ricans often classified Dominicans as additionally *trigueños* (tri-racial) (Duany, 1998).

In spite of this tri-racial classification, Duany emphasized that Dominicans often do not identify with these racial classifications. Furthermore, Duany expressed that this racialization of Dominicans immigrants caused distress and difficulty upon assimilating to the United States (Dunay, 1998). This concept was examined initially through looking at the contrast between racial discourses in the Caribbean versus the United States. Research suggested that though Dominicans struggle to fit themselves into racial categorizations of both the United States and Puerto Rico, the difficulty was less substantial in participants who migrated to Puerto Rico (Dunay, 1998).

According to Dunay's research Puerto Rican constructions of race do not confine Dominicans to a more "middle-race," homogenous category such as Latino, nor do they exclusively assume that all darker Dominicans are black (Dunay, 1998). Rather, Puerto Rico's constructions of race allow for a more complex understanding of mixed heritage; one that is less dichotomous than much of American racial discourse, and one that allows the potential for racial identity to be multi-faceted (Dunay, 1998).

In spite of this, Dunay's research shows that the shift into cultures whose constructions of race clash with those of the Dominican Republic can cause trauma as a result of a potential forced shift in identity (Dunay, 1998). This research further extrapolated on the difficulties of transitioning into countries with differing racial discourse by examining the ways in which this

displacement may impact housing. In both countries Dominicans are categorized as populations who are predominately mixed or black; both of which carry negative connotations for Americans and Puerto Ricans. As a result of such, research has shown that this transition not only cause emotional distress in participants, but also subjects Dominicans to “residential segregation:” Dominicans do not have the same access to housing as other populations due to hierarchical structures inherent in American and Puerto Rican constructions of race that place whites as superior (Dunay, 1998).

The role of hair and facial features in racial identity. Research on racial identity of Dominicans before and after immigration to the United States is further complicated by the roles hair and facial features play in constructions of blackness. One scholar, Gina Candelario, pursued research that addressed Dominican-American women and their perceptions of race and racial identity, all of which was based in Candelario’s pre-determined conceptualization for how race is constructed in the Dominican Republic (2007). Candelario expressed that race is predominately perceived by four different factors, in order: hair, facial features, skin tone, and ancestry.

Due to this structure, this study addressed the role of hair and facial features in Dominican constructions of blackness. Several Dominican women were interviewed and shown pictures of women with a variety of different hair types, and asked to speak to how hair and facial features informed beauty and racial identity. Women overall associated coarse hair, or hair with very tight curls, as indicative of blackness or African ancestry regardless of skin tone. Participants discussed a culture surrounding *pelo bueno* (“good hair”) and *pelo malo* (“bad hair”): the straighter and sleeker one’s hair was, the more beautiful one was considered. These concepts were also discussed when participants were subsequently shown pictures of men.

Participants in the study expanded upon this concept of beauty and expressed that these ideologies stemmed from general constructions of whiteness as superior, particularly within Dominican standards of beauty. Participants additionally discussed standards of professionalism as related to perceived blackness based upon hair and facial features. Participants in this study often suggested that those who were lighter-skinned and had *pelo bueno* seemed more likely to be responsible, and thereby more professional.

However, participants did distinguish between whiteness as defined by the United States versus the Dominican Republic. Thus, Candelario's research expanded upon differences in constructions of whiteness: participants associated features such as very fair skin, blonde hair, and light eyes as more synonymous with whiteness in the United States. In contrast, individuals with less fair skin and darker features (hair and eyes) were considered white according to Dominican constructions of whiteness.

Lastly, this study cited previous research (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000) that discussed the ways in which Dominicans are racialized upon immigration to the United States. Candelario hypothesized based on prior research that the acceptance of a “Hispanic” or “Latino” identifier is often seen as an opportunity to identify in a way that distances Dominicans from blackness (Candelario, 2007). The concept of distancing oneself from blackness may result in an internalized anti-blackness; which in turn may explain how Dominican-American participants reacted to the pictures of individuals with different hair and facial features.

“Latino” and “Hispanic” as forced identities. Many of the studies that address the adoption of “Latino” and “Hispanic” identities in the United States specifically have shown similar results. A separate study discussed how Dominicans often use “Latino” or “Hispanic” in an attempt to place themselves within American constructs of race (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral,

2000). In spite of this, the study found that these identifications did not appear to supersede the participants' general nationalism and identity with the Dominican Republic (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Researchers in this study sought to explore the ways in which Dominicans assimilating to the United States might place themselves in American racial and ethnic classifications. Prior to discussing the research, this study highlights a key component of Dominican racial categorizations: socioeconomic status. Though status is not often used in reference to racial identification, it seems that having class privilege allowed association with racial identities that were more proximal to whiteness.

However, Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral's study references the "one-drop rule;" a "rule" in the United States that identified any individual with at least "one drop" of African ancestry as black. Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral explained that this rule applied to Dominican populations, and argued that most mixed Dominicans with varied identities are seen as black in the United States (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Though this is supported by the study's participant data, other studies of black Dominicans argue that these immigrants experience an inability to identify as both black and Dominican in the United States (Bailey, 2012).

However, despite referencing blackness, Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral's study predominantly addresses mixed populations—immigrants to the United States who identified as mixed race within the Dominican Republic. These mixed race Dominicans experienced difficulty when they attempted to locate their identities within the larger, more limited constructions of race in the United States.

In contrast, Bailey (2012) studied participants who were perceived as African American in the United States, but were racially black (within Dominican racial categorizations) and ethnically Dominican. These Dominican-American participants distinguished themselves from

their African-American peers ethnolinguistically: identifying their ethnicity with their ability to speak Spanish. Though participants still identified as “Latino” and “Hispanic,” due to their Dominican roots and Spanish-speaking upbringing, some identified with the word “Spanish” as both a racial and ethnic identifier (Bailey, 2012).

Within American culture, there seems to be no clear category for Black-Americans that is separate from the category of African-American; thus Dominican participants tended to select a more general identification such as the new categorization of “Spanish”. The participants reached for a more generalizable label that existed for them within American constructions of race, rather than the option of identifying racially as black, but still allowing space for a Dominican ethnic identity. This pre-existing conflation of African American as synonymous to Black-American not only seemed to lead participants to avoid racially categorizing themselves as black in the United States, but also further caused participants to select an identifier that conflated race, ethnicity, and language (Bailey, 2012).

Though it is difficult for Dominicans to claim blackness in the United States, it can often be additionally difficult for Dominicans to identify as black in the Dominican Republic due to anti-black sentiment within Dominican culture. Following the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican Republic’s new president Joaquín Balaguer still perpetuated a culture of anti-blackness (Torres-Saillant, 2000). Balaguer further ingrained anti-Haitianism into Dominican culture, and justified the 1937 Parsley Massacre as an admirable act of patriotism rather than an inexcusable genocide. This was even reflected in Dominican pedagogy—Balaguer’s Trujillo-inspired influence created an environment in which history textbooks continuously identified Dominican national origins as white. This rewriting of history was an erasure of Afro-Dominican

heritage. Even when blackness was incorporated into historical texts, it was often framed as the “destruction of Dominican culture” (Torres-Saillant, 2000, p.1101).

While Balaguer’s influence is being contested in modern-day Dominican writing, anti-black sentiment still remains prominent in Dominican culture, pedagogy, and constructions of race. This anti-black culture will arguably continue to be central due to white supremacist politicians maintaining white hegemony. Furthermore, the dominant white culture in the Dominican Republic seems to greatly impact the ways in which blackness in the Dominican Republic is constructed today, and thus the structure of racial identification.

Though the larger ability to deconstruct anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic seems difficult to ascertain, research suggests that these associations with blackness—initially in the Dominican Republic, and subsequently upon transitioning to the United States—can cause Dominicans to lose the importance and complexity of their identity and experience (Torres-Saillant, 2000). Thus, the research literature as a whole indicates that Dominicans who migrate to the United States are faced with a limited, more dichotomous racial discourse resulting in disruption of both personal identity and self-concepts.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how the intersection of Dominican and American constructions of race may affect Dominican-American racial self-identification. By examining this cross-cultural experience, this study also hopes to inform social work research and practice on clients struggling with dual cultures that experience race and racism differently. This is a concept that is important to address within social work research in particular, as experiences surrounding dual or contrasting constructions of race in two different cultures is not often discussed in social work research.

Additionally, this research is important in the larger context of social work research on Latinx populations. Oftentimes, social work research addresses Latinx populations as a singular entity, and makes claims about Latinxs as a whole, despite the diversity of cultures and experiences within this panethnic categorization. Thus, examining this type of racialization as it applies to a specific population (Dominican-Americans) helps to deconstruct narratives that discuss Latinxs as a homogenous population.

These concepts were explored through qualitative research that utilized semi-structured guided interviews. This method was selected in order to obtain information that was as rich and in-depth as possible, and to center the voices and experiences of Dominican-Americans when discussing their racial self-identification.

Sample

Inclusion criteria for this study required that participants were born in the Dominican Republic and lived in the Dominican Republic through the age of 16. Additionally, participants were required to have lived in the contiguous United States for a minimum of five years. This five-year period of time assumes that participants will have adjusted somewhat to life in the United States, and will have a grasp on the culture surrounding race and racism in the United States.

To further understand level of exposure to U.S. culture, participants were also asked what they learned about race and racism upon arrival to the U.S and how that differed from the Dominican Republic. This allowed for complex thinking about the participants' racial identity that was contextualized by growing up in the Dominican Republic. These questions about race also likely allowed for a more complete understanding of the history and culture surrounding Dominican colorism (discrimination based on color towards darker-skinned individuals, typically between members of the same ethnic group). This includes but is not limited to Dominican anti-blackness, colonization history, and white supremacist culture surrounding ideology such as *mejorar la raza*. Residence in the Dominican Republic through age 16 also highly increased the likelihood of participants having a Dominican birth certificate or a cedula (identification card in the Dominican Republic obtained at approximately age 15).

Historically both cedula and birth certificates in the Dominican Republic indicate an individual's race/color. Race and color were often synonymous on these forms, and were typically designated based on visual evaluations by individual government employees or hospital workers helping with documentation (Simmons, 2009). While it is unclear when the practice of noting race and color on these forms ended, there is strong indication that race/color was

assigned on these forms pre-2013. Therefore, each participant was asked individually if their documentation indicated race/color in any capacity. If it did, participants were asked what the documentation indicated and if it was synonymous with their own identification(s).

Participants were recruited through the snowball method. First, participants were sought through advertisements on social media listing eligibility criteria, basic information on the study, and the researcher's contact information. This statement was also emailed to members of the Dominican community that the researcher is connected with, and was spoken about with these community members in person and over the phone. This recruitment method was selected as the optimal method of recruitment as social media allowed for more random selection, while the researcher's connections to larger Dominican communities allowed for more inclusion.

Research Design

Participants with access to email were sent consent forms via email, and scheduled their interviews via email as well. Participants were also able to schedule their interviews via phone call or text. Some participants were sent consent forms via paper mail. Regardless of the way in which participants received consent forms, interview scheduling only began once the researcher obtained a signed copy of the consent form (via mail, or via email with a scanned copy or an electronic signature). A copy of this form is included in Appendix A.

Eleven participants were interviewed via phone, and one was interviewed via FaceTime. Prior to the interview, participants with email access emailed questions they had regarding the interview, or used email to schedule a time via phone to ask questions regarding the interview. Participants who communicated via phone were offered two times prior to the interview (one the day prior to the scheduled interview, one a week prior) during which they could call in with questions regarding the interview. Interview questions were sent out a day prior to the interview

for those with email, and were sent via paper mail a week before the interview (for those who did not have access to email). Each participant was given a number in place of a name once signed consent forms were received, in hopes of maintaining anonymity in the study.

Once scheduled, interviews lasted approximately forty minutes. Only three participants consented to being audio recorded; however, notes were taken by the researcher during each interview that was not audio-recorded. Participant's names were not used at any point during note taking. This methodology was approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Board. This letter of approval is attached in Appendix B. Subsequent amendments were added to the application to the Human Subjects Review Board (questions about participant's age and gender were included, as well as an additional option to FaceTime instead of Skype). For the letter of approval for the amendments see Appendix C.

Analysis

After completion of the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data. The researcher read through notes from interviews, and cross-referenced the transcriptions and personal notes to code for themes that naturally arose in the data. Following coding, different themes were grouped into categories that concerned participants' racial categorization. These racial categorizations materialized based on the existing data. Categorizations that have been historically used to identify Dominican-Americans but did not arise in the data or narratives were placed in a separate category.

Categories were then sorted in two methods: first, each categorization was sub-categorized to highlight similar experiences in the identification process. Second, similarities in experiences across categories were highlighted as well. This sorting process and development of themes was then used to formulate theories as to how cross-cultural constructions of race may

have impacted Dominican-American racial identification. This process of coding, categorization, and theoretical formulation is rooted in the methodology of grounded theory, and is further explained in the discussion.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this methodology, the first of which is the sample size. While the narratives were rich and provided an immense amount of detail, it is hard to say that such a small number of participants can be generalizable to the larger Dominican-American community. However, factoring in this limitation with the depth and detail of the narratives, this research may be used as a beginning exploration, which raises some possible implications about the impact of cross-cultural constructions of race on Dominican-American identity.

Additionally, it is important to address the positionality of the researcher. Though the researcher is Dominican-American, the researcher was born and grew up in the United States. This positioning as compared to participants may limit the capacity for understanding and appropriately coding the narratives of Dominican immigrants who moved to the United States after living in the Dominican Republic for a minimum of 16 years.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

The semi-structured, guided interviews in this study revealed many important findings on the impact of cross-cultural constructions of race on Dominican-American racial identity. Three themes in particular were most significant and emerged from the data in a striking manner. First, every participant's individual racial self-identification was incongruent with the ways in which Americans identified the participant. Second, eleven of twelve participants felt that their identity shifted upon immigration to the United States. Lastly, of these eleven participants, eight felt they were being forced into American categorizations of race that they did not wish to select, to the point where they experienced personal distress.

Participant Demographics

Participants answered general questions that asked about age and identified gender, as well as whether or not they had a *cedula*. Participants were also asked if either their birth certificate or *cedula* (provided they had one) listed race or color. These demographics are listed in the table below:

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Participant ID Number	Age	Self-Identified Gender	Race Listed on Birth Certificate	Has Cedula/ Race Listed
1	65	Cisgender Male	None	Yes; <i>Indio</i>
2	51	Female	<i>India</i>	Yes; <i>India</i>
3	42	Female	None	Yes; Unsure
4	45	Female	None	No Cedula
5	56	Male	None	No Cedula
6	43	Female	None	No Cedula
7	27	Male	None	No Cedula
8	47	Female	None	No Cedula
9	32	Female	None	No Cedula
10	25	Male	None	No Cedula
11	53	Female	Likely <i>Indio</i>	Yes; <i>Indio</i>
12	42	Male	None	No Cedula

Of the three participants who reported a race or skin color listed on their birth certificate and/or cedula, all participants reported that they felt the assigned race categories were generally congruent with their own identification in the Dominican Republic.

Additionally, all participants immigrated to the East Coast upon arrival. Participant's specific locations upon immigration have not been included in the data to maintain confidentiality. The majority of participants are located in New York City (n=9), two participants are located in Massachusetts, and one is located in Florida. However, one participant from New York has lived in various countries and states several years after immigration, as a result of

joining the United States Military. Lastly, though participants were not required to disclose their educational backgrounds, two participants in the study expressed that they received Masters degrees in the United States, one participant received a doctorate in the United States, and one participant discussed currently pursuing master's degree at an elite private university.

After providing their demographic information, participants responded to questions regarding their experiences growing up in the Dominican Republic, immigrating to the United States, and how they experienced cultural differences around race and racism in both countries. Participants were also asked questions regarding their personal identity in both countries. These findings will be presented below based upon these questions in four sections: learned experiences around race and skin color growing up in the Dominican Republic, racial identity in the Dominican Republic, learned experiences immigrating to the United States, and racial identity following immigration to the United States. These sections will address the above key findings, and will provide additional new findings that arose during the interview process.

Learned Experiences Regarding Race and Color in the Dominican Republic

Cultural and community learning. When participants were first asked what they learned about race and skin color growing up in the Dominican Republic, participants unanimously reported a culture that valued lighter-skinned individuals over darker-skinned individuals. Nearly all participants explained that this was rooted in anti-Haitian sentiment (n=10), and those who did not explain this initially, later brought up anti-Haitian sentiment and culture in answering subsequent questions regarding learning about race and skin color growing up in the Dominican Republic.

Participants outlined clear differences between the ways in which light-skinned and dark-skinned Dominicans were treated. Half of participants cited being light-skinned as a beauty standard that was necessary to adhere to in their response to the very first question, "what did

you learn about race and skin color growing up in the Dominican Republic?” Participants reported that growing up, light-skinned girls and girls with straight or wavy hair were often called “beautiful” and “pretty” in comparison to darker-skinned girls, girls with coarse hair, or hair with tight curls. These participants, along with four others, discussed the ways in which blackness was not only defined by skin tone, but by a combination of skin tone, hair, and facial features.

In this way, Dominicans who were considered and categorized as either black, Haitian, or both, were consistently regarded as more unattractive than, or generally “less than” light-skinned Dominicans. Participant 9 spoke to the ways in which she encountered anti-black and anti-Haitian sentiment as a child. The participant discusses the use of the terms *maldito negro* and *maldito haitiano*, the latter of which translates to “fucking Haitians.” Both phrases are meant to use profanity and be intentionally derogatory. However, the word *negro* in the phrase *maldito negro* does not simply translate to black: here, it is used as a racial slur meant to further debase the individuals it refers to.

Growing up I saw how light-skinned "white" Dominicans treated dark skinned ones. I remember my dad's father went to the Dominican Republic to visit (before I came to live to the US) and the military stopped our bus and he was asked to prove that he wasn't Haitian. I will never forget that day. It was crazy. There was and still is a lot of discrimination against Haitians, and a lot of deportation took place and it's still taking place. And you would always hear people say "*maldito negro or maldito haitiano.*" So I could see that being of a darker skin tone was seen as something bad. Something ugly. Other participants shared similar answers when asked what they learned about these types of differences in the Dominican Republic when growing up. Participant 3 shared an experience of

going to a club that would not let dark-skinned participants in, and two participants shared stories of women relaxing their curly or kinky hair. These participants also emphasized that not doing so was often looked down upon with their respective communities in the Dominican Republic.

Educational system. Though no participants expressed that the anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness described was overtly present within institutional pedagogy, many participants expressed seeing very few dark-skinned Dominicans or Haitians at their schools. Participant 4 shared that though there was a general, somewhat subtle culture surrounding dark-skinned Dominicans and Haitians as “less than,” she did appreciate her experience of learning Dominican ethnic history. This participant explained that her favorite teacher taught the history of Columbus and his colonization of the Taíno, as well as the importation of enslaved Africans, as a way to understand the class’ collective Dominican roots. This participant explained that her teacher framed the discussion as being meant to not only inform students of their ancestry, but to be appreciative of *all* of their roots: inclusive of those from Africa.

Because this teacher helped the participant to learn to love her African roots as a darker-skinned Dominican, Participant 4 expressed appreciation for her schooling growing up in the Dominican Republic. However, the participant also included the caveat that teaching was often not structured that way in the Dominican Republic. Though the participant did not report feeling neglected or ignored as a child in school due to being darker-skinned, the participant still spoke to an unspoken understanding that lighter-skinned Dominicans were considered better.

Historical and cultural narratives. Other participants shared historical and cultural narratives referencing anti-Haitian and anti-black Dominican sentiment. Two participants expressed a culture around skin bleaching in an attempt to look whiter as part of a cultural narrative that valued whiteness. Participant 8 described a larger historical context by discussing

recent Dominican conflict surrounding citizenship rights of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. This narrative involved recent conflict in the city of Santiago in the Dominican Republic in 2015. In this narrative, the participant explained hearing that many Haitians who did not have citizenship papers were sent to the capital of the Dominican Republic. Though it was assumed they were to be depatriated, this participant reported hearing that many of the Haitians were instead killed. This participant also reported generally noticing more anti-Haitianism in the capital as compared to the countryside.

Participant 1 referenced the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in attempting to describe anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican Republic. This participant explained that Trujillo encouraged Jewish refugees to seek safe haven in the Dominican Republic in the 1930s and 1940s, with the sole hope of white Jewish refugees mixing into the Dominican population, and thus whitening it further. This participant also mentioned a similar effort by Trujillo in the 1950s, but instead through encouraging white Spanish immigration into the country.

Mejorar la Raza. Participants were also asked if they had heard the phrase *mejorar la raza*, or “improving the race:” a phrase meant to imply that marrying or having children with lighter-skinned individuals creates a lighter, and thereby “improved” next generation. Ten out of twelve participants had experienced hearing this phrase growing up, including all of the female participants. The two participants who had not heard the phrase did not provide any context, or ask questions regarding the phrase. Those who did know the phrase mentioned hearing it frequently throughout their lives. Lastly, five participants (all women) reported being told to “improve upon the race” in this way by immediate family members as a child.

Participant 2 stated that she felt the phrase was mostly directed towards women. Another participant, Participant 5, introduced the phrase *jodio la raza*, the literal translation of which is

“fuck up the race.” In elaborating on this phrase, the participant explained that the phrase was used in a way that was meant to be degrading, and was meant to additionally insinuate that one was “marrying backwards.” Similarly, Participant 9 reported hearing from her mother that marrying someone darker-skinned would make her new children *cocolos*, which loosely translates to “ugly.” Participant 4 expressed that the racist, white supremacist sentiment inherent in the phrase was often something that was internalized. This participant came to the realization during their interview that they had experienced this internalization of *mejorar la raza* themselves concerning the people they dated, and in their current marriage. This participant also confirmed that it was common to hear “you’re damaging your kids” if one was to marry someone who was darker-skinned.

Participant 11 discussed the ways in which features associated with blackness were also discussed as a part of the culture behind *mejorar la raza*. This participant described her nose as flat, and explained that according to Dominican culture she does not have what is considered to be a “good nose” because of its association with features that are categorized as or linked to blackness. She explained that peers had often asked her if she had considered plastic surgery to “fix it,” and that many peers in the Dominican Republic with similar noses had done so. This participant connected these conversations to the idea of *mejorar la raza*, as people in the participant’s family pointed out the fact that the participant’s child had inherited her nose. The participant explained that this was framed as a negative, and referenced once more the idea of whiteness (and the features and straight hair often associated with such) as the only thing worth passing on to the next generation.

Class issues. Lastly, many of the participants expressed that discrimination was often linked to class in addition to race. Those within the Dominican Republic who had educational

and class privilege were reported to often be associated with whiteness; however, those who were darker-skinned but had immense socioeconomic or education privilege were considered superior due to these additional factors.

Racial Identity in the Dominican Republic

Participants answered in a variety of ways when asked how they would identify their own race or skin color. Three participants identified as mixed, one participant identified as “light-skinned but mixed,” and another identified as multi-racial. Three identified using Dominican racial classifications, identifying their racial identity in Spanish in spite of answering the question in English.

These three identified as *mulata* (mixed parentage, often darker-skinned), *blanca* (white), and *morenita* (loosely translates to darker-skinned). The participant who identified as *mulata* expressed that she selected the word because she is of mixed heritage, but still identifies more with being dark-skinned rather than light-skinned due to her complexion, facial features, and hair. This participant states that she does not identify with the European aspect of her background in spite of some Spanish ancestry. The participant who identified as *blanca* clarified that she identified this way in the context of the Dominican Republic: whiteness as it’s viewed in the United States is often not associated with being Latinx. Lastly, the participant identifying as *morenita* referenced a word in Spanish that is a term of endearment for someone who is dark-skinned. This word references the word *morena*, which translates to “darker woman.”

Of the remaining participants, Participant 7 was unsure of how to identify, and expressed feeling as if it was “hard to describe.” In spite of this, the participant expressed never feeling a sense of discomfort or unhappiness around his identity, due to consistently being surrounded by diverse/mixed communities. Participant 10 identified as Afro-Dominican, but expressed that this

was more in the context of the United States. This participant explained that in the Dominican Republic he would likely be “more Indian” or mixed. Participant 5 did identify as white but stated that this was in the context of the Dominican Republic, and was not reflective of his identity in the United States. The remaining participant identified as *indio oscuro*.

Concerns about immigration to the United States. When participants were asked what worries they had upon moving to the United States, eight participants cited language as either their initial concern or their largest concern. Of the four participants who did not cite language as a concern, two expressed that it was not a concern due to having learned English in the Dominican Republic and practicing with English-speaking family members prior to arrival. Participants with concerns surrounding language stated worrying about the ability to communicate with others, and voiced fears around being shamed, or being perceived as unintelligent due to not being fluent in the language.

Four participants further expressed initial concerns over the ways their accents would be perceived, one participant expressed concern over immigration status (as this participant was undocumented), and one participant expressed concerns over being ostracized due to race or color. Seven of the participants expressed concerns around the ability to relate to those in the new community, and five of the seven reported that these concerns were due to differences between American and Dominican communities.

These participants unanimously expressed that they had heard from relatives in America that Americans were often colder and less open and friendly than Dominicans. Two cited specific experiences in their own communities at home in the Dominican Republic where neighbors frequented each other’s homes and children could safely play unsupervised with one another in the streets. These participants also noted that their fears were confirmed upon arriving

to the United States: one expressed feeling jailed as a child by the idea that she could not walk in the streets with friends or find community in her new apartment building. Lastly, three participants voiced generally fearing the unknown that awaited them in the United States.

Learned Experiences of Race in the United States

Concerns of racial discrimination in the United States. When participants were asked if they were worried about being received specifically due to race or skin color, four participants were not concerned, three voiced concern, and five participants stated that they were not worried prior to arrival but their opinions immediately shifted when they experienced discrimination upon arrival. Of the participants who were not concerned, one expressed that he was concerned not exclusively about race/skin color, but about race in conjunction with his accent (based on perceived difference and “othering”). One other participant who did not express concern expressed that she traveled to the United States with many of her family members, and felt that this support alleviated any concerns that may have risen in the immigration process. Of the remaining two participants who had no stated concerns, one did not elaborate on her lack of concerns, and another expressed not worrying due to coming from a community that had a variety of people from differing backgrounds.

Those who voiced worrying about being perceived differently due to race or skin color reported that their fears were validated upon arrival. These participants—in addition to those who did not initially voice concerns but later experienced discrimination—expressed cruelty and bullying from school peers in particular. One participant reported being called “watchu say” by peers who mocked her inquiries of teachers and peers to repeat difficult or fast sentences when speaking English. Other participants (n=5) expressed students consistently assuming lack of intelligence due to combined race and immigration status, and one expressed constantly feeling as if there was an “us vs. them” culture within the American school system. Additionally, five of

the nine participants who voiced concern about race-based discrimination upon arriving in the United States expressed feeling as if they needed to force themselves to “Americanize” and assimilate to avoid bullying and harassment upon immigration.

Lastly, nine participants reported hearing harmful stereotypes associated with Hispanics, Latinos, and Dominicans upon arrival: all three of these stereotypes were racialized and placed onto participants, regardless of skin tone or self-identified race. Two participants voiced struggling with fitting in racially before questions were asked about racial identity in the United States. Participant 2, who identified as mixed, expressed confusion and difficulty upon arriving to the United States to attend college.

When I arrived at the University here there were all different types of groups at school: Black Student’s Union, Latino Student Association....You see the white kids hanging out, Indian kids hanging out, Latino kids, and you didn’t know where you were supposed to be. Whereas back there we were all Dominican no matter what color you were. There was no need to say ‘oh I’m Dominican....’ For the first time I was in a race limbo: I really didn’t know whether I was considered Dominican, black, white. I was considered Latino/Hispanic, and it was the first time I saw the difference in terms of how people view other groups.

Participant 4 mentioned initial difficulties with identity and displacement around fitting in. The participant reported a great amount of distress over “where to go,” as she was neither white nor black, and did not feel there was space for her in dichotomous discussions of race and identity. This participant reported later realizing she was Hispanic upon immigrating to United States.

Communities in the United States following immigration. When participants were subsequently asked about their communities in the United states, two reported moving to

predominately white boarding schools, and nine expressed moving to neighborhoods that were predominately “Hispanic.” Of the nine who immigrated to predominately Hispanic neighborhoods, three reported neighborhoods that were a mix of Hispanic and (American) black populations. Six reported moving to neighborhoods where the Latinx population was predominately Dominican. However, one of the participants reported moving to a predominately white neighborhood shortly after arrival.

Participant 6 expressed wanting to “keep away from other Dominicans,” and explained that she preferred to live with those who she considered to be mixed, but were not Dominican. This participant expressed feeling as if this might allow her to be associated more with being mixed rather than being identified as Dominican.

Lastly, participants were asked what they learned generally about race and racism in the United States upon arrival. Of the twelve participants, only two participants expressed discrimination between communities of color in the United States. Participant 11 expressed disdain over the ways in which she witnessed members of the Hispanic community perpetuate anti-blackness upon arriving in the United States. This participant explained that she interpreted this as contributing to a larger culture that she experienced around more discrimination against African Americans in the United States. In contrast, participant 3 did share a narrative in which her Dominican aunt experienced discrimination from African-American co-workers.

Outside of these narratives, the other ten participants reported that larger communities of color consistently experienced racism and discrimination in the United States, inclusive of Dominicans in particular. Within these narratives, participants expressed that Latinx and black (American) individuals were most discriminated against, and four reported that discrimination against Black-Americans in the United States was particularly rampant.

Difficulty finding racial identity. Participants shared experiences within school, communities in the United States, and personal experiences as sources of learning regarding race and racism in the United States. Of the participants who shared personal narratives, some (n=3) spoke to the ways in which learning about race in the United States caused them to struggle with their identities. Participant 9, who self-described as dark-skinned, expressed the ways in which she saw her identity shift upon her arrival.

[Coming to the United States] made me realize that I was no longer *morenita*. I was considered black. I remember I used to say ‘I’m not black. I’m Dominican’ and then I learned about the different categories they have when filling out forms where they list your race and color. I could only choose between white or black and I knew I wasn’t white but I was always hesitant to choose black, because I saw myself as *morenita* not *negra*.

One other participant described the ways in which she noticed that individuals in the United States were put into very “distinctive classifications,” and that different people of different races were not only treated differently and approached differently, but expected to behave differently as well.

This participant further elaborated to explain that this idea of fitting into groups translated into filling out forms in the United States.

It became a big thing—even filling out an application, it became a big question: what do you check? Do you check black, do you become white, do you check Hispanic? It became a very important issue that I did not have to deal with back home, in terms of every day making yourself having to fit in a little category/box/group.

While only two participants directly referenced their own personal struggles with identity as related to learning about race and racism in the United States, one dark-skinned participant expressed fear for the ways in which she would be treated due to discrimination she noticed against Black-Americans in the United States. This participant explained that her mother taught her not to go out frequently because they “weren’t white” and thus were likely at risk for stereotyping, particularly on behalf of the police.

Participant 10 shared a narrative of campaigning throughout a large city as a way to explain a personal experience of racism in the United States. The participant explained the process: knocking on doors, with a campaign t-shirt on, clipboard in hand, and backpack on. The participant also self-described as short, very young looking, and presumably un-threatening. However, the participant expressed that when knocking on doors, homeowners would initially open the door with a friendly face but immediately freeze upon seeing the participant and tense up. The participant expressed that this micro-aggression was experienced more intensely by other American, black-identified members of the campaigning team who were physically larger. She explained that this was only one instance of many that highlighted experiences of racism in the United States.

Experiences of discrimination. Outside of these experiences, participants shared varied narratives that they witnessed or heard about from peers that exemplified the culture surrounding race and racism in the United States. Participant 1 reported witnessing white students who denigrated both Latinx and black students, and often called them racial slurs without impunity, and Participant 7 reported being spat at and called racial slurs upon arrival to the United States. Five participants referenced learning about the history of discrimination against black individuals during the Civil Rights Movement, and participants reported emotions ranging from confusion to

shock and surprise. Participant 6 expressed becoming “a mess” when she came to understand American histories of discrimination. Lastly, seven participants expressed feeling racism was more rampant and more noticeable in the United States than in the Dominican Republic.

Other participants also noted some differences when asked how their experiences learning about race and racism in the United States differed from Dominican culture. Eleven of twelve participants reported that they felt racism in the United States was more overt than discrimination in the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, when discrimination was discussed in the Dominican Republic it was often contextualized differently. Participant 1 explained the difference in the Dominican Republic as more of a colorism and an internalized racism rather than overt, more clear racism as was experienced in the United States. Many participants also reiterated that education and class were factors in the Dominican Republic in addition to race, which did not seem to be the case in the United States.

The one participant who did not feel American racism was more overt than discrimination in the Dominican Republic voiced uncertainty as to whether or not the Dominican categorized race and skin color in the way the United States did. In spite of this, the participant expressed feeling that many of the actions rooted in race-based discrimination were the same in both the Dominican Republic and the United States. Lastly, of the eleven participants who noticed/experienced more racism in the United States, participant 10 stated that this perception may have been due in part to privileges in the Dominican Republic that he did not have in the United States.

Racial Identity following Immigration

How American society identified participants. When participants were asked how Americans identified them, no participants reported being identified in a way that was

synonymous with their own racial self-identification. Participant’s self-identification, as described in their own words, is listed in the table below alongside the ways participants reported being identified by Americans.

Table 3. Racial Self-Identification vs. American Categorization

Participant ID Number	Self-Described Race/Color	How Americans identified Participants
1	Multi-Racial	Spanish
2	Mixed	Hispanic
3	Light-skinned and mixed	Hispanic
4	<i>Mulata</i> ; 1/3 white, 1/3 Taíno, 1/3 black. Identifies as more black.	Hispanic
5	“White but Dominican”	Hispanic
6	Mixed	Hispanic/Minority
7	“Hard to describe”	Muslim/Ethiopian/Pakistani
8	<i>Blanca</i>	Hispanic
9	<i>Morenita</i> or Afro-Latina; Not white but not black	Black
10	Afro-Dominican; Black	Latino; sometimes Arab
11	Indio Oscuro	Hispanic; Sometimes Black
12	Mixed	Hispanic

Six participants elaborated on the ways in which Americans identified them. Participant 3 expressed some disdain for the identification, stating “most of them fit me into the Hispanic group, whatever that means.” Participant 1 expressed being perceived as different enough from black peers to not be placed in the same category, and thus was thrown into the larger

categorization of Hispanic. Participant 12 discussed being in the military for 20 years, and how he was thereby exposed to more integrative environments than others. In spite of this, though Participant 12 was mostly categorized as Hispanic, the participant additionally reported being categorized as Mexican. The participant explained that many people saw Mexican as synonymous to Hispanic, and thus conflated the two.

Three participants expressed that Americans were consistently surprised that the participants could speak Spanish. Of these three, two participants expressed identifying as black, and as dark-skinned. Participant 10 explained the ways in which black in the United States was conflated with being African American. This participant expressed that white Americans and African Americans alike did not understand the differences between claiming blackness versus claiming African heritage, and thus often challenged him when he identified as black.

Furthermore, the participant who Americans identified as “Spanish” (Participant 1) explained that Spanish indicated being from Spain, which was not the participant’s identity. However, this participant further stated that white peers did not know that, nor did they seem to care about the difference. Lastly, two participants expressed that Americans as a whole seem to have a difficult time comprehending race and ethnicity.

Participants’ feelings about fitting in. When participants were directly asked if they felt they could fit into racial groups in the United States, one reported being unsure, one reported likely feeling she could fit, and one participant reported feeling he could identify with the “Hispanic” group. Outside of these three participants, all remaining participants reported that they did not feel they could fit into the racial groups in the United States.

Two participants who expressed they felt they could not fit into racial groups in the United States cited the process of filling out forms as an indicator of not fitting in. Participant 10

echoed prior themes discussed around filling out forms, and expressed that he remembered being very confused upon first filling out a form for the U.S. Census, and inevitably checked both white and black to try to “bridge the two.” The second participant, Participant 4, similarly expressed confusion looking at the varying options when first filling out paperwork.

Oh no, I didn’t feel I could fit into the groups at all. I remember, ‘what’s the box?’ Hispanic, Black, Asian...I didn’t know what the others were. So I thought, okay, I guess I belong here. But the Hispanic group is so broad! So [in regards to] the group, if you really had to put me in a box...it would be with the Hispanics.

Outside of these two participants, four participants stated feeling forced in some way to fit into American racial categories. Participant 6 expressed feeling it was “rare” to be able to fit into racial groups in the United States. However, Participant 7, who did voice struggling to fit into any of the racial categories in the United States, expressed feeling as if this was in part due to general difficulties fitting in within the United States.

Effect on participant self-identification. Lastly, participants were asked if any of these experiences changed how they identified or viewed themselves. Eleven of twelve participants responded that these experiences did impact the way they self-identified in some way. Two participants expressed that this change was somewhat positive and due in part to meeting a mixture of different people upon immigration. Participant 12 expressed that exposure to multiple Spanish-speaking communities at church in the United States helped to form his perspectives, and expressed feeling this allowed him to shift to focus from attempting to racially identify others to solely focusing on their character and personality.

Outside of these participants, eight participants stated that they felt their identity shift was forced upon them by an inability to fit into American constructions of race. One participant,

Participant 7, made sure to clarify that though he never was generally concerned about identifying himself, he often felt pushed to do so and to make a decision here in the United States.

Within this group, two participants cited forms as a point of difficulty, and explained that filling out forms caused this feeling of needing to change self-identification. Participant 3 outlined the importance of identity and the impact of the shift in identity upon immigration to the United States.

Just not having a place to put my identity on a form...when I was young it didn't make a difference, because I wasn't as aware of the *circumstances*—to put it nicely—that minorities face in the US, and the struggles they face. Whether it's discrimination or trying to get an education in college. At that age I didn't think much about it. But now at my age I think it's important to have that: your identity is who you are. I'm not just Hispanic, I'm a mixture! I'm Dominican, and Dominican is a whole different culture than Hispanic. That's so broad.

This narrative was reflected in the feedback from the second participant as well. The second participant who discussed forms expressed feeling forced to choose identity when filling out forms in the United States. This participant expressed feeling as if she had to fill out black on the form in place of something such as Dominican, and wished to indicate both but was unable to do so.

Summary

At the end of the interview, participants were asked for final thoughts. Though not all chose to share, many (n=5) of the participants who did share summarized their thoughts on the interview topics and points of discussion. In addition to these participants, two participants chose

to share additional historical narratives. Participant 3 explained that she knew of one recent presidential candidate in the Dominican Republic that was black who was largely unsuccessful due to anti-black sentiment perpetuated by other politicians and by some individuals in general. The second participant stated that Rafael Trujillo personally used bleaching skin creams, and was someone who perpetuated the idea of whiteness as something to venerate. This participant additionally cited Trujillo as a source of attempting to remove parts of Dominican culture that referenced African roots, as well as massacring Haitians that recently came into the country's capital.

One additional participant did not choose to summarize her thoughts, but instead spoke to her concerns regarding the ways in which the experiences of discrimination and racism that Dominicans in the United States face may have significant, detrimental impacts on the next generation. This participant highlighted that Dominican children have a lack of access to education, because the United States has historically lacked strong supports for those who immigrate to this country. The participant additionally emphasized that current bilingual education in the United States is greatly faltering.

Outside of these participants, those who summarized their final thoughts re-iterated prior thoughts on stereotypes of Dominicans and uncertainty around racial self-identification. Participants that summarized their thoughts reported feeling limited by stereotypes or forced identifications, and Participant 6 furthered this reiteration by explaining that she felt that there was limited representation of mixed individuals in the United States. Lastly, Participant 1 shared his general thoughts and frustrations on the ways in which American culture deals with and racializes Latinos.

There is notion that this country can't quite deal with the concept of being multi-racial. It's kind of binary black or white; they don't know what to make of us Latinos. They just go by appearance: if you pass. They really don't know what to make of a blue-eyed, Blonde Latina, or a Spanish-speaking black Latino. It blows their minds.

This participant brings up one of the main findings of interviews: unanimously, the ways participants racially self-identified were incongruent with the ways in which Americans categorized them. Thus, the implication of this finding, along with the varied other findings within this research, are important to discuss when considering how to deconstruct racial paradigms forced onto the Latinx individual, and when examining the impact of the immigration experience on Dominican-Americans' racial self-identification.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The findings of this study inform our understanding of the cross-cultural constructions of race between the Dominican Republic and the United States, which greatly impact Dominican-Americans' racial self-identification. Participants' interviews confirmed the ways in which Dominican histories of colonization and anti-Haitianism informed individual's constructions of race while living in the Dominican Republic, as well as the ways this historical context informed shifts in self-identification upon arrival to the United States.

Participant's narratives further confirmed prior literature on the negative impacts of shifting to American constructions of race when racial identity had already been formed in the Dominican Republic; particularly when being placed within the singular, panethnic categorizations of "Latino" and "Hispanic." Lastly, participant's narratives confirmed this research study's hypothesis that Dominican immigrants shifting to Latinx racial paradigms in the United States experience detrimental impacts upon their sense of belonging, and general mental health.

This impact will first be discussed by looking at how these findings reflect the current literature. This chapter will then address the implications for social work practice, and the ways in which research, and American society as a whole, creates a culture that reductively racializes Latinxs. Lastly, recommendations will be made for future research, as well as recommendations for how this research can inform social work practice, pedagogy, and curricula.

Findings as Reflected in Research

As a whole, participant's narratives mirror the pre-existing research. Participants and researchers alike not only address differing constructions of race between the United States and the Dominican Republic, but also additionally discuss distinctions between white/Spanish supremacist standards in the Dominican Republic and experiences of racial discrimination in the United States. However, participant's narratives provided additional depth describing the ways in which Dominican-American immigrants experience discrimination alongside difficulties in forming racial-identity within American constructions of race.

Dominican constructions of beauty and blackness. Participant's descriptions of the white supremacist influences within Dominican beauty standards reflected prior research on the idealization of whiteness as beautiful within Dominican culture. Participants in this study described the ways in which those who were identified as black based upon their hair and facial features, in addition to their skin tone, were considered less beautiful: in the same way that participants in Candelario's study described darker-skinned individuals less attractive than lighter-skinned individuals.

However, participants in this study differed from those interviewed by Candelario. Participants in this study that identified as *mulata*, *morena*, *indio oscuro*, and mixed distinguished between their own opinions of their blackness and society's opinions of their blackness. Though participants expressed that they internalized societal perceptions of anti-blackness at varied points in their lives (both in the Dominican Republic and the United States), they eventually came to claim features, hair, and skin-tone that categorized them as black with pride rather than disdain. Most participants additionally expressed that coming to re-claim these

attributes took a longer process of introspection due to the difficulty of immigrating to the United States.

This differed from the ways in which Candelario described her participants: Candelario's speculated that "Hispanic" and "Latino" were often claimed as a way to dismiss black roots. However, in spite of the discrepancy between this research and Candelario's research, it is important to note that the combined impact of white supremacy in both the Dominican Republic and the United States has often been enough to cause many individuals to choose to distance themselves from blackness. Thus, Candelario is likely correct in calling attention to the ways in which internalized anti-blackness from both countries may impact racial self-identification upon immigration to the United States. This is particularly salient, as Candelario's research is one of very few studies that addresses hair and facial features as they intersect with racial identity, let alone the further intersection of these concepts with gender and Dominican constructions of race.

Intersections of womanhood and racial self-identification. Participants' discussions in this research surrounding the intersections of hair, facial features, and racial identity were also predominately reported by women. This finding highlights gender disparities between men and women in the research, and was the first of two findings that indicated that Dominican women likely experience the shift to the United States differently in regards to racial self-identification. The second disparity between men and women in this research was surrounding the concept of *mejorar la raza*. In addition to deconstructing anti-black sentiment based on white supremacist constructions of beauty in the Dominican Republic and the United States, women were the only individuals in the study who expressed being personally told by immediate family to "*mejorar la raza*."

Though the majority of participants did not share expansive information on the culture around *mejorar la raza*, the visceral descriptions participants provided of experiences surrounding the phrase reflected a deep impact upon Dominican women. Women in the study spoke consistently to the ways in which this message was perpetuated and further internalized in childhood and beyond. Furthermore, each of the women who spoke to hearing *mejorar la raza* as young girls recalled these instances with at least twenty to twenty-five years of distance from childhood. Some women spoke to hearing *mejorar la raza* more than forty years prior. Though it is difficult to extrapolate the implication of this phrase based on the limited sample, participant's clear recollection of these incidents after several decades suggests that the impact of these words resonated strongly. This further suggests that the intersection of age, gender, and racial identity shows that cross-cultural constructions of race may collectively impact women more significantly than men.

Current research on racial identification in the Dominican Republic, as well as research as a whole on cross-cultural constructions of race, often does not focus on the disparities that stem from marginalization experienced by women combined with the re-shaping of racial self-identification upon immigration to the United States. Furthermore, crucial questions arise when thinking about the impact of hearing "*mejorar la raza*," on young women: first, what is the contribution of this phrase to internalizing colorism? Second, what does it teach young women about how they must structure themselves in position to men? In addition, this phrase addresses the gendered implications of women's responsibility to have children (particularly lighter-skinned children) in Dominican society.

Historical context and narratives of anti-Haitianism. One additional piece of participant's narratives that was reflected in the literature was the influence and impact of

Dominican historical context on racial identity and constructions of race. However, contrary to what current research literature suggests, participants largely learned of these historical narratives through conversations within communities rather than in school environments.

Participant 3's commentary on 1996 presidential candidate Jose Francisco Peña Gómez is a particularly poignant example of such community discourse. Peña Gómez, a man with Haitian ancestry, lost the Dominican presidency largely in part to anti-Haitianism perpetuated within Dominican culture. This participant's reference to colorism and anti-Haitianism as contributing factors to Peña Gómez's defeat was confirmed in literature on Dominican racial identity, and serves to contextualize cultural responses around blackness in the Dominican Republic (Duany, 1998).

Other participants referenced anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness in Trujillo's dictatorship, skin-bleaching in the Dominican Republic, and recent depatriating of those in the Dominican Republic with Haitian origin (The American Prospect, 2015): all of which is similarly reflected in current research. These historical narratives were present in each participant's interviews, and most historical narratives centered on the ways in which anti-Haitianism was still largely present within Dominican collective consciousness. This presence speaks strongly to the ways in which participants growing up in the Dominican Republic became aware of the devaluing of people of black and of Haitian origin as a result of white Dominican hegemony. This presents an incredibly important context for considering how Dominicans are socialized to view themselves within dual constructs of race; participants developed their identities in tandem with learning about the devaluation of blackness in Dominican culture, and subsequently immigrated to a country that largely discriminates and devalues black individuals as well.

Navigating additional immigration stressors. In addition to the difficulties that come with developing racial identity within differing constructions of race, a majority of participants discussed a multitude of additional fears they faced upon immigration to the United States. Participant's high levels of anxiety surrounding discrimination based on an inability to communicate in English or communicating with an accent added new context to the ways in which racial identity can be further complicated by language differences. In spite of this, though prior studies have addressed the ways in which racial identity development through a cross-cultural lens can cause trauma as a result of extreme stress (Duany, 1998), few studies have addressed the additional impact of navigating how this is further informed by inabilities or difficulties communicating in English.

Recurring themes within participant's narratives additionally included feelings of distress, displacement, fear, and in some cases clinical depression. Many of these experiences were described as a result of attempting to navigate their place as a Latinx in the United States, and the discrimination they experienced in the United States as a result of their Latinx identity. This theme contextualized the main finding of the research study: American racial paradigms are implicated as complicit in making individuals feel they must give up their prior racial identities.

Findings from this study additionally show that shifts in identities are complicated not only by assimilating into new constructions of race, but also by fears of race-based discrimination, bullying, stereotyping, harassment and violence, and police brutality—many of which were confirmed in participant's experiences upon arriving to the United States. Furthermore, because blackness in the United States is a precursor to race-based discrimination such as police brutality, the racial paradigm creates a situation in which participants have additional reasons to disavow their own self-identity for the sake of their own safety.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Though the difficulties that are associated with cross-cultural constructions of race are multi-faceted, it is important to reflect upon the struggles faced by these populations that must consistently hold dual experiences of race-based discrimination, and dual constructions of race rooted in white supremacy. The cognitive dissonance that can come with experiencing cross-cultural constructions of race may cause a variety of distressing emotions and experiences: experiences that are crucial to address in social work practice.

Though this study specifically addresses Dominican-American racial identity, research on the difficulties that come with immigration and experiences of cross-cultural constructions of race have a larger applicability. Experiences of immigration are difficult enough when isolated from other intersecting factors, and only cause further stress when new immigrants must shift their identities to generalizable, panethnic classifications. Clinicians must not only consider what is lost when immigrant's histories and backgrounds are ignored upon assimilation to the United States, but what is further lost when they are forced to adhere to American constructions of race.

Within clinical social work practice in particular, it is important to connect with clients and ask questions regarding client's own racial identities, rather than assuming based upon presentation, immigration status, country of origin, or language of origin. In doing so, clinicians must critically examine their own preconceived notions regarding immigrant communities, and must additionally introspect as to the ways that internalized racism and stereotypes of immigrant communities may be impacting their clinical work. Clinicians must additionally realize that identity is not a static concept, and that a client's racial identity should not be assumed as a fixed point even following immigration to the United States.

It is additionally important to recognize that if a client identifies with a larger panethnic categorization this is not necessarily problematic, in spite of research in the literature that indicates reductive categorizations such as “Latino” or “Hispanic” can be harmful. In clinical work, it is important to recognize the ways in which systems, particularly systems embedded in white supremacy, operate and inform the ways that people of color identify. Furthermore, conversations regarding mixed-race individuals are limited in the United States: our racial discourse is not inclusive of the many gradations of racial identity in the Dominican Republic listed in Table 1. Thus, clients may often opt into the use of identifiers such as “Latino” and “Hispanic.” Rather than seeing this identification as a detriment, clinicians should reflect upon how social work as a field uses panethnic categories in a way that is reductionist rather than supportive.

Lastly, clinicians must differentiate between the use of “Latino,” “Hispanic,” and “Spanish” as synonymous for one another when identifying Latinx populations. This is particularly important for Latinx populations with a Spanish colonization history, because referring to these Latinx populations as “Hispanic” and “Spanish” references Spanish colonial influence. Though clients will vary in the language that they feel comfortable using, as clinicians, it is important to critically examine the implication of language and the words that we utilize in clinical settings with clients.

Critiques of Current Research

Current research within the field of social work does not address feelings of distress, displacement, and anxiety that often result from the cognitive dissonance experienced by clients when faced with cross-cultural constructions of race and race-based discrimination. Few publications similarly address how the reduction of individuals from varying countries and

backgrounds into one singular panethnic categorization can impact one's feelings of belonging and be potentially harmful to one's mental health. Furthermore, the confluences of race and ethnicity in the United States are rarely discussed in social work research. Social work literature is often complicit in using the terms "black" and "African-American" interchangeably, and additionally often discusses white, black, and Latinx populations as three separate entities.

Though it is important to address the above, social work research must also look critically at its authorship. Because the authorship of social work research in the United States is historically and predominately white, it is important to consider social work's roots in the larger white supremacist structure of academia. Thus, social workers must continue to push for the deconstruction of white supremacy within social work research and academia as a whole. Additionally, social workers must reflect critically upon the impact that the centering of white narratives has upon Latinx communities and larger communities of color.

Recommendations for Future Research

In pursuing further research, there are many aspects of this study that can be elaborated upon and addressed. First, it is important for future research to further explore the ways in which the Dominican diaspora in the United States may factor into how Dominicans experience displacement from cross-cultural constructions of race. It is important to contextualize this research in analysis of the ways in which migration may impact participant's experiences: particularly as different locations in the United States have varying diversity and racial discrimination. Though some research has addressed this, few studies examine the impact of cross-cultural constructions of race across varied rural, suburban, and urban locations within the United States. In pursuing this further, it will be additionally important for the sample to be more geographically varied, as all participants in this research study immigrated to the East Coast.

Additionally, several participants in this study addressed their educational backgrounds, but did not elaborate on the ways in which their experiences within higher education informed their racial identity formation. Though participants who had graduate degrees did seem to have a higher consciousness of the systemic impact of white supremacy and the role it plays in American racial discourse, this consciousness was not disproportionate compared to the participants who did not have graduate degrees. Thus, further studies are needed to examine the ways in which education may similarly inform shifts in racial identity across two cultures.

One additional point for expansion would be to examine the ways in which other varying identities and social locations inform participant's experiences. For example, though participants discussed the ways class discrepancies informed racial identity in the Dominican Republic, few participants addressed how their current socioeconomic status informed their racial identity. While some participants spoke about the impact of living in neighborhoods where the majority of the population was of low socioeconomic status, participants did not share about the overall impact of class as it related to their shifts in identity upon immigration to the United States.

Overall, it is important to construct a fuller, more in-depth narrative regarding the ways that intersecting identities inform immigrant's transitions from the Dominican Republic to the United States. This can encompass a variety of intersections, including but not limited to ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. In doing so, future research may address potential limitations of this study.

Conclusion

Though this research produced a variety of informative findings regarding cross-cultural constructions of race and their impact on Dominican-American racial identity, perhaps the most impactful finding was the complete disconnection between all the participants' racial self-

identification and the ways that the larger culture racialized and identified them in the United States. The ways that “Latino” and “Hispanic” are constructed in the United States strip millions of their racial and ethnic identities, and reduces a unique diversity of cultures and backgrounds into a singular, homogenous racial paradigm. This is especially salient within Dominican-American populations: the complex histories of racial tension and anti-black sentiment that inform racial identity development are lost with the ways that Americans often conceptualize a larger Latinx population. Dominican-American experience is often lost in marginalization, oppression, and discrimination of all forms, and the conflation of Dominican-American racial identity into a larger Latinx experience does these populations a disservice.

Thus, it is imperative to continuously reflect on the ways in which our culture—both within research and as a larger American society—perpetuates harmful stereotypes and is dismissive of immigrants’ rich narratives and histories. Latinx racial paradigms in the United States must be deconstructed to begin to understand and address the immense difficulties that can be associated with racial identity and sense of belonging upon immigration to the United States.

References

- The American Prospect. (2015). The Culture of Fear Fueling the Dominican Deportation Crisis.
- Bailey, B. (2001). Dominican-American Ethnic/Racial Identities and United States Social Categories. *International Migration Review*, (3). 677.
- Candelario, G. B. (2007). *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Crassweller, R. D. (1966). Trujillo; The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator. New York: Macmillan, 1966.
- Cobas, J. A., Duany, J., & Feagin, J. R. (2009). *How the United States Racializes Latinos: White Hegemony and its Consequences*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Duany, J. (1998). Reconstructing Racial Identity: Ethnicity, Color, and Class among Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico. *Latin American Perspectives*, (3). 147.
- Itzigsohn, J., & Dore-Cabral, C. (2000). Competing Identities? Race, Ethnicity and Panethnicity among Dominicans in the United States. *Sociological Forum*, (2). 225.
- Mikkelsen, J. M., & Kant, I. (2012). *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Oboler, S. (1995). *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)presentation in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Roorda, E., Derby, L. H., & González, R. (2014). *The Dominican Republic Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- Simmons, K. E. (2011). *Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Torres-Saillant, S. (2000). The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity.

Callaloo, (3). 1086.

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form



2015-2016

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA

.....
Title of Study: Deconstructing Latinx Racial Paradigms: Cross-Cultural Constructions of Race and their Impact on Dominican-American Racial Identity

Investigator(s): Jacqueline Cosse
Smith College School for Social Work
Email: jcosse@smith.edu
Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

.....
Introduction

- You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring Dominican-American Racial Identity for my master's thesis at the Smith College School for Social Work
- You were selected as a possible participant because you were born in the Dominican Republic, lived there for at least 16 years, and have lived in the United States for at least 5 years.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to learn about the potential impact of both Dominican culture and American culture on Dominican-American racial identity.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's degree at the Smith College School for Social Work
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to interview individually with the researcher via phone or Skype for approximately 90 minutes. Upon returning the signed consent form, you will receive a copy of the questions the day prior to your interview (if you have email) or by mail prior to the interview so you are able to ask questions in advance about any of the interview questions. Questions received by mail will be sent out when the researcher receives a signed copy of the consent form.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- This study has little foreseeable risk outside of some emotional discomfort upon discussing identity or past [family and developmental] history. If you would like some support following this interview, two websites have been attached at the bottom of the form to assist you in finding a therapist. Additionally, a phone number is listed to help find community-specific resources that may better fit your needs.
- Additionally, participants are **not** required to have green cards or be legal residents in the United States. The researcher is not interested in residency status and will not ask questions about it.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- Benefits of participating include potential insight into racial identity, as well as culture surrounding race within both the Dominican Republic and the United States.
- Benefits to social work/society are contributing to research on the ways that Latino populations, specifically Dominicans, are racialized. Additionally, participation can contribute to larger conversation within research on how cross-cultural experiences and constructions of race impact Latinx racialization and identification.

Confidentiality

- Your participation will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used at any point during note taking. Your interview will be audio-recorded based on your agreement (you may specify below whether or not you are comfortable with such), and the interviewer will take notes during the interview. This is in hopes of improving accuracy of your narrative upon transcription and will only be used for this research.
- **All interviews and materials will be kept confidential:** only the interviewer and a hired, outside transcriber with no connections to Dominican communities will have access to the interviews/recordings/interview notes. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement to keep materials confidential.
- You will also be asked to complete the interview in a private space: one in which the ability to be overheard is limited. For this reason, and in order to maintain confidentiality through this choice of yours, interviews will be conducted either by phone or via skype (based on your preference).
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* (up to the date noted below) without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to

withdraw by email or phone by May 1st, 2016. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Jacqueline Cosse at jcosse@smith.edu or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. Please retain a copy of this form for your own records. You will also be given a list of referrals and access information if you experience emotional issues related to your participation in this study, which are attached to this form.

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____
Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

1. I agree to be audio taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____
Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____
Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

Additional Referral Sources/Resources:

- Number for referral to community and support resources: 211
 - You may dial 2-1-1 on your telephone and be connected to a statewide or local help referral agency. 211 can also connect you with Spanish-speakers if necessary.
- Private Practice/Therapy Referral Resources:
 - <http://www.helppro.com/>
 - <http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

Appendix B: Human Subjects Review Board Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

February 19, 2016

Jacqueline Cosse

Dear Jackie,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Elizabeth Johnston, Research Advisor

Appendix C: Amendments to HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work

Smith College

Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

March 24, 2016

Jacqueline Cosse

Dear Jackie,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. The amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Liz Johnston, Research Advisor