

Understanding Latino Students' Schooling Experiences: The Relevance of Skin Color Among Mexican and Puerto Rican High School Students

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Background/Context: For the last 40 years, researchers have posited competing theories regarding the relative influence of social class background and racial-group membership on the school experiences, academic performance, behavior, and motivation of ethnic minority students. The general purpose of these competing theories has been to explain why ethnic minority students fail or succeed in schools. Many of these theories consider factors inside the school and the child's family, culture, racial/ethnic group affiliation, and responses to school. These theories are commonly situated into three categories of thought: cultural deprivation, cultural difference/discontinuity, and cultural ecology. Each theory juxtaposes dimensions of race as a significant variable, but each has omitted the meaning of race/ethnicity as internally and externally constructed, particularly among Latino groups.

Focus of Study: The study focused on discerning (1) how the students defined their own racial/ethnic identification and how they perceived that others defined them; (2) how they discussed the opportunities available for the social group with which they identified and the social group with which they believed others situated them; and (3) how the students' academic orientation (which reflected their educational and occupational aspirations, participation in cocurricular activities, and accommodation to schooling norms) related to their experiences of racial and ethnic identification and their perceptions of opportunity.

Population: Interviews were conducted with 17 high school students. The students ranged from Grade 9 to Grade 12. In addition, students identified as Mexican or Puerto Rican.

Research Design: Qualitative interviews were conducted at three data points with

participants. The interview protocol consisted of four main sections: (1) familial, socioeconomic, and migratory background of each student; (2) student's ethnic identification and construction; (3) student's academic orientation (i.e., educational and occupational aspirations, interpretation of school utility, school engagement, school experiences, and academic performance); and (4) students' interpretation of constraint and opportunity.

Conclusions/Recommendations: This study represents an initial foray into a complex conversation on internal and external social identification, racial constructs, and interaction as part of the schooling experience of Latino students. Two significant findings from the larger study are reported in this article. First, the negotiation of identity among these Mexican and Puerto Rican students in predominantly African American schools demonstrates racial/ethnic boundary designations (i.e., who is in and who is out) as structured by skin color. Second, what is meant to be designated as White-looking, Hispanic/Mexican-looking, or Black/biracial-looking maintained differing meaning and latitude in the racial/ethnic boundary options across skin color groups. Both these findings posit further questioning as to what we know about identification among Latino students and, more important, how it gets played out in schools.

Along various indicators of educational success, Latino students are not attaining at levels comparable with White students. More than 50% of fourth-grade Latino students are not proficient in math and reading, and by the time Latino students are 17 years old, many are demonstrating math and reading skills comparable to 13-year-old White students. At best, only 50% of Latino students are graduating from high school, and this graduation outlook is more bleak for Latino males (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2004). Explanations of this educational progress have invariably focused on several factors: school structure (tracking, testing, teacher quality, curriculum, instruction, equitable access, and so on), district/school resources, immigrant status/nativity, language barriers, home-school culture compatibility, teacher expectations, location (urban, suburban, and rural; region of the United States), academic and racial/ethnic identity compatibility, and racial/ethnic identification (Carter & Segura, 1979; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Flores-González, 1999; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu, 1978; Portes & MacLeod, 1996a; Suárez-Orozco, 1991; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Trueba, 1987; Valenzuela, 1999). This research has offered some of the most robust explanations for how these factors interact among Latinos, but few have examined the relevance of skin color variation (e.g., Arce, Murguía, & Frisbie, 1987; Flores-Gonzalez; Gomez, 2000; Murguía & Telles, 1996; Valenzuela)—more specifically, whether skin color plays a role in the educational experiences of Latinos students (i.e., do light- and dark-skinned Latino students experience school in similar ways?) This article outlines findings from a qualitative study of 17 low-

income Mexican and Puerto Rican high school students of different skin colors. The study focused on discerning (1) how the students defined their own racial/ethnic identification and how they perceived that others defined them; (2) how they discussed the opportunities available for the social group with which they identified and the social group with which they believed others situated them; and (3) how the students' academic orientation (which reflected their educational and occupational aspirations, participation in cocurricular activities, and accommodation to schooling norms) related to their experiences of racial and ethnic identification and their perceptions of opportunity. This article focuses on the findings surrounding the interplay of internal and external identification based on their skin color as it relates to their educational experiences.

BACKGROUND

Our changing and pronounced demographic shifts among immigrant Latino groups has become front and center of political and social discourse, but it has not involved a substantive understanding of the complexity among Latino groups—a complexity that goes beyond national differences. According to the 2000 census, over 35 million Latinos live in the United States, including over 900,000 (2.7%) who self-identify as Black Hispanic and 17.6 million (47.9%) as White Hispanic (Logan, 2003). Black Hispanic as an identification is most prominent among Dominicans (12.7%), followed by Puerto Ricans (8.2%), Cubans (4.7%), and Central Americans (4.1%; Logan). On the other hand, White Hispanic identification is most prevalent among Cubans (85.4%), followed by South Americans (61.1%), Mexicans (49.3%), and Puerto Ricans (49%). As far as educational and social outcomes, the educational attainment of Black Hispanics is higher than White Hispanics (a mean 11.7 years vs. 10.5 years), but Black Hispanics have a lower median income, higher unemployment, and higher poverty rates than White Hispanics (Logan). These differences are also noted in studies on skin color and labor market participation (Espino & Franz, 2002), and political activities and attitudes (Hochschild, Weaver, & Burch, 2004). Among Latino children under 18, the majority of White Hispanic children (71%) have two parents who identify as White Hispanic, whereas only 30% of Black Hispanic children have two parents who identify as Black Hispanic (Logan). These differences in identification and correlation to academic and social outcomes raises questions as to what we know regarding Latinos. And, more important, do these differences emerge during, and moderate, the schooling process?

Within education research, explanatory conversations on the educational progress of Latinos have focused on certain dynamics—adaptation/acclimation processes of immigrant generations, economic mobility, language acquisition, and so on. These areas of research have provided a substantive knowledge base surrounding the social and economic conditions within and across Latino groups that are implicated in the variation of educational progress. More important, these cultural ecological discussions have offered some of the most robust theories as to what happens to Latinos within the school context. However, these explanations have not engaged the relevance of skin color among Latinos and whether it moderates schooling experiences.

Educational anthropologist John Ogbu (1978, 1987), in an attempt to address the limitations of previous research on academic variability among ethnic minority youth, offered an exploration that focused on power differentials and how student subjectivity influences academic performance. Ogbu (1987) argued that cultural deprivation and difference models do not account for why some ethnic minority students perform better than other minority and White students. His contention is that ethnic minority students have different histories of entry into, and subjugation within, the United States, which embody specific experiences of racial discrimination and social mobility. These experiences, Ogbu argued, are reflected in the student's subjective interpretations of the relationship between school and social outcomes, which in turn informs the students' accommodation of, or resistance to, school. This argument is referred to as the cultural ecological model (CEM).

According to Ogbu's (1987) CEM, two macro ethnic minority groups are prevalent in the United States: voluntary and involuntary minorities. These categories reflect two migration patterns: voluntary entry into the United States (e.g., immigrants) and involuntary entry (e.g., slaves, U.S. commonwealth countries). According to this model, ethnic minority students' interpretations and responses stem from cultural adaptations that differ between involuntary and voluntary minorities (Ogbu, 1992). The critical differences in cultural adaptations derive from the relationship between White American mainstream, immigrant, and involuntary minority cultures. For immigrants, their interpretations and perceptions of social institutions do not include viewing them as an affront to their racial/ethnic identity, thus translating to immigrant students being able to cross cultural boundaries in school. Involuntary minorities appear to interpret differences with Whites as symbols of group identity and thus construct oppositional identities toward White America. They believe that learning aspects of White American culture and/or behaving like Whites in school is detrimental to their own language, culture, and iden-

tity (Ogbu, 1991). Moreover, they perceive themselves as unable to reap the benefits of academic success comparable with Whites and in turn disengage from school.

Immigration research on Latinos, however, complicates this cultural ecological model by asserting that variations in racial/ethnic identification are related to differences in generation adaptation for Latino/Latina immigrants; this may also explain academic performance (Flores-González, 1999; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Portes & MacLeod, 1996a, 1996b; Rumbaut, 1994; Suárez-Orozco, 1991). In other words, immigrant groups embody variations (e.g., class, race/ethnicity, skin color, language) that interact with structural mechanisms, resulting in different adaptation processes. Among immigration researchers, there are considerably different articulations as to how the adaptation occurs and the factors involved in this process (e.g., Gans, 1979; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Yancey, Ericksen, & Richard, 1976). However, this research discourse has, over time, noted that ethnicity, when controlling for other factors (e.g., socioeconomic status [SES], family background), still maintains an interactive relationship with academic performance (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut). Overall, this conversation outlines these differences in immigrant adaptation as responsive to structural and cultural conditions. However, there has not been a substantive exploration of within-group variation (such as skin color) as a moderating factor in this differential adaptation process.

In sum, CEM and immigration research have provided robust considerations of the adaptation experiences of racial/ethnic minorities and its implications in educational and social outcomes. However, the omission of skin color as a variable in the construction of a racial/ethnic identification exposes a limitation in these adaptation explanations. That is, how does skin color emerge in the construction of racial/ethnic identification? And how does this function within the school environment?

CEM inadvertently characterizes racial/ethnic identification as an “essence” that is reflected in individual and group renderings of opportunity and academic orientation. This assumption defines collective identifications (e.g., Black, African American, White, Hispanic/Latino/Latina, and West Indian) as having some set of core features commonly shared by members and not present in other groups. These features range from experiences of racism and discrimination to similar renderings of slavery, colonization, and cultural artifacts and symbols. In addition, this “essence” invokes an implied biological construct by asserting that in the student’s identification as Black, African American, Latino/Latina, or Hispanic, he or she is read similarly by others. Thus, this assumption of an “essence” implies that individuals and groups con-

struct shared patterns of thoughts and beliefs that define their identification.

Meanwhile, immigration research has interrogated the complexities of racial/ethnic identification—its construction and interaction across and within various social institutions (e.g., schools, labor market, religion)—as significant components of the adaptation process. The examination of immigrants' construction of identity has outlined the social context's notions of race/ethnicity (Gans, 1979; Patterson, 1975; Waters, 1990) and the self-ascription of identity as functioning in the development of identity. There has also been some significant theoretical exploration of identity, particularly among immigrant groups, as involving self-ascription and external ascription. Waters (1994) noted Jamaicans donning a Black American identity in certain contexts, and Portes and MacLeod (1996a) described Latinos vacillating among a Hispanic, Latino, and national identity. However, there has not been substantive attention to the function of skin color in the construction of racial/ethnic identification and its interaction or how it plays out within various social institutions. This omission ignores the potential of skin color variation functioning in the construction of a racial/ethnic identity.

Specifically, what is missing is an empirical exploration of the theoretical construct of identity/identification as involving self-ascription and external ascription, with particular attention to the role of skin color. Nagel and other scholars (Bashi, 1998; Cornell, 1988; Duany, 1998; Portes & MacLeod, 1996a) assert that identity involves agency and mandatory components. In other words, an individual's ethnic identification is constructed by both internal choice and outside agents' perceptions of that identity (Barth, 1969; Nagel, 1994; Saenz & Aguirre, 1991). For instance, identity functions differently among White Americans and Americans of African ancestry; "white Americans have considerable latitude in choosing ethnic identities . . . Americans of African ancestry, on the other hand, are confronted with essentially one ethnic option—Black" (Nagel, p. 156). Such differences in the latitude of ethnic options demonstrates the boundary of identity and the significant role that outside agents play in restricting the available options for identification. However, Nagel's example of Black and White individuals having distinct ethnic options also points to a more fundamental issue of identification as a positioning of difference with implied power relations. Hall and du Gray (1996) argued that identification is "a discursive process of representation" of positions, which includes both the way that individuals are situated into certain positions and the process of individuals investing and/or contesting such positions. That is, identification involves internal

and external simultaneous renderings of “What am I? What am I not? And who makes that decision?” The latter issue of decision making signals the significance of power relations in the boundary making process. As Bashi (1998) wrote,

It matters who does the identifying . . . it makes a difference who is doing the categorical defining, and who is policing the boundaries of these definitions. It comes down to a question of power: who holds it, where the power-holders see themselves and others in the existing hierarchy, where they think they should be in the racial hierarchy (that is, the meaning or racial positioning), and how they use their power to realize those norms. (p. 965)

In such a process of boundary-making, the use of markers as identification represents such power relations. For example, skin color plays the role of a signifier of racial/ethnic identification, but its significance lies in whom and in what context its meaning is being invoked. Numerous studies on Latino/Latina and West Indian groups note that individuals change identification based on the context in which they find themselves (e.g., Martin, DeMaio, & Campanelli, 1990; Massey & Denton, 1992; Padilla, 1985; Patterson, 1975; Rodriguez, 1992; Rodriguez & Cordero-Guzman, 1992; Saenz & Aguirre, 1991). What these studies represent are empirical accounts that skin color and other signifiers (language and culture) are used by ethnic minorities and Whites to position difference and power relations in the process of identification.

In short, this article provides an initial foray into how skin color operates in the schooling process among Latino students. More specifically, the negotiation of racial/ethnic identification differed by skin color type, which signals the schooling experiences of Latino students, is less static than prior research has indicated. Such findings can provide a more robust understanding of how racial/ethnic minority students come to formulate their academic orientation, which informs academic outcomes.

This article explores these issues through a qualitative study of 17 Mexican and Puerto Rican high school students attending predominantly African American schools in Detroit, Michigan. I highlight the nuances that emerged in the negotiation of self-identity and external identification as it was experienced in the school context. The nuances suggest that skin color, as a race/ethnicity marker, moderates how these students experience the schooling process.

METHODS

The study was conducted in 1999–2000 (Fergus, 2002, 2004). A stratified purposeful sample of 26 students in Grades 9–12¹ were recruited from a youth center, *Adelante* (a pseudonym, as are all other names in this article), which is centrally located in a largely Latino/Latina-populated neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Interviews were conducted over the course of 6 months. Interviews were conducted with 26 high school students from the same low-income to low-middle-income² neighborhood who attended three different high schools. The overall study focused on discerning (1) how the students defined their own racial/ethnic identification and how they perceived that others defined them; (2) how they discussed the opportunities available for the social group with which they identified and the social group with which they believed others situated them; and (3) how the students' academic orientation (which reflected their educational aspirations, participation in cocurricular activities, and accommodation to schooling norms) related to their experiences of racial and ethnic identification and their perceptions of opportunity. This article focuses on the findings surrounding the interplay of internal and external identification as it relates to their educational experiences.

As the primary investigator, I recruited Latino students based on my impression of their skin color variation. That is, with the knowledge that they were Latino, I sought to identify students within three general categories of skin color: (1) White or fair skin tone; (2) reddish brown to olive skin tone; and (3) light brown to dark brown skin tone. Such categorization also included noting how I would identify them racially and ethnically and what markers I used to situate the students (i.e., skin color, language, slang). In every instance, I situated them into ethnic and racial categories such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Black/Afro Puerto Rican, or White Mexican/Puerto Rican. However, though I knew that these students were most likely either Mexican or Puerto Rican, in the absence of that information, I still would have categorized them racially and ethnically based on those same markers (i.e., skin color, language, and slang). The assumptions that I made about their identities provided a first indication of how they might have been identified by others. The students discussed in this article reflected the following three phenotype groupings: White-looking, Mexican/Hispanic-looking, and Black/biracial-looking. These groupings represent the categories that the students described others using to racially and ethnically situate them.

Students were interviewed at multiple data points using an open- and close-ended interview protocol. Each interview lasted 1–2 hours. The interview protocol featured structured open-ended questions and close-

ended questions, and a one-page survey. The one-page survey captured students' rankings of various factors related to getting ahead in life (e.g., education, luck, and skin color). The closed-ended questions were followed by open-ended probes so that the participant could qualify and elaborate upon his or her responses. Taken in total, the open-ended and closed-ended questions were designed to capture (1) students' discussion of their ethnic identity, culture, and external perceptions of identity; (2) how students discuss the opportunities available for the social group with which they identify and the social group with which they believe others situate them; and (3) academic orientation, which includes students' educational aspirations, views on school, academic performance, and engagement in school-related activities. These questions were designed for students to respond in their own words and thoughts regarding each question, thus introducing concepts not considered by the researcher (Patton, 1990). Each student was asked the same series of questions to capture the same information across respondents (Patton). Additionally, to increase the internal reliability, more than one question within each section of the interview measure spoke to a specific construct. This tactic enabled the researcher to observe any inconsistencies in responses (Weis, 1994).

The interview protocol consisted of four main sections³: (1) familial, socioeconomic, and migratory background of each student, (2) student's ethnic identification and construction, (3) student's academic orientation (i.e., educational and occupational aspirations, interpretation of school utility, school engagement, school experiences, and academic performance), and (4) students' interpretation of constraint and opportunity. The first section was focused on capturing some of the familial, socioeconomic, and migratory background of each student for contextualizing student responses to the aforementioned issues. The second section explored the student's ethnic identification. This section included questions that allowed students to articulate how they self-identified along ethnic and racial lines and how they perceived that others identified them ethnically and racially (e.g., How do you identify yourself in terms of race or ethnicity? How important is this identity to you? Do your friends identify you in the same way? Do your teachers identify you in the same way?).

The next section of the interview protocol consisted of questions on academic orientation. Academic orientation was gauged by student self-reports of educational and occupational aspirations (e.g., Do you expect to graduate high school? Attend college? What do you want to be when you get older?); perception of the utility of school (e.g., How important is school to your life right now? What are your parent's attitude(s) toward

school?); engagement in school-related activities (e.g., Are you a member of any clubs, teams, or social organizations at school? Have you ever been an office aide or teacher's assistant?); accommodation to school norms (e.g., How often do you go to school? What do you like and dislike about school? Do you participate in classroom discussions? Describe last Tuesday at school, what did you do? Who are your favorite teachers? Who are your least favorite teachers?); opportunity and differential treatment in school (i.e., Is your school divided into groups? Do you think that everyone has the same opportunity to get good grades? Are students with good grades treated better than, the same as, or worse than students with bad grades?); and social group affiliation in school (i.e., Who do you hang out with in school?). Data collection also involved gathering copies of students' most recent report cards. This form of data collection was necessary in verifying the students' self-reported grade point average and types of courses.

The last section of the interview protocol focused on the students' perceptions of opportunity. These questions illuminated students' assessment of whether and how they interpret and explain social equity and inequity, the process of status attainment and mobility, and their perceptions of advantages and disadvantages for the group with which they affiliate and other ethnic groups (e.g., What does it mean to make it in society? What does it take to make it? What type of people make it? Do some groups have better opportunities to make it?). Although these questions signaled students' perceptions of opportunity in society at the macro-level, other questions captured how students made sense of the opportunity made available to them as individuals in school (e.g., Do you see yourself as having more, less, or the same opportunity as other students in your racial/ethnic group?). Some questions additionally explored the opportunity that they felt was available to the social groups with which they identified, and others in the school (e.g., Do the African American and White students have more, fewer, or the same opportunities in school as the Mexican or Puerto Rican students?).

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

The 26 students whom I interviewed are not all discussed in this article or the larger study. In the hope of controlling for immigrant generation, I concentrate on the second and third generation of students, which was the largest group represented. My reasoning is based on immigration research that has established the adaptation process of first-generation immigrants as distinct from that of second and later generations (Portes, 1994; Rumbaut, 1994; Waters, 1990; Zhou, 1997). Such data reduction

resulted in the pool of 17 students who are the focus of this article. Table 1 shows the distribution of students' ethnic identification, gender, and how others racially and ethnically identified them, along with how I racially and ethnically situated these students. From this pool of 17, 3 students defined themselves as Mexican or Chicano, another 3 identified themselves as having multiple ethnic identities that include Mexican, and the remaining 11 students identified themselves as Puerto Rican.

Table 1. Identification of Respondents

	Grade	Gender	Others identify as	Self-identifies as	Investigator's identification	Phenotype grouping
Jeff	10	Male	Arab/Mexican-looking	Mexican	Mexican	Reddish-brown to olive complexion
Tara	11	Female	Mexican/Hispanic-looking	Detroit-Rican & Boricua	Mexican	
Maria	12	Female	Mexican/Hispanic-looking	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rican	
Beverly	10	Female	Mexican/Hispanic-looking	Mexican-Puerto Rican-Italian and Boricua	Mexican	
Alex	10	Male	Black-looking	Puerto Rican	Light-skin Black	Light brown to dark brown complexion
Yami	11	Female	Black and Mexican-looking	Puerto Rican	Dark-skin Mexican	
Samantha	12	Female	Light-skin Black, Arab, Indian/biracial-looking	Detroit-Rican & Puerto Rican	Light-skin Black	
Laura	12	Female	Puerto Rican/Black-looking	Boricua	Puerto Rican	
Liv	11	Female	Puerto Rican/Black-looking	Puerto Rican	Puerto Rican	
Mellie	10	Female	White-looking	Puerto Rican American	Light-skin Puerto Rican	Very fair/ white complexion
Carola	9	Female	Japanese or White-looking	Puerto Rican	White	
John	11	Male	White- and Mexican/White-looking	Mexican American-Italian	White	
Nori	11	Male	White-looking	Puerto Rican	Light-skin Puerto Rican	
Keyla	10	Female	White-looking	Mexican American-German	White	
Paul	12	Male	White-looking	Chicano	White	
Edgard	10	Male	White- and Mexican/White-looking	Mexican	Light-skin Mexican	
Don	11	Male	White- and Mexican/White-looking	Puerto Rican	White	

Although an equal number of Mexican and Puerto Rican students are not represented in this pool, it is not the intention of this study to make comparisons between the two groups. Instead, the recruitment procedure focused on identifying students who ranged in phenotype. The racial/ethnic identifications of the students are, however, related in part to their phenotype and will necessarily be implicated in how Mexican and Puerto Rican students of different phenotypes navigate in and outside the school environment.

The other dynamic that is important to understand is the educational and economic background of the students' parents. The students reside in single- and two-parent households. Single- and two-parent household families are equally represented in this study, 8 and 9 respectively. They are the children of White and blue-collar workers, and their parents range in educational background. More than half (15) of the students' parents (29 total) are college and high school graduates, and the remain-

ing parents (14) have some high school or middle/elementary school education.

The mean parental education level is 10th grade, and 41% of parents in the households represented did not complete high school. Such a percentage parallels national figures in which 44% of Latinos/Latinas 25 or older have not completed high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The majority of the parents are blue-collar workers and, according to the students, work long shifts. Several students reported parents having to leave a job because of health conditions that emerged at the job site. For example, Tara's mother quit her job at the laundromat because she began to have problems with circulation in her hands, and John's mother has been disabled since 1993 because of an accident at the factory in which she used to work. Other parents work in the service and labor industry, and a small number hold white-collar jobs that range in status, such as teaching aide, social worker, and administrative assistant.

As stated previously, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have had a presence in Detroit since the beginning of the 20th century. Although various generations of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans live in Detroit, the majority of the students represented in this article are either second-¹ or third-generation immigrants. Many of the third-generation Puerto Rican students and/or their parents were born in East Coast cities, such as Reading, Pennsylvania, Trenton, New Jersey, and the Bronx, New York. Some of the students born in Puerto Rico did not come directly from the island; several came via the Virgin Islands, New York City, and New Jersey, and another from Chicago. The second- and third-generation Mexican students were either born in Detroit, California, or Houston, Texas. This sample of students does not include students born in Mexico, but several students discussed that they had lived in Mexico for extended periods (i.e., 1–6 years).

In sum, the sample of students in this article represents a range in phenotype, gender, grade, and immigrant generation. In addition, the students' distinct histories of migration and parents' educational and economic background allow us to focus on phenotype as operating in their lived experience as we hold these other factors constant.

DATA REDUCTION AND ANALYSIS

The data for this study were reduced through various levels of analysis. First, the data were coded in accordance with coding categories reflecting a priori "concepts" that were articulated in the framing and design of the study. These categories framed the interview protocol. The following coding categories signal those concepts: ethnic identification; external

perceptions of identity; whether and how students interpret and explain social inequity; interpretations of how one "makes it"; perceptions of equality in society; perceptions of self-opportunity, ethnic group opportunity, and other ethnic groups' opportunity; educational aspirations and expectations; engagement in school-related activities; accommodation to schooling norms; perception of racialization within school; gender; and immigrant generation.

These categories were used to conduct deductive analysis within a data matrix that allowed for within-case and across-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The initial deductive analysis was conducted by categorizing the data by student and examining the data from that vantage point. Within this first level of deductive analysis, the students responses were organized by the above-named categories; as such, this first level of analysis involved determining themes within and across each category and cases of students. The next level of analysis involved examining along the phenotype groups that the students perceived that others situated them into (i.e., White-looking, Mexican/Hispanic-looking, and Black/biracial-looking). In addition, within each phenotype grouping, I further divided the students by gender and immigrant generation. Within-case analyses were conducted to determine themes and to compare the responses of students of similar phenotype. In addition, across-case analyses were conducted to determine themes and compare responses of one phenotype grouping with another.

The inductive analysis process followed a similar pattern of examining the data, but the categories in this part of the process came from the data. This inductive data matrix was divided by individual cases of students and phenotype groupings to reexamine the data based on these new additional categories and themes that were not considered before. In order to understand whether these additional categories and themes were specific to an individual student or a phenotype, or occurred across students or phenotype groupings, I analyzed these new categories within-cases and across-cases. The final stage of analysis involved determining whether relationships (i.e., patterns) existed between categories, which further enhanced the interpretation of data. Toward this end, I relied on a matrix of all categories to determine whether relationships emerged between categories, and I began clustering these relationships as conceptually related categories or themes across individual cases of students and along phenotype lines (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The development of such a matrix became important in understanding how skin color moderated perceptions of opportunity and academic orientation. More important, this matrix was used to determine whether such conceptually clustered categories were patterned along skin color lines, gender, and

immigrant generation. Overall, this iterative process allowed for the verification of analysis categories, which enhanced the validity and reliability of data interpretation. In addition, with the intent of validating the analysis, the lead researcher involved another doctoral student who assisted in the verification of codes and interpretation with several student transcripts. The three interviews (or data points) conducted with the students allowed for the posing of follow-up questions that helped to verify whether the responses provided during prior interviews were being correctly interpreted (e.g., At our last meeting, you said that being Puerto Rican was very important only certain times, what did you mean by that?).

As an example, Table 2 provides the responses of two students to the self-identification questions and the within- and across-case deductive analysis. The first level of deductive analysis involved within-case analysis of Maria's responses to questions about self-identification. Maria's discussion about her self-identification as Puerto Rican demonstrated her connection to an ancestral past and a recognition of knowing when to be Puerto Rican. The across-case analysis demonstrated that students, like Maria and Paul, provided varying self-identifications and definitions (e.g., Mexican American, Detroit-Rican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Chicano, and Boricua). As a result of this deductive analysis, a new temporary category, identities, emerged from the data. This new category became the basis for the inductive process of reexamining the data with the identifications to ascertain whether they were specific to students, what the identifications meant, and what the identifications signaled about how the students defined themselves.

By reexamining the self-identification conversation via the identities they selected, a particular pattern emerged specific to these identifications that, after member checks with each student, I collapsed into three typologies of identification: (1) hyphenated identification, (2) ancestral/national identification, and (3) cultural identification. A hyphenated identification was a means of "representing" the multiple locales that comprise who the students considered themselves to be.⁵ Ancestral/national identification reflected a birth in Mexico or Puerto Rico, or ancestral ties to Mexico or Puerto Rico, which is what Maria represented in Table 2. Maria's reference to her culture noted ancestry: African, Spaniard, Taino Indian, and skin color. Both terms are connected because what is implicit in the students' definition involved a direct connection to Mexico or Puerto Rico, either through family or actual birth in the country. Cultural identification reflected the students' actual use of the term *culture* in defining who they are and involved a political perspective; Paul's defining of his Chicano identity represented

Table 2. Sample Deductive Analysis

Select Self-Identification questions	Student 1	Student 2
Q1: How would you describe yourself in terms of race or ethnicity?	<p>Maria: Yeah, I'm Puerto Rican. <i>Interviewer:</i> do you ever describe yourself as Hispanic or Latina? Maria: Yeah, I'm Puerto Rican Latina . . . Puerto Rican that just means you're from Puerto Rico, Boricua that means that you know more about your background, Nuyorican that means you're a Puerto Rican born in NYC.</p>	<p>Paul: Well, I describe myself as Chicano. I'm Mexican American, Chicano, I go with any one of them 'cause I'm 100% Mexican blooded but yet I was born in the United States. Like I was born in California. So I'm not from there, I'm an American citizen, I'm from here but I am full-blooded Mexican. I grew with the identity like here what shaped my identity was this culture, not Mexican, I mean my Mexican tradition and culture through my parents, but not like the outside world.</p>
Q3: Would you say that being Puerto Rican or Mexican is important to you?	<p>Maria: Yeah. <i>Interviewer:</i> why? Maria: Because being Puerto Rican, that means I was not born on American soil but I'm an American citizen and yet I still have culture. I see the side of two worlds.</p>	<p>Paul: Yeah I think it's really important to me. Like the way I have grown up and like the way I understand things from Chicano point of view has helped me greatly in terms of family, in terms of education, in terms of chance that I get. There is just a million things that it helps you. I know about certain things that other Latinos wouldn't know about and lot more than a person who is not Mexican. I think being Chicano is a big part of who I am and what I learn every day because I take things from my point of view. Like family structure, religion is important to me and like the way I have relationships with other people, I take them seriously. Basically my life structure surrounds being Chicano. The culture, the Mexican culture.</p>
Within-case analysis	Puerto Rican identification is bound to birth in Puerto Rico.	Chicano identification is bound to a point of view and culture
Across-case analysis	Level 1 analysis: Identification and meaning attached to the identification Level 2 analysis: Demographics of students (e.g., generation, gender, skin color)	

this type of identification. Even though the students may have articulated the meaning that they attach to the term they use most often, these typologies were not mutually exclusive. Some students used two different typologies to describe themselves, thus implying that the students maintained multiple points of reference regarding their identification. As apparent in Maria's and Paul's responses, they used various identifications interchangeably. These typologies, as new categories not previously

considered in the framing of the study, emerged in the conceptually clustered matrix as closely related to the students' immigrant generation. This analysis process allowed for the interpretation of the three typologies as representative of the type of generational acculturation and adaptation that the students made of their U.S. context and cultural connection to a Mexican or Puerto Rican identification; this finding is similar to previous immigration research outlining that with each passing generation, immigrants develop new identities that reflect their shifting orientation (e.g., Portes, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995).

This example represents how the new categories were checked prior to construction of the final conceptually clustered matrix that guided the interpretation of how multiple factors operate and, most important, how skin color moderated schooling experiences. The final categories that emerged from the deductive and inductive process are gender; generation; three typologies of identification; notions of culture; phenotype grouping; treatment by other students; treatment by teachers/administration; aspirations; academic performance; utility of schooling; experiences of discrimination; and perceptions of "making it."

Overall, by conducting these various forms of deductive and inductive analysis along with member checks with the students and verifying codes with another researcher, I was able to compare and contrast the differences in how students of similar and differing phenotype discuss their ethnic identification, external interpretation of identity, perceptions of opportunity, and academic orientation. Moreover, the intent of this coding and analysis was to allow the data to speak for themselves and perhaps illustrate categories and relationships not previously considered. Analytical memos were also used throughout the coding and analysis process to reinspect the data, modify predetermined codes, and construct new codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Thus, the result of these coding patterns was to encourage deductive and inductive coding and interpretation throughout the analysis.

CITY AND COMMUNITY SETTING

The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000) regards Detroit as the largest Black city in the nation. According to 2000 census data, African Americans constitute 81.6% of the 951,270 people living in Detroit. The next largest groups are Whites (12.3%), followed by Hispanics/Latino/as (5.0%). However, similar to national figures, Latinos/Latinas are the fastest growing population in Detroit (Cardenas, 2000). The 1990 census calculated the Latino/Latina population in Detroit at 28,500, and a decade later,

the census captured the population at 47,167, a 60% increase. Of that population, 62% are Mexican, 10% are Puerto Rican, 3% are Cuban, and 15% are from various Central and South American countries (Census, 2000). As Table 3 illustrates, the Latino/Latina population in Detroit is comparable with national population counts.

Table 3. Percentage of National and Detroit Latino/Latina Groups

National Groups	Percentage	Detroit Groups	Percentage
Mexicans	65%	Mexicans	62%
Puerto Ricans	10%	Puerto Ricans	10%
Cubans	4%	Cubans	3%
Central and South American	14%	Central and South American	15%
Other	7%		

From United States Bureau of the Census, U.S. and Detroit Census Data 1999.

The various Latino/Latina groups that populate Detroit have unique migration patterns that provide further understanding of the context. Between 1990 and 2000, many of the newly arrived Mexicans living in Detroit came from the cities of San Ignacio, Jesus Maria, and Arandas, which are in the middle of Mexico, east of Guadalajara and north of Mexico City (Cardenas, 2000). However Latino/Latina groups have been a part of the Detroit landscape since the beginning of the 20th century. From 1900 to 1930, Detroit experienced a large influx of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central and South Americans. Many came because of the growing industries in Detroit (sugar beet and automobile), the decent wages, and the lower cost of living compared with Chicago, Florida, and California. Each group, specifically Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, migrated to Detroit.

Although Mexicans have generally been the largest population of Latinos/Latinas, during the 1930s, the United States repatriation program deported an estimated 12,500 of the 15,000 Mexicans living in Detroit. It was not until World War II that a second wave of immigrants arrived from Mexico looking for work in agriculture fields and on assembly lines. This wave was considered part of the *Braceros* program that focused on using immigrant labor to fill labor positions left by Americans who went to fight in WWII (Cardenas, 2000).

During the 1950s, a second wave of Puerto Ricans migrated to Michigan. This wave of Puerto Ricans was responding to the employment conditions on the island; the United States, via Operation Bootstrap, had changed the physical landscape and industry of Puerto Rico by encouraging the opening of U.S. factories on the island. Within a 10-year span (1945–1955), Puerto Rico's urban population increased from 40% to

70%. Unfortunately, the operation did nothing to diminish the rising unemployment rates. Consequently, Puerto Ricans living in rural areas migrated to cities like Springfield, Massachusetts, Camden and Trenton, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, to follow employment opportunities that could be found in these cities (Nieto, 1998). These groups not only have been a part of the labor industry in Detroit, but they have also infused Mexican and Puerto Rican culture into their surrounding community. The community that encompasses these two groups maintains cultural festivals, such as Cinco de Mayo, Diego Rivera murals, the "Africa in Mexico" exhibit, and open fruit markets that are representative of Mexican culture; however, the festivals showcase the larger Latino/Latina presence in Detroit.

Adelante is a community-based organization that provides various health, legal, and educational services to community members in the neighborhood and served as the interview site. Adelante's clientele are from various Latino/Latina groups (e.g., Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans), are predominantly low income, and vary in their immigrant status. Adelante maintains a youth center that provides counseling, after-school tutoring, GED classes, mid-night basketball, and other activities for adults, dropouts, and middle and high school students. Over the course of a year, the center services an average of 400–500 youth and adults through their formal GED, computer, and ESL classes, guidance counseling, and unstructured drop-in tutorial, computer, and open-basketball sessions.

Aside from attending Adelante after school, the students in this study attended three different high schools: Crestwood, Westwood, and Smith. Each school maintained similar ethnic group composition, although it differed slightly at each school. Crestwood and Smith are primarily populated by African Americans, 95% and 55%, respectively. Westwood, however, has a mainly Latino/Latina student body (58%). Such numbers contradict Westwood students' impression that African Americans represent the predominant ethnic category. The students' perception may be due to the high percentage of African American faculty and staff who work at each school: 75% at Crestwood, 55% at Westwood, and 61% at Smith.

In sum, these community and school data establish and contextualize the migration history and ethnic demographics of the community and schooling environments that these students must navigate. More important, it situates that the schooling experiences of these students occurred in schools with primarily African American and Latino students; as such, the proceeding discussion highlights differences in racial and ethnic experiences surrounding skin color as moderating schooling experience.

FINDINGS

Numerous social theorists highlight that within racial/ethnic identification, self-identification represents one component of the process; external constructs of race and ethnicity, whether individual or nation-state policies (e.g., U.S. Bureau of Census classifications), are also involved in the process (Bashi, 1998; Calhoun, 1995; Cornell, 1996, 1998; Nagel, 1986, 1994; Oboler, 1991; Omi & Winant, 1994; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Meanwhile, education researchers note race and identification as significant factors in the schooling experiences of racial/ethnic minority students (e.g., Davidson, 1996, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Mickelson, 1990; O'Connor, 1999, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). What emerges from the students in this study presents some compelling notions of what happens when identification as an internal and external construct emerges within the school context. I focus on two significant findings: (1) the manner in which these Latino/Latina students of different skin color are racialized by others in school, and (2) the ways in which this racialization appears in their descriptions of discrimination.

RACE AND SKIN COLOR: CONSTRUCTING DIFFERENT IDENTIFICATIONS

The resounding story emerging from the racial/ethnic identity conversation with these students was the interplay between how they identified themselves and how they perceived that others situated their racial/ethnic identity. This interaction surrounded how skin color was used as a signifier, the ways in which the students responded, and the latitude available in opting in and out of racial/ethnic identification.

When asked whether others, including their peers and teachers, viewed them in the same way that they saw themselves, many of these students highlighted a mismatch. For instance, Alex, a second-generation Puerto Rican 10th grader, typified the kind of negotiations that these students endured; he was phenotypically dark skin, and when I asked whether others viewed him as Puerto Rican, Alex stated, "They mostly see me as Black. Some Blacks have my skin color, so they get confused." When asked about how they identified themselves, what that meant to them, and whether others viewed them similarly or differently, for many of these students, like Alex, their self-identifications of race/ethnicity were not absent of how they perceived others situating their identity. For instance Samantha, a second-generation Puerto Rican in the 12th grade, invoked a consciousness of how she was perceived by others in describing her racial/ethnic identification:

I guess I'm Puerto Rican, but Puerto Ricans to me are mutts. There is no such thing as 100% Puerto Rican. Some have more than others, like my family has a lot of African, Indian, we got Taino Indian, we got a little European, we got French and we got Spaniard. It depends because my father looks Arab, but my mother looks Black, so it's a mixture. And my sister looks White . . . When somebody asks me I tell them yeah I'm Puerto Rican, but when they see me, they say I can pass as anything. So some people think I'm a light-skin Black girl or I'm Indian or Arab or something Mexican. It don't bother though but I just tell them where I'm from.

Through the course of the various interviews, three categories of external classification emerged: White-looking, Mexican/Hispanic-looking, and Black/biracial-looking. The following are the three categories and general physical descriptions of students:

- *White-looking*: This grouping includes students who were identified as White or half White and half Hispanic. They generally have dark brown hair with green or brown eyes and white skin color.
- *Mexican/Hispanic-looking*: This grouping includes students who were simultaneously identified as Arab or Indian and Mexican/Hispanic. They generally have dark hair, brown eyes, and an olive to reddish brown skin color.
- *Black/biracial-looking*: This grouping includes students who were identified as Black, or perceived as biracial or having "some Black in them" (i.e., Black and White, Black and Hispanic, Black and Filipino). These students had what I consider a trigueño skin color, which ranges from olive to a brown skin color, along with brown eyes and curly black or brown hair.⁶

These categories operated across both the Mexican and Puerto Rican students, and within their own identification of themselves. The various students used self-identification terms that are commonly used among Latinos. For instance, some students used a cultural identification such as Chicano or Boricua to reflect a cultural identification, whereas others used an ancestral/national identification such as Mexican or Puerto Rican to signal a direct lineage or place of birth as defining their identification. Still others used a hyphenated-based identification such as Mexican-American or Detroit-Rican, which outlined the boundary as a connection of different cultural/national locales. Although a clear assertion of self-identification was apparent, what emerged in much of

their discussion was their struggle with *how* their external identification was being framed by skin color.

The students talked about the use of skin color as a signifier of a type of racial affiliation and/or congruence. A racial affiliation involved an external interpretation of behaviors consistent with a White, Black, or Hispanic/Mexican group affiliation. This was represented by various students discussing being racially affiliated with Blacks or Whites because they exhibited Black or White behaviors (e.g., talking slang or academically oriented). Although a racial congruence meant that a student merely looked White, Black, or Hispanic/Mexican, it did not necessarily signal an actual affiliation. Of course, the articulation of these differences can be hypothesized to exist in such school environments because of the opportunity to exhibit an affiliation to Blacks. With that said, these two notions are not intended to be mutually exclusive, but there was a qualitative difference in how these students discussed the construction of their White-looking, Hispanic/Mexican-looking, and Black/biracial-looking versus their self-identification. The following illustrates such operation along these phenotype groups.

White-looking and Latino

The White-looking students described being positioned according to their skin color and behavior. This meant that they were situated into a White-looking identification either through a congruence or affiliation with Whites. Being affiliated with, or having features that were congruent with that of, Whites placed these students in situations in which they were either treated as White or at times made to feel as if they did not readily belong to a Mexican or Puerto Rican community. John, an 11th grader and “proud Mexican,” experienced some of this racial/ethnic displacement because of his light skin color: “Some of them make cracks. Some of them say Italian boy, White boy, Bagel boy. And once I just go ballistic about that. I know you’d go ballistic if they called you . . . you know.” John’s connection of his displacement to the researcher’s racialization⁷ implied such actions as offensive. Further, such experiences of displacement can also involve having racial/ethnic identification called into question, as in the case of Paul, a 12th grader and adamant Chicano.

INTERVIEWER: Has someone ever assumed you were part of another ethnic or racial group?

PAUL: Yeah, I’ve always been confused as a White kid because I have a real light complexion and my eyes are light. Most

Mexicans are darker than me cause they tan or that they are just naturally darker. You know I'm really light-skinned so and of course my eyes are blue. I mean I walk up to Mexican girls and they automatically think that I am White. Well here's an example, like last month I walked into a Chicano studies program and it was high school night and people go there to hear people talk about college, and I enter the room and right away people are like what are you, what are you doing. They didn't think I was part of the group. I always get from everybody that I am White, you know I get that until they hear me talk or they hear my name. Yeah so I get that a lot.

Although some of this displacement continually occurred, some students discussed these external interpretations as not bothering them, but it was readily apparent that they were aware of them. As Mellie, a Puerto Rican, described, "No, they consider me as a White girl . . . Yeah, cause I'm White. . . . Sometimes I'll be like 'I'm Puerto Rican' and they're like, 'Yeah whatever, you're American,' but that doesn't bother me. As long as I know that I'm Puerto Rican, that doesn't matter."

Some of the students also talked about how the displacement as White also meant that they were not discriminated against in and out school. This is a relevant point because a reoccurring narrative among the students was the differential treatment against Mexican and Puerto Rican students by African American teachers and students. For instance, Paul acknowledged that although he recognized discrimination occurring in his school, it did not impact him.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that [discrimination] impacts how people interact with you?

PAUL: I would say for the most part, my case, not really. They would, just because I'm the type of person who would go up to someone and just like start . . . I'm not the type of person that fits that stereotype. I don't go out of my way to avoid it but I just don't fit it. When people see me right away they don't think I'm Mexican, they think I'm White. They're more open with me, like if I were to conversate with a White person right now, I wasn't to say my name and they would start talking to me about Mexican culture. Yeah, the stereotype doesn't come to me, maybe if I was a dark-skin Mexican that most Mexicans are then people would be scared of me or think of me as a criminal.

And yet other students, like Carola, a ninth grader, were aware of the discrimination and its operation but unsure as to its realness:

A lot of people say that our teachers and principal are prejudice, um I don't think that but a lot of people say that they think that when a group of Hispanics, a group of Whites and a group of African American are outside, she'll go and yell at the Whites and Hispanics but the African Americans, she will just smile at them and go back in. Or when you go to give her a message from a teacher, she'll say go away, but when you look in the room she's in the room with an African American. So a lot of people say she is prejudice, I can't really tell you if she is or not.

Other students recounted more verbal encounters with other students. John said,

I was gonna pledge for a team, and they were like, get out of here, you spic. We don't want you, spic. I'm like, screw you. I don't know who the heck you think you are. I'll just drag your skanky butts to the corner. I'll take them to the smack-down hotel.

To offset their light skin color and to negotiate their identification, some of these students discussed performing a Mexican or Puerto Rican identification. These performances represented the students' way of exhibiting some degree of power in the racializing process. For instance, Carola, a second-generation Puerto Rican, was identified as Puerto Rican because of the bomber jacket she wore all the time, which said "Boricua" with the Puerto Rican flag below it. The jacket appeared to hang off her frame, but it was something she liked wearing all the time. This was Carola's indirect way of ensuring that she was not identified as "White, Japanese or some type of Latin, maybe Spanish." Carola described herself as the type of individual who does not profess her identification to everyone. As she stated, "[I'm] a shy person, I get along with basically everyone." However, the jacket allowed her to perform her Puerto Rican identification to others or, as she rationalized, to "represent" her identification. Nori, an 11th grader who self-identifies as Puerto Rican, talked about sometimes donning contact lenses that resulted in him being identified as White:

NORI: Yeah, when I had gray contacts, lot of people thought I was a White boy.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you have gray contacts?

NORI: I just wanted to see how they looked.

INTERVIEWER: Do others see you as Puerto Rican?

NORI: No, not really, because I don't look like regular Puerto Ricans . . . my skin color is not too dark.

This self-positioning did not always supersede the external interpretations made of their skin color. Thus, what emerged was a story of racializing that involved others positioning these students as either affiliated with or congruent with Whites, and these White-looking students challenging such racializing by positioning themselves into a Mexican or Puerto Rican category through artifacts and cultural events.

Another construct that emerged for one White-looking student was the option or latitude of when to use a White versus a Mexican or Puerto Rican identification. Paul, a second-generation or 1.5-generation student from Mexico, identified himself as Chicano. Although Paul described being centered in his Chicano identity, he also described having to negotiate this identity because of his White skin color, brown hair, and light-colored eyes. However, Paul also noted opportunities for which he could invoke his white skin color.

INTERVIEWER: Have there been times when being Chicano has been more or less important to you?

PAUL: Oh yeah, when I was in middle school, me and my sister we were the only Latinos in the whole school. You know, all my friends were White just because I assimilated myself with White folks because I had just moved out of my neighborhood and into a White neighborhood. You know I wanted to be like them. I started to lose my Spanish. I started to not like my name I wanted to change it. I really wanted to change my name, I just didn't want to be Mexican. You know, so my middle school years I really had a hard time because I wanted to assimilate my whole life to like White culture. But then as soon as I hit high school, that changed cause there were so many Latinos, and so then I wanted to be more Chicano than ever. I lost my self-identity during my middle school.

Although this was a challenging experience, Paul's narrative and

those of other White-looking students also point to a gain and loss dynamism to the boundary designation of identification. Identification, as Hall and du Gray (1996) argued, is a process that involves a gain and a loss in which the individual and external forces make decisions about who can own an identification and how that is done. What underscores this dynamic is the latitude available in identities that can be gained or lost. That is, for a student like Paul, having light skin color and identifying as Chicano are not mutually exclusive constructs within the U.S. context. Paul was able to be White and possibly be accepted as a White person because of his skin color, but he could also acquire a Chicano identification because having White skin color and a Latino/Latina identification does not require hyphenation, unlike those who are Afro-Latino or Black Latino (Rodriguez, 2000). However, for a dark-skin Chicano, such latitude in identification does not readily exist; White is not an available identity. As such, there is a certain degree of power implicit in being able to gain or lose one's identification with or without challenge from outsiders (Bashi, 1998) and to identify as White. Furthermore, the option of selecting a White identification also affords economic and social mobility that differs from a Black and Latino identification (Nagel, 1994). Thus, the White-looking students, as Paul's narrative above indicates, retain flexibility in their identification process that could allow for increased social mobility. More important, the discussion of identification among these White-looking students illustrates the dimensions of racial/ethnic identification involved in having White skin color and identifying as Mexican and/or Puerto Rican in the school context.

Mexican/Hispanic-looking, Black/biracial-looking, and Latino

Skin color as a signifier of racial/ethnic identification operated slightly differently for the Mexican/Hispanic-looking and Black/biracial-looking students. The Mexican/Hispanic-looking students were situated as racially affiliated with Mexicans and as part of a collective Hispanic group which, according to the students, was code for Mexican. As Tara, an 11th grader and self-defined Boricua, described, her affiliation as Mexican/Hispanic-looking was driven by who she hung out with.

It's because sometimes they confuse me, sometimes if I'm Mexican, because you know I'm always with either the Mexicans

or Puerto Ricans, como conzco mucho [because I know so many] I be hanging with these or hanging with these and sometimes when I'm with the Mexican, they always say are you Mexican y yo digo que no [I say no], I'm Puerto Rican.

For a student like Beverly, who identified herself as a Mexican-Puerto Rican/Boricua-Italian, being identified as a collective Hispanic or solely Mexican did not recognize all her identifications. However, it was difficult for someone like Beverly, whose straight black hair and olive skin color were often viewed as signifiers of a Mexican identification.⁸

INTERVIEWER: You indicated that you see yourself as Mexican and Puerto Rican, do your teachers see you in this way or do they see you differently?

BEVERLY: No, I think most of them see me as Mexican.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think they see you as Mexican and not Mexican and Puerto Rican?

BEVERLY: I think because of my features, they are not as strongly, I guess they are more strongly Mexican than Puerto Rican. And since I live with my mom and they see mom, and my mom is Mexican. They see me with her and see me as Mexican. They don't categorize me as Mexican and Puerto Rican.

INTERVIEWER: Do you find that pretty hard, them thinking of you as just Mexican and not both?

BEVERLY: Their opinion to me does not really matter, but if its going to interfere with what they are going to teach me, we're going to have a situation.

Such discussions articulated some of the dynamic specific to these students, which is that "Mexican" has a particular look. This appearance means that according to others, looking Mexican signals that you are Hispanic, which also means treated as Mexican. This treatment as "Mexican" at times meant not only being homogenized but also, according to Maria, a Puerto Rican, involving presumed behaviors.

MARIA: The majority of my teachers, they be like okay, you are Hispanic, so you're Spanish or Mexican, they always think I'm

Mexican because all there is around here is Mexican.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about that?

MARIA: As long as they know that I am Hispanic I don't have no problem, but when they start just cause they see my appearance they be like oh you're Mexican, no. . . . You know, like Black people do it to, they see a Hispanic person, oh you're Mexican, that's first thing like they ask, can you speak Mexican. I be like what?

INTERVIEWER: Speak Mexican?

MARIA: Yeah that cracks me up. I just come back with, oh yeah well do you speak Jamaican?

The Black/biracial-looking students experienced a similar kind of racializing. These students tended to be Puerto Rican. Thus, it was plausible for these students to stretch their Puerto Rican identification to include Black because, as many of them stated, part of Puerto Rico's cultural history includes a significant African presence. The positioning as Black/biracial looking in predominantly African American high schools occurred because according to these students, they either donned a "Black" persona or were perceived as having a Black persona. Laura, a 12th grader who self-identifies as Boricua, exemplifies how this affiliation operates: "Yeah. People always ask me if I have Black in me and stuff, or, if I'm White and Mexican and stuff. I'm like, nah, I'm Puerto Rican, you know. They think, cause the way I look, and act and talk that I'm a different race. But I'm not." This impression of a Black persona may have solidified their affiliation with Blacks. However, as will be discussed later, it did not always translate into favorable treatment in predominantly African American high schools.

With Alex, a dark brown 10th-grade student with hazel eyes, skin color was not the only signifier used to identify him as Black; he also participated in this identification by talking like African Americans: "Its just when I am around full-blown Blacks, I start talking like them." Alex could not explain why he tended to talk like "full-blown Blacks," but such behavior suggests that on some level, Alex tried to develop what he perceived to be a Black identification. In addition, his reference to African Americans as "full-blown Blacks" simultaneously suggests that he views himself as distinct from African Americans but interprets himself as Black (i.e., views himself as less than full-blown Black). It is such an interpretation that implies that a connection may exist between self-identification

and external identification. That is, Alex's definition of his identification as connected to an ancestral history (i.e., Taino Indian and African) suggests that the content of his self-identification parallels the external factors that others use to identify him. This, of course, begs the question, are these students' self-identification a response to how they experience others using skin color as a racial/ethnic identifier? It is difficult to predict any type of causality with identification, but in the case of the Mexican/Hispanic-looking and Black/biracial-looking students, there appears to be consistency in the content of their self-identification and the relevance of external factors in how others situate them racially/ethnically.

This situating as Mexican/Hispanic-looking and Black/biracial-looking also involved experiences of discrimination that differed from the White-looking students. Some of the discrimination the students described they perceived as part of their daily routine in school. For instance, Beverly discussed how stereotypes manifested themselves in the classroom and impacted academic performance. Beverly, a 10th grader, had only been at Westwood for a year and several months but described numerous encounters with teachers that she perceived as minimizing her opportunity. Given such encounters and resulting limited opportunity, it did not necessarily have an impact on her 3.8 GPA, but more on how she views her engagement in school.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been discriminated against?

BEVERLY: I feel as if I am discriminated against in school. It's mostly an African American population, and I was in student government last year and this year also, and it seems as if to me, I wouldn't get notification of meetings if I didn't go up to the teacher or the person advisor and ask for it. If I wasn't right behind her, it's like I wasn't even there, it's always the Black kids, the Black kids this, the Black kids that. So I had to stay on top it, but there was this, it wasn't against me but it was a comment that was worded very ugly and it was taken as racist. In my algebra class, my teacher was absent and the department head was filling in. She was so happy, she's an African American woman, and she was so happy that she had just hired a teacher, and this one girl asked her is she Black, and she said of course.

INTERVIEWER: What did you get from that?

BEVERLY: There is only two Hispanic kids in my first hour in my

algebra class, and we just looked at each other and we knew that was not right. She standing right in front of me, and she says of course she's Black, like of course the person has to be Black. Like there is no other way to go.

Beverly's argument that the interests of the chair of the department did not coincide with her desire for a Latino teacher highlights some of the ways that Latino students were not having their needs met. Further, the teacher's comfort in proclaiming "of course it's a Black teacher" further demonstrated to Beverly that her needs were invisible within this context. Other students, like Yami, a Puerto Rican female in the 11th grade, also noted the preferential treatment of Black students:

Sometimes some teachers are racist or whatever. It depends if they're Black and they see a White person, they'll go off on them or whatever, and if they see a Black person doing the same thing, they won't say nothing. So a lot of people feel offended. To me I don't care.

The Black/biracial-looking students also reported experiencing discrimination. However, they additionally reported experiencing a dual life of discrimination and social acceptance. That is, although they perceived themselves as being discriminated against, they also recognized that African American students treated them as part of their ethnic minority community. It was not an acceptance resulting in better treatment in the classroom, but it suggested the possibility that these students had better social relations with African American students than did other Mexican and Puerto Rican students who did not look like they had "Black in them." However, this acceptance did not absolve these students of discrimination. Liv reported that her African American peers made stereotyping comments about Puerto Ricans that sometimes referenced her.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever been discriminated against?

LIV: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of things have happened to you?

LIV: Whites or somebody that's not Puerto Rican, they be like, "oh that Puerto Rican girl you know, they are lazy." Or they be like, you're Puerto Rican right? They always talk bad about Puerto Ricans.

INTERVIEWER: How do they talk bad about Puerto Ricans?

LIV: Like, they talk about people like people being rude, they be like “oh Puerto Ricans are always rude and they always loud,” they always stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think people judge you based on skin color?

LIV: Yeah.

Interviewer: In what way do you think they judge you?

LIV: They always like, oh there goes that loud girl. Because me being Puerto Rican, not because I’m Puerto Rican, but I just don’t take nothing from nobody. If they got to say something, say it my face, if I got to say something, I’ll say it flat out. I don’t like people talking behind my back. So they do . . . they be like “oh yeah . . . there goes that blonde they call me blunt girl. They say I say things flat out. I don’t care if they are bigger than me and they’ll beat me up.

Overall, neither category allowed for the students to be solely Mexican or Puerto Rican. Even though these students were not seemingly frustrated that they were situated as Hispanic or Black, they ultimately wanted to be seen as belonging to their Mexican or Puerto Rican community. Many of the students incorporated these labels into their repertoire of identities, but they could not be absent of such identities. Such a racializing process purports that there are aspects of these students’ identification that are constantly being interpreted based on the definitions of others. Given the terrain of empirical research on how race is constructed on a daily basis, it is expected for different definitions to emerge; however, the question becomes, whose identification dominates, what power lies in others defining your racial/ethnic identification, and what agency do these students have in constructing their identity in school?

In short, the narratives of these students illustrate how racial/ethnic identification is constructed and complicated by how others situate them. This means that the construction of their Mexican or Puerto Rican identity is not only a self-ascriptive process but also bound to how others engage in this process through the racializing of skin color. But, more important, what does it mean for these Latino/Latina students to negotiate and experience their racial/ethnic identification in such ways within

the schooling context? How does this construct the conditions for learning? These differential experiences of racialization within the school environment suggest a different outlining of the role of race in various facets of schooling (e.g., instruction, teacher expectations, and curricular and course-taking options) and inject into this discourse the possibility that such racializing is moderated by skin color among Latinos/Latinas.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study represents an initial foray into a complex conversation on internal and external social identification, racial constructs, and interaction as part of the schooling experience of Latino/Latina students. The two significant findings reported in this article are (1) identification of Latino/Latina students structured by skin color, and (2) the skin color designations signaling different meaning. First, the negotiation of identity among these Mexican and Puerto Rican students in predominantly African American schools demonstrates racial/ethnic boundary designations (i.e., who is in and who is out) as structured by skin color. Second, what is meant to be designated as White-looking, Hispanic/Mexican-looking, or Black/biracial-looking maintained differing meaning and latitude in the racial/ethnic boundary options across skin color groups. Both these findings posit further questioning as to what we know about identification among Latino students and, more important, how it gets played out in schools.

The designation process of a Mexican and Puerto Rican identification among these students outlined how race and ethnicity operate on a day-to-day basis as social and biological constructs for Latino students. These Mexican and Puerto Rican students recognized that the social construct they maintained regarding their identification (i.e., Mexican, Chicano, Boricua, Detroit-Rican) is operating at times in opposition to a biological construct expressed by their African American teachers and peers (i.e., looking White, Black, Hispanic, or Mexican). Their discussion of this interplay suggests that the identity politics found among these Latino students and their African American peers involved a struggle over physical and cultural markers of what defines a Puerto Rican and Mexican identification. This finding empirically demonstrates what Nagel (1994) described: The stuff "inside the shopping cart" is not as important as how the actual shopping cart is defined. This point is particularly important to stress and connect to the sociocultural composition of the school that these students were attending. That is, the manner in which race and ethnicity was constructed for these students is presumably influenced by

their African American peers' constructs and experiences surrounding what is race and ethnicity, as well as the constructs of race and ethnicity within their Latino, Mexican, and Puerto Rican community. This finding further bolsters the literature on race, identity, and schools (e.g., Davidson, 1996; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Lewis, 2003), which empirically accounts how school demographic composition is an important and interactive variable in structuring the boundary designation of a Latino/Latina identification. However, what this study adds is some of the contours of how racial/ethnic identity is constructed within the school space for Latino/Latina students.

The students' discussion also offered the notion that what is available for negotiation is also significant; that is, there is different significance in having White as an identity option versus Black. Race and ethnicity theories have continually articulated the importance of power and privilege embedded in the social identities available, as well as who selects the identities. These students stressed this point through the meaning of having White, Hispanic, and/or Black as available identities. For example, it was readily apparent that the White-looking students recognized their ability to vacillate between a White and Latino/Latina identity. Meanwhile, the Black/biracial-looking and Mexican/Hispanic-looking students articulated the available identities as singular—that is, either Black or Puerto Rican, not both. This difference suggests that the White-looking students maintain further latitude in being able to employ a dual frame, which symbolically means that there is differential identity movement and possibly better social mobility. Furthermore, it situates that identities as phenotypically White and Latino are not mutually exclusive. Meanwhile, within our U.S. social constructs of race/ethnicity, Black and Latino are interpreted as mutually exclusive. This difference in racial/ethnic identification latitude is significant because it can articulate the universe of what students can be in schools. Such structuring has implications in how these students can activate cultural and social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), the degree of relational engagement with teachers of differing racial/ethnic groups (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, *in press*), the type of race-based resilient persona developed and enacted (Trueba, 2002), the degree of abstract and concrete academic orientation (Mickelson, 1990), and the co-narratives of social outcomes connected to educational progress (O'Connor, 1997). Overall, such details of negotiation across skin color groups among these Latino/Latina students point to some of the empirically unexplored contours of racialization experienced by Latino/Latina groups and its significance in the school environment.

This racialization difference sets a stage for questioning the ways in

which these struggles of self and external identification bound to skin color become implicated in the academic orientation of Latino students. The difference of racialization begs multiple questions regarding the school context: Does this difference moderate interpretations of education? Is it self- or external interpretations of identity moderating these interpretations of education? These questions situate the need for a larger study of racial/ethnic identification and racialization, their implications in how Latino students construct and engage in school (behavior, cognitive, and relational), and their moderating role in academic performance. More important, this study could extrapolate the contours of identification as it is bound to skin color and other cultural markers, and how it gets constructed with teachers and in schools. Such an exploration would depart from current academic variability research by positing that it is not enough to know who is Black, White, and Hispanic; rather, we need to understand who gets to be Black, White, and Hispanic and how such social constructs operate as a lens for setting the conditions for learning, and navigating and engaging the school context.

In sum, this article outlines significant additions to the explanatory research of Latino academic performance and purports an arena of empirical research that necessitates further inquiry. The current educational discourse, particularly on reform, demonstrates a substantive concern as to what schools need to know about Latino groups, and in some reductionist discussions, how we teach them. The findings from this study suggest that such educational discourse should also incorporate explorations of within- and across-group variations as part of the discourse in understanding Latino groups. Further, this study situates within the educational discourse of multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching that social identity as a fluid construct pushes teachers to reexamine who they situate in what racial/ethnic category and what that signals about teachers' racial/ethnic constructs. Overall, as we continue to disentangle how schools could better provide instructional and organizational supports for the academic success of Latino/Latina students, there should be attention to not only who identifies as Latino/Latina but also who gets to be Latino/Latina and how such identity politics get implicated in the schooling process.

Notes

1. The study investigated high school students, which permits the primary method of data collection to be closed-ended and open-ended interviews. The maturity of this population speaks to their verbal ability and intellectual development, which allows for application of this methodology with greater certainty. In addition, their lengthy schooling history

may provide insight into shifts in schooling orientation that might have occurred.

2. I identify the students as low income to low middle income because of their self-reported free or reduced lunch status.

3. The interview measure has been adapted from a 1997–1998 pilot study conducted for this study. The pilot study involved low-income Mexican students in the Midwest attending a predominantly White school. It has been modified to ensure that the language is accessible and the questions are soliciting useful data.

4. Immigration research has, for the last 25 years, offered numerous benchmarks of what should be considered a first- and second-generation immigrant (Rumbaut, 1994). Within this article, I adopt the definition that second-generation immigrants are either born in the United States or arrived prior to the age of 10. I use age 10 as the benchmark because developmentally, the child's identification would be formed with memories of homeland and adaptation experiences in the new context.

5. The word *represent* is used by various ethnic minority groups—mainly younger individuals—to imply that individuals should demonstrate who they are and what they have allegiance to.

6. The description of the groupings' appearances is only to provide a general picture of what these students looked like from the perspective of the investigator, and what features others may have used to situate these students as White looking, Mexican/Hispanic looking and Black/biracial looking.

7. As the primary researcher in this study, I was consistently asked by students to position my racial/ethnic identification. Once I positioned my identification as Panamanian and noted that English is my second language, students made continual remarks implying that I understood their experience.

8. Some theoretical arguments surrounding the racial classification of Latinos stipulate that the term *Hispanic* has been defined to “subtly” reference a stereotype image of “tan” or “light-skinned” (Rodriguez, 2000).

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