NAVIGATING A RACIAL MIDDLE: EXPLORING US RACIAL LINES THROUGH ASIANNESS AND LATINIDAD

by

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(Under the Direction of Vanessa Gonlin)

ABSTRACT

Because racial stratification in the US seems to be centered around a Black-White binary, studies on race and colorism have focused on this Black-White binary. However, I argue that research into skin tone bias and its effects on a "racial middle" offers insight into the racial hierarchy of the US. Using the key variables of skin tone and clothing, I conduct an experiment to examine the effects of these variables on the racial categorization of a racially ambiguous subject from White American participants. Through my experiment, I find that darker skin tone and low status clothing increased the likelihood of participants categorizing this racially ambiguous subject as Latino and Black, whereas lighter skin tone and high status clothing increased the likelihood of Asian and White categorization. Findings from this study thus suggest that White Americans perceive Asians as being adjacent to Whiteness and Latinés as adjacent to Blackness.

INDEX WORDS: Race, colorism, skin tone bias, social status, identity, clothing

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DEDICATION

To Bố and Má, my parents, for everything you have done to help me live my life to the fullest. For providing my siblings and I with endless dedication and love even through your moments of fatigue and exhaustion. For exemplifying the potential and power of a strong heart, will, and sacrifice. Thank you for the gift of opportunity, I hope to live my life to the fullest in dedication to your efforts. Cám ơn Bố với Má.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Asians and Latinés make up the two fastest growing racial groups in the US (Budiman and Ruiz 2021). However, despite this fact, the US remains driven by a Black-White binary due to the highly racialized history of exploitation and systemically racist structures that are specifically targeted against Black and Brown communities. Because of this, we see ways in which other racial groups such as Asians, Latinés, Indigenous, and Middle Eastern Americans all hold identity as part of a racial middle (Bonilla-Silva 2002, 2004; O'Brien 2008). Coined by Dr. Eileen O'Brien (2008), the "racial middle" offers the potential for ambiguity and complications in the dynamics of racial relations in the US. In particular, O'Brien's (2008) concept of the racial middle argues that Asians and Latinés represent two opposing ends along a Black & White racial binary, due to opposing constructions of their racial identities and polarizing stereotypes such as the model minority myth (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Chanbonpin 2015; Flores and Schachter 2018; García 2017; Harpalani 2013; Kiang et al. 2017; Lee 2001; Lee and Fiske 2006; Lee, Wong, and Alvarez 2008; Menjívar 2021; Ngo and Lee 2007; Ramírez 2018; Ryabov 2016; Yoo 2020). In other words, O'Brien's racial middle seems to suggest that Asians are racialized as closer to Whiteness whereas Latinés are racialized closer to Blackness.

Bonilla-Silva (2004) touches on this racial middle by theorizing the future of racial relations in the US through his Latin Americanization Thesis and concept of the tri-racial hierarchy. Through this tri-racial hierarchy, Bonilla-Silva (2004) broadly theorizes the status and social positioning of various racial identities based on a variety of variables including skin tone

and mean income. However, I argue that Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy remains too broad and lacks key important variables such as perceptions of social distance and attitudes regarding racial identity. Past studies have examined aspects of the tri-racial hierarchy such as perceptions of racial identity, social distance, and stereotypes, but I have not found any study that directly examines the perception of this racial middle and social distance along the Black-White binary that drives the US in racial relations (Forman, Goar, and Lewis 2002; Freeman et al. 2011; Herring 2002; Lee and Fiske 2006).

When considering the foundational role that colorism or skin tone bias has on Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy, skin tone and its relationship with social class status seem to be key variables in investigating perceptions of the racial middle and social distance between White, Black, Asian, and Latino racial categories. This is especially so when considering the widespread and global impact that colorism has on daily life through areas such as culture and the economy. For example, studies have found that colorism has direct effects on beauty standards and the skin product market, the perception of athletes, and court decisions (Dixon and Telles 2017; Foy and Ray 2019; Garner and Bibi 2023; King and Johnson 2016; Rondilla 2009; Rondilla and Spickard 2007). When examining findings for the impact of colorism on the racial middle so far, specifically for Asians and Latinés, the majority of research has focused on colorism's effects on Asian and Latin American nations.

However, little research has comparatively been done on the effects of colorism for Asians and Latinés in the US. Because of this, current research may be missing key effects regarding ambiguous spaces such as the racial middle. For example, in the case of the Asian American community, current findings and theory behind the effects of colorism so far would suggest that skin tone bias would have deeper effects and implications across various Asian

groups based on historical and ongoing intragroup tensions and biases, in which skin tone and social class status seem to both act as key variables in causing these intragroup divisions (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Dixon and Telles 2017; Harpalani 2013; Ngo and Lee 2007; Rondilla 2009; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Woo, Sakamoto, and Takei 2012). Similar issues can certainly be found across Latiné and Chicano groups as well, causing deep racial stratification across the Latin American community and affecting notions of Latinidad (Bonilla-Silva 2002, 2004; Charles 2021; Dixon 2019; Dixon and Telles 2017; Hunter 2016; Montalvo and Codina 2001; Quiros and Dawson 2013; Sowards 2021).

For these reasons, I am proposing a study that examines perceptions of Asian and Latiné identity, by specifically examining skin tone and social class status as key markers of racial categorization for Asians and Latinés. By doing so, I expect to find results that may help understand some of the nuances surrounding the racial middle in relation to key markers of racial categorization, along with proximity to Whiteness and Blackness for both Asians and Latinés in the US. I thus design a study that attempts to answer the research questions: In the US, is the racial identity of "Asian" collectively seen by White people as adjacent to Whiteness? Conversely, is the racial identity of "Latiné" seen by White people as adjacent to Blackness? More specifically, when considering the impact of colorism, does skin tone and perceived class status affect how White Americans racialize Asians and Latinés and their perception of social distance from Blackness and Whiteness?

CHAPTER 2

KEY THEORIES & CONCEPTS

Bonilla-Silva's Tri-Racial Hierarchy (Latin Americanization Thesis)

As a foundation and inspiration for this study, I turn to Bonilla-Silva tri-racial hierarchy or "Latin Americanization Thesis" (2004). Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy theorizes that the US will see a transition from a bi-racial hierarchy to a tri-racial hierarchy composed of "Whites," Honorary Whites," and "Collective Black." This concept of a tri-racial hierarchy was inspired by the tri-racial hierarchy that Bonilla-Silva observes from various Latin American and Caribbean countries, noting the role of variables such as skin tone in the racial stratification for Latin American and Caribbean countries. For this reason, Bonilla-Silva's theory can also be known as the "Latin Americanization Thesis," as Bonilla-Silva (2002) argues that the US will follow the same racial stratification and tri-racial hierarchy consistently found across Latin American countries.

Bonilla-Silva (2004) specifically forms this hierarchy utilizing a variety of variables and data such as mean income, racial attitudes, and skin tone to develop a theory on the state of racial relations in the future of the US. Through available data and theory, Bonilla-Silva (2004) ultimately separates placement for Latinés based on skin tone and level of assimilation. Thus, "assimilated white Latinos" are placed in the "Whites" category of this tri-racial hierarchy whereas "darker-skinned Latinos" are placed in the "Collective Black" category. For Asians, Bonilla-Silva (2004) separates Asian ethnicities across the hierarchy primarily based on differences in data such as mean income. This way, some Asian identities such as Chinese

American and Asian Indian are in the "Honorary Whites" category whereas other Asian identities such as Vietnamese and Laotian Americans are in the "Collective Black" category.

Key to my study here is the role that variables such as skin tone and mean income play in separating racial and ethnic groups across Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy. By taking into account the data and log that Bonilla-Silva (2004) used to create their hierarchy, I would like to use Bonilla-Silva's (2004) as a perspective and frame to guide the construction and analysis of this study. In particular, this study aims to examine the role of skin tone and stereotypes regarding social status and class as key variables that help predict how White Americans may perceive and classify a person's racial classification. However, while Bonilla-Silva's (2004) hierarchy offers a frame to examine how White Americans may racialize another person based on the influence of skin tone and perceived social status, the theory of racial formation will be key to understanding the very construction of racial categories in the first place. Thus, the theory of racial formation will help supplement and contextualize the construction of Bonilla-Silva's (2004) racial hierarchy.

Racial Formation

To explain the role of racial formation in this study, I will point to a foundational tenet of the theory of racial formation, which states that race is socially constructed and formed through racial projects (Omi & Winant 2015). Through these racial projects, racial categories can be fluidly changed and destroyed (Omi & Winant 2015). Recognizing the fluidity and social constructed nature of race becomes important in understanding how markers of racial identification such as skin tone, phenotypes, and perceived social status all become part of the process of racialization. For example, racial projects may include media portrayals of racial identities through images and stereotypical character archetypes. When considering that Bonilla-

Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy was strongly driven by data and theory regarding the effects of colorism on racial lines in the US and Latin America, racial formation helps supplement and contextualize the way that stereotypes about skin tone and social status for racial groups act as key identifiers for racial categorization.

With these two theories in mind, I will now begin by introducing key findings from past research and literature thus far. Specifically, I will examine some key findings made from studies for colorism, being as skin tone will be a key variable to this study. Because this study will specifically focus on the role of skin tone and clothing on racial categorization for Asians and Latinés in the US, I will focus on colorism literature regarding these racial communities and findings that may be key to this study. Subsequently, I will also delve into current literature available regarding this study's second key variable, clothing. Acting as a cue or marker of an individual's social class and status, I will briefly examine findings thus far regarding the role of clothing in influencing the process of racialization. Taking into account the theory of racial formation, I will then examine literature regarding the social construction of Asians and Latinés. Specifically, I will examine some key stereotypes that may drive the perception and responses for participants in this study. Relatedly, I will then consider current literature regarding perceived social distance and associations between the racial groups observed in this study: White, Black, Asian, and Latiné. After considering some key findings thus far from past research and literature, I will then delve into the study itself, starting with the study's hypotheses, design, and methods. Finally, I will examine this study's findings and discuss their possible implications.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial Formation and Colorism

As previously noted, this study will be constructed and analyzed following the theoretical framework of Bonilla-Silva's (2002) Latin Americanization thesis, along with Omi and Winant's (2015) theory of racial formation. With skin tone and social status (represented by clothing) as key variables in this study, it may be useful to consider the real-life impact of skin tone and perceived social status through an example of a racial project, being as racial projects are the key foundations to the social construction of race and racial identities under the theory of racial formation. To return to our example of the media as a racial project, some Hollywood and pop culture examples offered by various texts demonstrate the way that skin tone and social class act as building blocks in the social construction of Asian and Latiné identities. Through the media, dominant images of Asian and Latiné identity are reinforced and produced in select representations of such identities. For example, in her book, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media,* Molina-Guzmán (2010) offers a variety of examples in which Latiné identity is produced, coded, and reinforced in Latina celebrities through their bodily markers of identity including skin tone and clothing. In the case of *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media* (1997), Rodríguez points to how skin tone and class status become markers of identity for stereotypes such as the "poorer and darker" Latino villains. Through stereotypical portrayals based on colorism and class identity, racial categories are constructed and reinforced

to affect perceptions of observed race. Media as a racial project, thus demonstrates the crucial influence that skin tone and class status may have on the process of racial categorization.

In fact, these variables were already tested in a past study conducted by Freeman and colleagues (2011), which examined the role that skin tone and clothing play in people's perception of identity. Through their experiment, Freeman and colleagues (2011) found how skin tone and social status cues (represented by clothing in this experiment) interact to shape racial categorization. Similarly, the Stereotype Content Model constructed by Lee and Fiske (2006) offers insight into how social constructions of race may be heavily driven by stereotypes regarding race and class.

These studies are supported by extensive literature on the effects of colorism, which demonstrate the global impact that skin tone bias has on socioeconomic status. For example, in Dixon and Telles (2017) comprehensive review of colorism literature, the authors highlight the historical and ongoing impacts of colorism through global beauty standards and the conflation of skin color and race. Because of the salience of skin tone and colorism has had on the historical and ongoing oppression of Black Americans, a significant portion of colorism literature has focused on the racial lines between Black and White communities in the US (Dixon and Telles 2017). However, a notable area of colorism literature has also specifically investigated its impact on Asian and Latiné communities, demonstrating the salience of colorism across racial groups (Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, and Organista 2016; Chanbonpin 2015; Charles 2021; Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, and Organista 2014; Dixon 2019; Dixon and Telles 2017; Gailey 1994; Hunter 2007, 2016; Hunter and Hall 2008; Lee and Bean 2010; Montalvo and Codina 2001; Quiros and Dawson 2013; Rondilla 2009; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Ryabov 2016; Villarreal 2010).

Being that this study is specifically examining the perception of social distance between Asian identity to Whiteness, and Latiné identity to Blackness, I will now briefly consider some key nuances of colorism on Asian and Latiné communities that may be beneficial to understanding the findings of my study. Both Asian and Latiné communities offer past findings that strongly support the impact of colorism on these communities, with extensive literature specifically pointing to the effect colorism has on the socioeconomic outcomes of individuals for both communities (Dixon and Telles 2017; Hunter 2007, 2016; Hunter and Hall 2008; Montalvo and Codina 2001; Rondilla 2009; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Ryabov 2016). In the case of Ryabov's (2016) study on educational outcomes of Asians and Latinés, findings of their study point to a strong association between educational attainment and lightness of skin tone even when accounting for various ethnic subgroups. In particular, Ryabov's (2016) study found that the results were strongest for Filipinos and Puerto Ricans, supporting past literature on colorism for Asian and Latiné communities. However, to complicate findings for the effects of colorism, I will examine specific spaces of racial ambiguity within the Asian and Latiné communities. Being that O'Brien (2008) claims both Asians and Latinés as part of the racial middle in the US, examining these complications and nuances for both communities may prove to be beneficial in analyzing any possible complications with findings from this study.

Key Nuances of Colorism in Asian Communities

In the case of Asian Americans, Harpalani (2013) points to the racial ambiguity that South Asians hold with a tumultuous past on their racial categorization with varied experiences in past court decisions. Pointing to the impact of colorism, these decisions on citizenship for South Asians often ultimately came down to skin tone (Harpalani 2013). Interestingly, Harpalani's (2013) research also points out the separation between South Asian immigrants and

other Asian communities in their attempts at attaining citizenship, with many authorities categorizing South Asians as "Caucasian".

Today, while some continue to question the categorization of South Asian as part of the broader racial category of "Asian" in the US, research nevertheless points to how South Asians are considered part of the model minority and thus constructed with the broader Asian American category to be a "successful minority" in contrast to other racial groups in the US such as Black, Latiné, and Native Americans (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Goel et al. 2021; Harpalani 2013; Joshi, Balaji, and Deshpande 2016; Lee and Fiske 2006; Lee et al. 2008; Ryabov 2016; Woo et al. 2012). In fact, Lee and Fiske' (2006) study found that "Indians" were stereotyped to be separate from "Asian" to be grouped with the second highest cluster along with "American," "Europeans," and "Canadians". However, despite association with the model minority myth, Harpalani (2013) still notes that South Asians continue to experience discrimination over skin tone, with one survey stating that skin color discrimination was perceived to be the most frequent basis for discrimination. While not directly related towards South Asian identity, this study will examine whether or not "Asians" as a broad racial category are associated with lighter skin tones, higher social status, and adjacency to whiteness. Because of this, I argue that understanding the unique impact colorism has had on South Asians in the US may help inform results from this study.

Key Nuances of Colorism in Latiné Communities

The Latiné community becomes complicated by the current process of racial classification in the US. Specifically, due to the current structure of the US census, Latiné identity is classified as being separate from race and instead is treated as an ethnicity. Due to this design, many Latinés are forced to choose other racial categories such as "Black" or "White" in

their self-identification of race (Dixon 2019; Forman et al. 2002; Vargas 2015; Vargas-Ramos 2005). Most interestingly, we find that in Forman and colleagues' (2002) study, they found that Cubans overwhelmingly identified as "White" rather than "Latino" or "Black". Within Forman and colleagues' (2002) study, they also found that their sample of "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," and "Cuban," all groups were much more likely to identify as "White" rather than "Black". Additionally, Dixon's (2019) study on perceptions of skin tone and class discrimination in Latin American countries found that majority did not perceive any skin tone or class discrimination. In fact, between perception of skin tone and class discrimination, the Dominican Republic and Mexico had the lowest results for perception of skin tone based discrimination and saw much higher rates of class discrimination in comparison to just skin tone based discrimination (Dixon 2019).

These nuances of colorism in Latin American communities complicate the perceptions and salience of Latinidad, a concept that essentially argues for the existence of a collective identity shared across Latin America, suggesting that various attributes skin tone and language are key markers of Latin American identification (Acquie 2021; Sowards 2021). Thus, when considering the concept of Latinidad, the aforementioned nuances of colorism in Latin America demonstrate the ambiguity regarding markers of racial categorization of Latinés along with their position as a part of the racial middle (O'Brien 2008). Therefore, these nuances should be recognized and considered in this study and its findings where we investigate the racial categorization of Latinés from White Americans based on skin tone and the social status cue of clothing.

Clothing and Social Status

While research on colorism will inform my study design and analysis, this study will also be using clothing as a cue for social status to examine if social status acts as a key predictor of Asian or Latiné categorization for White Americans. Based on literature, clothing can act as a marker of racial categorization through the role of social status and class (Freeman et al. 2011; Gurung et al. 2021; McDermott and Pettijohn II 2011; Molina-Guzmán 2010). In Gurung and colleagues' (2021) study, they found that formal wear brought significantly higher results for positive attributes from raters in their perception of attributes for Black men in the study. Similarly, McDermott and Pettijohn II's (2011) study suggests evidence for the role in which clothing has on perceived socioeconomic status, with the brand name sweatshirt bringing the highest mean SES from raters on the model. These studies thus suggest a positive relationship between formal clothing and positive or desirable perceptions from others, including perception of higher SES. Conversely, Freeman and colleagues (2011) found that "low status attire" increased the likelihood of their participants categorizing a racially ambiguous model as Black and "high status attire" consequently increased the likelihood of participants categorizing the model as White. As such, while little research thus far has been done on the effects of clothing as a marker of identity or influencing peer perception, current literature suggests that clothing acts as a marker of racial categorization and social status.

Stereotypes

Understanding key stereotypes for Asians and Latinés will strongly inform the design and predicted outcomes of my experiment when considering the strong association between racial identity and these stereotypes. For my experiment, I argue that the model minority stereotype will overshadow the myth of the perpetual foreigner which is noted by Lee and colleagues

(2008) in their overview of these two dominant stereotypes for Asian identities. This is due to the findings from a variety of studies looking at general socioeconomic outcomes for the category of "Asian" at large (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Chou and Feagin 2008; Harpalani 2013; Kiang et al. 2017; Lee and Fiske 2006; Lee et al. 2008; Park 2023; Ryabov 2016; Yoo 2020).

I argue that the effects of the model minority myth can be found in Lee and Fiske's (2006) study and their Stereotype Content Model, which depicts that Asian identities (with the exception of Indian and Vietnamese) were grouped by undergraduate students with "rich people," "tech industry," and "professionals," of which all match the stereotypes reinforced by the model minority myth. However, I question if the exception to "Indian" and "Vietnamese" would potentially be evidence supporting Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy. From the perspective of Lee and Fiske (2006), the authors of this study suggest that the position of "Vietnamese" in the Stereotype Content Model may be due to their recent history as war refugees, bringing in a perception separate from other Asian identities in their study. Unfortunately, Lee and Fiske (2006) did not offer any interpretation to the findings for "Indian" as an outlier from Asian grouping in this model. However, the separation of "Indian" from other Asian racial groups in this model may be a key dynamic to consider in the findings of my study. Especially when considering overwhelming literature attesting the impact shared with the South Asian community under the model minority myth (Goel et al. 2021; Harpalani 2013; Joshi et al. 2016; Lee et al. 2008; Woo et al. 2012). Unfortunately, while colorism literature points to the integral role skin tone has in social construction of Asian American identity, much of literature regarding the model minority myth lacks any meaningful discussion of the impacts of colorism on Asian Americans and the model minority myth. A measure for skin tone in the Lee and

Fiske's (2006) Stereotype Content Model may have offered evidence of colorism at play in the results of this study.

In contrast, Lee and Fiske's (2006) study also found that "Latino," "Mexican," and "South American" were all grouped together in their model with "poor people," "farm worker," "undocumented". These findings offer support for literature regarding the racialization of "illegality," which brings racializes the concept of legal status and thus reinforcing Latinés as an outgroup through an association with undocumented status (Flores and Schachter 2018; García 2017; Lee and Fiske 2006; Menjívar 2021; Ramírez 2018). Furthermore, a study conducted by Lacayo (2017) suggests that whites perceive Latiné culture as "perpetually inferior". Lacayo's (2017) findings thus suggest that Latinés will be associated with "low status" as part of our social status measurement represented by clothing. However, once again, use of a skin tone measurement in both Lacayo's (2017) and Lee and Fiske's (2006) studies may have offered deeper insight into the impact of colorism and evidence for an association between Latinidad and darker skin tones (Hunter 2004).

Perceived Social Distance

This study will also be examining the perceived social distance between the racial categories of Asian, Black, Latiné and White. Specifically, my study will be examining the perceived social distance from White American respondents for Asians and Latinés in relation to Blackness and Whiteness. For example, Lacayo's (2017) study finds that many White people see Latiné culture as inferior and consequently seeing Latinés are inferior, such as describing Latinés as "incompetent and lazy". Conversely, Lacayo's (2017) study also finds evidence that White people also have a much more positive attitude towards Asians, seeing them as "smart" and "motivated". Additionally, Lee and Fiske's (2006) Stereotype Content Model also presents

evidence for perceptions of social distance between White, Black, Asian, and Latiné racial categories. Specifically, the Stereotype Content Model found that "Latino," "African," and "poor people" were associated together, and "European" and "Asian" and "rich people" were represented on the opposite spectrum of the study's Stereotype Content Model. As such, based on Lee and Fiskes' (2006) and Lacayo's (2017) findings, we can expect that results in my study will suggest Asians as being adjacent to Whiteness and Latinés as being at the very minimum, distant from Whiteness and more likely to be perceived as being adjacent to Blackness. Furthermore, Park (2023) also points out that the model minority myth acts to separate and position Asian Americans as being in opposition to "Black and Latinx political struggles" (362). For these reasons, I expect to find evidence that White respondents will see Asians as being adjacent to Whiteness and Latinés as being adjacent to Blackness.

Hypotheses

Taking into account the literature reviewed thus far, I expect that White people would be more likely to associate darker skin and perceived low social class status with Latinidad and Blackness. Because of these associations, I predict that White participants will be more likely to racially categorize a racially ambiguous man as Latino as opposed to Asian based on the two markers of identification: darker skin tone and a perception of lower social class status based on the individual's clothing. Similarly, I also expect that White participants will be more likely to racially categorize a racially ambiguous man as Black as opposed to White based on the same two markers of identification. Following these hypotheses, I also expect that White participants who categorize a racially ambiguous man as Latino (as opposed to Asian) are also more likely to categorize that same man as Black (as opposed to White):

Hypothesis 1: White participants will be more likely to categorize a man with darker skin tone (compared to lighter skin tone) as Latino than as Asian.

Hypothesis 2: White participants will be more likely to categorize a man with lower status clothing (compared to higher status clothing) as Latino than as Asian.

Hypothesis 3: The interaction of darker skin tone and lower status will amplify the tendency for White participants to categorize a man as more Latino than as Asian.

Hypothesis 4: White participants will be more likely to categorize a man with darker skin tone (compared to lighter skin tone) as Black than as White.

Hypothesis 5: White participants will be more likely to categorize a man with lower status clothing (compared to higher status clothing) as Black than as White.

Hypothesis 6: The interaction of darker skin tone and lower status will amplify the tendency for White participants to categorize a man as more Black than White.

Hypothesis 7: White participants who categorize a man as more Latino than Asian are also more likely to categorize that same person as more Black than White.

By finding support for my hypotheses, I aim to answer my original research questions regarding the impact of colorism on the process of racial categorization along with its impact on the perceived social distance between racial categories. In the following section, I will discuss the data, methods, measures, and variables used to design and construct this study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA & METHODS

Study Design

	Low-status outfit	High-status outfit
Lighter Skin Tone	Racial Categorization	Racial Categorization
Darker Skin Tone	Racial Categorization	Racial Categorization

Figure 1. 2x2 Experiment Design

In order to answer the hypotheses and research questions, I constructed an online experiment with a 2x2 experimental design to examine the individual and interaction effects of the study's independent variables, skin tone and clothing, on the racial categorization of a racially ambiguous subject. This online experiment was constructed using Qualtrics and conducted through Prolific. Using both Prolific's pre-screening filters and inputting preset screening questions from Prolific into my online experiment on Qualtrics, a total of 517 participants were recruited through Prolific and consented to participate in the experiment. After choosing to accept the consent form, the preset screening questions were used as part of the demographic questions section as a secondary measure for screening. From these preset screening questions, I designed the study to screen out anyone that was under 18 or identified as

nonwhite. As such, this study's participants only included White Americans who do not identify as Hispanic and were 18 years old or older. Additionally, after manually dropping participants in the dataset who did not qualify for this study (such as identifying as mixed race or nonwhite), my study's sample size for participants in the secondary set of screening (demographics section) was 502 participants. However, using listwise deletion to drop missing data, the final sample size for the regression models used in this study was 493. I will now elaborate on the variables and measures used in this study in the following section.

Control Variables

With the first question acting as a screener for self-identified racial and ethnic identity, I then input preset demographic questions available through Qualtrics to obtain information for the control variables of this study: age, income, education, and gender. Age was measured with a 7-item question with age ranges as the question's seven categories. Income was measured with a 7-item question that asked for the participant's "total household income before taxes during the past 12 months." Education was measured with a 7-item question asking the participant "what is the highest level of education you have completed?" Lastly, gender was measured using a 5-item question asking, "how do you describe yourself?" Table 1 can be found at the bottom of this section and displays the descriptive statistics of this study's participants and exact categories used to measure the control variables.

Independent Variables

The two key independent variables in this study will be skin tone and clothing. Both of these variables will be measured dichotomously with clothing being measured as "high status" and "low status," whereas skin tone will be measured as "lighter skin tone" and "darker skin tone". Operationalizing this study's variables dichotomously, the 2x2 experiment design will

offer clear and focused results regarding the effects of each independent variable, thus offering clear evidence for each hypothesis mentioned earlier. Each of these variables and conditions were chosen based on findings from pre-testing, which will be discussed in the following section.

The key independent variables of this study were applied to a racially ambiguous subject selected from the Chicago Face Database. Manipulations to this racially ambiguous subject were conducted using Canva's AI to create a "high-status" outfit represented by a dress suit and tie, whereas a "low status" outfit will be represented by a construction uniform. Affinity Photo, a photo editing software application, was used to adjust the skin tone of the model and to clean up any possible errors from the Canva AI's creation of both clothing conditions.

Pre-Testing

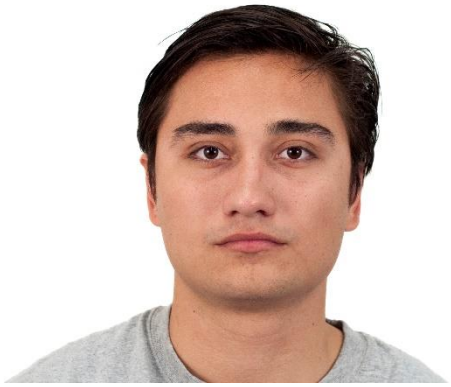

Figure 2. Selected Subject from Chicago Face Database

To begin, I started the process of constructing this experiment with two rounds of exploratory pre-testing. Specifically, I was concerned with finding a subject from the Chicago Face Database that would be perceived as more racially ambiguous to ensure that the subject didn't have any heavy skew towards a racial categorization based on their facial structure or features. Including these two initial rounds of exploratory pre-testing, my entire pre-testing phase had a total sample size of 158 participants from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. I

argue that using a racially diverse population for my pre-testing would ensure the racial ambiguity of the subject.

In the very first round of exploratory pre-testing, two of the participants categorized the subject in Figure 2 as Asian with 14 categorizing the subject as Latino and three participants selecting "both" as their answer. In the second round, seven of the participants categorized this model to be Asian and four of the participants categorized the model as Latino. After my initial two rounds of exploratory pre-testing, my third and final round of pre-testing was conducted through Qualtrics and included a 5-point bipolar scale measuring between "Asian" and "Latino" with the varying degrees of certainty: "Probably" and "Definitely". Being a 5-point bipolar scale, the scale was divided by a neutral option of "Not Sure". With a total sample size of 128 participants, 125 of the participants responded with categorizations to the selected subject in Figure 2.

Of these 125 participants, 46 participants (37%) selected "Not Sure," 29 participants (23%) selected "probably Asian," 47 participants (38%) selected "probably Latino", and only 3 participants (3%) selected "Definitely" for Asian and Latino (2 for Definitely Asian and 1 for Definitely Latino). Notably, the model was categorized as "Latino" under the Chicago Face Database. By using a 5-point scale, the middle values of 2-4 were coded to represent a space of uncertainty through the options of "Probably Asian" or "Probably Latino" and "Not Sure" in the middle of the scale. As such, this 5-point scale was helpful in determining the racial ambiguity of our subject. However, in the final design of this experiment, I recognized the possibility factors such as social desirability bias as a key motivator for participants to choose the neutral option of "Not Sure". For this reason, the final experiment used a 6-point scale for both racial

categorization questions asking between “White or Black” and “Asian or Latino.” I will specify the exact measures for these scales later when I discuss this study’s dependent variable.

Under the third round of pre-testing through Qualtrics, I also tested the skin tone and clothing conditions that will be applied to the racially ambiguous subject. To elaborate, I used Canva’s AI to create a “dress shirt and tie” for the subject in order to represent the high status condition, and a “construction worker uniform” to represent the low status uniform. Using the results that I found to be most believable, pre-testing found that the clothing manipulations were sufficient. Specifically, 119 (95%) respondents perceived the dress shirt and tie as a “high-class” uniform, whereas 104 (84%) respondents perceived the construction worker uniform as “low-class.”

Regarding the selections for skin tone, the skin tones were selected based on the original color values sourced from the original image file of the subject. Using the “Color Picker Tool” in Affinity Photo, a color value was chosen as the baseline, then I manipulated the image to select a darker color value and a lighter color value. These chosen colors were recorded using their RGB (red, green, blue) values and presented to respondents in the third round of pre-testing through Qualtrics. Next, respondents were given a 4-point scale bipolar scale between “dark” and “light” (1 = Very Dark, 2 = Darker, 3 = Lighter, 4 = Very light). From here 99 (79%) of respondents perceived the darker skin tone as “darker” and 109 (87%) of respondents perceived the lighter skin tone as “lighter”, with 14 (11%) perceiving the presented color as “very light”.

Manipulation of Racially Ambiguous Subject

After pre-testing this study’s variables and conditions, the independent variables were then applied to the racially ambiguous subject to create four different images depicting the study’s four different conditions. Affinity Photo, a photo editing software application, was used

to manipulate the skin tone of the model and to clean up any possible errors from the Canva AI's creation of both clothing conditions. The final images used in this study and its four different conditions are depicted on Figure 3 at the end of this chapter.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable for this study was measured using two 6-point bipolar scales. The first bipolar scale seen by participants in this study asks, "is this person more White or Black?" and offers six categories ranging from 1) "Definitely White," 2) "Most Likely White," and 3) "Probably White." Categories 4-6 hence offered the same ranges of "Definitely" to "Probably" but for racial categorization of "Black". Similarly, the second bipolar scale seen by participants in this study asks, "is this person more Asian or Latino" with the same range categories starting with 1) "Definitely Asian" and 6) "Definitely Latino." The frequency distribution of participants in each study condition and their racial categorizations are found on Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Control Variables (N=502)[1]

	Frequency	Percent
Age (N = 502)		
44 years old or younger	323	64.34%
45 years old or older	179	35.66%
Income (N = 495)		
Below $75,000	266	53.74%
$25,000-$49,999	229	46.26%
Education (N = 500)		
Associates or technical degree	216	43.20%
Bachelor's degree	190	38.00%
Graduate or professional degree	94	18.80%
Gender (N = 498)		
Female	297	59.64%
Male	187	37.55%
Non-binary/third gender	14	2.81%

[1] Responses for "prefer not to say" were coded as missing

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Asian or Latino Categorization (N=502)			
Conditions		Frequency	Percent
Lighter skin tone and high status clothing	Definitely Asian	20	15.87
	Most Likely Asian	43	34.13
	Probably Asian	21	16.67
	Probably Latino	19	15.08
	Most Likely Latino	19	15.08
	Definitely Latino	4	3.17
Lighter skin tone and low status clothing	Definitely Asian	18	14.40
	Most Likely Asian	37	29.60
	Probably Asian	30	24.00
	Probably Latino	18	14.40
	Most Likely Latino	17	13.60
	Definitely Latino	5	4.00
Darker skin tone and high status clothing	Definitely Asian	5	3.97
	Most Likely Asian	31	24.60
	Probably Asian	33	26.19
	Probably Latino	26	20.63
	Most Likely Latino	21	16.67
	Definitely Latino	10	7.94
Darker skin tone and low status clothing	Definitely Asian	4	3.20
	Most Likely Asian	13	10.40
	Probably Asian	16	12.80
	Probably Latino	28	22.40
	Most Likely Latino	46	36.80
	Definitely Latino	18	14.40

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of White or Black Categorization (N=502)			
Conditions		Frequency	Percent
Lighter skin tone and high status clothing	Definitely White	61	48.41
	Most Likely White	44	34.92
	Probably White	16	12.70
	Probably Black	1	0.79
	Most Likely Black	2	1.59
	Definitely Black	2	1.59
Lighter skin tone and low status clothing	Definitely White	34	27.20
	Most Likely White	60	48.00
	Probably White	25	20.00
	Probably Black	5	4.00
	Most Likely Black	1	0.80
	Definitely Black	0	0
Darker skin tone and high status clothing	Definitely White	13	10.32
	Most Likely White	27	21.43
	Probably White	40	31.75
	Probably Black	37	29.37
	Most Likely Black	8	6.35
	Definitely Black	1	0.79
Darker skin tone and low status clothing	Definitely White	12	9.60
	Most Likely White	18	14.40
	Probably White	52	41.60
	Probably Black	39	31.20
	Most Likely Black	4	3.20
	Definitely Black	0	0

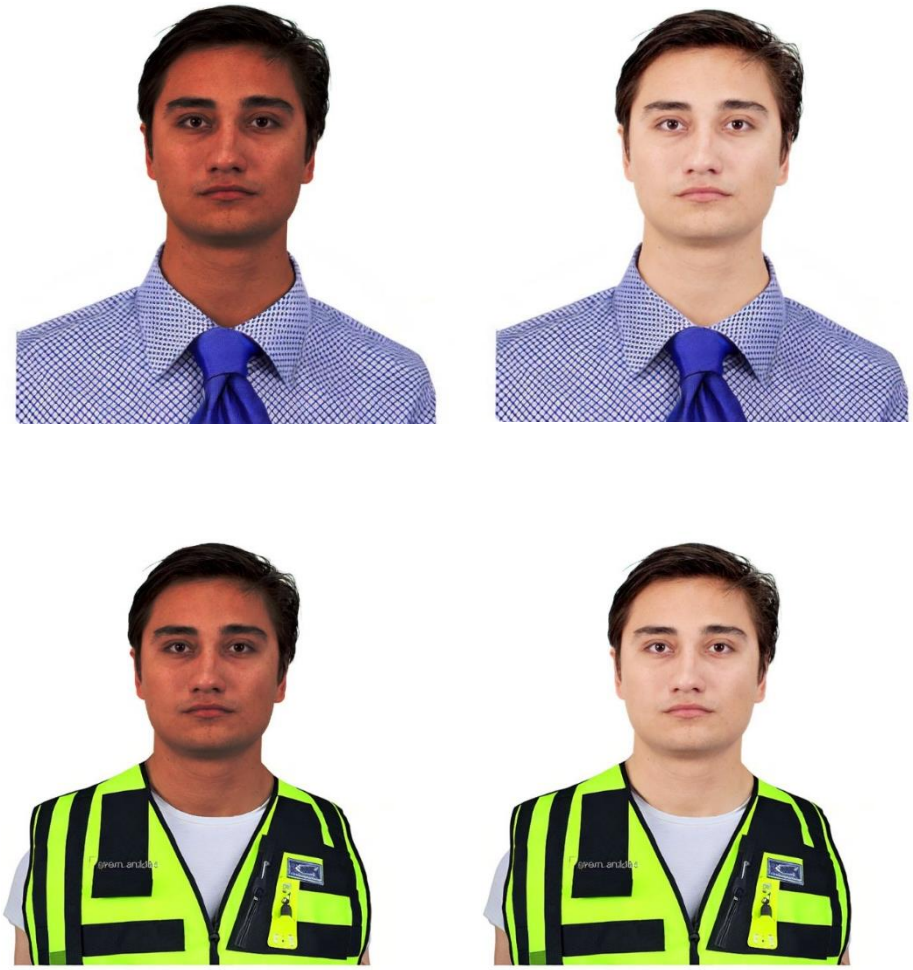

Figure 3. Skin Tone and Clothing Manipulations of Subject

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Table 4 displays the ordinal logistic regression models examining the effect of skin tone and clothing as predictors of racial identification. In the case of this study, clothing and skin tone are specifically used to predict perceived Asian or Latino identification and perceived White or Black categorization. Based on the results of Table 4, we can see from models 1 and 3 that darker skin tone significantly increases categorization of the model as Latino (log odds = 1.177, p = 0.000) or Black (log odds = 2.141, p = 0.000). Furthermore, models 1 and 3 depict that low status clothing acts as a statistically significant predictor of Latino and Black categorization, with participants more likely to categorize someone with low status clothing as Latino (log odds = 0.502, p = 0.002) or Black (log odds = 0.348, p = 0.036).

Based on the coefficient values, darker skin tone has a higher log odd for predicting Black categorization (2.141) in comparison to Latino categorization (1.177). Conversely, the coefficient values suggest that low status clothing has a higher log odd for predicting Latino categorization (0.502) in comparison to Black categorization (0.348). Thus, while both key variables are statistically significant in predicting Latino and Black categorization, the coefficient values seem to suggest that darker skin tone has a stronger effect on Black categorization whereas low status clothing has a stronger effect on Latino categorization. In any case, findings from models 1 and 3 offer strong support for hypotheses one, two, five and six.

Interestingly, Table 4 also shows that age is also statistically significant in predicting Latino categorization for both models 1 and 2. Being as the control variable of age was coded as

dichotomous, this finding suggests that participants 45 or older were more likely to categorize the subject as Latino (log odds = 0.439, p = 0.009). On the other hand, age becomes nonsignificant when predicting White or Black categorization. While unrelated to the hypotheses, the effects of "age" as a predictor for racialization has interesting implications that will be discussed in the discussion section of this thesis.

Table 4 also depicts the interaction effect as found in models 3 and 4, which tackle hypotheses three and six. Starting with model 2, I find that the main effects of darker skin tone are statistically significant in predicting Latino categorization. Specifically, the main effects of darker skin tone increase the log odds of being categorized as Latino by 0.677 (p = 0.003). Although, the main effects of low status clothing are nonsignificant here (p = 0.908), when examining the interaction effect between darker skin tone and low status clothing, we find that the interaction effect between these two variables amplifies their effects, increasing the log odds of being categorized as Latino by 1.024 (p = 0.002). Thus, the findings for model 2 offer strong support for hypothesis three.

Turning to model 4, this regression model tests for the interaction effect between darker skin tone and low status clothing in predicting Black or White categorization. Here, we find similar results in line with previous findings discussed thus far. However, the main effects of darker skin tone are significantly stronger in this model, increasing the log odds of being categorized as Black by 2.504 (p = 0.000). The main effects of clothing are also statistically significant (p = 0.003), increasing the log odds of Black categorization by 0.691.

Table 4. Ordinal Logistic Regressions and Interaction Effect Models Examining Darker Skin Tone and Low Status Clothing as Predictors of Racial Categorization

VARIABLES	Model 1: Asian (-) or Latino (+)	Model 2: Asian (-) or Latino (+)	Model 3: White (-) or Black (+)	Model 4: White (-) or Black (+)
Darker skin tone (ref: lighter skin tone)	1.177***	0.677**	2.141***	2.504***
	(0.168)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.262)
Low status clothing (ref: high status clothing)	0.502***	-0.0270	0.348*	0.691**
	(0.162)	(0.234)	(0.165)	(0.237)
Interaction Effect (darker skin tone and low status clothing)		1.024**		-0.678*
		(0.327)		(0.332)
Age	0.439**	0.485**	-0.0149	-0.0263
	(0.169)	(0.170)	(0.175)	(0.175)
Income	-0.101	-0.125	-0.00640	-0.000795
	(0.170)	(0.170)	(0.173)	(0.174)
Education (ref: Associates or Lower)				
Bachelor's Degree	0.123	-0.0125	0.192	-0.0330
	(0.183)	(0.0470)	(0.187)	(0.0485)
Graduate or Professional Degree	0.112	0.126	-0.0190	-0.0273
	(0.234)	(0.234)	(0.240)	(0.241)
Gender (ref: Female)				
Male	0.0999	0.104	-0.143	-0.253
	(0.167)	(0.167)	(0.499)	(0.172)
Non-binary or Third gender	0.108	0.182		-0.188
	(0.450)	(0.453)		(0.500)
Observations	493	493	493	493

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

In regard to the interaction effect in predicting Black or White categorization, the findings from this interaction effect model seem to suggest that interaction between darker skin tone and low status clothing "qualifies" the odds of predicting Black categorization. Thus, when comparing the log odds found from the main effects of this model, we can see the interaction effect qualifies the log odds of predicting Black categorization, bringing the log odds to -0.678 ($p = 0.041$). Thus, findings for this model offer weaker support for hypothesis six.

Moving on to Table 5, models 5 and 6 examine the relationship between participants' responses for both questions regarding the perceived race of our racially ambiguous subject. In particular, the ordinal logistic regression found on model 5 uses the responses of Asian or Latino categorization as a predictor of their responses for White or Black categorization. The results for Table 5 thus tackle this study's last hypothesis, hypothesis seven, which argues that respondents who categorize the subject as Latino will also be more likely to categorize the same subject as Black. Here, model 5 offers strong support for hypothesis seven, as each increase in the participants' confidence for Latino categorization (ordered from "Probably", "Most Likely", and "Definitely") also increases the log odds of being categorized as Black by 0.243 ($p = 0.000$).

However, it is important to note here that model 5 intentionally removes the effects of darker skin tone as a variable. As seen in model 6, the inclusion of darker skin tone as a variable in this ordinal logistic regression makes Latino categorization nonsignificant and decreases the log odds of Latino categorization as a predictor down to 0.030 ($p = 0.620$). However, similar to the main effects for predicting Black categorization found on Table 4, darker skin tone increases the log odds of Black categorization by 2.112 ($p = 0.000$) and low status clothing increases the log odds of Black categorization by 0.334 ($p = 0.047$). From these findings, we can infer that

darker skin tone has much stronger effects in predicting Black categorization. Nevertheless, model 5 offers strong support for hypothesis seven.

Being as the intention of hypothesis seven was to find evidence of White Americans perceiving Latino identity as being more adjacent to Black identity (in comparison to Asians), I run models 7 and 8 to find additional support for the findings made from models 5 and 6. Specifically, I run an ordinal logistic regression model that examines the inverse relationship: using Black categorization as a predictor of Latino categorization. By doing so, I argue that I am able to confirm and find additional support for the implications of hypothesis seven. As I expected, models 7 and 8 have similar findings to models 5 and 6. Specifically, each increase in the participants' confidence towards Black categorization increased the log odds of Latino categorization by 0.290 ($p = 0.000$).

Interestingly, unlike in model 5, low status clothing remains significant and actually has a stronger effect in predicting Latino categorization. In particular, the log odds of low status clothing as a predictor of Latino categorization increases by 0.413 ($p = 0.011$). However, similar to model 6, the inclusion of darker skin tone as a variable in the ordinal logistic regression makes Black categorization nonsignificant (log odds = 0.068, $p = 0.405$), whereas darker skin tone increases the log odds of Latino categorization by 1.104 ($p = 0.000$) along with low status clothing (log odds = 0.489, $p = 0.003$). Also, like the findings for models 1 and 3, the control variable of age remains a statistically significant predictor of Latino categorization for both models 7 (log odds = 0.442, $p = 0.009$) and 8 (log odds = 0.439, $p = 0.009$). Despite the weaker effects, age consistently remains a significant enough predictor of Latino categorization across all of this study's regression models.

Table 5. Ordinal Logistic Regressions Examining Black-White Categorization Based on Asian-Latino Categorization and Vice Versa

VARIABLES	Model 5: White (-) or Black (+)	Model 6: White (-) or Black (+)	Model 7: Asian (-) or Latino (+)	Model 8: Asian (-) or Latino (+)
Perceived as more Latino than Asian	0.243***	0.0304		
	(0.0570)	(0.0611)		
Perceived as more Black than White			0.290***	0.0679
			(0.0713)	(0.0815)
Darker skin tone (ref: lighter skin tone)		2.112***		1.104***
		(0.199)		(0.189)
Low status clothing (ref: high status clothing)	0.182	0.334*	0.413*	0.489**
	(0.164)	(0.168)	(0.162)	(0.163)
Age	-0.0770	-0.0238	0.442**	0.439**
	(0.171)	(0.176)	(0.169)	(0.169)
Income	0.0217	-0.00537	-0.0610	-0.103
	(0.170)	(0.174)	(0.169)	(0.170)
Education (ref: Associates or Lower)				
Bachelor's	0.0347	0.189	0.0217	0.117
	(0.184)	(0.187)	(0.182)	(0.183)
Graduate or Professional	-0.0672	-0.0210	0.0284	0.107
	(0.233)	(0.240)	(0.233)	(0.234)
Gender (ref: Female)				
Male	-0.277	-0.247	0.172	0.111
	(0.169)	(0.172)	(0.167)	(0.168)
Non-binary or Third gender	-0.497	-0.142	0.0715	0.127
	(0.509)	(0.500)	(0.453)	(0.452)
Observations	493	493	493	493

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This study was motivated by Bonilla-Silva's (2004) concept of the tri-racial hierarchy, with the intentions of investigating the presence and state of a racial hierarchy. While this study does not directly test Bonilla-Silva's (2004) thesis or tri-racial hierarchy itself, I argue that findings from this study hold important implications for the dominant perceptions of racial identification and relations in the US, specifically with the four broad racial groups of White, Black, Asian, and Latiné.

With Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy in mind, this study uses racial formation (Omi and Winant 2015) to emphasize the social construction of racial identification, acting as a key perspective in investigating the perceptions of Asians and Latinés in the US. Using racial formation, findings from this study suggest greater nuance and range to how the racial categories of "Asian" and "Latino" are constructed.[2] While only manipulating two key variables, clothing and skin tone, findings suggest implications on how White Americans may perceive who or what is considered "Asian" or "Latino." With statistical support for all seven hypotheses formulated for this study, the findings from this study have strong evidence to suggest that White Americans perceive Asians as being more adjacent to Whiteness, whereas Latinos are perceived as more adjacent to Blackness.

[2] being that this study only uses a self-identified male and Latino as the subject model, I use Latino in direct reference to this study

As noted from the results section, findings for hypothesis suggest an association between Latino and Black identities, being that the likelihood of the subject model being perceived as more Latino increases when the same subject model is also perceived as more Black. However, it may be important to note that the statistical significance found on model 5 only exists when removing the effect of skin tone. Thus, while we ultimately do find support for hypothesis seven, findings for hypothesis seven seem to make the qualification that darker skin tone acts a much stronger predictor of Black and Latino categorization.

Similarly, hypotheses one through six all examine clothing and skin tone as markers of White, Black, Asian, or Latino categorization. To start, this study's findings strongly support hypothesis one, which tests whether or not darker skin tone can predict the model being perceived as more Latino than Asian. Similarly, this study's findings also strongly support hypothesis four, which tests whether or not darker skin tone can predict the model being perceived as more Black than White. Findings for hypotheses one and four thus suggest that both Black and Latino identities are strongly associated with having darker skin.

These findings fall in line with Margaret Hunter's position and research, which argue that having darker skin is a marker of authenticity for Latino and Black identities (Hunter 2004; Hunter and Hall 2008). Following Hunter's perspective, these findings would suggest that this association between having a darker skin tone and being "authentically" Black or Latino is also shared with White Americans, implying that the dominant racial group in the US sees having darker skin as a key identifier for Latino and Black identities. This interpretation makes sense when considering results from this study's regression models, in which racial categorization of the racial ambiguous subject as Latino or Black was consistently predicted through the effects of skin tone.

Additionally, hypotheses two and five examine low status attire (as represented by a construction worker uniform) as a predictor of both Latino and Black identities. Here, findings from this study offer support for both hypotheses two and five, but at varying degrees. When considering the difference in log odds, findings for hypotheses two and five seem to suggest that low status clothing has a stronger effect in predicting Latino categorization in comparison to Black categorization. Thus, this study's findings may suggest that skin tone is a much more significant identifier for Black categorization in comparison to Latino categorization, whereas clothing, is much more significant in predicting Latino categorization.

When considering past research, these findings may suggest that social status cues, such as clothing, help "fill in the gap" for racial identities that are seen as more "gray," "ambiguous," or part of the "racial middle" (O'Brien 2008). In other words, if Asian and Latinés are seen as part of a "racial middle," social status cues such as clothing act as important markers of racial identification or Asians and Latinés being that theses racial groups may be seen as more nuanced and ambiguous compared to Black and White categories. Based on these findings, social status cues such as clothing may act as a form of "secondary confirmation" or "context clue" in deciding between Asian or Latino categorization.

Additionally, my study finds that the control variable of "age" consistently holds statistical significance in predicting Latino categorization. For example, the coefficient values of models 1 (0.439) and 2 (0.485) would indicate that older participants see an increased likelihood of classifying the racially ambiguous subject as Latino. This finding may suggest generational shifts in the construction of Asian and Latino identities in the US. Specifically, the results found from age as a control variable may suggest an effect of differential racialization in US history

where social positions of Asians and Latinos were reversed, with Latinos being more adjacent to Whiteness (Kang and Torres-Saillant 2016; Pulido 2002).

Kang and Torres (2016) offer examples of this differential racialization in their critical analysis and discussion of Asians and Latinés as a rapidly growing and integral "ethnoracial minority groups" (545). For example, Kang and Torres (2016)) note how rhetoric and attitudes from the Los Angeles County Health Department under the leadership of Dr. John Larabee, characterized Japanese Americans as "unredeemable aliens" whereas Mexicans were "redeemable immigrants." Due to this characterization from county and health officials, Japanese Americans "did not merit social programs focused on improving their quality of life, expanding educational access, or ensuring health care choices, all of which their Mexican counterparts could more readily obtain" (Kang and Torres-Saillant 2016:551).

When comparing this historical period of for Japanese and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles with our literature review of stereotypes for Asians and Latinés, we see evidence of differential racialization that may have had lasting effects on racial categorization of Asians and Latinés across the shifting generations for White Americans. Thus, despite our literature regarding key stereotypes that characterize Asians and Latinés in the US today, the significance of age as a predictor for Latino categorization in this study may point to the continued effects of differential racialization on racial categorization from White Americans.

Potentially, the statistical significance found with age may also suggest that the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype may have a stronger presence in the perceptions of older White Americans, possibly blurring the lines Asian and Latino categorizations and thus generalizing both identities as foreigners (Dennis 2018; Flores and Schachter 2018; García 2017; Lee et al. 2008; Li and Nicholson 2021; Menjívar 2021; Ramírez 2018). Moreover, when considering that

age only displayed weak effects for the models predicting Asian or Latino categorization, and not for Black or White categorization, this finding may also reinforce the ambiguity and fluidity with navigating self-perception and racialization of Asian and Latinés in the US.

This study thus offers findings that support the "gray area" described by Eileen O'Brien (2008) in her concept of the racial middle. Conversely, this interpretation would imply that Black or White categorization is much more concrete, acting as the polar ends of a bipolar spectrum or scale. Moreover, the findings for Black or White categorization in this study further support past findings on the key role of skin tone for Black or White categorization, including the racial categorization of multiracial people (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Feliciano 2016; Harris and Khanna 2010; Hunter 2004; Hunter and Hall 2008). Considering these findings and interpretations, O'Brien's (2008) concept of the racial middle seems to help inform the structure and order of Bonilla-Silva's (2004) tri-racial hierarchy from their Latin Americanization thesis. In this tri-racial hierarchy, we may interpret the hierarchy and order of racial groups as positioning along a Black and White spectrum, where darker skinned Black people represent one end and the most privileged of White people representing the opposite end.

Next, when examining findings for hypotheses three and six, this study finds weaker evidence to support these two hypotheses. Both models 2 and 4 seem to suggest that there seems to be a qualifying effect found through an interaction effect between darker skin tone and low status clothing. In particular, when comparing the models 1 and 2, the addition of an interaction effect seemed to qualify the main effects of darker skin tone and low status clothing respectively, with low status clothing seeing a particularly strong "qualifying" effect from the addition of the interaction model. However, based on the high coefficient value for the interaction effect in model 2 (log odds 1.024, $p = 0.002$), the interaction effect seems to amplify the effects of darker

skin tone and clothing in predicting Latino categorization. On the other hand, the findings for model 4 seem to suggest that darker skin tone has a "qualifying" effect in the interaction between darker skin tone and low status clothing in predicting Black categorization. Thus, while findings here seem to suggest that the interaction still has an increased likelihood of predicting Black categorization, there seems to be a qualifying effect in the interaction between these two variables.

When considering past research and findings for the other hypotheses, the findings for the interaction effect models seem to suggest that the combination of darker skin tone and low status clothing is much stronger in predicting Latino categorization, suggesting that the interaction of these two variables is much more important as a marker of Latino identity. This seems to be similar to the findings for Table 5, which also seems to suggest that clothing is much more significant in predicting Latino categorization due to this category being part of the "racial middle". Conversely, findings for model 4 seem to be in line with findings for models 5 and 6, which all seem to suggest the much stronger importance in darker skin tone as a predictor of Black categorization and thus, a key marker of Black identity. Again, these findings seem to be in line with past research on colorism, particularly in regards to findings for categorization of multiracial people (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Feliciano 2016; Harris and Khanna 2010; Hunter 2004; Hunter and Hall 2008).

In summary, findings from this study point to the strong association made between the model minority myth and Asians, along with the status of White people as the default and dominant racial group of society. Being that the model minority myth is associated with higher socioeconomic status, the statistical significance found from high status clothing in this study may suggest the persistent and close association made between Asian classification and high

socioeconomic status constructed and reinforced by the model minority myth (Dennis 2018; Lee et al. 2008, 2008). On the other hand, if White people are the dominant and default racial group in US society, it would make sense that high status clothing only slightly increases the likelihood of being categorized as White as Whiteness is seen as the default of most positions in society.

Conversely, when following our hypotheses, we can see that darker skin significantly increases the likelihood of being categorized as more Latino as opposed to Asian, as well as more Black as opposed to White. As noted earlier, these findings are supported by past research on colorism for Black and Latiné communities, which have been found to view darker skin as a marker of authenticity to Blackness and Latinidad (Hunter 2004; Hunter and Hall 2008). Similarly, this study's findings are also in line with research on perceptions of multiracial people along with research on racial categorization from White people, which essentially have found that skin tone acts as an important marker of racial identification between Black and White, including Black and White biracial individuals (Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Schachter, Flores, and Maghbouleh 2021).

Also, when considering the role of skin tone as a key marker of racial categorization for Black and Latinés individuals, we may then see reasons behind findings in this study for low status clothing. In particular, this study's findings on the effects of low status clothing seems to offer a possible explanation behind the findings of past research on clothing, stereotypes, and racialization of Black people and Latinés, such as the study conducted by Freeman and colleagues (2011), Lee and Fiske (2006), and the various literature regarding the racialization of illegality (Flores and Schachter 2018; García 2017; Menjívar 2021; Ramírez 2018).

Limitations

This study's design potentially limits the ability to make any conclusive claims or implications that can be made from this study. However, while this study's 2x2 experimental design may be limited in scope, the experimental design also ensures high internal validity through the ability to control and isolate the study's two key variables of skin tone and clothing. As seen from this study's results, this study was able to find strong evidence of darker skin tone and low status clothing as predictors of Latino categorization. Conversely, this study also found strong evidence of lighter skin tone and high status clothing as predictors of Asian categorization. Table 4 thus offers strong evidence to support hypotheses one through six.

Additionally, findings from Table 5 offer strong evidence to support the last hypothesis, hypothesis seven. As such, while this study's simple design may suggest a limited scope in conclusive claims that can be made, the simple experiment design was still able to find strong support for all seven hypotheses in this study. Furthermore, with a sample size of 502, this study was still able to find strong evidence for the seven hypotheses even with a sizable sample size, especially when considering the limitations in experiment design and budget. Thus, even with a low cost, simple, and quick experiment design, this study was able to effectively and efficiently find strong evidence for seven different hypotheses. Lastly, despite a lack of literature that could be directly applied and drawn from, this study's findings act as a notable addition to current literature on race and colorism by focusing on Asians and Latinés. Thus, while racial groups outside of the Black-White binary are often overlooked in studies regarding colorism in the US, this study's focus on Asians and Latinés helps add new, nuanced, and well supported findings to academia's current understanding of the US racial hierarchy.

Future Directions

Future directions for studies regarding or related to colorism hold a plethora of possibilities, such as various phenomena, identities, and communities that have yet to have any substantial research at this current moment. Firstly, future studies should further investigate perceptions of other minority groups that are potentially part of the racial middle such as Middle Eastern and North Africa (MENA) or Native Americans. Continued studies on colorism for various racial or ethnic communities that still lack substantial research would help fill in gaps in current literature. With the rise in influence and scope of digital spaces and multimedia platforms, future studies should also investigate sources of social construction such as through the media, particularly examining which forms or mediums of media may have the most influence in socially constructing race. Using racial formation theory, future studies could examine the racial projects that have constructed Asians and Latinés in the US. In particular, future research should investigate the stereotypes that may have motivated responses from the participants of this study, with particular attention to the relationship between race and class.

Additionally, as briefly mentioned earlier, future research should investigate further into the effects of clothing, hair, and skin tone as variables in the perception of women or nonbinary individuals. As found from past studies thus far, gender of individuals can have a significant effect on the impact of various markers of identity such as skin tone and hair (Goel et al. 2021; Matsumoto and Hwang 2018; Sims, Pirtle, and Johnson-Arnold 2020). Similarly, research thus far has focused on the effects of clothing on the perception of Black individuals, Black men in particular (Freeman et al. 2011; Gurung et al. 2021; McDermott and Pettijohn II 2011). However, less research has been conducted on the effects of skin tone and clothing as markers of identification for Asian or Latiné individuals. Notably, research regarding effects of clothing in

influencing perception has also mostly focused on the effects for men, with less research investigating the effects of clothing for women, especially for women of color. Aside from a few studies investigating the effects of hair in affecting racial or national classification, future studies can further investigate the effects of clothing for women and especially women of color (Goel et al. 2021; Matsumoto and Hwang 2018; Sims et al. 2020).

Lastly, future research should look into "real life" or "practical" implications of colorism on various racial or ethnic communities, investigating the everyday effects of colorism based on the perception (or lack thereof) of the significance of skin tone and racial identity. For example, a future study could incorporate qualitative methods to investigate the perception of colorism for Asian and Latiné communities. By building on this study, further evidence from future studies could help strengthen and clarify the results of current and past studies on colorism or racial stratification.

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