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### The Beyond Ethnicity Project

Corri Zimmerman  
*Hope College*

Rita Kagaju  
*Hope College*

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# The Beyond Ethnicity Project – Initial Findings

Corri Zimmerman , Student, Hope College

Rita Kagaju, Student, Hope College

Rodrigo Serrão, Ph.D. | Sociology and Social Work Department, Hope College

Hope HSRB Number: 21-063

For more information, contact:

Corri Zimmerman -

[corri.zimmerman@hope.edu](mailto:corri.zimmerman@hope.edu)

Rita Kagaju - [rita.kagaju@hope.edu](mailto:rita.kagaju@hope.edu)

Rodrigo Serrão – [serrao@hope.edu](mailto:serrao@hope.edu)

## Introduction

This study is part of a larger ongoing study conducted by Dr. Serrão aiming to understand Latinx perceived racial identity and its impact on their sense of belonging at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

This study was conducted at a predominately White liberal arts colleges in the Midwest

- 80% of the student body identifies as White
- 8% as Hispanic/Latinx
- 12% (all other racial groups and international students combined)
- 62% Women

We focused on Latinx students divided into three categories:

- White-identifying
- Non-White identifying
- International students from Latin America

## Literature Review

Sociologists Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Crystal E. Peoples (2022) recently wrote about Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCU or PWI), arguing that due to the United States' history of racial oppression, these institutions are places of "informal segregation" that disenfranchise students and faculty of color, causing them to experience intense negative emotions like rejection, and isolation. These experiences have been well-documented in various studies investigating microaggressions and their impact on minority students' sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2021; Harwood et al., 2012). Furthermore, these experiences are intensified when race and gender intersect, resulting in hypervisibility and invisibility for Black women or hypersexualization for Latinas (Newton, 2022; McCabe, 2009).

When it comes to Latinx students in PWIs, however, studies often fail to consider how factors like skin color and international background (for Latin American international students) shape their experiences. Instead, these studies tend to lump all Latinx students into a single category and assume that all Latinx students face the same challenges (Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016; Rolón-Dow, Covarrubias, & Guerrón Montero, 2022; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; McCabe, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009). Our research uses Latinx Critical Race Theory LatCrit theory to explore how skin color, racial identification, and international status impact Latinx students' experiences at a PWI (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

## Research Question

How do skin color, racial identification, and international status impact Latinx students’ experiences at a predominately white institution?

## Methods

In-depth interviews with 23 Latinx students divided into three categories:

White-identifying (9), non-White identifying (9), and F1-Visa holder (5).

We used a combination of recruiting methods such as: recruiting flyers, and purposive and snowball sampling (once we identified a student who fit our criteria, we invited them to participate in the study. We also asked them to refer one or two other potential participants).

Interviews ranged between 1 to 3 hours in length.

Background information survey filled out prior to the interview.

Interviews were transcribed using automated speech-to-text online services.

Interviews were coded using focused coding (Charmaz 2014) for identifying common themes across multiple interviews.

### Participants:

75% of participants were born in the United States.

46.4% grew up speaking Spanish only in their homes. 42.9% grew up speaking Spanish and English. Only 7.1% spoke only English in their homes.

78.6 identify as females.

28.6% come from a working class household (income ranging \$25K to \$50K).

25% first-year students; 21.4% second-year; 14.3% third-year; 39.3% fourth-

year.

67.9% are first-generation students.

46.4% Democrat; 25% Independent; 28.6% “something-else”; no one

identified as Republican.

42.9% identified as Catholic; 10.7% as Protestant; 25% “other.”

## Preliminary Findings

- White-identifying students feel like outsiders in spaces that are predominately White and in spaces that are predominately Latina/o/x.
- Non-White identifying Latina/o/x students were more likely to experience prejudice.
- International students face ignorance about their place of origin, but feel secure in having the privilege of being a member of the majority group in their home countries.

### **Selected quotes:**

#### **White identifying students:**

“I've been told my whole life, oh, you look white...And it came up like almost every day of my life where even my own sister would be like, well you're not Mexican...” (W-9)

“I have to put white, but in person, I don't think I'm white...I had to constantly prove myself that I am Mexican...But then with other people, I'm like, oh no, but I am American too, don't get me wrong...it's like this constant battle of having to prove to others that I do fit this identity.” (W-8)

“...it's getting to the point where the people of color are like, if you're a little bit white, I don't want you in this space. And not everyone's like that, but I've encountered it enough where I realized that even within a space of people of color, I have to have my guard up because of the fact that I'm mixed and more white-passing and I'm going to experience things differently from other people of color, people that are darker than me.” (W-5)

### **Selected quotes:**

#### **Non-White identifying students:**

“...They would ask me if I got here by jumping the wall or crossing the river...they would use those type of things. Like, I guess how immigrants here that are Mexican cross the border, and they're asking me how I did it or how high I could jump...” (NW-6)

“...There was another occasion where, like, a kid asked me if I had a green card.

Like, you wouldn't ask a white woman that. You wouldn't ask a white woman

that at all. You would never ask that question.” (NW-8)

“And then also sitting in class with a lot of the students that are majoring in the same department that I am, a lot of them are, like, male white students, and they kind of put me to the side. They see me as a female of color and they're just like she probably doesn't know. So, I've had experiences where they'll, like, completely turn their backs around, like, against me and just not include me in class work and stuff like that.” (NW-2)

#### **International students**

“...Back home, I was not part of a minority, so I just felt like I fit in. So coming (to America), everything revolves around identity and who you are and how you look.” (F1-2)

“In my country, I'm the majority. I never had to identify myself as anything but (the person says their name). And then when you come to college, then you realize you're a race too. (F1-4)

“Last year, I do think that I experienced it a lot more just, like, comments about my country or where I'm from or stuff like that... but I'm part of the group that doesn't experience racism back at home.” (F1-5)

## Takeaways

- Skin color and international status can impact students' experiences at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These factors may influence how students are perceived by others and can affect their sense of belonging on campus.
- White racial identification does not always correspond with lighter skin tone. Some students may choose to identify as White because they do not see themselves as belonging to another racial category, even if their skin tone is not necessarily lighter.
- Having a light skin tone does not necessarily indicate a student will choose to identify as White. Some students with lighter skin may identify as a person of color and choose a racial category other than White for personal reasons.
- White supremacy and colorism affect Latinx students interactions on campus which can also result in internalized racism.

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