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Being Brown on Campus: Racism and the Social-Emotional Health of Latino Students

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Publication Date

2022

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Being Brown on Campus:
Racism and the Social-Emotional Health of Latino Students

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Enrique Espinoza

June 2022

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Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful to everyone who has made this dream of earning a doctorate a reality. I could not have done this without my caring co-advisors, Dr. Louie F. Rodriguez and Dr. Rita Kohli. Your guidance and encouragements always kept me going - even when at times it seemed like I was not up to par. Dr. Rodriguez, thank you for taking me under your wing and bringing me on board to the Center for Transformational Education research team where you helped me develop my skills and love for qualitative research. I am forever in debt for your mentorship and support. Dr. Kohli, thank you for introducing me to the world of Critical Race Theory in Education and Microaggression Theory. For constantly pushing me to think critically and helping me build my racial literacy. To my dissertation committee member and Project Males Mentor, Dr. Edwin Hernandez, thank you for all your support and guidance. Thanks to you I am teaching in a school counseling program, helping shape the next generation of school counselors.

To the faculty at UC Riverside who were instrumental in my doctoral career, Dr. Begoña Echeveria and Dr. Lorena Gutierrez. Dr. Echeveria, I will cherish our many conversations about gender issues, qualitative research, and, of course, the Basque cheese! Dr. Gutierrez, I could not have done this without you as a mentor in CET and a role model. Till this day I remind myself of the words you shared, "A good dissertation is a done dissertation". This kept me going when I felt burnt out and continued to procrastinate. ¡Gracias!

To my extraordinary ESC classmates! Arturo Nevárez, Danielle Mireles, Patriccia Ordoñez-Kim, Yajaira Calderon, and Margarita Vizcarra (rest in power). UCR

would be impossible without all of our hangouts, complain sessions, laughs, and all your support! To my fellow GSOE friends who were the first people I met and befriended at the graduate student mentorship orientation, Sara Grummert and Megan Galligan. I may have finished last, but we did it!

To my friends outside of UCR, Christina Su, Jonathan Hong, Thong Dinh, and Marco Gutierrez. You all kept me sane, and your emotional support was everything! I am sure you heard me talk about my program and research countless times! Thank you for joining me on this rollercoaster of a journey!

To my high school counselor and mentor, Maricela Montes. Thank you for always being there for me and your continued guidance! After all these years you are still someone I turn to for support and to think through situations. I cannot thank you enough for having that conversation with me back in 2017 when I got admitted to UCR and I was contemplating quitting my job as a school counselor. Thank you for talking me into making that decision.

To my graduate mentors at Cal State Long Beach, Dr. Jonathan O'Brien and Dr. Pamela Kreiser. Dr. O'Brien, thank you for introducing me to qualitative research and supporting me as my thesis advisor. Dr. Kreiser, thank you for being my mentor in undergrad and making research fascinating and following me into my master's program as a committee member for my thesis. You both always saw the researcher in me and encouraged me to pursue a PhD. As a first-generation college student, and now doctor, I am forever thankful for your faith in me and support.

Lastly, to my family. Mom, Leonel Contreras, Rosangela Espinoza, Martha Espinoza, Magaly Espinoza, and Pedro Espinoza. I could not have done this without your support and love. I know sometimes you may not fully understand how a PhD works and why I do the work/schooling I do but thank you! Pedro, you are next to earn your PhD – you can do it! To all my nieces and nephews, I hope my journey as a first-generation college student and doctor shows you that you too can succeed! Love you all.

Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful, ever-loving mother, Martha Elsa Contreras. Mil gracias por su apollo, cariño, amor, sacrificio, y por siempre trabajando para darnos un mejor futuro. Te amo.

To the six young Latino men who so kindly shared their struggles with racism with me. May you continue to fight on and never give up. ¡Sí se puedes!

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Being Brown on Campus:
Racism and the Social-Emotional Health of Latino Students

by

Enrique Espinoza

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education

University of California, Riverside, June 2022

Dr. Louie F. Rodriguez, Co-Chairperson

Dr. Rita Kohli, Co-Chairperson

With the continued racism and anti-immigrant rhetoric targeted at the Latinx

population, there is a need to further explore the impact that racism has on Latino

students' social-emotional health and academic performance. Ample scholarship

highlights the ways in which racism in education manifests in the forms of racial

microaggressions and toxic campus racial climate that affects students of color (Kohli &

Solórzano, 2012; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014; Yosso et al., 2009). However, few

studies have examined the ways in which the experiences with racism can contribute to

the development of racism-induced traumatic stress (i.e., hypervigilance, lack of sleep,

and muscle tension; Akbar, 2017; Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019) among K-12 Latino students. This study builds on existing literature on racism-induced traumatic stress by studying the way in which six Latino high school students experienced racism at various levels ranging from structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internal. Interview data describes how frequent encounters with racism took a toll on the social-emotional wellbeing of these students and ultimately impeded their academic success. Lastly, the study results, limitations, and implications for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2015, I first met Joshua, a soft-spoken young Latino[1] who was a smart young

man in AP and honors courses, during his 10th grade year. He was sent to my office, his

school counselor, for displaying what we perceived to be symptoms of generalized

anxiety – difficulty breathing, nervousness when presenting, shutting down. Joshua's

grades began to deteriorate and after a couple counseling sessions, I decided that a

section 504 plan[2] was needed to support his anxiety in his classes. Throughout the

evaluation process and beyond, Joshua and I developed a good relationship where he

would come speak with me when he had a difficult time focusing in class or needed to

get away for a few minutes. Through our meetings I learned that he was fearful that his

parents, who were undocumented, would get deported and that he would either have to

stay here alone in the U.S. or leave with them to Mexico. With media coverage of I.C.E.

separating families and the hostile climate under the policies and public rhetoric of

Donald J. Trump (then U.S. President), his fear grew over the months and exasperated his

anxiety symptoms, manifesting in 11th grade into feelings that his skin was burning or as

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[1] For the purpose of this study, the term Latino is used to describe participants who are of
a) a Latin American/Latinx heritage and 2) identify as being men. When addressing
people of all genders, the term Latinx will be used. The term Latinx works as a gender-
neutral term to address people of Latin American decent. It was created by the LGBTQ+
community and is an extension of the former Latin@ that still followed the gender
binary.

[2] Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, section 504 prohibits any discrimination based on
a disability. It is a civil rights statute that requires that the needs of students with
disabilities are met through accommodations that allow them to access a fare and
appropriate education, including accessing general education courses. For Joshua, this
meant being able to leave the classroom for a few minutes or to present one-on-one rather
than in front of the entire class.

he described it "I feel like I'm on fire". At a parent meeting to discuss the flare-up of his heightened symptoms, his mother, whom I had frequent interaction with, self-disclosed her undocumented status and laid out the plan they had in the event I.C.E. got to them. She asked for my help in supporting Joshua in school and to encourage him to stay in the U.S. if they were deported.

What Joshua was experiencing seemed beyond just general anxiety, but at the time I did not have the language or understanding to name it as racism-induced traumatic stress – the psychological and/or physiological impacts on a person of color due to racism. Racism can range from physical and verbal threats of harm, racial microaggressions, events that humiliate and shame people of color, and/or witnessing incidents of harm to other people of color due to real or perceived racism (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011), and the impacts of such experiences can range from experiencing depression, anxiety, irritability, lack of concentration, and many more (Akbar, 2017, Jernigan & Daniel, 2011)

On the surface, a section 504 plan helped Joshua manage his symptoms by allowing him to avoid presentations that would evoke anxiety and grant him extra time for large projects, but it did not address the underlying triggers – racism and fear of its consequences. As a Latino school counselor working at a financially and economically diverse Southern California high school that primarily served Latinx and Asian American students, Joshua is but one case of a student fearing separation of families due to deportation, an aspect of racialization that many Latinx families at our high school were experiencing at the time.

Though Joshua's physical and psychological wellbeing was impacted by racism he experienced outside of school, many Latinx students at the school also experience racism within school that have direct impacts on their wellbeing. I have observed students struggling with teachers' comments about why they would not succeed because of their race, or others who were humiliated by peers in front of the class for going to clean homes with their families rather than "focusing on school". Observing this as a school counselor who was not trained to support students through the institutional and interpersonal racism they are experiencing, it drove me to want to explore, from the lens of Latino students, how do schools support them through the racism-induced traumatic stress they are feeling within and outside of school?

Latinx Racism

Racism in the United States is defined as the belief that one racial group is superior to all others and a system that allows such a group to execute such superiority (Solórzano, 1998). Racism functions as a system of oppression that creates inequities for communities of color that suppresses them while lifting the white community. Racism, like stated before, is systemic, consisting of various levels of oppression that manifest as ideology, laws and policies, and physical actions taken against communities of color (Tatum, 2001; Williams, 2020).

Latinx communities have a long history of racialization from the mid to late 1800's to today, with deficit practices that disproportionally make them look as non-American, second-class citizens (Garcia, 2018). In recent years, conservative media, Former president Trumps' campaign, and his presidency frequently targeted the Latinx

community. For instance, he often referred to them as dangerous, drug users and dealers, rapist, and lazy (Brown, Jones, & Becker, 2018). Thus, his words, policies, and actions racialized Latinx communities in such a way that it othered them from the "general" American citizen. Unfortunately, these elements create a sense of belief that Latinx citizens were un-American and should not be welcomed. Moreover, there exist a lengthy list of racial incidents targeted at the Latinx community documented by the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (CCIS, 2019). Some additional examples of the impact racism has had on this community include: the attempt to rescind DACA in 2017 by the Trump administration which would no longer allow early childhood arrival immigrants from gaining lawful presence in the U.S., an increase in death rates of unaccompanied or separated youth at the Southern border, an increase in family separations via I.C.E. raids (including near schools to target parents picking-up their children, inadequate housing and service for immigrants at border camps (CCIS, 2019). Inhumane policies were used towards immigrant children at border camps in the conservative state of Texas that allowed border patrol agents to administer antipsychotic, anxiety, and depression medication without parental consent (CCIS, 2019).

Racism in Schools

Racism has long been and continues to be a part of the education system. As there has been a current upsurge of racism in our current socio-political climate, this is trickling down into schools. Racism in the United States is defined as the belief that one racial group is superior to all others and a system that allows such a group to execute such superiority (Solórzano, 1998). Racism functions as a system of oppression that

creates inequities for communities of color that suppresses them while lifting the white

community. Historically, racism in schools has segregated students of color, preventing

them from accessing the same level of education as their white and affluent counterparts

(Ladson-Billings, 2006). School tracking practices impact students of color by

disproportionately tracking them into lower and remedial courses that limit their

opportunity for higher education (Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Oakes, 2005).

Recently, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2016) surveyed over 10,000

educators regarding the campaign and election of former President Donald J. Trump and

concluded that 90 percent reported a deep negative impact on students and their schools.

This report recognized that there has been a drastic increase, a resurgence in overt forms

of racism like an increase in verbal harassment, the use of slurs, and racist incidents that

target marginalized student populations. These actions often are covert and passed off as

'jokes' or 'isolated events' arguing that these actions were done by misinformed

individuals (SPLC, 2016). That said, although there is a new form of racism that is

subtler (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Kohli et al., 2017), former President Trump's election has

catalyzed a resurgence of explicit, more covert, forms of racism too (SLPC, 2019).

For example, in New York a 6th grade white student was recorded wearing black

face while acting like an ape and in Idaho elementary teachers dressed up as stereotypical

Mexicans and Trump's border wall (SLPC, 2019). Moreover, what is more alarming is

that these racist incidents that grab media attention are just a snapshot of what is

happening every day in our schools. SLPC (2019) highlighted in their most recent report

that in 2018, 821 school hate and/or bias incidents were presented in media, but in their

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survey, they recorded 3,265 incidents. Of those incidents reported in media, 63 percent

were race and ethnicity based (racist). More than two thirds of the educators (2,776)

surveyed reported witnessing an act of hate or bias during the fall of 2018 (SLPC, 2019).

Hate and/or bias incidents were defined as "verbal, written or physical—that target

someone based on identity or group membership. They include slurs, hate symbols,

graffiti and harassment" (SLPC, 2019, p. 6). Although former president Trump is no

longer in office, these incidents continue to persist in schools.

Racism-Induced Traumatic Stress

While overt racism is still present as in the examples above, scholars have

conceptualized New Racism to describe racism that is more discrete, subtle, and difficult

to identify (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). Its frequent exercise, along with the

resurgence of overt racism, has highlighted the importance of studying racism-induced

traumatic stress – also referred to as racial trauma, racism-related stress, or urban trauma.

In the existing literature studying the racist experience of people of color, racial trauma,

racism-related stress, race-based traumatic stress, and urban trauma have been used

interchangeably. But, as noted by Truong and Museus (2012) there is no clear distinction

between the different terms, racial trauma and racism-related stress. However, all terms,

to some degree, seek to name and address the psychological impact racism has on people

of color. Some scholars define race-based traumatic stress as the result of an

accumulation of racism on an individual's mental and physical health. It has been linked

to feelings of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, as well as other physical health

issues (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019). People with multiple

intersectional oppressed identities have a greater exposure to racism-induced traumatic stress and its negative consequences (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012). For the purpose of this study, I define these experiences as *racism-induced traumatic stress* –symptoms that manifest within people of color as a result of frequently experiencing traumatic, racist situations that are so extreme that they cause traumatic-stress symptoms such as: hypervigilance, anxiety, fear, and depression.

There is a great need to study racism-induced traumatic stress in K-12. Duncan-Andrade (2009) emphasizes that the cumulation of multiple negative stressors (i.e., microaggressions, humiliation) is overwhelming and harms one's health. Smith (2004; 2009) introduced educators to the concept of *Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF)* to explain that people of color face both psychological challenges (frustration, anger, etc.) and physiological challenges (high blood pressure, headaches, etc.) because of racism and their frequent need to defend and cope with it. This can be physically and emotionally draining. Therefore, their academics, professional, and personal lives, and overall wellbeing is negatively affected from experiences with racism. Moreover, Adelman (2008) directs attention to the fact that these multiple stressors are causing even more severe health issues because low-income communities, predominantly of color, have less access to resources to help them cope with racism-induced traumatic stress. Living and constantly interacting in toxic environments, like hostile schools, has been found to be one of the major factors causing poor health (Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen 2016; Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Thus, there is a need for scholarship, like this study, to explore the ways that schools can cultivate a hostile culture that aids in the harming of Latino

students and what school-based mental health professions, whose duty is to support the overall wellbeing of students, can provide support and advocate for progressive policy changes.

Though there are countless studies that support the argument that racism-induced traumatic stress and racism in all its forms has very real negative psychological and physiological impacts on people of color (Akbar, 2017; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2017; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), its impact is yet to be officially recognized in the field of counseling (Akbar, 2017; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

While the need to study racism-induced traumatic stress for Latinx students is always there, it was even more relevant for schools at the time of the study. This study was conducted in the midst of the world-wide pandemic during the 2020-2021 academic school year. This pandemic placed a spotlight on the systemic oppression that communities of color, and other marginalized demographics, face on a daily basis. The world witness many working class families (often of color) struggle financially, blue collar jobs coming to a halt, and a disproportion deathrate among communities of color affected by the COVID-19 virus (CDC, 2020). To no surprise, our low-income, Latinx students also suffered. Compared to their white counterparts, Latinx homes on average had more adults working (due to double occupancy and larger families) as essential workers and a higher infection rate (CSLHC, 2021). Though these families were key in keeping the U.S. going, their jobs disproportionately placed them at-risk for infection and

spreading at home (CSLHC, 2021) where youth would likely get ill and not be able to engage in virtual learning. Schools were shut down for what was meant to be two weeks, then a few months, and the closures continued to be extended. As a result, schools shifted to an online, virtual setting that widened the opportunity gap for academic attainment. Families needed access to reliable internet and a functional computer for their children to "zoom-in" to class and complete their work. Moreover, a suitable study/workspace for learning was hard for some families who had doubled or tripled-up in a home. Even single unit homes struggled as space for a large family was scarce. Student engagement dipped and understandably so given the fear of COVID-19 and the high infection and death rates. Ultimately, students of all positionalities experienced stress and anxiety during the pandemic, and working-class Latinx students were intersectionally impacted, resulting in additional layers of stress and anxiety to what they were experiencing prior. This context has made it all the more important for school leaders, teachers, staff, and counselors to understand student experiences with racism-induced traumatic stress.

CURRENT STUDY

This qualitative study explored the experiences of Latino high school students with racism-induced traumatic stress as a result of in-and-out of school racism, to understand a) how it impacted their education and mental health, as well as b) if supports for these stresses felt accessible. Additionally, this study helps fill the gap in knowledge for school counselors, and other educators, to better understand the impact of racism and how to help students cope and address it in their schools.

Though there has been a growth in empirical work that examines racial trauma (Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011), urban trauma (Akbar, 2017), race-based traumatic stress (Carter, 2007), race-related stress (Richman, & Jonassaint, 2008) and their impact on communities of color, few have explicitly examined the experience of students of color with racism-induced traumatic stress in education, especially among Latinos. Much of the current work is based in the field of psychology and explores issues of racial trauma[3] more broadly in everyday life (Akbar, 2017; Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Helms et al., 2012). Even then, much of the recent work studying racial trauma documents the ways it impacts the Black community (Akbar, 2017; Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). For example, Jernigan and Daniel (2011) studied how racial trauma in schools negatively impacted Black children's identity development. Schools are one of the primary ways that youth learn to develop their racial identity. They concluded that how one experiences racial trauma is closely tied to their racial identity (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011).

Currently, few studies have looked at forms of racial trauma specifically in high school (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Paperson, 2010; Warren, 2014) and none, to my knowledge, on racism-induced traumatic stress. These studies predominantly studied the experience of racial trauma in the form of segregation between white and communities of color, the unequal funding of schools, and the "*culture of* poverty" narrative (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Paperson, 2010; Warren, 2014). The culture of poverty refers to the

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[3] For convenience, when referring to the work of other scholars we collapsed the various names into racial trauma to distinguish it from the proposed name of racism-induced traumatic stress.

belief that poor communities of color "are so dysfunctional that they do not know how to operate in mainstream society. Thus, the major responsibility of teachers and the school is to discipline and bring order to their chaotic lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2017, pp. 81-82).

Other work has been done to study the impacts of racial trauma in the form of racial microaggressions on students of color in the K-12 classroom (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Kohli et al., 2017). These studies highlight the subtle forms of racism (racial microaggressions) that are enacted in schools and how their constant encounters build up and has both psychological and physiological negative effects on the health of students of color. However, racial microaggressions, segregation, and the culture of poverty are each a form of racism-induced traumatic stress. The studies presented above examine the experience of students of color with specific forms of racism-induced traumatic stress, but do not capture a more comprehensive and layered experience of students of color with racism-induced traumatic stress. This study aimed to do just that.

With the growing negative rhetoric in society and media coverage on harsh racist incidents that target Latinx populations, both in-and-out of schools, the need to study racism-induced traumatic stress is ever more needed. Especially, because racism-induced traumatic stress brings to the forefront racism and, through CRT, helps us understand its systematic oppressive power on Latino high school students, like the development of traumatic stress. Traumatic experiences have been documented to negatively impact individuals by raising levels of stress hormones like cortisol, which can impede one's self-regulation (Richman & Jonassaint, 2008). As a result, Latino students' behavior might be misinterpreted as disruptive without taking into consideration the structural and

systematic forms of racism continuously inflicting harm. This may lead to disciplinary action that impacts their educational outcomes. Thus, studies like this one brings much needed value in understanding how racism, not one's race, impacts their schooling and social emotional well-being.

Also, the Latinx population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) and as the Latinx population continues to increase, a corresponding growth in the number Latinx students in K-12 is expected, but more importantly, so is the current socio-political, xenophobic, and anti-Latinx climate (SLPC, 2016; SLPC, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to examine the experiences of Latino youth with racism-induced traumatic stress in K-12, of which little is found in existing literature. Because young men of color are disproportionally targeted in school disciplinary action, specifically Black and Brown young students (Warren, 2014), more work examining the experience of Latino students is needed. Education and public health research inform us that Latino students continue to be negatively impacted by racism in (Hernandez et al., 2021) and out of schools (CDC, 2021). Given their expanding growth across the U.S., and in the U.S. education system, it is imperative that educators learn more about meeting this populations needs and addressing practices that would continue to harm them. We know practices like frequent involvement in school disciplinary procedures is correlated to youth entering the juvenile justice system which places them on the school-to-prison pipeline (Warren, 2014; Hernandez et al, 2021). These incidents are documented as having a connection to racism, because of the student populations they target and how they are utilized (Warren, 2014).

Researchers have found that young men in schools are less likely to engage in help-seeking behavior (Wimer & Levant, 2011; Seamark & Gabriel, 2018). Engaging in help-seeking behavior is important because numerous scholars have identified that racial trauma, in all its forms, has severe psychological impacts that can hinder student's connection with school and academics (Akbar, 2017; Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Kohli et al., 2017). For instance, Maslow's (1943) pyramid of hierarchical needs argues that when basic human needs like food and safety are not being met, it is extremely challenging for individuals to focus on needs that are higher up the hierarchy, like education. Further researching if and how Latino students address, and process racism-induced traumatic stress has the potential to inform school counselors on ways to better support this student population.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways do Latino high school students experience racism within and outside of schools?

2. What are the impacts of racism on Latino high school students?

    a. What impacts does it have on their social emotional health?

    b. What impacts does it have on their academic engagement?

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

With a growing body of literature on racism-induced traumatic stress, this study is significant because it contributes to the growing body of literature focused on the racism and psychological stress of young men of color by bringing attention to the negative

impacts that racism-induced traumatic stress can have on Latino students' academic achievement as well as their social emotional well-being. Currently, racism-induced traumatic stress is not widely discussed and understood in school-based mental health, which means, these professionals might be missing the adequate tools and frameworks to help Latinos address racism-induced traumatic stress which might be impacting their school achievement. This study has the potential to not only inform educators about the experiences of Latino high school students with racism-induced traumatic stress, but ways that schools can be intentional in supporting and guiding Latino students overcome these obstacles.

SUMMARY

This chapter provides background information regarding the growing body of literature on racism-induced traumatic stress, as well as a call for the need to further explore racism-induced traumatic stress among Latino high school students. The discussion identified the potential negative impact that racism-induced traumatic stress might have on the social emotional wellbeing and the academic engagement of Latino youth. Chapter 2 of this dissertation will provide an overview of an exhaustive review of relevant literature to expand on the problem statement of this study and present the conceptual framework used in this study to examine racism-induced traumatic stress. Next, chapter 3 will lay out the qualitative research design of this study, with details on participant demographics, research site, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 discuss the findings of this study with the identified thematic findings. Lastly, Chapter 6 discusses the thematic findings, implications for school counselors, counselor

educator programs, and what schools and districts can focus on to address racism-induced

traumatic stress among Latino high school students, and presents future research ideas

that build on the work of this study.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

With a lack of research exploring the experience of Latino students with racism-induced traumatic stress comes an under theorization of how race and racism in education can create traumatic experiences for these students. This dissertation utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Microaggression Theory (MT) to study racism that results in racially traumatic experiences for high school among Latino students. This chapter begins with a review of existing relevant literature focuses on topics about the educational participation and performance of Latinx youth, race and racism in schools, and concludes with racial healing and school counseling. Next, a discussion on how CRT, LatCrit, and MT together are used as a lens to study the phenomenon of racism-induced traumatic stress. I will explain how, together, these three concepts assisted me in exploring and understanding the unique experiences of Latino high school students who experience racism-induced traumatic stress.

Latinx Students and Education

Among minority populations in the United States, the Latinx population is the most rapidly growing population. Between the years 2000 and 2010, the Latinx population accounted for 50% of the population growth nationwide (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Recent census data tells us that this population is higher than 50 million – accounting for more than 16% of the U.S. population (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) and about 25% of students enrolled across the K-12 education pipeline (Kena et al., 2016). In general, the Latinx student population has improved in academic achievement and attainment (Rodriguez, 2013). However, despite nationwide

trends in lowering dropout rates (Rodriguez, 2013), the rate of improvement is not high

enough to keep up with the growing gap between them and their white counterparts

(Education Trust-West, 2017). With a large and growing student population, a

corresponding growth in the number of underperforming Latinx students is expected.

Young Latino Men in Education

Ample research has documented that woman generally outperform their men

counterparts and articulate into higher education at a higher rate (Riegle-Crumb, 2010;

Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Among students of color, Latinos lag behind with the lowest

graduation rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau,

2013) and have the highest dropout rate (Snyder, de Bray, & Dillow, 2016). Moreover,

when it comes to obtaining college degrees, roughly 60% of degrees (AA/AS/BA/BS)

awarded were to women students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The data points to a trend

that Latinos are disproportionately encountering hurdles in their schooling that minimizes

their success (Saenz, Ponjuan, Segoviam & Del Real Viramontes, 2015).

An abundance of scholarship has ventured out to explore why is it that Latinos are

performing poorly in school. Their works have identified over representation in special

education services (Vega & Moore, 2016), enrollment in large classes and underfunded

schools (Vega & Moore, 2016), disciplinary referrals based on behavior (Noguera, 2012),

school counseling practices that minimize their access to college preparatory classes and

information (Oakes, 2005), as well as a lack of culturally relevant school counselors that

are equipped with the tools to address the many issues that Latinos encounter (Clark et

al., 2013). These mediating agents often work in connection with one another to prevent the success and well-being of Latino students.

However, in 2014 former United States President Barack Obama launched his "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to help close the gap among young men of color. His initiative helped provide resources to public education and private organizations to help increase the educational success of young men of color (Saenz et al., 2015; The White House, 2014). Despite this big initiative by the former president, educational policy makers paid little attention to it, and it minimally influenced new policy (Saenz et al., 2015). Though many variables have been explored, there remains one that has been undertheorized in education – racial trauma.

Latino Students at the Intersection of Gender and Race

When thinking about what it means to be a young Latino man, we must understand that this experience is composed of both their racial and gendered identity collectively, not separately. A lot of literature on men of color will consolidate all the experiences of different racial groups (i.e., Black, Latino, Native American) and equate them as being the same (Singh, 2018), but that is a disservice as each sub-group of men of color experience life uniquely to their identity. In general, men of color are presented in media and perceived in schools as being disengaged, villains, and living in a culture of poverty (Harper and Williams, 2013). Specifically, for Latinos, they are often projected as being dangerous and hypersexualized (Yosso & Garcia, 2010). Various studies have traced this deficit understanding of Latinos to have originated in the 19th century with the stereotype of the Mexican Bandit – violent, drunk, lazy, etc. (Pérez Huber & Solórzano,

2015; Romero, 2001). Since then, the same image has been reproduced in media like movies *Stand and Deliver (1988)* and *Dangerous Minds (1995)*. Unfortunately, this leads educators, and people in general, to develop misinformed ideas of what a Latino man is like (Yosso & Garcia, 2010). Malagón (2010) studied the ways that policies and structures within schools' work to perpetuate these deficit images and understandings of Latinos, working to quickly label them as 'bad.'

Culturally, research has also documented that Latinos, especially the oldest or only man, are expected to help contribute to the home earning (Gutmann, 2007). Societal conceptions of machismo, what it means to be a man, are ascribed to Latinos which expect them to be emotionally restrictive and capable of problem solving on their own. The true is the same for most ways that masculinity is defined across societies (Connell, 2005). Unfortunately, gender stereotypes of what it means to a Latino, have been documented as discouraging help-seeking behavior, which can result in worsening mental health (Gutmann, 2007) as they seldomly choose to seek out help when needed. Moreover, Latinos are functioning in a world dominated by racism and white supremacy that problematize them, thus, creating a space where they behave in such a way that is deemed rude and violet, in an effort to gain respect in a Anglo-dominated world that views them as inferior (Rios & Lopez-Aguado, 2012). As a result, the stereotypical understanding of what a young Latino man is like, is the result of racism that corners these young men, ascribing these behaviors onto them.

Race, Racism, & Racism-Induced Traumatic Stress

Race

Among many educational and sociological scholars, there is a shared understanding that race, inextricably linked to racism, is a social construct with real system consequences that is used to privilege white people, material wealth, and ideologies, while structurally oppressing communities of color (Omi & Winant 2015; Golash-Boza, 2016). By this definition, race provides social and economic benefits to those who fit the mold of what it means to be racially white (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Banks (1995) and Solórzano (1997) similarly argue that race is a social construct that is created with the purpose of differentiating racial groups (based on skin tone) and establishing superiority of one race over the other. For example, many United State history books are written through the lens of a white Eurocentric lens that highlights the history and accomplishments of white people with minimal discussion on the contributions of people of color (Loewen, 2007). As a result, it sends the message that only the stories of white people are significant and credits only them for notable accomplishments.

Racism in Schools

Racism in schools is nothing new, but rather a common practice that has long been implemented in the U.S. educational system. For instance, previous scholarship has documented that Latinx students are strategically segregated in schools (Conchas, 2006; Gitlin et al., 2003). Garcia (2018) documented the ways that neighbors were outlined and re-outlined has more and more Latinx families moved into the Oxnard area of California

throughout the early 1900s. As far back as the time of slavery, people of color were not

allowed to attend schools and access an education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Even after

slavery was abolished, there was the establishment of the "Freedman's schools whose

purpose was the maintenance of servant class" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). Later, Black

and Brown students were allowed in schools but under the legal policy of "separate but

equal". In 1896 the supreme court case *Plessy v Ferguson (1896)* established that it was

legal to segregate (De Jure Segregation) people of color under the disguise that separate

facilities would be equal to those that white people could access. People of color had to

fight for their right to integrate and access the same curricula and resources as their white

middle and upper-class peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Cases like *Mendez v Westminster*

(1946) and *Brown v Board of Education (1958)* challenged "separate but equal" and

caused the dismantling of this policy. There was now a legal mandate for schools to

integrate Students of Color. In Southern California, the Mendez case was an example of

the Latinx community fighting the California Public schools to have integration so that

families of a Mexican or Latinx ancestry could gain access to quality education – not

separate but equal.

Fast forward to today and Latinx students are still facing racism at school. For

example, the implementation of tracking practices that place white students in honor/AP

and other college bound tracks at a much higher rate than Latinx youth who are

overwhelmingly placed in vocational and remedial tracks (Kanno & Kangas, 2014;

Oakes, 2005). Unfortunately, tracking is a common practice in education and school

counseling that governs who has access to what curriculum. School counselors run the

risk of functioning as gatekeepers, preventing the upward mobility of Latinx youth while favoring white students (Oakes, 2005; Wagner, Dymes, & Wiggan, 2017).

Moreover, racism in the form of changing Latinx students' Indigenous and Spanish names have a historical place in US schools, and has been documented in contemporary research as racial microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Pérez Huber & Solórzano (2014) studied how visual representations of racism, visual racial microaggressions, have been used in schools such as allowing students to impersonate other ethnic groups – oftentimes overdramatically appropriating other cultures. Even the implementation of English dominance in schools and policy has functioned as institutional racism that made students who were not proficient in English as inferior (Pérez Huber, 2011). English dominance was enacted by teachers and school personnel by discouraging students from speaking languages other than English and by educational policies like California Proposition 227 "English for the Children" that banned bilingual education (Pérez Huber, 2011).

Racism-Induced Traumatic Stress

The study of racism-induced traumatic stress, or racial trauma, is fairly recent and is gaining momentum in terms of attention and scholarship. There is no clear consensus on naming the traumatic stress that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) encounter (Truong and Museus, 2012), and there are a wide range of names used to name this experience (i.e., racial trauma, race-based traumatic stress, etc). For the purpose of this study, I use the term *racism-induced traumatic stress* to emphasize that the symptoms of traumatic stress like inattention, hypervigilance, muscle tension, lack of

sleep, and many more are the result of racism. Naming it racial trauma or race-based traumatic stress uses 'race' as a scapegoat to not bring attention to the policies and practices that schools and educators uphold which sustain racism. Racism-induced traumatic stress is defined as experiences by Black, Indigenous, People of Color that evoke traumatic stress symptoms as a result of frequent exposure to racism through racial microaggressions, racist violence, events of humiliation, and real or perceived danger based on race (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011).

Moreover, racism-induced traumatic stress can be passed down intergenerationally (Akbar, 2017) and can affect BIPOC who witness such actions and events, even if they are not directly experiencing them themselves (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). In the past, many scholars have tried to equate versions of racism-induced traumatic stress as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arguing that those who experiences racism displayed some of the same symptoms of PTSD (i.e., fear, anxiety, avoidance) but failed to get it recognized as a mental disorder (Akbar, 2017; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Racism-induced traumatic stress failed to meet the criteria for PTSD under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) because of "individual's subjective experiences and perceptions that are not specifically included in the limited criteria required for a diagnosis of PTSD" (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011, p. 127). Some have considered it to be a form of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) because of its continued exposure (Duncan-Andrade, 2011), yet that also failed to get recognition by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). To this day, racism-induced

traumatic stress has not been officially recognized by the APA nor is it listed on the DSM- V, the mental health book that holds all the recognized mental disorders, symptoms and criteria, and proposed treatment. It should be noted that the APA governs the DSM.

However, more and more mental health and medical organizations like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Medical Association (AMA), have begun to recognize that racism is a public health crisis that severely impacts the overall health of BIPOC (AMA, 2020; CDC, 2021). Furthermore, the CDC's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey, which historically has studied the ways that early childhood traumatic experiences (i.e., abuse, neglect) affects the wellbeing and development of children, did not previously take racism into account. Recently, Philadelphia has expanded the original ACE's survey created by the CDC, now the *Philadelphia Expanded ACE Project*, to include racism and discrimination (among other categories that Urban BIPOC often face) as part of the traumatic childhood experiences (Philadelphia ACE Project, 2019).

The fact that racism-induced traumatic stress is not widely recognized as a creating psychological stress, despite many studies that have found it is very real and has severe negative impact on the overall mental health of people of color (Akbar, 2017; Carter, 2007; Duncan Andrade, 2009; Duncan Andrade, 2011), is troubling. For this reason, this study hold value in bringing awareness to the under researched and underacknowledged phenomenon of racism-induced traumatic stress.

Racism-induced traumatic stress, like other forms of trauma, causes the body to generate high levels of stress hormones like cortisol (Berger & Sarnyai, 2015). High levels of cortisol have been associated with negatively impacting an individual's prefrontal cortex which is essentially a command center for various major life activities including executive functioning (Berger, Sarnyai, 2015; Shields, Sazma, & Yonelinas, 2016). Executive function includes one's ability to regulate emotions, plan and organize, and focus (Shields, Sazma, & Yonelinas, 2016) – among others. The prefrontal cortex is already one of the last parts of the brain to solidify around the age of 25, which is why we often see teens engage in risky behavior (Shaw, Dupree, & Neigh, 2019). Add racism into the mix and that means that racism-induced traumatic stress can further contribute to the lack of academic achievement among Latino students, because the oppressive racist experiences they encounter on a daily basis are inhibiting their mental state. I do, however, want to make it clear that not everyone that experiences trauma due to race and racism will develop racism-induced traumatic stress. Some individuals, like others who experience rape, natural disasters, and violence, are able to process and heal without ever developing PTSD – or in this study racism-induced traumatic stress. Some protective factors that help in coping with trauma include strong social networks, sense of belonging to cultural/ethnic groups, and positive self-perception (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019; DeWolf & Geddes, 2019)

Moreover, when it comes to assessing students' scholastic abilities, psychological assessment tools and evaluations are culturally biased (Reynolds & Suzuki, 2012) and even translating them into other languages does not take into account cultural differences.

Critical scholars in the field of psychology have criticized the origins and use of these assessment tools because they are based on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) psychology (Nielsen, Haun, Kärtner, & Legare, 2017). Not surprisingly, these assessments are biased toward white privileged communities and negatively impact BIPOC. With a lack of understanding and training about racism and white supremacy (i.e., forms of oppression) school counselors might be causing more harm than help to Latino high school students.

Much of the work that is done on racial trauma is focused on the experience of the Black community (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019), and though informative, might differ from the experiences that Latinos face. Studies have found that racial trauma among the Black community affects not just mental health, but also has been found to cause physiological harm on the body (Akbar, 2017) like tensing of muscles and high blood pressure due to stress. DeWolf and Geddes (2019) studied epigenetics – the study of how environments can cause certain genes to turn on or off and influence emotional and physical health. Epigenetics suggest that social stresses, like racial prejudice and racism, affect genes in BIPOC and can also be passed down through generations (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019). Moreover, Akbar (2017) concluded that many who do experience racial trauma do not display symptoms of trauma immediately, but often can be delayed making it harder for them and others to understand the source. Additionally, other scholars have concluded that racial trauma among Black youth aided the development of fear and disruptive behavior such as anger (Akbar, 2007). Black youth who had poor racial identity development were more prone to negative impacts of racial trauma

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(Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Schools were found as one of the major spaces where Black youth encounter racism and experiences that hindered a positive racial identity (Akbar, 2017; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Likely, similar impacts can occur among Latino high school students.

Latinos and Racism-Induced Traumatic Stress

To some extent, racism-induced traumatic stress has been studied among the Latinx community. One study looking at traumatic stress from racism among Latinx students found that high truancy in school was connected to racism because school became a toxic environment that re-exposed them to racially traumatic experiences (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2010). Others found that use of alcohol and substance abuse as a coping strategy was common among Latinx youth experiencing traumatic stress related to racism (Cheng, & Mallinckrodt, 2015). Alfaro et al. (2009) found that racist traumatic stress interfered with Latinx youth's academic achievement and also increased the likelihood of alcohol consumption. Phipps and Degges-White (2014) studied how immigration-related trauma was passed down intergenerationally in Latinx communities, especially if the culture valued a close bond with the family (Familismo). The trauma that parents and grandparents experienced coming to the U.S. and as immigrants in the U.S. was transmitted "into the cultural memory of the group and flows from generation to generation in the same way that other aspects of culture do as a normal phenomenon" (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014, p. 177). As a result of intergenerational trauma, Latinx youth grow up internalizing the collective racial trauma that their family and community

has endured, that even witnessing others experience racial trauma evokes symptoms of traumatic stress within themselves (Cheng, & Mallinckrodt, 2015).

Latinx youth experiencing race-based traumatic stress have also been found to develop symptoms of depression and low energy, enthusiasm, and positive outlook on life (positive affect). Some individuals also developed a sense of hypervigilance and feelings of being a second-class citizen (Torres & Taknint, 2015). Like the studies with other Black, Indigenous, or communities of color, Latinx people that encounter racism and oppression were found to be at a higher risk of developing negative consequences with racial trauma (Torres & Taknint, 2015).

Trauma-Informed Care, Healing-Centered, & Counseling Young Men

Trauma-Informed Care

With the rise of focus on more socially justice and culturally relevant practices in schools to better serve our students of color, or Latinos in this study, schools have also incorporated caring practices to meet the needs of students. One such caring practice is trauma-informed care which is a relatively new concept in schools and in mental health. Trauma-informed care is an approach to working with individuals that have experienced violence and other forms of trauma and are displaying symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Carello& Butler, 2015). Fallot and Harrison (2009) identified five main principles associated with trauma-informed care to be: ensuring safety, establishing trustworthiness, maximizing choice, maximizing collaboration, and prioritizing empowerment. Like current trends in teaching practices where there is a shift from the teacher as an expert to a facilitator, trauma-informed care promotes the same in that individuals who experience

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trauma work in tandem to recover (Carello& Butler, 2015). Trauma-informed care is a step to more progressive ways of healing, it seeks to remove barriers to learning by promoting self-care, resilience, and developing a safe and supportive environment (Breckenridge & James, 2010; Shannon et al., 2012), among other strategies.

Educators who work with a trauma-informed care approach can help alleviate some of the symptoms impacting a student's ability to learn and function in school, similarly to the way a 504-plan aided Joshua. Ultimately, these educational practices do not center race and racism, nor invest in addressing the main problem. Undeniably, trauma-informed care focuses on the individual, their symptoms, their injury, and how to better support them without discussing the systemic forms of oppression (racism) and how these systemic forms of oppressions continue to negatively affect the physical and psychological well-being of youth who experience trauma (Ginwright, 2018).

Healing-Centered

"…the world in which we live is shaped by us, by our practices and our culture, by our very existence, and our DNA respond to that in turn."
- *Adam Rutherford*

Adam Rutherford's quote exemplifies how the quality of life for communities of color are intricately connected to their social environment and how widespread ideologies like racism directly impact their wellbeing. Martin-Baro (1994) and Watkins and Shulman (2008) recognized this and called for *Liberation Psychology* – an approach to psychology with the purpose of understanding the psychology of oppression to improve and address the sociopolitical world that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) exist in. A function of liberation psychology is racial healing. Healing from racism-

induced traumatic stress can be a challenging and painful task for many BIPOC. For starters, the healing process is painful because one who has experienced racism-induced traumatic stress is being asked to revisit and re-experience the traumatic event(s) that they encountered (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Dominant practices of psychotherapy focus on the individual and how they can overcome traumatic stress. Yet, focusing on the individual can create feelings of isolation and fail to consider local and cultural context (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) causing a disconnect from one's community and culture.

Approaching racial healing through an individualistic lens runs the risk of symbolic loss (Homans, 2000). Symbolic loss occurs when an individual internalizes dominant culture practices of healing and results in a major loss, if not complete loss, of cultural practices, histories, and identity (Homans, 200). Psychotherapy should not be used to conform minorities into a western way of life (DeWorld & Geddes, 2019; Martin-Baro, 1994). Which is why it is imperative for school counselors, and anyone working with communities of color healing from racism-induced traumatic stress to take culture and local context into consideration (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). CRT and LatCrit inform this goal, by providing the framework in which race and racism are centered and used as our analysis of the oppression students of color encounter. LatCrit informs us of the racial specific forms of oppression that are targeted towards the Latinx community. Moreover, both theories acknowledge the intersection of marginalized identities and therefore help us get a more comprehensive understanding of the struggle's students of color face.

Indeed, there is a need for school counselors to understand that dominant practices in mental health are Eurocentric in nature and fail to recognize how society and other systems create and sustain harm among BIPOC (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). DeWolf and Geddes (2019) explain how we can experience trauma "collectively, through historical, generational, and cultural events, as well as from ongoing, structural/systemic forces" (p. 9). As a result, a critical multicultural counseling approach is needed to best serve BIPOC in the healing process. Failure to recognize and address how systemic oppression works can result in a temporary sense of healing, but ultimately relapse because the symptom (racism), and not the disease (white supremacy) was addressed (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Trauma-informed care is an example of an approach to healing that fails to address the root cause. For instance, trauma informed care is helpful in that it recognizes the individual needs of those who experience trauma but fails to realize that 1) trauma can be collective among groups, 2) does not inform school counselors on how to address the root cause, and 3) risk focusing on the pathology of trauma and not promoting healing (Ginwright, 2018).

Different counseling techniques and activities such as recollection of histories (Morrison, 2017; Watkins & Shulman, 2008), naming of racism and the development of racial literacy (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019; Pierce, 1970a; 1970b), restorative justice/practices (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019), and photovoice projects (Lykes, Blanche, & Hamber, 2003), to name a few, have been found to be useful to help heal from racism-induced traumatic stress. Recollecting histories and stories about our past and diving into the long legacy of oppression among communities of color is an essential step in healing

(DeWolf & Geddes, 2019). Research has shown that students of color have limited access to curriculum that brings to light their cultural histories (Loewen, 2007). This is problematic because it presents a very narrow view of the legacy and accomplishments of BIPOC and can make it challenging for students of color to find remodels or sources of inspiration and it distorts history by only showing the story from a white man's point of view. Therefore, it is crucial to have more culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum in schools (Paris, 2012). CRT in education is one way of doing this because CRT is rooted in the lived experiences of people of color and surfaces the counter narratives of communities of color (Yosso, 2005). For example, stories (textbooks, novels, etc.) from marginalized groups help provide different, if not more accurate, recollections of history of communities of color. To do this, ethnic studies pedagogy can be used across content areas to provide this knowledge and insight (Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2015).

Group counseling, or community building activities, that engage in the histories of their culture and ethnic group show to be empowering and validating (Anderson, 2007). It helps cultivate an understanding that their experiences do not occur in isolation or that their current circumstances are only a result of their actions, but also of an oppressive system that works against them (Anderson, 2007).

Freire (1970) argued that a key component to liberation was for oppressed people to be able to read the world around them. Similarly, Pierce (1970a; 1970b) concluded that being able to name racism and racial microaggressions (reading the world) carried a lot of strength in minimizing the negative impacts that Black Americans had as a result of their

racialized experiences. Therefore, working collaboratively to build racial literacy and a solid understanding of racism and other forms of oppression is a necessary step in racial healing and liberation. School counselors should develop counseling lesson units or create group counseling programs whose purpose is to build racial literacy and an understanding of oppression.

Social Justice Counseling in the form of restorative practices has been found to be an effective way to heal from racial harm while also restoring the damage, the injustice, that has occurred (DeWolf & Geddes, 2019; Gavrielides, 2014). As human beings, relationships are very important for our wellbeing. A restorative justice approach to racial healing would require that critical reflection and dialogue is held between the perpetrator and the victim (Gavrielides, 2014). In schools, school counselors can facilitate this with students when experiencing racial trauma at school. Will this process be easy? No. Albrecht (2010) discussed how traditional restorative justice alone is challenging because it requires the two parties, if not more, to come together to reflect, discuss, and restore an injustice. When race is a part of the equation, the challenges during mediation are expected to be enhanced (Albrecht, 2010). However, with appropriate training restorative justice has proven to be effective in addressing issues of racism. After all, one of the purposes of restorative justice is to help transform how we understand ourselves and others (Gavrielides, 2014). Having counseling frameworks that are guided by CRT, LatCrit, and MT can support and inform school counselors on how to address uses of racism with restorative practices.

Lastly, some scholars have used photos as a way of telling stories to heal from racially traumatic experiences. For instance, Lykes, Blanche, & Hamber (2003) studied how the use of photo storytelling, or photovoice, helped women in Guatemala heal after experiencing the long violent civil war between 1960-1996. Photovoice is a participatory action research method that engages participants and co-researchers and allows for them to tell their stories through the use of photos (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos, & Nieuwendyk, 2011; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009). The Guatemalan women in this study used photovoice to grieve in solidarity with communities and families that lost loved ones, as well as showcase cultural traditions of ceremonies for mourning and commemorating loved ones (Lykes et al., 2003). These ceremonies were being lost because of their disruption during the war where some indigenous groups were being killed off, and this photovoice project helped preserve traditional practices and aid healing for indigenous people. Much of the experience of these Guatemalan women mirrors the erasure of the histories and traditions of communities of color in the United States. Thus, the need for culturally sustaining pedagogy, ethnic studies pedagogy, and other forms of critical pedagogy in K-12 schools that share the stories of communities of color and challenge the dominant narratives told by predominantly white men.

Counseling Young Men

Societal culture in the U.S. is very oppressive towards Latinos, hypersexualizing them and portraying them as violent (Yosso & Garcia, 2010). Moreover, Latinos find themselves in a world in which institutionalized racism lays out the blueprint of how they are expected to behave, often causing men of color to engage in toxic masculinity and be

emotionally restricted as a means of gaining respect in a society dominated by white men

(Connell, 2005). Rios and Lopez-Aguado (2012) concluded that young Latinos would

engage in "Cholo style" (i.e., baggy clothing) as a means of resistance to white standards

of what it means to be a "good city youth". Furthermore, they would embrace their

difference from the societal standard and reclaim their deference, making it their own and

not something that was imposed on to them (Rios & Lopez-Aguado, 2012). This is

important because systemic racism in the U.S. has repeatedly, over the decades, placed

Latinos into a box of what it means to be Latino. Thus, their resistance is important as

they find ways to help themselves and reclaim their identity. Unfortunately, many times

their resistance to racism and other forms oppression are labeled as defiant, troubling, and

disengaged in K-12 schooling.

  As a result, schools need to understand the ways in which deficit views of

Latinos, that are widely held in society, impact their overall wellbeing. School counselors

are uniquely positioned to assist Latinos navigate these oppressive systems. Those

working with young Latinos must understand the toxic society in which these youth live

in that teaches them to be emotionally restrictive. Additionally, being culturally informed

and responsive to the unique race-gendered experiences of Latino youth is paramount if

school counselors want to connect and collaborate with them to jointly resolve issues of

racism. Unfortunately, many men of color grapple with expressing themselves and see

emotional expression as feminine and a state of vulnerability (Connell, 2005; Degges-

White & Colon, 2012). Culturally, Latinx communities in general, not just Latino, might

be apprehensive in self-disclosing personal information because of the fear of chisme (gossip), that others might find out and talk about their personal matters.

Despite these cultural and gendered hurdles, there is research that showcases how students of color have less access to school support systems, like school counselors, and are less informed about the services their school counselors provide (Clark et al., 2013). One study found that Latinos felt their school counselors were not adequately prepared to assist them and in fact, school counselors shared that they were often unaware of critical issues affecting Latino students (Clark et al, 2013). As a result, Latinos are less likely to engage in help-seeking behavior to address social emotional issues like experiencing racism-induced traumatic stress because of race-gendered expectations and a lack of cultural competency among school counselors. Lastly, because Latinos are less likely to access traditional forms of psychotherapy, which require intimate one-on-one counseling sessions, school counselors should develop more active and engaging approaches to clinical interviewing (Degges-White & Colon, 2012). This is especially important as the literature on racism-induced traumatic stress underscores the severity of the consequences Latinos experience due to repeated encounters with racism (Cheng, & Mallinckrodt, 2015; Torres & Taknint, 2015). This study sought out to investigate Latino students experience with racism-induced traumatic stress, the impact on their academics and social-emotional health, to better inform those who work with them directly on ways to aid them with coping and addressing racism.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

CRT is a framework that is used to study issues of race, racism and its intersection with other oppressed identities while centering the lived experiences and voices of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Solórzano 1998; Pérez-Huber & Solórzano, 2014). CRT was first developed among critical legal scholars in the 1970's to underscore how racism and other intersecting forms of oppression were being enacted through law (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lawrence, 1995). Some of the early critical legal scholars who developed the framework of CRT consist of Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Grounded in legal studies, CRT has since been borrowed and implemented in the field of education to study and identify the role of race and racism in education (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Tate, 1997; Yosso et al., 2009). Since its branch into education, CRT was, and still is, used to specifically address issues of educational inequity through race and racism in education, because "despite the salience of race in U.S. society, it remains untheorized as a topic of scholarly inquiry in education" (Tate, 1997, p. 196). Additionally, even though race has no biological identifiers and is a social construct, race has very real consequences for people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998) which highlights why race still matters. To establish CRT in education, Daniel J. Solórzano identified five tenets of CRT in educational research. These tenets are:

(a) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms

of subordination: CRT always centers race but acknowledged its intersectional

relationships with other subordinate identities like class, sex, and immigration

status, etc.

(b) The challenge to dominant ideology: CRT challenges white privilege and

structures by centering the experience of marginalized communities.

(c) The commitment to social justice: CRT offers a transformative response to

oppression and empowering oppressed communities.

(d) The centrality of experiential knowledge: CRT legitimizes the experiential

knowledge of people of color and uses it to analyze racial subordination.

(e) The transdisciplinary perspective: CRT analyzes race and racism with the use

of other scholarship from various disciplines like sociology and ethnic studies

(Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, Yosso, 2005).

Together, these tenets guide the framework of CRT to identify and name the ways that

race and racism work in education to perpetuate the subordination of students of color.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

LatCrit is a branch of CRT that emerged to help highlight the specific racist and

oppressive experiences of the Latinx community such as racist nativism, immigration

status, phenotype, and language (Iglesias, 1997; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano &

Delgado Bernal, 2001). Like CRT, LatCrit also follows the same five tenets previously

outlined and Solórzano & Yosso (2001) underscore that LatCrit is not created to be in

opposition with CRT, but rather to complement it. Moreover, LatCrit is a response to the

Black-white binary and is tailored to address the oppressive experiences pertaining to the

Latinx community – the aim of this dissertation exploring racial trauma among young

Latino high school students. LatCrit allows us to recognize and analyze the nuanced ways

that racism against the Latinx presents itself and how Latinos experience race, gender,

sexuality, etc. Such as, racial slurs that question Latino student's citizen status, language,

hypersexualizing them, and othering that might otherwise be overlooked without having

the critical Latinx lens.

Microaggression Theory

Through CRT and LatCrit we have a lens to study how racism plays out in

education, and with the concept of racial microaggressions we can bring to light the

subtle day-to-day forms of racism that often go unnoticed. Racial Microaggressions were

first studied by Dr. Chester Piece, a psychiatrist who later worked in education. He began

his work with racial microaggressions in the late 1960s into the early 1970s (Pierce,

1970a; 1970b; 1974). His work with racial microaggressions was influenced by

understanding the ways that these micro-assaults were affecting the Black community,

given their constant experiences with forms of racism (Pierce, 1970a; 1970b). In his

original work, Dr. Pierce first names these forms of subtle attacks as *offensive*

mechanisms (Pierce, 1970a; 1970b) and it was not until the late 1970s that he began to

use the term microaggressions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978). Pierce et

al. (1978) defined microaggressions as:

> The chief vehicle for pro-racist behaviors are microaggressions. These are subtle,
> stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are `put downs' of
> blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks often are

innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major

ingredient in black-white interactions (p. 66).

A more contemporary definition of microaggressions is defined as subtle, often

unconscious, verbal and non-verbal, visual, layered insults/assaults, cumulative everyday

forms of racism used to keep people of color in place (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, Pérez

Huber & Solórzano, 2014; 2015; Yosso et al., 2009).

A counseling psychologist, Dr. Derald Sue outlines three forms of

microaggressions:

(a) Microassaults are "explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a

verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-

calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Sue et al., 2007,

p. 274).

(b) Microinsults are verbal interactions that rude, insensitive, and discredit a

person's ethnic background and identity (Sue et al., 2007a).

(c) Microinvalidation is defined as communication that "exclude, negate, or

nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of

color" (Sue et al., 2007a, p. 274).

Racial microaggressions in K-12 have been studied to play out in different forms.

For example, Kohli & Solórzano (2012) researched the ways in which name

pronunciation worked as a form of racial microaggressions towards students of color who

had names not "traditional" in the Eurocentric English language. Other studies have

looked at broader campus climates and how they are conducive to racial and gendered

stereotypes (Jordan, 1990; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002;

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Yosso et a., 2009). Pérez-Huber & Solórzano, 2015 studied visual microaggressions in education, which "are systemic, everyday visual assaults based on race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname that emerge in various mediums such as textbooks, children's books, advertisements, film and television, dance and theater performance, and public signage and statuary" (p. 223). Other work also documented the ways that racial jokes and "compliments" played out in the K-12 setting (Kohli, Arteaga, & McGovern, 2018).
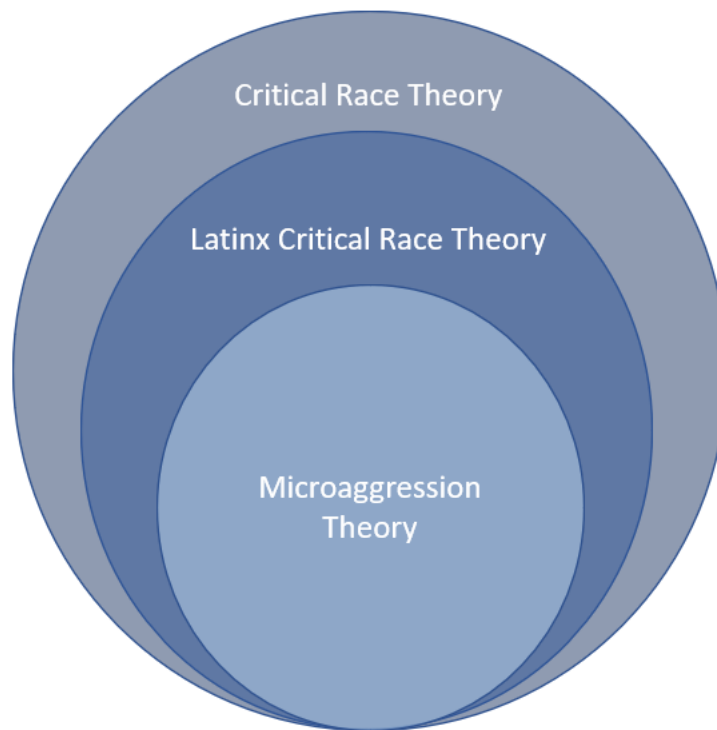
Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Jointly, CRT, LatCrit, and MT build on one another to allow me to study how the layers of racism, both inside and outside of school, impact Latino students in education by centralizing their race and highlighting their stories. Additionally, the interdisciplinary lens of CRT and LatCrit provide us the means to understand the ways that racism

manifest and what forms are unique to the Latinx community. MT, neatly woven into both, help us identify and analyze racism through the subtle ways it shows up in the form of words, non-verbal language, policy, and imagery. This lens (CRT/LatCrit/MT) provides me a way to study how social structures, system policies and practices, and the related interpersonal interactions of educators and peers impact the social emotional well-being of Latino students.

Conclusion

As shown in the literature, Latinx students are experiencing racism both outside and inside of school. In addition, there are few structures that offer culturally, and community response supports for these experiences and their impacts. Using the theoretical frames I outlined, in this study I extent this literature to explore a very racialized and stress inducing time, trying to understand how Latino students experienced the impacts of racism during the pandemic. Using CRT to understand how systems must be accountable to this, I also aim to understand if the supports built into schools feel accessible to Latinx students, particularly young men, In the next chapter, I outline my qualitative methods used to capture and understand the lived experiences of Latino high school students with racism and traumatic stress-like symptoms. A discussion on data collection and analysis is presented.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter begins with an explanation of the focus of this study, followed by the research questions that guided this study and a reflection on the researcher's positionality. Next, the chapter elaborates on case study research design, the setting, participant demographics and recruitment. Lastly, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the data collection methods and subsequent data analysis.

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the unique experiences of Latino high school students who encounter racism-induced traumatic stress. Racism has been found to negatively impact communities of color through psychological and physiological hardship (Akbar, 2017; DeWolf & Geddes, 2019). Using CRT guided conceptualizations of racism-induced traumatic stress, this study explored the extent of its impact on Latino high school students as it relates to their academic engagement and social emotional health. To do so, this study looked to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Latino high school students experience racism within and outside of schools?

2. What are the impacts of racism on Latino high school students?

    a. What impact does it have on their social emotional health?

    b. What impact does it have on their academic engagement?

Researcher's Background & Positionality

My interest and the development of this research study began long ago, before my journey into graduate school. Admittedly, my interest in racism and how Latinos seek our support to address the impacts racism has on them was not so obvious to me at the time. In reflecting on my own experiences as a Latino and a practicing school counselor, I realize that these salient identities of mine are what sparked my interest in further exploring the racism that Latino youth face in K-12 schooling and how it might create negative psychological and academic outcomes. I share this to help situate myself in this work and be transparent about my connection to this work. As Malterud (2001) states it: "a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (p. 483-484).

Growing up gay and Latinx in southern California, in a predominately working class Latinx neighborhood, I can still recall some of the racist and homophobic words I would hear used to describe me and my community. At times the racism was not so obvious, though it inflicted a wound imposed by educators and peers but was not easy to understand (microaggressions). One would think that growing up in a community overwhelmingly of color, that racism (or oppression in general) would be little to none at school, but that was not the case. I recall speaking to school personnel about some of the racist and homophobic slurs I heard or were directed at me. Although it helped to vent, no real solutions were ever conceptualized. I assume this was because they were

uncomfortable and unfamiliar with how to discuss issues pertaining to racism and oppression.

Unlike most of my Latino peers, and men of other races, I was and am, more inclined to seek out help for social emotional problems. In high school, I sought out my school counselor and school psychologist. I credit my time with these educators to helping mitigate the disheartening comments and situations I encountered because of my race, gender, and sexuality. Nonetheless, I often questioned why my peers who were men were much more reluctant to ask for help, but more deeply wondered how it was that they processed and managed these negative emotions and situations. These experiences lead me to researching help-seeking behavior.

As a practitioner, I worked in a community that very much resembles my upbringing. As stated earlier in chapter 1, my position as a school counselor has presented opportunities where I can engage with youth who also share similar identities and experiences like me. In fact, some of the youth I have worked with are dealing with larger problems than those I faced in school – many of which are connected to racism, racist nativism, and race-gender stereotypes for Latinos. One experience that I cannot say I fully relate to is the development of traumatic stress-like symptoms due to racism. Yes, I experienced and still experience forms of racism, but I, like many others who experience racism and racially traumatic events, have managed to avoid developing symptoms like hypervigilance, impaired emotional regulation, and anxiety due to racism – to name a few. My support system comprised of other Latinx and BIPOC students and some educated helped buffer the effects. Having a space and someone to talk to and

process is likely credited for this. That said, I enter this work to learn more about the ways that racism can impact Latino students, resulting in the manifestation of racism-induced traumatic stress. I sought out to learn in an effort to help develop best practices for school counselors, school-based mental health professionals, and other school personnel that workday-in and day-out with young Latino students who might be struggling internally with racism-induced traumatic stress. The goal of this research was to explore the experience of Latino students with racism and the development of racism-induced traumatic stress so that the findings can inform educators in positions of leadership on ways to be critical about their own policies, practices, and campus racial climate.

As a result, as a researcher, my personal experiences with school counseling and racism likely helped me connect with my participants who have had similar experiences as me. It allowed for a richer discussion during semi-structured interviews where my experience assisted me in taking the conversation deeper by asking follow-up questions that uncover more detailed recollections of the racism they encountered. Moreover, to some degree, my connection and research to this topic already generated potential themes that I expected to hear and find. However, I was very intentional about being open to other unexpected emerging themes and using the data to form the emerging themes of this study. Thus, with a cycle of revisiting the data, I was able to see commonalities among the data rather than only relying on what I anticipated to find.

Case Study Research Design and Methodology

This dissertation used a case study method to explore the experience of Latino high school students who experience racism-induced traumatic stress. Yin (2018) argues that a case study design has utility when examining a particular event or phenomenon in its organic setting. This study will examine racism-induced traumatic stress at one particular high school in southern California (the case). A case study design is appropriate for this research study because its aim is to uncover the experiences of Latino high school students with racism-induced traumatic stress and examine if systems of support at a particular high school help address racism-induced traumatic stress. Naturally, qualitative research methods, including case study design, are not meant to generate findings that are generalizable to the greater population. Though this qualitative study does not seek to generalize the experiences of Latino high school students who experience racism-induced traumatic stress, it can help inform educators and researchers of what their experiences might be like across campuses. In fact, Wieviorka (1992) states that "a case becomes the opportunity to discover knowledge about how it is both specific to and representative of a larger phenomenon" (p. 170). However, the data of this study can only speak to this particular school site.

Research Setting

This study took place at a large urban high school in southern California. The school is in the greater Los Angeles area– about 35 miles south of Los Angeles. The high school has a diverse student population that comprises of 50.2% Latinx/Hispanic, 38.9% Asian, 1.2 % African American, and 5.8% White. The school is surrounded by

neighborhoods from opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of income and sits less than a mile from City Hall. As one approaches the school site, they will notice the large, high black fence that encloses the campus – a sharp contrast of color against the all-white concrete buildings.

The research site is designated as a title 1 high school, meaning that at least 40% or more of its students' population are considered low-income and enrolled in the Free or Reduced lunch program (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Title 1 schools receive additional grants to help children from low-income families to meet the rigorous state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education..." (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p.1). Additionally, the high school has an approximate 96% graduation rate.

As more and more schools across the United States have large, if not predominantly, Latinx student populations, conducting the study at a school site that reflects what they are possible experiencing is beneficial. Furthermore, studying the ways in which racism-induced traumatic stress works in schools serving predominantly students of color can provide richer findings as many previous studies have documented the ways that racism impacts students of Color in predominantly white institutions (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009).

Historically, low-income schools are overwhelmingly majority of Color and poorly funded resulting in less than adequate systems of support for students of Color. Much of the racism-induced traumatic stress literature has been conducted with urban

youth and youth of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Adelman (2008) highlights the fact that multiple stressors cause severe health issues for communities of Color because low-income communities, predominantly of Color, have less access to resources to help them cope with racism-induced traumatic stress. To further contribute to the existing literature of racism-induced traumatic stress, and to better capture the experience of Latino high school students, many who are of working-class backgrounds, conducting my study at a Title 1 school is essential.

Participants

Student Requirements

This study consists of 6 participants that met the following criteria: 1) Identify as Latinx/Chicanx/Hispanic, 2) Identify as a young man - he/him pronouns, 3) are proficient in English as designated by their placement in regular/honors/or AP junior English, 4) are academically underperforming, meaning having a grade point average (GPA) below a 2.0 in a 4.0 scale, and 5) are currently enrolled as an 11th grade student. The grade level 11 as qualifying criteria was selected because in studying the experiences of Latino high school students with racism-induced traumatic stress at their respective school, 11th grade students would have attended this school for a longer period and I was able to followed-up with them in grade 12 as needed. Also, the longer a student has attended this school, the more comprehensive their narrative can be about their experiences with racism-induced traumatic stress and how it, if at all, impacts their social emotional health and academic performance. The criteria of being academically underperforming was selected due to the fact those underperforming students are historically a group underserved in

school, likely experiencing much more marginalization. Latino students are disproportionately targeted for harsh disciplinary action, pushed out of schools, and placed into the school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2012; Vega & Moore, 2016). As a result, they are candidates for experiencing racism and racism-induced traumatic stress, of which little attention has been given in literature.

However, some limitations to this strategy exist. For instance, since the questionnaire and interview were conducted in English, there were potentially emerging bilingual students (those enrolled in English Language Development courses) who experienced adverse racism, but their stories and experiences went unnoticed through this method.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Name (Pseudonyms)	Age	Self-reported Ethnicity/Race
Frank	16	Hispanic
Gian Luc	16	Hispanic
Rene	15	Hispanic/Latino
Christian	17	American/Mexican
Luis	16	Hispanic
Jacob	16	Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Mexican

Recruitment

Upon approval from the school district and UC Riverside's IRB, I worked with the assistant principal of counseling to generate a list of potential research participants.

To generate the list of potential participants, the assistant principal ran a query that pulled students who met the criteria outlined in the previous section. The list was not shared with me at any time prior to the collection of Parental Consent and Student Assent. The students who met the participant demographic criteria were invited to participate in this study by receiving a physical invitation (parental consent and student assent) from the assistant principal and/or the students' school counselor to be a part of this study. After both the parent consent and the student assent were collected, the participants name and contact information were shared with me, the researcher. Next, I scheduled virtual meeting times to interview the students and had students complete a demographic questionnaire as well.

The number of participants selected (aimed at 10 students) for the individual interview were done strategically to focus on the lived experiences of a few students – the case. However, reaching a total of 10 participants proved to be challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic as few students and parents were returning signed consent and assent forms to participate. Invited participants were given 3 weeks to return their form, and despite weekly follow-ups from their school counselor, few returned their invitations. Having a small number of participants allowed me to interview 7 participants more in-depth, with a case-study approach that illuminated their experiences with racism and racism-induced stress.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate restrictions with guest on campus due to unverified vaccination status and school district policies. Moreover, a virtual interview setting helped account for the risk of COVID-19 transmission since the

participants and I would need to be in close proximity to record the interview for a duration that lasted longer than 15 minutes. All zoom interviews were recorded as outlined in the student assent and parent consent forms. During the questionnaire portion, prior to the start of the interview, all participants were asked to select their own pseudonym to protect their identity.

Data Collection

As Yin (2018) describes, a case study is an "empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world content" (p. 15).

This qualitative case study will utilize multiple methods to collect data to help achieve "closeness" (Becker, 1996) to study the phenomenon of racial trauma experienced by Latino high school students. This study collected the following research data: (a) documentations (dress code policy, student handbook, OCR discipline report, website), (b) individual student interviews, and (c) individual student questionnaires. Using various data sources that speak to each other and that help corroborate the findings, allows me to use triangulation as a form of validating the findings of this research study (Stake, 1996).

Document Analysis

I began data collection for this study through document analysis. School documents give me a foundation for gauging the racial climate of the school. The analysis of documents in qualitative research is useful because documents can capture meaningful thoughts and ideas (Lichtman, 2012). Because racism-induced traumatic stress can manifest in various ways, I analyzed the school's student handbook, school

discipline/referral procedures, school website, OCR discipline report, and the school accountability report card.

By examining these documents, I was able to see if there were racial microaggressions or deficit perspectives in their policies such as what is appropriate clothing attire. The document analysis helped me explore the following questions: Do policies such as dress code target predominantly students of Color? Is there racialized language used in the description of these documents? Do disciplinary procedures target students of color or call for extreme consequences and involvement with law enforcement? In terms of answering the second research question, the student handbook listed the resources available to students that pertain to mental health. Additional information regarding systems of support were published on the school's website for parent and student reference. Studying these documents helped me generate possible questions to ask students during the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

This study used individual thirty-minute to forty-five-minute semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013) for each student participant in conjunction with document analysis. Individual interviews were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 precautions. Before the start of the individual interview, students completed a self-reported questionnaire to collect demographic information such as ethnicity and GPA (see Appendix A). Since one of the goals of this study was to understand the experiences of Latino high school students in experiencing racism-induced traumatic stress and how it impacts their mental health and academics,

interviewing Latino students provided rich data that speaks to the way that racism-induced traumatic stress occurs, its negative impact on their health and school performance, and of any support systems in schools to helped them address racism-induced traumatic stress.

The individual interviews used a semi-structured protocol that had guiding questions but allowed flexibility to take the conversation in different directions that speak to the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are an excellent data collecting method to assist researchers in gaining explanation to questions like "how" and "why" and collecting the perspectives of participants (Yin, 2018). Moreover, one of the pillars of CRT is the centrality of experiential knowledge (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014), using interviews to document Latino student's experience of racial trauma aligns with the theories proposed for this study.

Data Analysis

At the completion of the data collection phase, each individual interview was later transcribed by me, the researcher. All transcriptions were read and reviewed by me ensure they were free from errors and ensure participants' responses were reported word for word (Seidman, 2013). Each participant was be given the opportunity to review and edit their interview transcription for accuracy or removal of any information. This member checking approach ensured internal validity – credibility (Yin, 2018). The transcriptions were then analyzed using focused coding that can identify similar responses which were then organized into reoccurring themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw,

2011). Doing so helped me compile responses from "various episodes" and put them in conversation with one another (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). To accomplish this, I created a table comprised of three columns which listed the name of the reoccurring theme, a brief description of what the themed entailed, followed by the quotes from interviews and document analysis that matched each respective theme. This table and its themes allowed for a cross-case data analysis of thematic patterns across all participants (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, it helped me generate a comprehensive overview of each theme. Lastly, in interpreting the data from the different interviews and documents, I checked for consistency and any discrepancies with the literature (Seidman, 2013). This allowed me to build new understandings on the existing literature on racial trauma.

CHAPTER 4: Experiencing Racism Within and Outside of Schools

In this chapter, I share findings related to manifestations of racism and how Latino high school participants experienced them. Though there is a growing body of literature on racism in education (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Hernandez et al., 2021; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009), limited research has been focused on the current experience of Latino high school students with racism. If schools and educators are encouraged to do "anti-racist" work and be more culturally responsive, then better understanding of how Latino's experience racism in various levels is needed. To aid in the analysis and understanding on how the Latino youth in this study experienced racism across different levels, I introduce *Figure 2.0 The Levels of Racism* to help visualize how varying degrees of racism. From at CRT standpoint, such research can help provide insight through stories of Latino students that challenge deficit understandings of their low academic performance and inform practices aimed at a cultivating a more culturally sustaining, socially just education system (Freire, 1970; Paris, 2012; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015).
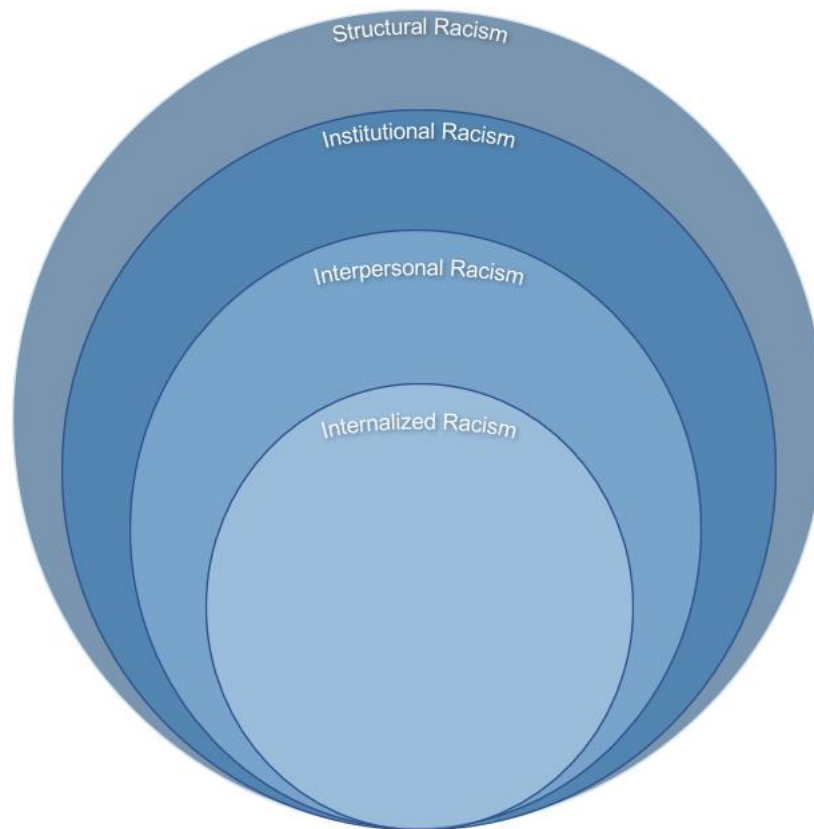
Figure 2 The Levels of Racism

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the ways that Latino high school students experience racism-induced traumatic stress, including the ways it impacts their academic and social-emotional wellbeing. To help expand the literature on Latinos, racism, and racism-induced traumatic stress, this study answered following research questions:

1. In what ways do Latino high school students experience racism within and outside of schools?

Experiencing Racism Within Schools

All participants in this study shared their unique experiences with racism and the various ways that they encountered it in schools. At times it was at a larger level,

intuitionally and at other times it was more direct and interpersonal (see chapter 2 for a

discussion on the levels of racism). The following exemplars help paint the picture of

what life as a Latino is at this particular high school.

Racist Nativism Microaggressions

At the research site, the enrollment data from the school accountability report card

indicated that 50.2% of the student population was Latinx, 38.9% Asian American, 5.8%

white, and 1.2% African American. When participants were asked, "*What are some*

challenges with being Latino at your high school?" responses from participants told

stories of comments and situations among peers and adults that made them feel like they

did not belong. Sometimes these subtle, yet racist, comments were presented as jokes and

easily written off as humor and other times were part of class discussion. Some students

shared racialized stories that they did not necessarily identify as racism.

> We first hear from Gian Luc, an energetic young man who openly shared that he

had a self-reported GPA of a 1.6 and is the youngest of three siblings. He shares a

personal account with racist jokes stating,

> "I guess not a challenge, but mostly people [came racial jokes] .... I know how to
> distinguish a joke from something being said mean about other Latinos. But, let's
> say uh… among all of us, you know, our age. We call each other beaners. You
> know. You got me. But, it's like, more like a joke, but not."

From this excerpt we hear Gian explain how subtle racism can be written off as humor

and the significance of it can be "minimized" by it not being overtly racist. Here, we see

how subtle and quickly these acts of racism are written off as jokes or exceptions. Critical

Race Theory (CRT), Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Microaggression Theory

(MT), together allow us to recognize and understand these acts as subtle forms of racism.

LatCrit in particular allows us to zero in on racism that is specific to the Latino community. Gian Luc describes incidents where students, both students of color *and* their white counterparts, use degrading language like "*Beaners*". Interestingly, although Gian Luc states this is a common form of joking around, the questions asked for *challenges* with being Latino, and this joking practice is what came to mind. Thus, further helping us see how invasive subtle forms of racism can be, and ultimately contribute to the experiences of racism-induced traumatic stress.

Rene, a somewhat timid 11th grade student with a self-reported GPA of a 2.0 was the only participant that after starting the interview asked if he could turn off his camera, comes from a single parent household and is the middle child of five children. Similar to Gian Luc, he shared his own experience with a white teacher who made comments in his classroom during a discussion on the school's demographics that made him feel uneasy. He shared,

> "I don't know his name again [teacher]. But there was like this teacher talking about, uh… Like [complaining about] how many races were in their classes. I know we're just the human race, but like I mean, like this…ethnicy. …Like they're just separating it [race]...like 'oh my god, how much Asians and Latino ethnicities there are [at school]', you know?"

In Rene's experience, the teacher seems to create an uncomfortable classroom environment with his statements about the vast majority of Asian American and Latinx students that make up the bulk of the school's student population. When asked to clarify the teacher's response, Rene indicated that the teacher shared this in a way that came across as if he was complaining about the large Asian American and Latinx population at their school/his classroom. However, Rene then goes on to share that "They were talking

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about it. It was just part of an example because like I think this was part of either history or science, I forgot." Like Gian Luc who argued that the joke his peers make are 'just' jokes, we see Rene defend his teachers' statements. LatCrit and MT help us understand Rene's explanation as "just part of an example…" and how easy it is to accept subtle racist acts. So much so, that these daily practices fly under the radar. And like with Gian Luc, these are still examples that subconsciously come to mind for these students who are asked to think about challenges they face due to their race and/or ethnicity.

Racist Nativism refers to a concept theorized by Pérez Huber et al. (2008) as the subtle racist jokes and/or comments (racial microaggressions) that ostracize people of color by assigning real or perceived differences from the "natives" (white Americans who see themselves as Native to the U.S. Land), referring to others as foreigners and a threat to the natives, as a means of oppressing them. In this study, racist nativism manifested both within and outside of the classroom.

Moreover, these acts of racist nativist microaggressions also function as a form of "othering". *Othering* can be understood as sociopolitical structure of racism that dictates who is considered to be "one of us" (American) and "one of them" (a foreigner; Brons, 2015; Bustamante, 2002; Udah, 2019). We see this in the exemplars above where the teacher comments on school's demographics being overwhelmingly of Color, giving the sense that Asian American and Latinx students are different. We even see this again when Gian Luc shared that other student used derogatory terminology like "*beaners*" to differentiate who was a "*true American*" and who was an "*outsider, non-American immigrant*".

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Lastly, we hear from Frank, a 16-year-old junior who is the middle child of three siblings, describe an incident where one of his friends was picked on due to his race and height. Frank shared:

> I don't really get picked on at all and, and like from the people I have… I've heard that others have gotten, gotten picked on in the past. They get picked on for…Well like not picked on but like, kind of joking around. He [friend] was extremely short and they [classmates] were picking on him because of his height, but… and he was a Hispanic.

Ethnic/racial humor is a common practice in the United States, especially among adolescents' peers (Gonzales & Wiseman, 2005; Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Often these forms of ethnic/racial humor are subtle forms of discrimination that focus on stereotypical images of a particular racial/ethnic group, showcased over and over in media (Gonzales & Wiseman, 2005; Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). These racial stereotypes also work as a form of visual microaggressions -racist rooted stereotypical images of communities of color in media and print (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015).

Frank's friend experienced subtle forms of racism through his classmates ethnic/racial humor. Frank's friend was made fun of because of his height and Frank alluded to it also being connected to the fact that he was Latino. MT helps us understand these jokes as something much more than a joke. It is a subtle, everyday racist act that has been so persistent that Frank and his classmates understand it as simple teasing and fun. Utilizing our LatCrit lens, we come to understand how oppression can be intersectional as we hear that Frank's friend was teased due to his height, gender, and racial/ethnic identify. LatCrit gives us insight into the racialization of Latino students who are prescribed expectations of "how to be" and the specific racial discrimination

they face. For instance, Frank's example discusses how targeted language like "*Beaner*" is used to dehumanize those from a Latinx background, and we also see the ways that his friend was teased because of his height and appearance that aligned with stereotypical images of what it means to be a Latino (Romero, 2001; Yosso & Garcia, 2010). Romero (2001) and Yosso and Garcia (2010) explains how Latinos are stereotyped as being aggressive, lazy, illegal, hyper-sexual, and even super-predators. Being short and male is often something that is looked down upon as males hope to be "tall" and may associate shortness as a feminine trait but is associated with racist tropes of Mexican/Latinx immigrants.

In all, we see how these everyday jokes and practices play out in the lives of Latino male high school students at the interpersonal level of racism. They experience subtle forms of racism in and out of the classroom through verbal interactions with adults and peers, with what seems like a frequent encounter. The fact that these participants all excused these experiences as simple jokes or excused the comments as simple observations/examples by a teacher, underscores the pervasiveness of racist nativism microaggressions. These comments made students feel othered by direct comments on their race and ethnicity, being called degrading names associated with their race and ethnicity and made fun of using ethnic/racial humor rooted is racist stereotypes of what it means to be a Latino. Moreover, subtle racism generates a toxic environment for Latino students at school, making them feel othered and potentially unwelcomed by school staff and peers. Thus, we come to understand how these racial microaggressions can accumulate and potentially affect the social-emotional wellbeing of Latino high school

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students due to the frequent teasing and feelings of being othered.

Lateral/Horizontal Violence

Another form of oppression that participants discussed in their interviews was the ways that both Latinx students and other students of color criticized them and made them feel like outsiders. Four of the six participants shared their experiences encountering or witnessing such events. When I asked in the interviews about times that were challenging for them at school due to their race/ethnicity, Luis, a tall 16-year-old junior, the oldest of three siblings, who was unsure of his GPA but described his work habits as lazy, shared that he witnessed other students, including students of color, use degrading and ostracizing language amongst each other as a form of joking around. For instance, Luis shared, "Uh, they were mostly about like. Other… other Latinos calling them aliens. Just outside during lunch." In this example, we learn that other Latinx students were using racist and offensive language towards other Latinx students. This serves as a prime example of how structural racism shows up at the interpersonal and individual level. Interpersonal because the students are verbally insulting one another, but those statements and ideologies are ingrained in students of color through wide-spread stereotypes (internalized). Next, Christian, a 17-year-old junior with a self-reported GPA of a 1.38 and is the oldest of five, shared an experience with being teased by his Latinx peers in connection to his limited Spanish. He states, "For me, yeah, 'cause I'm not fully like, fully developed being…being Mexican in my opinion. But I'm still learning how to speak, and I understand it." Likewise, we hear that Latinx students tease each other for not being able to speak Spanish - the dominant language in Latin America, when Frank shared:

"Like maybe this, like, it's just a stereotype. Like, 'cause most Latinos they're going to think that you speak Spanish. Like with me. …You don't speak Spanish and stuff like that, so that's probably one of the negative things that everyone thinks you're going to speak Spanish."

Luis, Frank, and Christian experienced lateral/horizontal violence from their peers in some compacity. Lateral violence (also known as horizontal violence) refers to incidents in which BIPOC sustain the racial divide and oppression by enacting oppressive behaviors towards each other, either within the same racial group or across different racial groups (Bailey, 2020; Pyke, 2010). These violent acts subsequently negatively affect both the perpetrator and the victim, though oftentimes the perpetrator is unaware of the damage they are doing to them/their community (Bailey, 2020). Without realizing it, these students of color were making statements that help uphold racism by widening the divide among communities of color with their words that degrade and hold back their peers. Lateral/horizontal violence, unfortunately, is a result of a lack of understanding of critical consciousness. Thus, the need for more racially literature educators to work with Latino youth to develop their racial literacy skills and critical consciousness.

Oppressed groups, in this case Latinx students, used words that are weaponized to 'other' them (racist nativism), towards each other. These acts of othering are used to make students feel they are not American because of their ethnic background. Like what was discussed in racist nativism microaggressions with the use of the slur "beaners", referring to students as "aliens" also creates a sense of othering (non-American). It's not uncommon for oppressed groups to internalize racism and sustain it by marginalizing other oppressed members (Freire, 1970; Bailey, 2020). LatCrit and MT provide the

framework to understand that acts of microaggressions that specifically target the Latinx community by calling them *aliens* and mocking them for their lack of proficiency with Spanish, can and are carried out by members of the same community.

Frank and Christin experienced lateral/horizontal violence because they are not fluent in Spanish. Ironically, Spanish is the language of the conquerors - the oppressors from Spain that invaded Latin America. Both students related this information in response to challenges of being Latino at their school. At a high school with a large Latinx population, it appears that many of them stereotype that all Latinx students speak Spanish. And when they encounter those who are not fluent in Spanish, they mock them. It is an interesting phenomenon, because on one hand not speaking Spanish can make one more "American" by having English as your dominant language, but on the other hand, knowing Spanish which comes from a White/European country can help give you social privilege. In this case, not knowing Spanish hinders you and you are mocked and treated as some sort of subservient Latino - second class to those who are bilingual or multilingual. Nonetheless, the complexity of this situation can be understood through LatCrit by teasing out the racist and oppressive history of Latin America with Spain and by MT that informs us of the subtle ways oppression can be carried out in comments and jokes.

The recollections of these events as times of struggle due to their race by these young men are indicative of the psychological stress it causes. These students may begin, if they have not already, start to believe they are "less-then", affecting their self-esteem, and/or easily irritated whenever someone else brings up their lack of Spanish mastery or

being referred to as an "alien". Though they may not recognize it as such, these daily encounters with lateral/horizontal violence slowly start to stack up and impact their overall wellbeing and school performance.

Experiencing Racism Outside of Schools

The data from this study tells the story of Latino high school students and how they encounter racism at the systemic level, outside of school through the racialization of the Latinx community and the generational impact racist polices have had in keeping many of the Latinx community in a state of poverty.

As discussed in chapter 1, this study was proposed in late 2019, right before the full blown COVID-19 pandemic and the start of the nation-wide lockdown starting in March 2020. Thus, COVID-19 was not a phenomenon that was expected to emerge from this study, but understandably did. The negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were a common theme among all six participants. Their lived experiences showcase how poverty and COVID-19 disproportionately affects Latino male high school students and their schooling experience.

Financial & Resource Disparities

At a crucial time in our recent history when illness and death was exponentially rising, our Latino high school students, and their families, faced challenges that were previously remedied by in-person instruction. For example, we hear from Gian Luc who informs us that his family quickly had to troubleshoot how he would get access to the internet in order for him to "attend" school. He shared,

> I was fortunate enough, 'cause, uh, well my my family has spectrum. But they
> have like this…not an organization, but a plan for students that have low income.
> And so, we applied and thankfully we don't pay as much as other people do 'cause
> of our low income that we have.

Thankfully, Gian Luc and his family were informed about internet service programs available to low-income families. This goes to show how schools become essential places and beacons of opportunity and resources for these families who depend on them to provide the resources their children need. Though they were able to get a low-rate internet, it was an unexpected financial burden they had to acquire, versus middle- and upper-class families who likely already had access to the internet at home.

Even when internet access was provided to students, many of the other participants shared how unreliable and spotty the connection was. Christen shared in his interview that "sometimes [the] internet went down...Yeah, it was at one point, it [school] was hard 'cause the connection was really poor". Rene relayed similar struggles with reliable internet due to what seemed like construction happening in his neighborhood. Rene shared, "Uh, sometimes it's either internet issues 'cause some, some, some people like have been tampering and there are construction workers. They tamper with, like the lines and sometimes it goes out." Lastly, Luis shared "It was mostly reliable. Sometimes it would lag a little bit during certain classes."

Yes, schools closed due to the growing number of COVID-19 cases and the lack of, at the time, a vaccine, but it placed the burden on access to students and their families. The document data on school discipline and enrollment demographics showed that the school is a Title 1 school. Meaning, that at least 40 percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch. Again, a Title 1 school receives additional funding "to

ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education..." (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p.1), and yet the lived experiences of our participants tell us this was not the case for them. Equality was providing all students with a Google Chromebook, per school document data, but equity was not served when the burden to access reliably was not addressed by the school.

Our framework guided by CRT and LatCrit help us understand the struggle to access quality and reliable internet amongst the participants as a social justice issue resulting from the history of racism the Latinx community has endured. These stories paint the picture of structural/systemic racism and the long history of underfunding neighborhoods of color (Warren, 2014) and redlining practices to zone them out of affluent ones (Garcia, 2018). In this study, systemic racism is defined as the institutionalized practices, structures, policies, and widely held beliefs in society that works to actively keep BIPOC communities down while uplifting the dominant culture (Feagin, 2006). These practices have lasting consequences for our students and their families. The conditions of the neighborhoods our students live in and the financial need these families are in, are all connected to legacy of racism in the United States that made it difficult for communities of color to obtain employment with livable wages. These structural forms of racism with a long history of segregation, continue to place low-income families into neighborhoods and schools with less than adequate resources to meet the needs of its community.

These young Latino men unfortunately must struggle with stressors of joining school online and potentially being kicked out or unable to stay connected due to low

quality internet service. Additionally, when their families are asked to pick up an added expense to supply the digital resources (internet, computer, etc.) these young Latino boys are burden with emotional distress that ultimately adds to the traumatic stress of these young boys.

Housing

Aside from challenges to access reliable and quality internet services, the participants of this study also informed me about their struggles with having their own personal space to do their schoolwork and study. Keeping in mind that the research site is designated as a Title 1 school, it comes as no surprise that many of these families are of low socioeconomic status. In fact, document data from the school accountability report card indicated that in the 2019-2020 school year, 68.50% of the students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged households.

To better understand the gravity of this situation, Gian Luc shares, "My family rents, rents out a room. We do not have our own personal space, so we all share a room with each other." For a family of 5 to be living together in a bedroom, not a one-bedroom apartment but rather a room within a home, we can see how difficult this must be to have your own quiet and productive space. Like Gian Luc, Frank informs us on his limited space and how he and his siblings had to be creative in spacing out. He shares, "So my sister would probably do, or she would do her resumes in the kitchen, and I would do It in my room. My brother in the living room." Though Frank had more than just a bedroom to space out in comparison to Gian Luc, the struggle to find an adequate space for virtual schooling continues to be a challenge without having your own personal

bedroom. Likewise, Luis shared that "Uh, yeah, we had to split up. We all need to have our spaces". Luis lived in a single parent household with two younger siblings who also attended school virtually. Their one-bedroom home, like others, proved to not have the adequate space for the three children to comfortably join virtual school and have their own workspace. Christian shared how even when he found a space to do schoolwork or join class virtually, there were still other distractions at home that made it difficult. Christian shared,

> "But sometimes my, my [younger] siblings can come around at, at random moments and bother me. Or pets just come and, on, and like, example for my cat that I have, they like to go on my computers and sometimes it turns off my Chromebook and presses random buttons."

In all, we repeatedly hear from these young men about the struggles related to their socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds they faced in accessing virtual school and a space to work and study. Data from the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) report on Latinx and housing during COVID-19 indicated that the Latinx community is falling behind on rent and losing homes (NCRC, 2021). Additionally, though prior to COVID-19 the Latinx housing and homeownership was increasing, this community is still "dealing with the legacy of the racial wealth divide" and the pandemic further exacerbated it (NCRC, 2021). With increased struggles with housing and income to pay for adequate housing, it comes as no surprise that we hear our students share about their struggles with finding a space in a crowded home to study and attend class online. These systemic forms of racism that make it challenging for BIPOC to move up social class and afford adequate housing and resources, evidently have had a negative influence in the distance learning schooling experience of our participants.

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As a result, many Latino students likely experienced some degree of psychological discomfort with finding adequate personal space at home to join school. The structural forms of racism make it extremely difficult for Latinx families to have adequate and stable housing, which contribute to the negative impact on Latino students social-emotional health and academic engagement. With limited personal space at home for many of these Latino youth, they are disproportionately more likely to encounter distractions, making it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork and participate in virtual class.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the layered ways that racism presented itself in and out of school and how these students encountered it. Referencing Figure.1 gives us a comprehensive view on how racism works and the direct (personal) and indirect (institutional & structural) experiences these students had. Consequences included internalized oppression in the forms of lateral/horizontal violence were Latino students brought down one another, or at times other racial groups, through acts of racist nativism. Other consequences included teacher comments about the racial makeup of the school, lack of access to adequate workspace, housing, and reliable internet. This chapter helps paint the picture of the racism-induced stress these students constantly face and how it was exacerbated during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 5: Racism, Student Social-Emotional Health, and Academics

Notably, much of the existing literature in racism and students of color highlight the ways in which racism can have a negative impact on their overall health (Akbar, 2007; Cheng, & Mallinckrodt, 2015; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Torres & Taknint, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). However, little has been done to reflect the current experiences of K-12 students, as most previous work was conducted with students in higher education and other adults. The data of this study helps answer research question two, by looking at the impact racism has on Latino high school students between their mental health/social-emotional wellbeing and their academics. From a LatCrit perspective, this study helps fill the literature gap on how racism, in all its forms and levels, affects the overall wellbeing of Latino high school students. Moreover, it provides us the lens to understand the specific racialized mechanisms that affect the Latinx community specifically (i.e., citizenship status, language use, etc).

To help fill this gap, this chapter focuses on the answers to the research questions: *2.a. What impacts does it have on their social emotional health? and 2b. What impacts does it have on their academic engagement?* Additionally, I build on Figure 1. The Four layers of Racism, to center Student Social-Emotional Health at the center of the four layers of racism (Figure 3.0). This helps us visualize and understand the cumulative impact that racism has on the social-emotional health of Latino high school students.
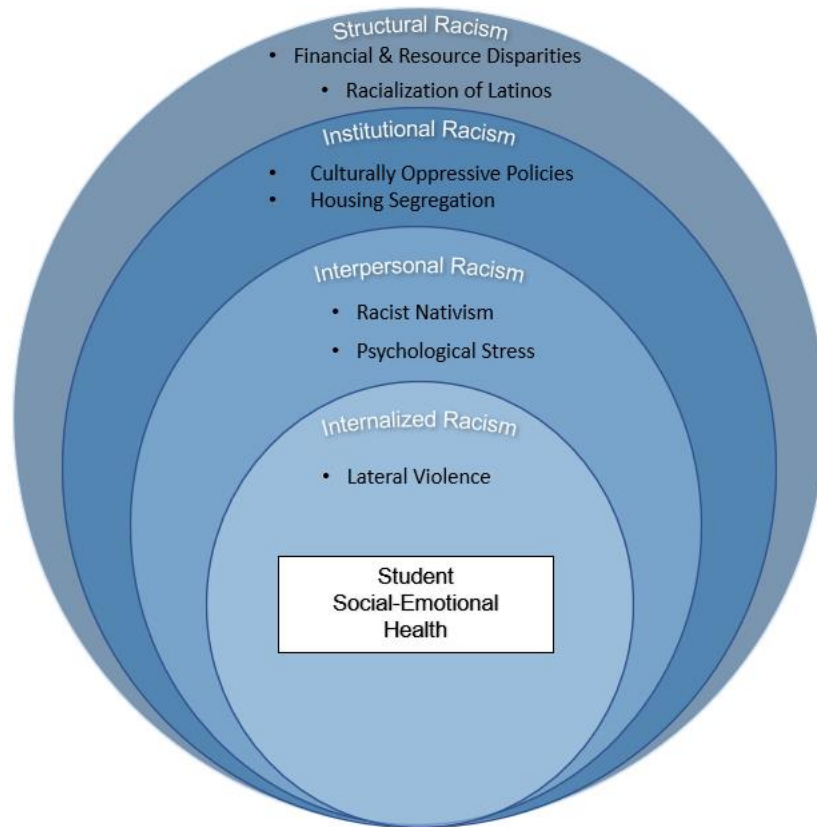
Figure 3 Student Social-Emotional Health and the Layers of Racism

Psychological Stress

As expected, the racism that these Latino high school students encountered had a

detrimental impact on their social emotional health. School policies and expectations

during the COVID-19 virtual learning period contributed to the negative impacts students

were facing despite the worldwide pandemic. Document analysis from the school districts

web page verified that all students were required to have their video cameras on. School

policy read:

> "Attendance in distance learning is mandatory. Attendance will be taken in each
> class and students who are not logged in will be marked absent. Just as students
> are required to be on time and present at school, students are expected to be on

time and **virtually present via video and audio**. [Emphasis added]"
Policies such as the one stated above may have good intentions in getting students

involved during virtual learning. But these policies and expectations fail to be culturally

responsive, taking into account the potential invasion of privacy this has on their students

and their families. For instance, Gian Luc shared,

> "It was kind of hard at times. Because at… during PE I…I had to go outside. I really. I really don't like saying it, but I was kind of embarrassed of, like, you know, turning on my camera inside my like where my parents were on. But I know that later on I'll hopefully have a place for me and my parents. So, I've never gotten to experience my own room, so that's something I really want to experience later on."

From Gian Luc's response, we learn about the psychological stress he had to navigate

when doing physical education through virtual schooling. He struggled with

embarrassment and fear that his peers and teachers would have access to his personal life,

his home, and see that he shared a one-bedroom apartment with his parents. To remedy

this, he elected to be outdoors and keep his home life private. His engagement with PE

came at an emotional tax that other privileged students did not have to pay.

CRT, LatCrit, and MT help us understand how policies can be oppressive. Peggy

Davis (1988) argues that laws can be forms of racial microaggressions that

disproportionately target underserved populations. Likewise, these school and district

policies impacted underserved students by taking away some students' privacy and

ability to equitably participate in their schooling. Having the stress and fear about being

"exposed" or "outed" via webcam does not create a support space for students to feel

comfortable, let alone focus their energy on learning and participating. Unfortunately,

many schools and districts remained in distance learning well over a year, thus, the

constant psychological stress has the potential to negatively impact the mental health

state of Latino students. It is important for schools to recognize the institutional harm

they were imposing on their students during distance learning and understand they too

contribute to the traumatic stress-like symptoms of these students by upholding racist

practices.

Other forms of psychological stress were noted by almost all participants. There

were a range of reasons why students felt overwhelmed and/or stressed, but all shared

some difficulties once COVID-19 resulted in virtual learning. We first hear from

Christian who explains that the virtual learning environment was emotionally and

mentally straining due to the lack of direct, in-person instruction and the pace of

everyday school. He shared,

> "I was like… I, I would be like sometimes stressed out, overwhelmed because there would be like a lot of times, I have to do assignments. And like, it's just frustrating sometimes because there's like so many classes that I have to do and typing it all the time. Like, sometimes it's looking at the screen hurts my eyes."

For Christian, being on a screen for hours and hours daily was overwhelming.

Additionally, he shared the challenge with having to type all his work and submit it

online. Other, more affluent students might have access to their home personal devices

with bigger screens than the school issued Chromebooks and this can minimize the

headaches they encounter due to larger fonts and clearer, bigger pictures. Unfortunately,

many of these students come from low-income homes and relied on the school issued

Chromebooks to access virtual learning which likely resulted in a mentally draining

online experience and frustration that Christian expressed above.

Similarly, Luis responded with "Oh yeah, during the pandemic. Like, I just felt

that it was hard to like concentrate on schoolwork when there was so many distractions at

home." Likewise, Gian Luc informed us of his challenge with staying focused, "I was at

home and I was, It was really hard for me to focus. I'd either be on my phone or at times I

really feel unmotivated, so I'd just be staring at my ceiling… that really messed me up."

Lastly, Rene expressed how drastically different and challenging school was for him

before and during COVID,

> When I first entered high school it was alright like before COVID. Everything
> was fine, but then like, after COVID-19 things change, you know. It's like weird, I
> don't know, but challenges are… they like, you know, were mostly just homework
> and grades. 'cause When I was and when I had COVID, it affected how I like, you
> know, worked. There is just like, just no energy.

Understandably so, schools shifting from in-person to virtual instruction was a necessary

step to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, the psychological stress it had on

students from this study indicates that much of it was connected to forms of racism.

Whether it be policies that corner students into vulnerable situations or the inability to

find an adequate quiet and spacious study space, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have

exacerbated the challenges these students face both mentally and academically. It is

unfortunate that a pandemic was necessary to bring much needed attention to inadequate

schooling and community resources.

Gender Roles & Help-seeking Behavior

Another prominent theme that emerged across all six participants, was the

challenge for them to openly express their social-emotional struggles. Notably, all our

Latino high school students expressed a desire of not wanting others to know about their

business, feelings of hesitation talking to a school counselor, or feeling uncomfortable with sharing personal information because it was something they are not accustomed to.

For instance, Frank shared about his challenge with self-disclosure and asking for help. He stated, "I'm not Really like a... If I'm… I can't do it. I'm Just gonna deal with it. I don't ask for help. I'm not really like that." When probed about what it would take for him to talk about and get help, Frank stated that, "But like I wanna make sure that the person that I'm telling this to is capable of like, not judging me. And like saying stuff on the side if you understand." Frank appeared to have concerns with others knowing his personal business and the potential for chisme (gossip) to occur which is common among young men (Connell, 2005; Gutmann, 2007; Malagón, 2010). Gian Luc self-disclosed similar struggles in his interview as well. He shared,

> "I always tend to always try to take care of my problems. I don't like… Actually, you know, talking to them [school counselor] again and again…I just, I… I don't feel… I don't feel comfortable sharing with them certain things, so I either just keep them to myself. Or, what I do sometimes, is sometimes I write on my notes on My phone and write down how I feel about myself."

As troubling as it may seem to hear these young men steer away from seeking help, it seems to be quite universal. Unfortunately, literature on gender roles informs us that this is a common thread among males (Connell, 2005; Gutmann, 2007; Malagón, 2010; Wimer et al., 2011). As previously discussed, Latino males in media are portrayed as strong and hyper masculine individuals (Romero, 2001; Yosso & Garcia, 2010), therefore, research suggests that seeking out help or being openly expressive would contradict an image imposed on them. However, given the fact that school is noted as a place that contributes to the harm on these students social-emotional wellbeing, it is

important to note that perhaps the toxic campus climate ~~also~~ influences their willingness

to as for support at school. Since school is understood as a place that makes it difficult for

them as Latinos (as discussed in chapter 4), it is understandable for these young men to

not trust or be motivated to ask for support from school personnel... Thus, we can draw

the conclusion that the everyday racism they experience on campus such as visual racial

microaggressions of Latinos in media, school policies, and toxic personal interactions

with peers and educations, all have a lasting negative effect (Akbar, 2017; Comas-Diaz et

al., 2019; Truong & Museus, 2012; Sue et al., 2007), creating layers of stress to Latino

students' overall wellbeing. Troubling, when schools are understood as places were these

students experience racism and psychological stress, it explains why, to some degree,

Latinos refrain from seeking support on campus from school personnel.

Many of these students shared similar views with not wanting to talk about their

personal problems with school counselors. This sense of solving one's problems seems

well engraved in these young men. So much so, that it seems asking for help is not worth

the psychological stress and fear of information being shared out without their consent.

To the point that Rene also shared that

> "Uhm, I don't really tell anyone about my feelings. So, I just bottle them up or just
> not tell anyone. I feel like it's better in my opinion, to just keep it bottled up. And
> so, I don't know it's... I feel like that's easier in my opinion."

For Rene, silence was equated to it being easier instead of speaking with someone about

their concerns and personal struggles. Though this may seem like a reasonable response

at the time, we know from researchers that harboring personal conflict over a long

duration of time can ultimately cause psychological stress to heighten (Akbar, 2017; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

Jacob expressed the psychological stress of having to retell his story and personal conflicts with different school counselors. Jacob is a student who was separated from his parents through court, making him a foster youth living with grandma – legal guardian. He stated, "I don't like sharing what's going on in my situation. Every time I get a new [school] counselor, there was always like 'oh little grandma…' So, I'd explain why I live with her." When asked if he had spoken to his school counselor about his circumstances, he explained that "My [school] counselor told me about it [being able to talk to her] but I say, no it's fine." Understandably, anyone with trauma that finds themselves in a situation to constantly having to retell, or relive, their experiences can be troublesome and painful. Jacob's experiences with high turnover of school counselors and a campus racial climate that adds psychological stress exacerbates this. Unfortunately, educator burnout, ill prepared or un-credential staffing is common among low-income schools (Garcia, 2018). This is a result of the institutional and structural racism that segregates school boundaries, dictates property values, how schools are funded, and ultimately what staff and support services they can fund. We know from the literature that men are less likely to seek help or counseling support. But with everything students are carrying during the pandemic, it is troubling to see a group of Latino young men express that they have no outlet to sharing their feelings

While an understanding of racism and its influence on school funding and services is crucial, to better understand these narratives from our young Latino men, we

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must use an intersectional approach to see this in a race-gendered lens. These young

Latino male students have to juggle their social-emotional health and the societal

expectations on what it means to be a "man", and more specially the racialization of what

it means to be a Latino. Men of color are frequently stereotyped as being hypermasculine,

gang related, tough, and independent (Yosso & Garcia, 2010). Their identities as young

men and a person of color intersect, making it even more challenging to navigate and

sustain what society expects of them as students of color (Malagón, 2010). Additionally,

schools need to reflect and understand that they too, contribute to the harm of these

young men to racist policies and upholding practices that marginalize Latino students.

LatCrit (Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), which acknowledges

the intersectionality of people of color, provides the foundation for us to understand how

these societal expectations imposed on Latino male students are acts of racism.

More importantly, it helps us grasp how these larger forms of racism are

negatively impacting their overall social-emotional health. In this study, the young men

all expressed traits associated with hypermasculinity like non-self-disclosure, not

engaging in help-seeking behavior, and a desire to solve one's problems. These toxic

traits that have been imposed on to them, ideologies they have been repetitively fed that

they embody, create long-term mental health struggles as these young men will likely

bottled-up many of their personal struggles. Therefore, their social-emotional health is

jeopardized. Although these young men expressed concern and difficulty being

emotionally expressive, I want to note that they all shared a wide range of personal

information to me. Topics beyond racism were shared with me that revolved around past

mental health struggles, family separation, and feelings of isolation.

Racism and the Impact on Academics

The racism that these young Latino high school students faced, clearly had a

negative impact on their overall social-emotional health. But it reached further then just

their social-emotional health, as it also negatively affected their academic engagements.

To begin with, Frank shared his experience with the initial stages of distance learning (at

first it was announced that schools would close for just 2 weeks) with accessing material

online and, ultimately, the newfound challenges in connecting with his teacher for help.

He shares,

> Overnight, like the quarantine, especially like the beginning of it where there was
> no zoom, they would just post it [class/homework]. That's like the only time
> where school is extremely difficult 'cause they would post an assignment, and I
> wouldn't know that school was going on….The zoom was hard because you didn't
> have like an actual teacher there to help you on like you had it through zoom, but
> they couldn't like if you had a problem or an issue with anything specific like on
> your paper and you didn't understand… you couldn't. The teacher couldn't just
> come up to you and ask you 'cause it was virtually.

Historically, immigrant families and those of socially economically disadvantaged

backgrounds struggle to navigate the education system in ways that their middle-class

counterparts do not. As such, we hear from Frank on his struggles in getting clarifying

questions answered from his teachers during distance learning and had no one at home to

turn to for assistance. In like fashion, Gian Luc also shared similar struggles,

> Probably the COVID Area like last year….I had A's & B' until like November
> and I hadn't failed…he (school counselor) had sent me an email regarding that I
> had to take a credit recovery. That really kind of brought me down.

Gian Luc's story speaks to the unexpected challenges that these students encountered and

had to adjust to. I was informed by the assistant principal that at the start of the pandemic shutdown, most of the students did not have access to a computer device and/or reliable internet. It took weeks for the district to start distributing school Chromebooks to students. This speaks to the Gian Luc's experience with having his grades drop dramatically as he reported. This is yet another example of the disparities between these low-income communities of color and their middle class, often white, counterparts with access to adequate educational resources (Haderlein et al, 2021). Rene himself also related these new struggles with academics once COVID-19 hit. He shared,

> When I first entered high school it was alright like before COVID. Everything was fine, but then like, after COVID-19 things change, you know. It's like weird, I don't know, but challenges are… they like, you know, were mostly just homework and grades.

Rene's statement speaks to the challenges that the Latinx community faced during COVID-19 with housing insecurities (NCRC, 2021) and the disproportionate infection and death rate among them (CDC, 2020). With this context, it is understandable that many of our students, like Rene, struggled academically not just because of lack of resources to access online school, but because of their livelihood and that of those around them was in constant danger. All of this is connected to the racialization of the Latinx community, with societal structures that place them in crowded, under resourced neighborhoods and school not equipped to meet their needs. Lastly, Luis echoed what almost all our participants experienced. Luis indicated that,

> Oh yeah, during the pandemic. Like, I just felt that it was hard to like Concentrate on schoolwork when there was so many distractions at home. Yeah, it was very overwhelming…well, just to go look on Aries. To see how my grades are falling.

The voices of these young men all shared concerns with their academics. Undeniably, much of the negative impact on their academics was during the COVID-19 shut down, but the root cause were the systemic forms of racism that disproportionately affect communities of color. As such, we hear about the mental and physical struggles that these students had to endure. The lack of access to support, or social capital to connect with others who can assist them (Yosso, 2005). On the surface this may seem the result of the COVID-19 shutdown, but our lenses from CRT and LatCrit help us understand that these struggles were already present. The only difference is that the COVID-19 exacerbated these struggles and only now is there attention given to these issues.

Conclusion

This chapter showcased exemplary data describing the lived experiences of the six Latino high school students in this study and how they experience racism. Looking at Figure 2 we can see how student mental social-emotional health is impacted by the layers of racism they encounter. The many mechanisms of racism such as psychological stress, racialized gender norm expectations, school policies, and their frequent encounter account for the cumulative harm they faced. All of which contribute to them experiencing forms of racism-induced traumatic stress. The findings depicted common themes across most, if not all, participants that helped address the purpose of this study - to explore the ways they experience racism and what impact, if any, do these experiences with racism have on their social-emotional wellbeing and their academics.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the ways in which Latino high school students experience racism and learn about the ways that it may impact their social emotional health and/or their academics. Given the rise in overt racism and the political climate, I sought to investigate what Latino youth were experiencing to better inform the practice of school counselors and other student support educators (school social workers, psychologists, etc.). the following research questions guided this dissertation study:

1) In what ways do Latino high school students experience racism within and outside of schools?

2) What are the impacts of racism on Latino high school students?

   a) What impact does it have on their social emotional health?

   b) What impact does it have on their academic engagement?

This study had many insightful points on the impact that racism and its traumatic stress-like symptoms have on Latino high school students. The findings indicated the various ways, and the various levels, that racism manifest in and out of schools, effecting Latino students both academically and social-emotionally. Additionally, this study had significant findings for school counselors and other educators to consider when working with Latino high school students. Chapter 4 summarizes the way in which Latino high school students experienced racism within the school setting and outside of the school. Data in chapter 4 highlighted the manifestation of racism as racial microaggressions, racist nativism, and lateral/horizontal violence. Chapter 5 builds on chapter 4, in that it teases out the specific ways that racism impacts Latino student's social emotional health

and their academic engagement. Data in this chapter showcased the psychological stress that Latino students endure due to deficit practices and policies in schools and hostile school environments that likely influence Latino students lack of seeking support at schools.

The stories of these young men inform us that racism is still very prevalent both within and outside of our schools. It comes as no surprise as many scholars have argued that school's function to replicate and reproduce inequalities that we see out in society (Brathwaite, 2017; Roksa & Robinson, 2017). Thus, as social justice-oriented educators, we must continue to challenge deficit understanding of this student demographic and question policies and practices that sustain the oppression of Latino students - and other marginalized communities. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that examines the way in which racism can inflict symptoms of post-traumatic stress and other negative outcomes on Latino students. It echoes the importance for society, the field of counseling and psychology to recognize racism as a public health issue that increasingly affects Latino students. Doing so can help inform the field of education and school counseling on how to better serve and meet the needs of these youth.

Implications

The Need for Racially Literate, Critically Conscious School Counselors

With the rise in overt racism and disproportionately brutality against Black, Indigenous, People of Color, there is a great need for school personnel that can understand the ways that systemic oppression impacts the many fascists of a BIPOC

student's life.

Interestingly, though all the participants in this study expressed challenges with self-disclosing information and a fear of others knowing about their personal business, all of them engaged in deep self-disclosure with me, the researcher. Whether they realized it or not, students shared personal information in their interview responses about divorce, previous suicide ideation, family mental state, struggles with making ends meet, and stories about crying at night or when alone. There could be numerous reasons as to why the participants shared what they did. But perhaps this interview was one of the few, if not the only, times someone has asked them to share about their personal lived experiences with racism and other oppressive systems. It could be that these interviews serve as racial microaffirmations (Solórzano, Pérez Huber, & Huber-Verjan, 2020) where students felt validated and affirmed that their experiences are not isolated incidents. From the start of the interview, there is the potential that seeing me on screen and learning about my racial identity could have created a pathway of affirming their racial identify from the very beginning and this could have created the conditions for them to share. The questions in the interview may have also contributed to this. Perhaps the fact I am a Latino male, a shared identity, was something that helped them feel at ease to share these stories. Nonetheless, this has huge implications for the importance of school counselors to meet the social emotional needs of Latino high school students. Staff that reflects their school demographics have strong potential for cultivating positive impact on their students and connecting with them, their parents, and the community at large in ways that others may not be. For instance, an understanding of cultural practices, ideologies, and

language.

Some scholars call attention for the need for Teachers of Color who can meet the needs of students of color in the classroom (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Clark et al., 2013), the same is argued for school counselors (Degges-White & Colon, 2012; Dollarhide et al., 2013). However, I argue that there is a need of more racially literate and critically conscious school counselors that have an understand of racism and oppression. This is key in helping students make sense of their experiences and to aid the field of education in dismantling racist, harmful practices against students of color. There is some complexity with this, given that school counselors of color might be positioned to understand and relate to similar experiences as these Latino students, given their lived experienced based on their racial identity. BIPOC school counselors may be equipped through their own lived experiences to relate and understand the racism-induced traumatic stress that their students of color, or in this study Latino students, face daily. They may already possess some of the racial literacy needed to understand the nuances of racism and recognize the psychological stress it brings on students of color. However, it is not a prerequisite for a school counselor to be BIPOC.

School district and school leaders should be intentional during their job fairs and hiring procedures to recruit more critically conscious and racially literate school counselors. They can include questions about their understanding of racism and the impacts it has on Latinos to help gauge their racial literacy skills. Edenmore so, they should provide the appropriate support to retain these school counselors through providing professional development opportunities that focus on racial and equity issues in

K-12 schools. A lot of funding of professional development within school counseling is funneled towards college and career readiness, so an expansion to more social-emotional trainings, particularly ones geared towards social and racial justice is needed.

Districts and Schools

Although there is great benefit in having diverse, racially literature, critically conscious school counselors, districts and schools must also take accountability for the harm they impost onto Latino students. Districts and schools need to revisit their practices, policies, and procedures such as discipline practices, dress codes, and how students engage with online platforms. As other researchers have indicated, schools enact and sustain forms of racism that harm students of color (Hernandez et al., 2021; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). We saw this in this study when district polices required that student have their video cameras on, adding to their stress during distance learning. Some of these policies manifest as racial microaggressions that seem like everyday practices, but in closer analysis are designed to disproportionately target students of color. Such practices can place Latino students to on the school to prison pipeline, create unwelcoming environments, and contribute to the racial stress Latino students experience.

As a result, Latino students may, understandably, have reservations seeking out support from a space that continuously harms their overall well-being. No amount of racially literate, critically conscious staff can meet the needs of Latino students if the root cause is not being addressed (think back to Joshua's story with racism and the use of a 504 plan). Thus, administrators at all levels need to be better informed on racism and

culturally responsive practices. They too must build on their racial literacy so that they

can cultivate school-wide and district-wide change that dismantles racist-rooted practices.

School Counseling Services Awareness and Accessibility

An unfortunate phenomenon that occurs in K-12 schools, is the lack of

understanding of the role of school counselors and what services they can provide to

students (Karatas & Kaya, 2015). In this study, all Latino high school students shared

how they did not seek out their school counselor to address issues of racism and/or other

social emotional concerns. Too often school counselors are burden with non-counseling

related duties (i.e., Master scheduling, test coordination, lunch supervision) that their

roles and services become ambiguous. Too often they are only understood as academic,

or the outdated term of "guidance counselors" that do little to no mental health related

support (ASCA, 2019; Randick et al., 2018).

Therefore, school counselors must advocate for their roles and help inform their

administrators about their unique skills and knowledge to gain more access to students.

Ways to accomplish this can be through the use of monthly meetings with their

admonitors to discuss student trends and services. Such meetings can help provide a

comprehensive understanding of their roles and what work they do to provide direct and

indirect student support. Administrators can also attend state and national conferences

like the annual California Association of School Counselor (CASC) Conference that

includes workshop strands for administrators. These professional development

opportunities for administrators are designed to help their understanding of the role of

school counselors and how to better utilize their skills and services.

Other ways that school counselors can better serve students and bring awareness about their role and skills is through an increase with more involvement in school-based mental health services and counseling guidance lessons in classrooms. Counseling lessons can cover general mental health concerns, but also be focused on social justice issues of equity and access to schooling and resources. Classroom discussions revolving current sociopolitical issues or racist acts can help students identify school counselors as support staff that are competent to understand their concerns and psychological stress (particularly students of color) Students can better learn about the role of school counselors through these lessons and constant interactions with their school counselors. These actions may aid the development of better relationships with them. With reduced caseloads (ASCA recommends 1:250) school counselors can better serve and help address school-based oppression by challenging policy, working in collaboration with youth, parents, and other stakeholders to address concerns.

School Counselor Training on Racism

Given the alarming stories our participants shared about how, when, and where they experience racism (direct or subtle) within high schools, there is a dire need for professional development training on issues of racial and social justice. The discussion on racist nativism in the findings bring to light the subtle and easy ways that forms of racism can manifest and slide by on campus to the untrained eye (Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber et al., 2008). Students in this study did not name their experiences with racial microaggressions as racism, but rather jokes. Therefore, school counselors, and other educators, should continue to engage in training and education to learn more about the

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ways racism can present itself in schools. This is especially needed as racism can present itself in comments, non-verbal, jokes, imagery, policies and practices (Davis, 1988; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). With a better understanding of the nuances of racism, school counselors will be better equipped to help students make sense of what they are experiencing and build on their racial literacy skills. As Freire (1970) and Pierce (1970a, 1970b) suggest, when BIPOC communities are able to name racism and make sense of their world they can minimize the negative impact racism has on them.

To accomplish this, pre-service school counseling programs needs to hire professors that have the critical understandings of racism and other forms of oppression. This would allow for school counseling programs to offer courses specific to addressing issues of racism in K-12 and beyond. Pre-service school counselors need to be trained on how to recognize and respond to racism that their students encounter. Racism-induced traumatic stress, as previously discussed, in not widely understood, thus allowing for more negative social-emotional impacts to occur among students of color who experience racism. Pre-service school counselors should graduate with a proficient level of racial justice literacy.

Because school counselors are trained using the DSM-V – the training manual of the mental health profession which holds all the recognized mental health diagnoses, their symptoms, and treatments – more critical training on the impact of racism and mental health needs to occur in pre-service graduate programs. School-based mental health professionals, like school counselors, are trained to recognize emotional distress as outlined in the DSM-V. However, there is no discussion on how concepts of racism like

racial battle fatigue (RBF) and racism-induced traumatic stress can create emotional distress. This has great implications for the lack of services that students of color can receive to disarm and address these very real form of racism

While the inclusion of racism-induced traumatic stress in the DSM-V, or as a qualified mental disorder, would be pathologizing, it is important that school counselors are aware of this experience for students of color. RBF helps us understand the phenomenon of racism-induced traumatic stress not as a form of mental illness but rather an experience directly resulting to constant interaction with racism – a byproduct or symptom. Thus, the little attention RBF gets among school-based mental health training, the more limited opportunities Latino students have to engage with a school counselor that can understand their experiences. As a result, practitioners working with these communities are potentially ill equipped to recognize and address the issues of racism-induced traumatic stress.

Furthermore, school and district administrators should seek out professional development and toolkits that enhance the racial literacy and culturally responsive skills of school counselors. CASC offers curriculum such as "How to be an anti-racist school counselor" and workshops to help inform school counselors on best practices. Yet, funding to access these trainings and curriculum are not robust enough. ASCA provides continuing education units that discuss similar topics as well. In all, more opportunity and funding need to be invested by schools and district to better equip their staff to meet the needs of their students of color.

Theories of Counseling

The narratives of our six participants help underscore the importance of cross-cultural counseling theories and techniques. It is crucial for the field of school counseling, and counseling at large, to continue to shape theories of counseling. As school-based mental health professionals, oftentimes we are the first experience these youth may have with a counselor. Therefore, school counselor education programs must impose a focus on culturally responsive counseling theories. Theories of counseling work as the framework and worldview for a counselor to engage with youth and provide support. Though there are currently post-modern theories of counseling (i.e., Solution-Focused Therapy, Narrative Therapy) that challenge traditional counseling theories (i.e., Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Psychoanalytic, etc.), Critical Race Theory, Latinx Critical Race Theory, and Microaggression Theory are all non-counseling theories that can be integrated into the work of cross-cultural counseling (Haskins & Singh, A. 2015; Jones-Smith, 2021; Torino, Rivera, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Sue, 2019;).

They provide new lenses to help understand the oppressive systems that people of color face. Better yet, they can help us and our students with making sense of the world they live in and the racist, oppressive encounters they encounter. Too many of the existing counseling theories come from white, cis-gender, Eurocentric scholars whose understanding does not fully capture the struggles and lived experiences of people of color and other oppressed groups. Given the potential benefits of these critical theories, I propose that these should also be introduced earlier on in undergraduate studies. Fields like human services, human development, psychology, and sociology can all benefit from

having curriculum that discuss these theories and their applicability in their respective fields. Lastly, although CRT has been getting lots of media attention and named controversial, some form of these theories should be taught at the K-12 level.

Limitations

Like all research, this study has its limitations. For instance, given the qualitative nature of this study, the findings of this dissertation cannot and should not be generalized to all Latino high school students. Instead, it serves as a point of reference of what other Latino high school students may be experiencing with racism, racism-induced traumatic stress and how school counselors can support them. With only six participants, some scholars may argue that the sample size is too small to draw concrete conclusions and therefore the findings are limited. However, Yin (2018) argues that a case study design helps explore real-life phenomena within a context (the high school). Additionally, the study happened at one high school with a predominantly Latinx student population (50.2%). Therefore, the experiences of Latino high school students with racism and racism-induced traumatic stress may differ at more white populated schools.

Lastly, the originally proposed study aimed at the racism Latino students experience had a small, but significant shift due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic shifted the focus of the study to examine racism beyond just the interpersonal and internalized level, but to study its manifestation and impact at the institutional and structural level. Thus, providing a much needed attention on how racism widely affects Latinos and the development of racism-induced traumatic stress.

Future Research

Future research in school counseling should look at examining the level of competency and level of comfort of school counselors with understanding and addressing issues of racism and other forms of oppressions. As more and more attention is drawn onto youth mental health and dismantling racism, it is important to examine the social justice literacy and orientation of practicing school counselors. Learning about the ways that school counselors understand racism and how they utilize their unique roles to advocate for change and student support can be instrumental in providing adequate school-based counseling to students experiencing racism-induced traumatic stress.

Additionally, other research can focus on examining how school counselor preparation programs are educating and informing pre-service counselors about racial and social justice. Is the curriculum meeting the needs of K-12 youth and are pre-service counselors being well equipped to enter the workforce as social justice-oriented educators? These are important questions to address. Given the limitations of current counseling and psychotherapy theories, research on integrating frameworks like Critical Race Theory, Latinx Critical Race Theory, and Microaggression Theory into the cross-cultural counseling curriculum is needed. It is important for school counselor preparation programs and faculty to utilize non-traditional, non-Eurocentric understandings of counseling and psychology to better support our diverse student populations.

Lastly, research on college-aged students reflecting back to their K-12 schooling to explore impacts of racism-induced traumatic stress can be of great value. The current study showcased how challenging it can be for some of these Latino high school students

to understand and make sense of the forms of racism they are experiencing. Perhaps older students who are exposed to university level coursework on oppression might be able to provide more in-depth experiences of racism and racism-induced traumatic stress. This can be instrumental in informing the practice of school counselors as well as informing educational policy makers and administrators on the ways that K-12 schools continue to inflict racial harm onto these students.

Conclusion

This qualitative study sought out to explore the experience of Latino male high school students with racism and racism-induced traumatic stress; including how it impacts their social emotional wellbeing and academic performance. The study concluded that there are forms of subtle racism that manifest in high school that had psychological and emotional impact on the students. Systemic forms of racism, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, were also highlighted as having a substantial negative impact on student learning and academic performance. The participants in this study shared how schooling became challenging with lack of reliable resources and school policies that created psychological stress for them. Importantly, the study also informs the practice of school counselors and other educators in the nuanced ways that racism invades the lives of Latino male high school students and the obvious, and not-so-obvious, ways that it complicates their overall wellbeing and academic performance. Lastly, this study contributes to the growing body of literature in education and counseling to better understand and recognize racism as a public health issue with very real consequences – psychologically, academically, and physiologically.

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