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# Latino racial choices: The effects of skin colour and discrimination on Latinos' and Latinas' racial self-identifications

Tanya Golash-Boza and William Darity, Jr

## Abstract

Are predictions that Hispanics will make up 25 per cent of the US population in 2050 reliable? The authors of this paper argue that these and other predictions are problematic insofar as they do not account for the volatile nature of Latino racial and ethnic identifications. In this light, the authors propose a theoretical framework that can be used to predict Latinos' and Latinas' racial choices. This framework is tested using two distinct datasets – the 1989 Latino National Political Survey and the 2002 National Survey of Latinos. The results from the analyses of both of these surveys lend credence to the authors' claims that Latinas' and Latinos' skin colour and experiences of discrimination affect whether people from Latin America and their descendants who live in the US will choose to identify racially as black, white or Latina/o.

**Keywords:** Latino; Hispanic; racial identification; skin colour; discrimination; assimilation.

If you had a choice of colors, which one would you choose, my brother? (Curtis Mayfield)

## Introduction

On 19 June 2003, an article in *USA Today* proclaimed that 'Hispanics outnumber[ed] blacks as the largest minority group in the USA'.<sup>1</sup> A few months later, the US Census undertook a project to predict what the US's racial make-up would be in 2050. The authors of this project, funded by the Minority Business Development Agency of the US Department of Commerce, predicted that non-Hispanic whites will constitute only 53 per cent of the US population in 2050, while

Hispanic whites will make up 22 per cent of the total population, Hispanic blacks 2 per cent and non-Hispanic blacks 13 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

These predictions are based on the problematic assumption that current patterns of racial and ethnic identification can be used to predict future identification patterns without taking into account the possibility that Hispanics' racial and ethnic identifications can and do change. Notably, the authors of the Census project seem to expect the ethnic and racial identification patterns of Hispanics to remain unchanged for the next fifty years. This mode of thinking runs contrary to the assimilation canon – most theorists who study assimilation agree that ethnic identifications can be expected to change (see Alba and Nee (1997) for a discussion of the assimilation canon and its merits). In addition, recent works by Harris and Sim (2002) and Brown, Hitlin and Elder (2006) suggest that racial self-identifications can also be expected to change. This paper takes on the question of what the future face of the US will look like by developing a theoretical framework that takes into account the viability of racial and ethnic identifiers for Latinos and Latinas in the US.

There are two central issues that must be addressed when considering the viability of racial and ethnic identifiers. One is the volatility of racial and ethnic self-identifiers at the individual level. The other is the changing nature of the racialized social structure in the US. Nevertheless, recent sociological studies that speculate on the future of racial and ethnic categorizations in the United States have focused primarily on the structure of the US racial hierarchy, and not directly on how Latinos/as identify racially or ethnically (see Bonilla-Silva 2004; Forman. Goar and Lewis 2002; Yancey 2003). In this article, we address the changing structure of the US racial hierarchy, but also argue that it is important to consider the factors that influence how individual Latinos/as self-identify in order better to predict how Latinos/as will identify in the future.

Before continuing, we should clarify the distinction between Hispanic as a racial category and Hispanic as an ethnic category. On the 2000 US Census, there were separate questions for race and ancestry. The race question was not open-ended. Respondents had to choose one or more of the following categories as their race: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White. In addition, there was the option of selecting 'other'. Ethnicity was a separate question, in which there were two minimum categories: 'Hispanic or Latino' and 'Not Hispanic or Latino'. Respondents were asked to choose between: 'NO, I am not Hispanic/Latino/Spanish'; 'YES, Mexican'; 'YES, Cuban'; 'YES, Puerto Rican'; and 'YES, other'. People who ethnically self-identified as Hispanic or Latino also could self-identify with any of the racial categories, and respondents were asked explicitly to

answer both the race and ethnicity questions. For this reason, data from the Census allow social scientists to talk about white Hispanics versus black Hispanics or to speculate on what it means for a Hispanic to choose 'other' for his or her race.

Although the US Census considers 'Hispanic' to be an ethnic identifier, this category differs in important ways from other ethnic identifiers such as Italian-American or Irish-American. If Hispanic were 'merely' an ethnic identifier, we would not expect for it to persist at the individual level for the next two generations, or at least would expect that it would dissipate to some extent. Thus, despite evidence that ethnic identifiers have generally become less salient over the course of generations, the current predictions about the future demographics of the US expect the children of Hispanics also to be Hispanics.

Most social scientists expect the category 'Hispanic' to persist because it is a racialized ethnic label. (Notably, those who expect it to disappear, such as Yancey (2003), treat Hispanic as an ethnic label.) However, we take the position that Hispanic is a racialized ethnic label because it is used and applied in a very similar way to other racial labels in the US – on the basis of physical appearance. In daily interactions, people in the US do not label people as Hispanic based on their ancestry, as it would be difficult to conduct genealogical analyses of people whom we encounter on a daily basis. We do, however, react to symbolic markers of ancestry, such as phenotype, accent and other cultural codes, thereby racializing the category 'Hispanic'. To the extent that we, in the United States, associate Latin American ancestry with a particular somatic image, we give racial meaning to Latin American ancestry, and treat people who fit that somatic norm, not as whites or blacks, but as Hispanics.

The US Census uses a definition of Hispanic that includes all people whose origin can be traced to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba or Central or South America. Given the great diversity of people from this area, combined with the social practice of associating a particular somatic norm image with Hispanicity in the US, we can expect some Latin Americans and their descendants not to self-identify as Hispanic. Specifically, we can expect those Census-defined Hispanics who do not fit this somatic norm image to be less likely to self-identify as Hispanic. We can further speculate that the children of this group of people who do not fit this somatic norm image will be even less likely to self-identify as Hispanic, as their relative lack of ethnic *and* racial identifiers render them even less likely to be identified as Hispanic in daily interactions. As such, some persons of Hispanic descent could potentially opt out of the Latino category and become non-Hispanic blacks or whites, while others could disassociate themselves from both labels, black and white, and adopt 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' as their racial

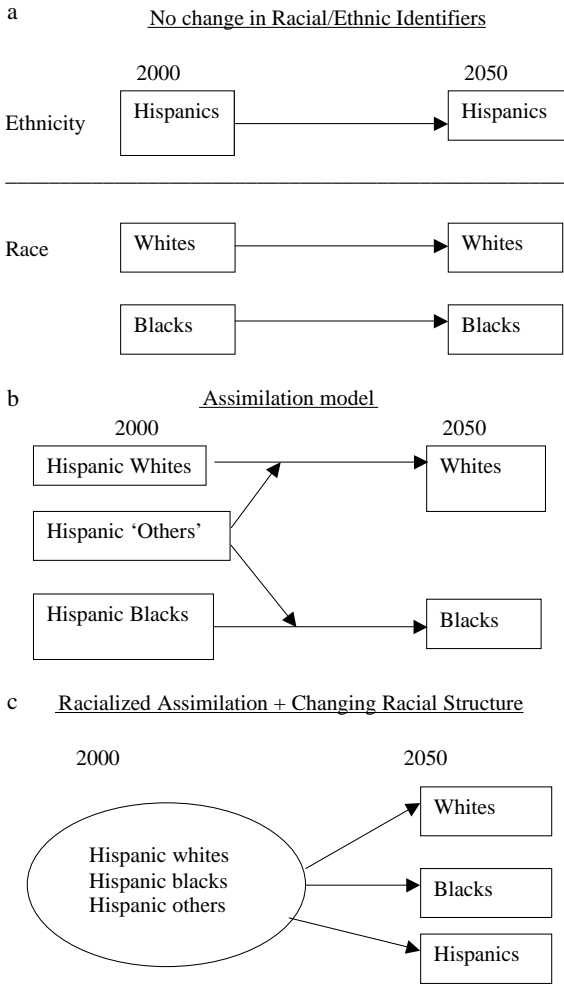
identification. The possibility of such a change in racial and ethnic identification patterns renders predictions based on projected immigration patterns and birth rates less useful. It means further that social scientists need to consider how Latinos/as racially self-identify and what factors affect those choices.

Social scientists who have considered Latinos' and Latinas' racial self-identification do not agree as to how Latinos/as' racial identifications work presently or will work in the future. Clara Rodríguez (2000) tells us that Latinos/as' racial identifications are fluid and contextual; Yancey (2003) predicts that the majority of Latinos/as will become white; Bonilla-Silva (2004) predicts that the majority will join the 'collective black' and Haney López (2005) argues that some identify racially as white, others as black and others as Latino or Latina. Without understanding the processes that underlie racial identification for Hispanics, our predictions and calculations about the future racial make-up of the United States hold very little water.

Despite the numerous implications of Hispanics actually becoming the 'nation's largest minority', social scientists have done remarkably little research on patterns of racial identification among Latinos/as in the United States. Current research indicates that racial and ethnic self-identifiers are fluid, and can vary over the course of one's life, or even the course of one's day (Rodríguez 2000). Studies by Eschbach and Gomez (1998) and Brown, Hitlin and Elder (2006) demonstrate that Hispanics are quite likely to change their racial and ethnic self-identifications from one survey to the next. Predictions about the future racial make-up of the US are based on self-reports of race and ethnicity, yet often do not take into account the fluid nature of these identifiers. In addition, it is not only important to describe racial fluidity as these studies have done, but to develop a theoretical framework that explains and potentially predicts Latinos' racial choices in order to predict what the future face of America will look like.

Figure 1 graphically displays three ways that race, ethnicity and assimilation could work together to produce racial categorizations in 2050. The first part, 1a, is a representation of what the US Census's predictions appear to be based on – the presumption of no change – that those who identified ethnically as Hispanic in 2000 will identify ethnically as such in 2050. The second part, 1b, represents the assimilation canon, which presumes that ethnicity will fade in importance, and Hispanic will no longer be a viable social category. The third part, 1c, incorporates the idea that the racial structure of the US is changing, and that Hispanic may fade as an ethnic category but is emerging as a racialized category. This latter is in line with scholars such as Bonilla-Silva and Forman who suggest that the racial structure of the United States is changing, and of Duany and Haney López who

**Figure 1.** How will 'Hispanics' self-identify racially and ethnically in 2050?



argue that Hispanic is emerging as a racial category. We find convincing the arguments that the racial structure is changing in the United States, and that Hispanic is emerging as a racial category but, in this paper, ask the question: what factors influence how people currently defined as Hispanic racially self-identify on surveys? Knowing what factors currently influence racial self-identifications will provide us with tools to better predict how people will self-identify in the future.

**Theoretical framework: racial identifications in Latin America and the US**

Before we can answer this question, it will be useful briefly to review the evidence that indicates that racial self-identifications are subject to change, specifically among Latin Americans. One reason for this is that processes of racial categorization and identification in Latin America do not parallel those of the United States (Rodríguez 1994; Duany 2005). Scholars are not in full agreement on exactly how these systems differ, yet it is worthwhile to set forth some claims. First of all, 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' are not common racial or ethnic descriptors in Latin America. (This claim is perhaps the most widely accepted.) Second, people of African or indigenous descent in Latin America are more likely to self-identify as white than similar people in the US (Wade 1997: 14, 38). Third, the use of terminology for mixed categories such as mulatto (white/black) or *mestizo* (white/Indian) or *zambo* (black/Indian) is more prevalent in Latin America than in the US, although the use of an array of mixed categories was also common in the US until the 1920s (Skidmore 1993; Duany 2005). Fourth, people of African descent are less likely to self-identify as black in Latin America than in the US (Cruz-Jansen 2001; Darity, Dietrich, and Hamilton 2005; Wade 1993). Finally, many studies have shown that in Latin America one's racial status is determined, in part, by one's social status. This means that people of higher economic or class status tend to classify themselves as whiter than their counterparts in lower strata, regardless of actual physical characteristics. In Brazil, for example, non-whites may change their racial identification to a whiter classification as they move up the class hierarchy (Lovell and Wood 1998). Notably, Telles (2004) and Wade (1993) point out that this ability to whiten is limited to people who hold a racially ambiguous status.

The reality of a distinct racialized social structure in Latin America has consequences for the racial self-identifications of immigrants from Latin America who reside in the US. Since these immigrants encounter a different system of racial classifications in the US, their racial self-identifications may change as they adapt to the US. For example, this distinct system of racial classification means that, in Latin America, there are people who self-identify as white who may not be seen as white in the United States. In addition, there are people who could begin to self-identify as black in the US that may not have considered themselves to be black in Latin America. Thus, some Latin American immigrants to the United States are likely to self-identify racially as something other than how they identified in their country of origin. For Dominicans in particular, Itzigshon, Giorguli and Vasquez (2005, p. 51) found that Dominican immigrants 'confront a racial

classification system that classifies many of them as black' despite the fact that many of these Dominicans do not perceive themselves to be black.

As Latin American immigrants acculturate to the United States, it is conceivable that they would be influenced by the US system of racial classification and may even begin to adapt to it. Lee and Bean posit that 'changes in ethnic and racial boundaries are a fundamental part of the immigration incorporation experience' (2004, p. 226). One way this could play out is that a person who considered herself to be 'white' in Peru may initially identify as 'white' in the US. However, if she is not seen as white in the US but as Latina, she may begin to self-identify as a Latina. Alternatively, she may resist these categorizations and insist on her whiteness. It is also reasonable to suggest that this hypothetical Peruvian immigrant would be able to pass for white if she had the financial and educational resources to downplay her ethnic origins. She also may be able to marry a white American and pass their collective whiteness on to their children. In another scenario, she may not be able to be classified as white, but her US-born children may be. At the other end of the spectrum, Bailey (2001) found that second-generation Dominicans use their knowledge of the Spanish language to ward off categorization as black. Given the rapid loss of Spanish language use and ability across generations, it is unlikely that their children will have the option of using Spanish to avoid being categorized as black. Will these third- (and later-) generation Dominican-Americans continue to identify as Hispanics, as black Hispanics, or will they consider themselves to be simply African-Americans? How likely are the descendants of immigrants from Peru to self-identify as Hispanic after they have been in the US for several generations?

It is important to point out that not only immigrants from Latin America might change their racial classifications, but also Latinos/as who are born in the US. The racial self-identifications of second- and third-generation immigrants from Latin America may also change over the course of their lives. As families move out of or into ethnic enclaves, as students attend university, and as people join political movements, it is reasonable to suggest that their racial or ethnic self-identifications may change. We currently consider Hispanics to be those people who identify as such on the US Census and other national surveys. In addition, social scientists make predictions about the future ethnic and racial make-up of the US on the basis of these self-reported data. However, we have very little information on the viability of the category 'Hispanic' and on what factors affect Hispanics' decision to self-identify as such on surveys.

This paper is grounded in the theoretical work on assimilation in the US. Whereas assimilation traditionally meant that immigrants would

become part of the Anglo-Saxon core in the US, thereby abandoning their ethnic affiliations, recent work on assimilation has contested this idea, and put forth the notion that there is more than one path of assimilation. Rumbaut and Portes (2001) and Zhou (1997), for example, argue that, while some immigrants will embark on the traditional path of assimilation towards the Anglo-Saxon core, others will retain some of their traditional values and practices through selective acculturation, and still others will experience downward assimilation and identify with the experiences of non-whites in the US. This paper builds on this work by highlighting the importance of racialization for the process of assimilation. We question the extent to which individuals who are non-white, even if they have the necessary accoutrements of middle-class status, can and will assimilate to the Anglo-Saxon core. While segmented assimilation theory provides a useful description of how immigrants adapt to the US, it does not fully engage the importance of race in the processes of assimilation, insofar as these works do not consider the extent to which racialization is an important part of becoming American (see Golash-Boza (2006) for a critique of the segmented assimilation perspective in terms of racialization). In addition, the three paths of segmented assimilation do not take into account the diversity in the non-white population in the US, as this framework involves the assumption that identifying with non-whites entails adopting an oppositional identity (i.e. 'downward assimilation'), and fails to differentiate between identifying as African-American and as Hispanic-American.

This paper also engages the scholarly debates on whether Hispanics will become white (Yancey 2003) or join the 'collective black' (Bonilla-Silva 2004). While Yancey argues that the boundaries of whiteness will expand to include everyone who is not African-American, Bonilla-Silva proposes that the racialized social structure is evolving to become more like Latin America, with an intermediate category between black and white that some Latinos/as will fit into. We disagree with Yancey's prediction that all Latinos/as will become white, largely because this assertion ignores the fact that Latin American immigrants who are physically indistinguishable from African-Americans have very little chance of being considered white by people in the United States. Our analyses are supportive of Bonilla-Silva's (and others') claims that the racial structure of the US is likely to change. We take a different angle than he does by using racial self-identification as a dependent variable, but our works speak to one another. Our analyses are also in line with the recent work of Ian Haney López (2005, p.10), where he argues that there are 'Latino Hispanics', who are different from black and white Hispanics, in that they 'identify as Hispanics on the ethnicity question and "other" on the race question'. We expand on this work by empirically testing the claim that white, black and Latino Hispanics

differ in important ways. We also echo his and Darity, Dietrich and Hamilton's (2005) calls for the inclusion of skin colour measures on national surveys.

### **What are Latinos' and Latinas' racial choices?**

Our current understandings of Latinos/as' racial identifications are largely based on two sources of data – ethnographic and interview-based studies, and small-scale statistical analyses of Puerto Rican and Dominican racial identifications. Clara Rodríguez (2000) found, in her interview-based study of Latinos/as in New York, that some of her interviewees found themselves subject to external pressure to self-identify as 'white' or 'black', and that many of them recognized their whiteness or blackness in this context but insisted that they were also Latino. Her case studies demonstrate that many Latinos/as racially identify as white, black or other, but culturally identify as Latinos/as or with their national origin. Landale and Oropesa (2002), in their study of Puerto Rican women, found that about 30 per cent of their Puerto Rican female respondents on the US mainland racially identified as Hispanic or Latina, as compared to only about 10 per cent of their Puerto Rican female respondents on the island. Surprisingly, the island women were more likely to choose 'white' or 'black' as a racial identifier than the mainland women. Their results indicate that some Puerto Ricans may be adopting 'Latino' or 'Hispanic' as a racial identification in the US, even if they racially identified as 'white' or 'black' on the island. This is also in line with Duany's (2005, p. 182) argument that Puerto Ricans respond that their race is neither white nor black, but 'other', because 'other' seems to be increasingly used as a racialized synonym for Hispanic. Itzigsohn, Giorguli and Vasquez (2005) found that 21 per cent of the first-generation Dominicans in their New York City-based study self-identified racially as Hispanics and that 5 per cent self-identified as blacks. However, they also found that 29 per cent thought that others would racially identify them as Hispanic and that 35 per cent thought that others would identify them as black. These studies indicate that many Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in the US understand 'Hispanic' as a racialized category that fits into the US racial hierarchy somewhere between white and black. What these studies do not provide us with is an understanding of what factors affect the decisions of that segment of the population that is defined by the US Census as being ethnically Hispanic to self-identify racially as white, black or 'other'.

While Hispanic/Latino is in many ways an ethnic category, we cannot ignore Latinas/os' and non-Latinas/os' perception of the category as a racial identifier. For example, in the 1989 Latino National Political Survey (de la Garza *et al.* 1992), 18 per cent of

the 2807 respondents reported their race to be Latino, Hispanic or their respective national origin. In addition, 46 per cent of the respondents to the 2002 National Latino Survey reported their race to be Hispanic or Latino, and not white or black. This large increase over the course of twelve years is in part indicative of the different survey measures, but is also in part due to the changing racial structure in the US, where 'Latino' is emerging as a racialized category. For example, in February 2006, when there were riots inside a prison near Los Angeles, the African-American and Latino prisoners formulated a written request to separate the inmates by 'race' to avoid more mayhem. In this case, the Latinos/as and blacks involved in those riots saw 'Latino' as a racial category that does not include African-Americans. These data demonstrate that Hispanics' racial choices include the labels 'Hispanic' and 'Latino', and we argue that it will be useful for students of race relations to understand the factors that affect Hispanics' racial choices. The analyses in this paper are designed to address Latinos' racial choices. The theoretical frameworks posed in this paper will allow us better to understand and potentially predict how Latinos/as answer race questions on surveys.

In this paper, we will consider three hypotheses that could explain Latinos' racial choices and that could be useful for predicting future demographic trends. Subsequently, we will test each of these hypotheses using two national datasets – the 1989 Latino National Political Survey and the Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos. Finally, we will make a case for incorporating ideas of racialization into understanding Latinos' and Latinas' current and future racial choices.

*Hypothesis 1 – the social whitening hypothesis:* Hispanics with higher incomes and higher levels of education are more likely to choose 'white' for their race, and less likely to choose 'black'.

The first hypothesis is that Latinos/as of higher class statuses are more likely to self-identify as white. This hypothesis derives from social whitening arguments made by some scholars who study Latin America. (For a full discussion of social whitening in Latin America, see Nutini 1997; Wade 1997; Wright 1990; Whitten and Torres 1998; Telles 2004; Twine 1998.) According to these scholars, social class plays an important role in racial identification in Latin America. Some of these scholars argue that social class trumps skin colour insofar as a dark-skinned person can self-identify as white if he or she is of high class standing. Others, such as Telles (2004) and Wade (1993), argue that only people who are racially ambiguous are able to experience social whitening, while people who are clearly black, such as the Brazilian soccer player Pele, will be identified as black, no matter their

class standing. It will be useful to understand whether or not this process carries over to the United States. In the US context, this would mean that Latinos/as who have higher educational levels and higher incomes are more likely to identify as white, especially those who do not have very dark skin. This would also serve as an indication of Latinos/as' resistance to US racial categorizations, which are not based on social characteristics such as income or education.

*Hypothesis 2 – identificational assimilation hypothesis:* Hispanics who are more assimilated are more likely to self-identify as 'white'.

The second hypothesis invokes assimilation as a central theme. Early theorists of assimilation such as Gordon (1964) and Park (1950) argued that, over the course of generations, immigrants eventually would lose their ethnic ties and fold into the American melting pot. An outcome of this process, identificational assimilation, means that the immigrant no longer considers himself to be an Italian-American, an Irish-American or a Mexican-American, but an American. This unmarked identity as 'American' could be interpreted as becoming 'white', since the unmarked requisite precludes the entry of African-Americans or Asian-Americans into this category. For example, Feagin (2000) argues that the unhyphenated 'American' label refers to those people in the US who have the luxury of acting as if they do not have a racial or ethnic status. This category of people thus includes only white Americans.

According to the traditional model, assimilation involves upward socioeconomic mobility, residential integration and intermarriage (Hirschman 2001). In order to determine whether or not the identificational assimilation hypothesis works in the case of Latino-Americans, it will be necessary to determine whether Latinos/as who have been in the US longer, have intermarried with whites and speak English are more likely to self-identify as white than Latinos/as who are less acculturated. This analysis also will allow us to examine the argument made by Yancey (2003) that nearly all Latino Americans will eventually adopt a white racial identity. On the basis of his finding that Latinos/as are likely to have opinions on racialized matters that are more similar to European Americans than to African Americans and previous evidence that some Latinos/as are assimilating residentially and maritally, Yancey contends that Hispanic Americans will eventually adopt a white racial identity. Nevertheless, Yancey's analyses do not take generational status into account, thereby weakening his ability to predict future trends. The analyses presented in this paper allow us to test this prediction more directly.

*Hypothesis 3 – racialized assimilation hypothesis:* Hispanics who have lighter skin and who have not experienced discrimination are more likely to self-identify as white, while Hispanics with darker skin and who have experienced discrimination are more likely to self-identify as black or Hispanic.

The third hypothesis draws on recent studies that have highlighted the dynamic relationship between external racial categorization and racial self-identification, as well as on studies of assimilation. Henry and Bankston (2001) argue that ethnic self-identification is affected by outsiders' ethnic designations. Specifically for Latinos/as, Clara Rodriguez (2000: 140–1) found that dark-skinned Dominicans in New York recognize a racial categorization as black, while Ginetta Candelario (2001) reported that the majority of Dominicans in the predominantly black city of Washington, DC, racially identified themselves as black. Steven Ropp (2000, p. 24) tells us that Asian Latinos/as are categorized as Asian in daily interactions. These findings indicate that Latinos/as experience a diverse array of experiences of racial categorization in the US. Some people who fit the Census's definition of Hispanic/Latino are racially categorized in everyday interactions as black, others as white, others as Asian and still others as Hispanic.

Scholars of race in Latin America and the US are not in full agreement about the extent to which racial categories differ in the US and in Latin America. However, we can say with certainty that, at the very least, there is one fundamental difference between Latin America and the US, and that is that the categories 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' are not commonly used in Latin America, while they are in the US. The racialized assimilation hypothesis entails that that some Latinos/as will be racialized as Latinos/as in the US, while others will not, and that those that belong to the former group are more likely to self-identify as Latinos/as and, in this fashion, to assimilate into the Latino category. This hypothesis draws on Nagel's (1994) argument that categorizations are dialectically related to identifications, meaning that they are both subject to change, and that they affect one another. In light of this and other research, it is reasonable to suggest that Latinos/as' racial self-identifications will be affected by external categorizations.

How do we know how Latinos/as are racially classified by people in the US? We suggest that Latinos/as are categorized in the same way as non-Latinos/as, on the basis of their skin colour. Brown, Dane and Durham conducted a series of interviews to find out what features people use to determine race. They found that '[s]kin color was rated the most important feature, followed by hair, eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, eyebrows, forehead, and ears' (1998, p. 298). In one of the datasets we will be using, we fortunately have a measure of skin colour,

which is the feature that people in the US are most likely to use to determine another person's race. Thus, to test this hypothesis, we will consider the relationship between skin colour and racial self-identification among Latinos/as. While we cannot use skin colour alone to predict how Latinos/as are categorized racially in the US, it is reasonable to suggest that skin colour is one of many indicators that affects racial categorization in the US.

We can predict that skin colour will affect racial categorization and thus identification. However, we can also use experiences of discrimination in our analyses because categorization is a necessary condition for discrimination. In order to discriminate against a person based on one's pre-conceived notions about their group, it is first necessary to categorize them as a member of that group. As such, if a respondent reports experiences of racial discrimination, we can conclude that he or she has been categorized as a member of a racial group. We assume that this discrimination would be based on the respondent being non-white, since whites are much less likely to experience racial discrimination than non-whites. As such, Latinos/as who are perceived by others to be white are less likely to be victims of racial discrimination than those who are perceived by others to be non-whites. In this sense, racial discrimination can be used as a proxy for non-whiteness. Of course, Latinos/as who are perceived to be white may have more access to white spaces and thus may witness more subtle forms of discrimination against other Latinos/as. Nevertheless, they would be less likely to experience racial discrimination themselves.

## **Data and methods**

For the analyses, we use two datasets – the 1989 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) and the Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos (NSL). We chose the LNPS (1989) because of its inclusion of measures of skin colour and NSL (2002) because of its recency and its extensive questions pertaining to discrimination. The similarities in these two datasets strengthen our claims, while the differences allow us to put some of our claims into perspective. Both of these datasets are unique insofar as they are nationally representative samplings of the English- and Spanish-speaking Latino populations, in contrast with studies such as the General Social Survey which include only English-speaking adults. See Tables 1 and 2 for a complete list of the descriptive statistics for each of the variables used in the analyses.

**Table 1.** 1989 LNPS descriptives

Measures	Categories	N
<b>Dependent variable</b>		
Racial self-identification	<i>White</i>	1,731
	Black	52
	Other	1,024
<b>Independent variables</b>		
National origin	<i>Mexican</i>	1,541
	Cuban	677
	Puerto Rican	588
Gender	<i>Male</i>	1,171
	Female	1,636
Yearly household income	<i>Less than \$20,000</i>	1,491
	\$20 to \$34,999	638
	Over \$35,000	471
Education	<i>Less than high school</i>	1665
	High school grad.	580
	Some college	389
	College grad.	173
Marital status	<i>Latinola spouse</i>	1,309
	No spouse	1,211
	Anglo spouse	163
	'Other' spouse	117
Generational status	<i>Not born in US mainland</i>	1,804
	Second generation	599
	Third generation	400
Language ability	<i>Spanish dominant</i>	1,021
	Bilingual	1,464
	English dominant	319
Discrimination	<i>Has not experienced</i>	2,031
	Has experienced	776
Interviewer-coded skin colour	<i>Light or very light</i>	1,328
	Medium	992
	Dark	409
	Very dark	59

### 1989 Latino National Political Survey

The LNPS is a representative national sample of the three largest Latino groups in the USA – Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans. The LNPS includes 2,807 respondents, and the interviews were conducted between 1989 and 1990. This dataset is particularly well suited to addressing the questions posed in this paper because of the broad sample of Latinos/as from all over the country and because of the different generational statuses included. In addition to the representative sample population of the LNPS, we were also interested in the unique data on interviewer-coded skin colour.

The LNPS was conducted in forty standard metropolitan statistical areas, and was representative of 91 per cent of the Mexican, Puerto

**Table 2.** 2002 NLS descriptives

Measures	Categories	N
<b>Dependent variable</b>		
Racial self-identification	<i>White</i>	1,022
	Black	157
	Asian	20
	Other	527
	Hispanic	1,175
<b>Independent variables</b>		
Gender	<i>Male</i>	1,285
	Female	1,644
National origin	<i>Other</i>	773
	Mexican	1,047
	Cuban	343
	Dominican	235
	Puerto Rican	317
	Colombian	214
	Yearly household income	<i>Less than \$30,000</i>
	\$30 to \$49,000	649
	More than \$50,000	561
Education	<i>Less than high school</i>	920
	High school grad.	803
	Some college	636
	College grad.	550
Marital status	<i>Not married or cohabiting</i>	1,168
	Married or co-habiting	1,750
Generational status	<i>Not born in US mainland</i>	2,014
	Second generation	526
	Third or fourth generation	362
Language ability	<i>Spanish dominant</i>	1354
	Bilingual	933
	English dominant	687
Discrimination	<i>Has not experienced</i>	1,122
	Has experienced	1,807

Rican and Cuban populations in the United States. All respondents were at least 18 years of age, and had at least one parent solely of Mexican, Cuban or Puerto Rican ancestry, or at least any two grandparents of solely Mexican, Cuban or Puerto Rican ancestry. The response rate was 74 per cent. The researchers who designed this study employed a multi-stage probability sample of households that first divided the country into primary sampling units (PSUs), based on the US Census. This selection included 90 per cent of the Latino population. From this selection, forty PSUs were selected that each had a Latino population of at least 10 per cent. The second stage involved selecting a disproportionate stratified sample of 500 second sampling units (SSUs) in order to ensure that Latinos/as in both predominantly Latino and predominantly non-Latino areas were represented.

Of the respondents in the LNPS dataset, 64 per cent were first-generation immigrants, 21 per cent were second-generation and 14 per cent were third-generation. Among the first-generation respondents, the average age at immigration was 24 years. Sixty-three per cent of the respondents were US citizens, and 41 per cent had completed high school. Interviewers were prepared to administer the questionnaires in Spanish or in English. Slightly less than 40 per cent of the respondents (1,021 or 36.4 per cent) had very limited English abilities, while 11 per cent of the respondents spoke only English at home. The LNPS also included an open-ended question asking respondents what they considered their race to be. In addition, interviewers graded respondents on a salient phenotypical dimension, their skin shade.

Respondents to the LNPS survey were asked if they consider themselves to be white, black or something else, and were asked to specify if they considered themselves neither white nor black. Table 3 provides a display of the variety of answers given by LNPS survey participants to the race question. A substantial majority of respondents chose to self-identify racially as white. About 2 per cent – only fifty-two respondents – chose to classify themselves as black. The remainder typically chose colour-oriented labels intermediate between black and white or national group labels, either collective labels like ‘Latino’ or country-specific labels (e.g. ‘*Mi raza es Puertorriqueña*’). In what follows, we will collapse the latter responses into a single category, ‘other’, separate from white or black. Using these three categories, 62 per cent of respondents in the LNPS said they are racially white, 2 per cent said they are black and 36 per cent chose another category, neither black nor white. The numbers do suggest that Latinos/as in this sample were not following the dictates of a ‘one-drop rule’ or notions of hypodescent with respect to black self-identification, since it is clearly the case that more than 2 per cent of the Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in the US have some African

**Table 3.** 1989 LNPS respondents’ racial self-identification

Racial self-identification	Freq.	Percent.	Cum.
White	1,731	61.67	61.67
Black	52	1.85	63.52
Or something else	79	2.81	66.33
Spanish label (i.e.[RG]/Hispanic/Latin)	514	18.31	84.65
Colour oriented label (moreno/trigueno)	382	13.61	98.25
Race label (mulato/n. American/Indian)	29	1.03	99.29
Refused	1	0.04	99.32
Don’t know	12	0.43	99.75
No answer	7	0.25	100
Total	2,807	100	

ancestry. According to the conservative estimates included in the 1992 *NACLA Report on the Americas*, in Mexico, the African-descended population is between 1 and 10 per cent; in Puerto Rico, it is between 23 and 70 per cent; and in Cuba it is between 34 and 62 per cent (Oveido 1992). We do not have these sorts of data for the Latin American population that resides in the United States, but we are comfortable in assuming that it is much more than 2 per cent. In any case, the fact that we do not have these data points to the need for better measures of the racial composition of the Hispanic population in the US.

In Table 4, we examine how the interviewers' grading of individual skin shade corresponded to the individual's self-reported race. A slight majority of participants in the survey were graded as having a medium skin shade out of the five categories used by the interviewers ('very dark', 'dark', 'medium', 'light', 'very light') closely followed by those graded as having a light skin shade. Comparable numbers were placed in the dark and very light categories. The smallest number of respondents (fifty-nine) was rated as having a very dark skin tone.

What Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate is a general Latino preference in 1989 to be identified as white. (See Darity, Hamilton and Dietrich (2002) for a related discussion in the context of labour market discrimination.) While most of the very dark and dark respondents chose a racial category other than black or white, more than one-third chose to self-identify as white. The majority of respondents identified as having a medium skin shade by the interviewers self-reported their race as white. In the two lightest categories, about 80 per cent of the respondents said they were white, largely eschewing the 'other' categories, never mind the black category. As skin shade lightens, more and more respondents chose white as their race, but significant proportions of darker-skinned respondents did so as well.

**Table 4.** *LNPS 1989 row percentages of race by interviewer-reported skin colour*

Interviewer-reported skin colour	Self-reported race				Total percentage (Total N)
	White	Black	Other	Missing	
Very dark	32.20	27.12	40.68	0.00	100.00 (59)
Dark	35.94	4.65	58.19	1.22	100.00 (409)
Medium	53.13	1.21	44.86	0.81	100.00 (992)
Light	75.22	0.54	23.60	0.65	100.00 (928)
Very light	82.75	0.00	17.25	0.00	100.00 (400)
No answer	47.37	0.00	47.37	5.26	100.00 (19)
Total	1,731.00	52.00	1004.00	20.00	(2,807)

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As Table 5 indicates, the preference for racial self-identification as white among Latinos/as attenuates somewhat the longer a person is in the USA. The proportion of Latinos/as self-identifying as white falls with each generation more distant from immigration. This contrasts with Yancey's (2003) prediction that most Latinos/as will become white. Note, however, in this survey, there is no evidence of an increasing preference for a black racial identity. If anything, black Latinos/as continue to disappear based upon self-reported race, just as they have disappeared historically in national data in Latin American countries (Andrews 2004). The second and third generations shift more and more towards self-classifications separate from white or black. In particular, they demonstrate a growing preference for the collective national labels as ethnic classifiers, Latino or Hispanic (see Table 6). This trend is also in line with Duany's finding that 'the quasi-racial use of the term "Hispanic" has led many Puerto Ricans to move away from the Black/white dichotomy in the US' (2005, p. 182) and increasingly to self-identify racially as Hispanic. The increased acceptance over generations of Hispanic or Latino as an ethnic identifier is also evident in Table 6, which shows the percentage of respondents who reported that they considered themselves to be Hispanic. Notably, even in the third generation, only 50 per cent of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans identified with this pan-ethnic term, nearly the same percentage as those who identified racially with this racialized term, in a separate question on race.

## 2002 National Survey of Latinos

The 2002 National Survey of Latinos/as is a representative sample of the Hispanic population in 2002. This survey was conducted by telephone between 4 April 2002 and 11 June 2002 among a nationally representative sample of 4,213 adults 18 years and older, including 2,929 Latinos/as and 1,284 non-Latinos. We chose this sample because of its relative recency and its similarity to the 1989 LNPS survey.

Interviews were conducted with 1,047 Mexicans, 317 Puerto Ricans, 343 Cubans, 204 Salvadorans, 235 Dominicans and 214 Colombians. Overall, 341 Central Americans and 394 South Americans were

**Table 5.** *1989 LNPS self-identified race by generational status*

Self-identified race	First generation	Second generation	Third generation
White	0.66	0.57	0.52
Black	0.02	0.03	0.01
Spanish Referent	0.32	0.40	0.47
Total N	1,794.00	593.00	397.00

**Table 6.** 1989 LNPS self-identified ethnicity by generational status

Self-identified ethnicity	First generation	Second generation	Third generation
Hispanic or Latino	0.27	0.42	0.50
Neither	0.73	0.58	0.50
Total N	1,805.00	599.00	400.00

interviewed. In this paper, we will be including in the analyses only those persons who are of Hispanic or Latin origin or descent, i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central or South American, Caribbean or some other Latin American background. In the sample used in this paper: 56 per cent were female; 49 per cent had a household income greater than \$30,000; 39 per cent owned their own homes; 52 per cent were immigrants to the US who came after the age of 18; 32 per cent had less than a high school education; and 45 per cent were Spanish-language dominant. The sample for the data was obtained through a stratified random digit dialling system. All the telephone interviewers were bilingual and the respondents were given the opportunity to complete the survey in Spanish or English.

Respondents to the National Survey of Latinos were asked: ‘What race do you consider yourself to be? White, Black or African-American, Asian, or some other race?’ and were given the opportunity to specify their race if they did not consider themselves to be white, black or Asian. In response to this question, more respondents identified as Hispanic (1,175) than as white (1,022). Only 157 identified as black, 20 as Asian and 527 as something else. It is important to note that Latinos/as’ racial self-identification as ‘Hispanic’ as opposed to white indicates that the respondents see Hispanic as a racial categorization, similar to white or black. Table 7 shows that, in contrast to the 1989 LNPS study, the 2002 NLS survey reveals a moderately declining preference for the black and Hispanic labels across generations. It is particularly noteworthy that the preference for the ‘other’ label increases from the first to the second generation, as one would expect first-generation respondents to be the least accepting of US racial classifications. The second generation turns out to be the

**Table 7.** 2002 NLS respondents’ racial self-identification by generational status

Race	First generation	Second generation	Third and fourth generation
White	0.37	0.28	0.39
Black	0.06	0.03	0.04
Asian	0.01	0.01	0.01
Other	0.15	0.26	0.24
Hispanic	0.41	0.42	0.32
Total N	1,993.00	524.00	358.00

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least likely to self-identify as 'white' and the most likely to self-identify as 'Hispanic'. This trend found in the 2002 NLS survey is different from what Duany (2005) found for Puerto Ricans, and may also be a result of the wider population sample used in the NLS survey.

### **Variables: LNPS 1989**

To explore the determinants of Latino choice of race while taking into account other factors, we employed a multinomial logistical regression where the dependent variable is the respondents' racial identification. The omitted category for the dependent variable is 'white,' and the two included categories are 'other' and 'black'. The category 'other' encompasses those respondents who indicated that their race was neither white nor black and provided another response to this question. The independent variables include: national origin, gender, annual household income, educational level, marital status and ethnicity of spouse, generational status, whether or not R had experienced discrimination and R's skin colour.

These independent variables were selected to cover demographic characteristics, as well as to test the three hypotheses. For the social whitening hypothesis, we chose to include income and education. Income is a categorical variable – the omitted category is less than \$20,000, and the two included categories are \$20,000 to \$34,999 and over \$35,000 annual household income. Education is also a categorical variable – those respondents who did not graduate from high school are the excluded category, and the included categories are: high school graduate, some college and college graduate. If the social whitening hypothesis is correct, the results would indicate that respondents with higher educational levels and incomes are more likely to self-identify as white.

For the identificational assimilation hypothesis, we chose variables that serve as indicators of assimilation. For example, we included marital status and ethnicity of spouse, language ability and generational status. If this hypothesis is correct, we would expect to see that respondents who do not have a Latino/a spouse, those who are monolingual English speakers and those who have been in the US for longer are more likely to self-identify as white.

For the racialization hypothesis, we included variables related to skin colour and discrimination. The skin colour variable is a categorical variable, based on an interview question where the interviewer coded the respondents' skin colour. The discrimination variable is based on an interview question which asked whether or not the respondent had been discriminated against. If this hypothesis is correct, we would expect to see that respondents who have darker skin

or who have been discriminated against would be less likely to self-identify as white and more likely to self-identify as black or 'other'.

### **Variables: NSL 2002**

For the 2002 National Survey of Latinos, the dependent variable is also the respondents' racial identification, and we also used a multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable has white as the omitted category, and has 'black', 'Asian', 'other' and 'Hispanic' as the included categories.

With this dataset, we also used the independent variables to test the three hypotheses of racial identification patterns. We did our best to match the variables from the NSL to those used in the LNPS. For the social whitening hypothesis, we included variables related to income and education. There are three categories for income – annual household income less than \$30,000 (excluded category), annual household income between \$30,000 and \$49,000 and annual household income over \$50,000. These values approximate to the 1989 values in terms of percentages of respondents who fit into these categories. For education, we used four categories – less than high school (excluded category), high school graduate, some college and college graduate. If the social whitening thesis is correct, we would expect to see that higher incomes and higher education levels increase the likelihood that Hispanics self-identify as 'white'.

For the identificational assimilation hypothesis, we included variables related to assimilation – generational status, language ability and marital status. We included marital status, even though there are no data on spouses' ethnicity, in order to make this analysis more similar to the analysis done on the LNPS data. For language ability, there are three categories – Spanish dominant (excluded), bilingual and English dominant. For generational status, there are also three categories – born abroad or in Puerto Rico (excluded), second generation, and third generation or more. For this hypothesis to be verified, English fluency and generational status would have to increase the likelihood that Hispanics self-identify as white.

For the racialization hypothesis, we did not have any information on skin colour, and thus had to rely solely on experiences of discrimination. The discrimination variable is based on a series of interview questions where respondents were asked if they had been discriminated against or had experienced unfair treatment. Specifically, the respondents were asked:

During the last 5 years, have you, a family member, or close friend experienced discrimination because of your racial or ethnic background, or not? Was that you personally or was that someone else?

In your day-to-day life, how often do any of the following things happen to you because of your racial or ethnic background? You are treated with less respect than other people. You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores. You are called names or insulted. Has there ever been a time when you have NOT been hired or promoted for a job because of your race or ethnic background, or has this not happened to you?

Subsequently, the responses to these questions were coded as '1' if the respondent reported that he or she had experienced racial or ethnic discrimination in response to any of the above questions and as '0' if he or she had not. In response to a later question about the motive of the unfair treatment, only 3.7 per cent of the respondents indicated that this discrimination was motivated by something that clearly was not race or ethnicity based, such as age, gender, jealousy or something else other than physical appearance, language or background. If the racialization hypothesis is correct, we would expect to see that experiences of discrimination or unfair treatment would decrease the likelihood that Hispanics would self-identify as white, and increase the likelihood that they identify as 'Hispanic' or 'black'.

### **Discussion of findings**

The results provide mixed evidence for the social whitening hypothesis. Table 9 indicates that respondents to the NLS who had a family income over \$50,000 are less likely to self-identify as black or Hispanic, and more likely to identify as white, and that Hispanics with some college or who have graduated from college are more likely to self-identify as white than as Hispanic. This seems to support the social whitening argument, the idea that Hispanics with more money and education are more likely to self-identify as white. However, these same coefficients are not significant in the analyses using the LNPS data, shown in Table 8 in the social whitening model. And, when we control for skin colour in the comparison model, we see that Hispanics whose household incomes were between \$20,000 and \$34,999 were more likely to self-identify racially as 'other' than as white in the LNPS survey.

One way to understand the differences in the findings between these two datasets is that the 2002 National Latino Survey does not include a variable for skin colour. As such, it is possible that Hispanics who earn more money are in fact lighter skinned in the US. This is a possibility given the strong relationship between social class and skin colour in Latin America (Rodríguez 2000). There is some evidence for this in the LNPS 1989 dataset. For example, 27 per cent of respondents with light or very light skin have annual household incomes over

**Table 8.** Beta Coefficients from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Racial Self-Identification. Omitted Category: White. LNPS 1989.

	Social Whitening		Identificational Assim		Racialization		Comparison	
	black	other	black	other	black	other	black	other
FEMALE	0.513 (0.298)	-0.235 (0.093)*	-0.435 (0.301)	-0.291 (0.089)**	-0.060 (0.322)	-0.173 (0.091)	-0.175 (0.356)	-0.109 (0.098)
<i>National Origin</i>								
Cuban	1.606 (0.561)**	-3.270 (0.229)**	1.838 (0.629)**	-3.188 (0.211)**	2.495 (0.584)**	-2.849 (0.210)**	2.857 (0.713)**	-2.957 (0.238)**
PRican	2.790 (0.540)**	-0.240 (0.105)*	2.942 (0.604)**	-0.379 (0.109)**	3.227 (0.555)**	-0.205 (0.104)*	3.380 (0.676)**	-0.215 (0.118)
<i>Yearly Income-Omitted: Less than \$20,000</i>								
income 20to35	0.563 (0.410)	0.131 (0.110)					0.032 (0.457)	0.233 (0.117)*
income over35	-0.795 (0.514)	0.210 (0.131)					-1.251 (0.724)	0.265 (0.139)
<i>Education-Omitted: Less than High School</i>								
HS grad	0.685 (0.348)*	0.087 (0.115)					0.394 (0.423)	0.066 (0.124)
some college	0.545 (0.418)	-0.013 (0.139)					0.279 (0.500)	-0.039 (0.149)
college grad	-0.178 (0.768)	-0.172 (0.222)					0.481 (0.805)	-0.140 (0.236)
<i>Marital Status/Spouse's Ethnicity: Omitted: Latinola Spouse</i>								
Anglo Spouse			-1.047 (1.113)	-0.099 (0.199)			-0.770 (1.222)	-0.087 (0.212)

Table 8 (Continued)

	Social Whitening		Identificational Assim		Racialization		Comparison	
	black	other	black	other	black	other	black	other
Other Spouse			1.485 (0.523)**	0.239 (0.234)			2.249 (0.647)**	0.270 (0.252)
no spouse			0.728 (0.360)*	0.130 (0.096)			1.010 (0.432)*	0.205 (0.105)
<i>Language Ability-Omitted Category: No English ability</i>								
Bilingual			-0.330 (0.351)	0.250 (0.111)*			-0.366 (0.441)	0.267 (0.123)*
Engl Only			0.911 (0.544)	0.476 (0.182)**			0.494 (0.720)	0.541 (0.200)**
<i>Generational Status-Omitted Category: First Generation</i>								
Sec Gen			0.285 (0.390)	-0.236 (0.120)*			0.723 (0.479)	-0.248 (0.129)
Third Gen			0.173 (0.904)	-0.282 (0.144)*			1.063 (0.960)	-0.304 (0.154)*
<i>Skin Color-Omitted: Light or Very Light</i>								
Medium					1.687 (0.543)**	0.748 (0.099)**	1.828 (0.553)**	0.757 (0.104)**
Dark					3.655 (0.524)**	1.290 (0.132)**	3.877 (0.551)**	1.410 (0.139)**
VDark					5.430 (0.598)**	1.081 (0.332)**	5.549 (0.673)**	0.808 (0.358)*

**Table 8** (Continued)

	Social Whitening		Identificational Assim		Racialization		Comparison	
	black	other	black	other	black	other	black	other
<i>Has R experienced discrimination?</i>								
Discrim					0.253 (0.353)	0.214 (0.096)*	0.220 (0.380)	0.162 (0.102)
Constant	-4.899 (0.551)**	0.000 (0.094)	-5.603 (0.658)**	-0.003 (0.104)	-7.689 (0.719)**	-0.579 (0.103)**	-8.760 (0.918)**	-0.939 (0.146)**
Observations	2582	2582	2775	2775	2787	2787	2572	2572
Pseudo R-squared		0.1473		0.1503		0.2016		0.2162
Standard errors in parentheses					* significant at 5% level; ** significant at 1% level			

**Table 9.** Beta Coefficients from Multinomial Logistic Regression on Respondents' Racial Self-Identification. Omitted Category: White. NLS 2002

	Social Whitening Hypothesis				Identificational Assimilation Hypothesis			
	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic
female	-0.005 (0.594)	-0.294 (0.528)	-0.259 (0.122)*	-0.064 (0.100)	-0.218 (0.179)	-0.279 (0.460)	-0.332 (0.113)**	-0.086 (0.092)
<i>National Origin</i>								
Mexican	-1.222 (0.514)**	-0.577 (0.581)	0.481 (0.150)**	0.577 (0.126)**	-1.200 (0.278)**	-0.202 (0.516)	0.474 (0.142)**	0.596 (0.117)**
PRican	0.071 (0.511) (10181260)	-33.309 (10181260)	0.601 (0.207)**	0.784 (0.179)**	-0.141 (0.307)	-30.572 (2250515)	0.457 (0.195)*	0.606 (0.170)**
Cuban	-1.444 (0.332)**	-2.192 (1.061)*	-1.698 (0.256)**	-1.447 (0.192)**	-1.436 (0.312)**	-2.096 (1.058)*	-1.617 (0.235)**	-1.607 (0.175)**
Colombian	-0.788 (0.367)* (12657655)	-33.957 (12657655)	-0.768 (0.268)**	-0.364 (0.198)	-0.807 (0.353)*	-30.967 (3062522)	-0.563 (0.246)*	-0.566 (0.183)**
DomRep	0.746 (0.328)* (12887754)	-32.983 (12887754)	0.321 (0.293)	1.104 (0.221)**	0.833 (0.305)**	-30.179 (3523951)	0.309 (0.269)	1.006 (0.197)**
<i>Yearly Income-Omitted: Less than \$30,000</i>								
income 30 to 49	-0.036 (0.230)	1.582 (0.720)*	0.046 (0.151)	-0.172 (0.122)				
income more 50	-0.569 (0.280)*	1.154 (0.815)	0.171 (0.161)	-0.453 (0.141)**				
<i>Education-Omitted: Less than High School</i>								
hs grad	-0.285 (0.282)	-0.394 (0.784)	0.531 (0.170)**	-0.091 (0.131)				
some college	0.154 (0.268)	-0.540 (0.811)	0.306 (0.183)	-0.426 (0.144)**				

**Table 9** (Continued)

	Social Whitening Hypothesis				Identificational Assimilation Hypothesis			
	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic
college grad	-0.019 (0.204)	0.016 (0.766)	0.255 (0.200)	-0.459 (0.161)**				
<i>Language Ability-Omitted: No English Ability</i>								
Bilingual					-0.345 (0.244)	-0.206 (0.854)	0.739 (0.147)**	-0.162 (0.116)
EnglDom					1.313 (0.262)**	2.455 (0.640)**	0.857 (0.196)**	-0.375 (0.168)*
<i>Marital Status-Omitted: Not Married or Co-habiting</i>								
married_cohab					-0.133 (0.181)	0.369 (0.490)	-0.016 (0.117)	-0.229 (0.095)*
<i>Generational Status-Omitted: First Generation</i>								
secgen					-0.894 (0.311)**	-0.436 (0.613)	0.320 (0.168)	0.391 (0.149)**
third4gen					-1.394 (0.337)**	-2.282 (0.838)**	-0.407 (0.203)*	-0.338 (0.184)
<i>Has R experienced Discrimination?</i>								
exp_disc								
Constant	-1.190 (0.244)**	-3.833 (0.749)**	-0.867 (0.177)**	0.333 (0.137)*	-1.213 (0.238)**	-3.983 (0.699)**	-0.964 (0.171)**	0.319 (0.133)*
Observations	2448	2448	2448	2448	2891	2891	2891	2891
<i>Pseudo R squared</i>	0.0636				0.0828			
Standard errors in parentheses				* significant at 5% level; ** significant at 1% level				

\$30,000, as opposed to 23 per cent of the respondents with medium, dark or very dark skin.

There is also mixed evidence for the identificational assimilation hypothesis. In Table 8 (LNPS 1989), we see that respondents with an 'other' spouse or no spouse are more likely to self-identify as black, net of all other factors. And bilingual and English-dominant respondents are more likely to self-identify as 'other' than as 'white'. In contrast, in Table 10 (NLS 2002), we see that linguistically assimilated respondents are more likely to self-identify as 'other' or as 'black', while third-generation respondents are less likely to self-identify as 'black' or 'Asian' and second-generation respondents are more likely to self-identify as 'Hispanic' and less likely to self-identify as 'black'. These data indicate that Hispanics who have been in the US for longer prefer to adopt a Hispanic identity. Nevertheless, English-dominant Hispanics and those who have an 'other' (perhaps black) spouse prefer to self-identify as 'black'. Additionally, English-speaking respondents are more likely to self-identify as other than as white. These findings do not support the hypothesis that assimilation leads to self-identification as white. Overall, these data do not demonstrate a trend towards whiteness among Hispanics who have structurally or linguistically assimilated into the United States.

What these data do show is somewhat contradictory. Respondents to the LNPS who were bilingual and those who did not speak Spanish were more likely to self-identify as 'other' than as white. This also holds true in the NLS survey. In the LNPS survey, second- and third-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as white than as other. In contrast, in the NLS survey, second-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as Hispanic than as white, and third- and later-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as white than as other. Notably, in both surveys, third- and later-generation respondents were more likely to self-identify as white than as other. However, once we take experiences of discrimination into account in the comparison model of the NLS survey (Table 10), the coefficient for self-identification as other is no longer significant.

There is the most consistent evidence in favour of the racialization hypothesis. In Table 8 (LNPS 1989), we see that darker-skinned Hispanics are consistently more likely to self-identify as 'black' or 'other' than as 'white' net of all other variables. Notably, when comparing relatively dark-skinned Latinos/as to lighter-skinned Latinos/as, very dark-skinned Latinos/as were 256 times more likely to self-identify as 'black', dark-skinned respondents were 48 times more likely to self-identify as 'black' and medium-skinned respondents were 5.4 times more likely to self-identify as 'black' than as 'white'. In Table 10 (NSL 2002), we see that respondents who have experienced discrimination are significantly more likely to self-identify as 'black', 'other' or

**Table 10.** Beta Coefficients from Multinomial Logistic Regression on Respondents' Racial Self-Identification. Omitted Category: White. NLS 2002

	Racialization Hypothesis				Comparison of Hypotheses			
	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic
female	-0.145 (0.147)	-0.259 (0.456)	-0.314 (0.113)**	-0.054 (0.092)	-0.072 (0.199)	-0.273 (0.549)	-0.253 (0.124)*	-0.047 (0.102)
<i>National Origin</i>								
Mexican	-1.304 (0.272)**	-0.577 (0.484)	0.397 (0.138)**	0.618 (0.114)**	-1.211 (0.322)**	-0.035 (0.634)	0.502 (0.156)**	0.563 (0.129)**
PRican	-0.185 (0.300)	-29.471 (1376435)	0.681 (0.192)**	0.630 (0.166)**	0.128 (0.321)	-30.978 (3075969)	0.418 (0.212)*	0.709 (0.183)**
Cuban	-1.488 (0.307)**	-2.352 (1.050)*	-1.532 (0.232)**	-1.441 (0.173)**	-1.054 (0.348)**	-1.700 (1.097)	-1.502 (0.263)**	-1.477 (0.197)**
Colombian	-0.916 (0.344)**	-30.185 (1696586)	-0.674 (0.241)**	-0.413 (0.179)*	-0.550 (0.384)	-31.365 (4190016)	-0.538 (0.278)	-0.417 (0.203)*
DomRep	0.619 (0.293)*	-29.299 (1656870)	0.239 (0.261)	1.126 (0.193)**	1.067 (0.345)**	-30.443 (4853616)	0.460 (0.301)	1.039 (0.224)**
<i>Yearly Income-Omitted: Less than \$30,000</i>								
income30to49					-0.082 (0.242)	1.545 (0.735)*	-0.177 (0.158)	-0.185 (0.127)
incomemore50					-0.665 (0.303)*	0.779 (0.851)	-0.134 (0.175)	-0.442 (0.152)**
<i>Education-Omitted: Less than High School</i>								
hsgrad					-0.425 (0.294)	-0.975 (0.859)	0.232 (0.178)	-0.108 (0.136)
somecollege					0.088 (0.282)	-1.109 (0.893)	-0.052 (0.194)	-0.456 (0.152)**

Table 10 (Continued)

	Racialization Hypothesis				Comparison of Hypotheses			
	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic	black	Asian	Other	Hispanic
collegrad					-0.167 (0.310)	-0.373 (0.853)	-0.143 (0.211)	-0.518 (0.168)**
<i>Language Ability-Omitted: No English Ability</i>								
Bilingual					-0.126 (0.298)	-0.532 (1.231)	1.022 (0.181)**	0.151 (0.142)
EnglDom					1.574 (0.320)**	2.942 (0.895)**	1.086 (0.229)**	-0.140 (0.195)
<i>Marital Status-Omitted: Not Married or Co-habiting</i>								
married_cohab					-0.056 (0.206)	0.194 (0.583)	0.107 (0.131)	-0.099 (0.106)
<i>Generational Status-Omitted: First Generation</i>								
secgen					-0.804 (0.332)*	-0.595 (0.686)	0.352 (0.181)	0.409 (0.163)*
third4gen					-1.262 (0.367)**	-2.982 (1.125)**	-0.345 (0.217)	-0.228 (0.199)
<i>Has R experienced Discrimination?</i>								
exp_disc	0.701 (0.194)**	0.244 (0.480)	0.483 (0.118)**	0.238 (0.093)*	0.751 (0.220)**	0.665 (0.617)	0.512 (0.131)**	0.230 (0.104)*
Constant	-1.690 (0.221)**	-3.127 (0.509)**	-0.779 (0.147)**	-0.132 (0.119)	-1.894 (0.342)**	-5.009 (1.124)**	-1.593 (0.230)**	0.238 (0.172)
Observations	2901	2901	2901	2901	2447	2447	2447	2447
<i>Pseudo R squared</i>	0.0616				0.1023			
Standard errors in parentheses								

\* significant at 5% level; \*\* significant at 1% level

'Hispanic' and less likely to self-identify as 'white'. Both sets of analyses confirm the hypothesis that Hispanics who experience discrimination are less likely to self-identify as white than those who do not. We also can confirm the hypothesis that, net of all other factors, Hispanics with darker skin shades are less likely to self-identify as white than Hispanics of lighter hues. The finding that self-identification as Hispanic is related to experiences of discrimination in the US points to the politicization of this term and the growing understanding of the term as a racialized label.

The clear relationship between skin colour and racial choices points to the need for data collection efforts to take skin shade into account. These findings also demonstrate that predictions as to whether or not Hispanics will become 'white' especially must take skin colour into account, as some of these studies have begun to do (see Forman, Goar and Lewis 2002).

### Conclusion

Skin shade clearly influences choice of racial category among Latinos/as, but this is complicated by the fact that so few respondents to the LNPS 1989 survey chose the black category and a significant share of darker respondents chose the white category. Lighter complexioned Latinos/as simply would not choose black as their racial category, but darker complexioned Latinos/as often would choose white as their racial category. This is reflective of a general Latino preference for whiteness. Nevertheless, the results from both survey analyses do show that darker skin, experiences of discrimination, lower incomes and limited Spanish ability all increase the likelihood that Latinos/as will self-identify as 'black' when given a choice to do so. Latinos/as who report having experienced discrimination on the basis of their racial or ethnic background are unlikely to self-identify as white. In the NLS 2002 survey, 61 per cent of the respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination on the basis of their race or ethnicity. They were made to feel not white, and thus were less likely to self-identify as white during the telephone survey. The NLS data also demonstrate that the experience of non-whiteness is not uniform. Some of those Latinas/os who reported discrimination self-identified as black, others as Hispanic and still others as 'other'.

In sum, these analyses indicate that Hispanics' experiences in the US are likely to affect their racial choices. This process of learning to adapt to the US racial system could be called *racialized assimilation*. A concept of racialized assimilation takes into account the overwhelming importance that skin colour has in shaping our interactions with others. Just as our racial status can be used to predict where we live, who we will marry and our life expectancy, how immigrants are

racially categorized by others will heavily influence their path of assimilation. This is in line with Golash-Boza's (2006) finding that Latinos/as who are not perceived to be white are less likely to become unhyphenated Americans. Just as experiences of discrimination teach Latinos/as that they are not Americans, they also teach them that they are not white.

The analyses presented in this paper demonstrate that experiences of discrimination and skin colour can be used to predict Latinos/as' racial choices. In the 1989 LNPS data, 79 per cent of the respondents who had very light skin reported that they had never experienced discrimination, as opposed to only 67 per cent of the dark-skinned respondents. This indicates that darker-skinned Hispanics are more likely to experience discrimination. We suggest that these experiences of discrimination teach Latinos/as that they are not white, and it is for this reason that Latinos/as do not self-identify as white. As Latino immigrants acculturate into US society, they also learn how to interpret our racial codes, and they learn how they are categorized by people in the US. Their racial categorization in turn affects their racial identification.

### **Research implications**

The finding that skin colour and experiences of discrimination affect racial identifications among Hispanics is evidence that Hispanics do not all experience the same process of racialization in the United States. As a consequence, predictions about the future racial make-up of the United States cannot rely on predictions based solely on whom researchers identify as Hispanic today. These studies must also take into account the fact that some Hispanics will become white, others black, and not all are likely to continue to identify as Hispanic. As such, in order to make such predictions on a national scale, more consistent data on skin colour, racial categorization, racial identification and experiences of racialization are needed. These sorts of data could be obtained in face-to-face interviews where interviewers record skin colour in addition to the respondents' racial self-identification, the respondents' opinion of how others would classify him or her and the interviewer's racial classification of the respondent. In telephone or mail-in surveys, it would be useful to include the respondent's opinion as to how others see him or her in addition to his or her racial self-identification.

Going back to Table 1, we can see that, of those 1,589 Latino respondents who were married or co-habiting in 1989, 10 per cent had Anglo spouses, while 7 per cent had 'other' spouses, who were neither Latino nor Anglo. We can safely presume that most of these spouses were black, Asian or Native American. The regression analyses show

that one's spouse's ethnicity affects racial self-identification, yet we can also assume that the children of these unions will not all choose to highlight their Hispanic heritage, especially if their Latino parent chooses to self-identify as white, black or Asian. Other studies have found that between 44 and 70 per cent of children who have one Hispanic parent and one non-Hispanic parent identify as Hispanic (cited in Lee and Bean 2004, p. 230). These trends in racial/ethnic intermarriage and identification must also be taken into account when making predictions about future racial identifications.

We also can learn something from considering the differences between the 1989 and 2002 surveys. In both surveys, respondents were asked to identify their race as 'white,' 'black' or 'something else'. In the 1989 survey, only 18.31 per cent of the respondents identified their race as Hispanic, Latino or their national origin. However, using a similar sample of respondents (i.e. just the Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Mexicans) in the 2002 National Latino survey, we found that 47 per cent of the respondents racially self-identified as Hispanic or Latino. This nearly three-fold increase over the course of twelve years is quite remarkable, despite the distinct techniques of survey collection that were employed in these two surveys. Additionally, it lends further support to the claim that Hispanic/Latino is emerging as a racial category. The percentage of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans self-identifying as black slightly increased from 1.9 to 2.6 per cent, and the percentage of those self-identifying as white decreased from 36 to 30 per cent. These latter differences are not so striking, but nevertheless suggest that Hispanics are increasingly unlikely to see themselves as 'white'.

The finding that subjective factors such as experiences of discrimination influence racial self-identification means that racial self-identification is indeed fluid, and can change over time. Of course, these logistic regressions cannot determine causality, and it is conceivable that people who self-identify as black or Hispanic as opposed to white are also those persons who are more likely to experience discrimination. In any case, the finding that skin colour affects racial self-identification means that parents' racial self-identification cannot always predict their children's racial self-identification, since our children's skin colour is not always a replica of our own. Up until now, race in the United States has been discussed using primarily a rhetoric of descent, meaning that your racial identification is entirely dependent on that of your parents (Davis 2001). However, the fact that these analyses demonstrate the subjective nature of racial self-identification indicates that racial self-identifications may be passed down to offspring less often than previously thought. These findings also lend support to Bonilla-Silva's (2004) argument that racial categorization in the US may be becoming more like those processes

in Latin America, at least in terms of the possibility of choosing a racial status distinct from that of one's parents. In any case, these analyses demonstrate that, while Latinos/as can choose their racial identification, this choice is constrained by the colour of their skin and their experiences in the United States.

## Notes

1. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2003-06-18-Census\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2003-06-18-Census_x.htm) (accessed 13 April 2005).
2. <http://www.mdba.gov/documents/mbdacolor.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2005).

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