“It Depends on Where You Go!”

The Transnational Racial Consciousness of Dominican Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

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OF DOMINICAN IMMIGRANTS

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This study aimed to explore transnational racial consciousness among immigrants from the Dominican Republic. Racial consciousness is the process whereby the people develop awareness and understanding of social oppression (Freire, 1971; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 274). Fifteen self-identified Dominican immigrants participated in semi-structured interviews, focused on their understandings of skin-color, racialization, racism, and group membership. A grounded theory design framed from a constructivist and critical social justice approach guided the analysis of the data. The theoretical framework that emerged from the analysis of the data suggests a core narrative of “negotiating contradicting cultural scripts” about race and racialization and “contradicting notions of self” from a racialized perspective. Participants shared experiences with racialization, colorism, and racism both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, which heightened their awareness of issues of racial oppression. Additionally, they described a cultural socialization that emphasized deracialized cultural notions that avoid explicit reference to race-specific material. Contradicting messages
existed at institutional, cultural, and interpersonal levels. Participants identified racial encounters in the context of social/interpersonal interactions. They elaborated on the meanings they have constructed in attempts to understand their varying and conflicting experiences with racialization. They also expressed complex emotional reactions triggered by experiences with discrimination and racism. Encounters with racism resulted in changes or shifts in consciousness for some participants. The importance of negotiating the contradictions that emerged in racialized interactions across social context implies that transnational racial consciousness is both interpersonal and intrapsychic for these participants. Suggestions for further research include continuing to examine the experiences of those who may be categorized as both Latino/a, as a result of language and culture, as well as Black, due to skin-color and descent. Implications for practice and training include a need for increased attention to the multiple locales and contexts in which immigrants are embedded. The transnational bonds, connections, and ties to systems of oppression that immigrants maintain need be explore in terms of the psychological processes these produce. Finally, expanding the role of psychologists and other mental health professionals, to more active agents of social justice at the local and transnational levels is also suggested.
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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In February 2012, the Dominican Republic (D.R.) experienced a great tragedy. One of the worst shipwrecks in the country’s history took place along the northeastern coast of Sabana de la Mar, Dominican Republic. Labeled a boatpeople tragedy, it took the lives of 56 victims. The yola, a canoe-like vessel carried seventy Dominicans en route to Puerto Rico. Only thirteen of these immigrants survived, by swimming to shore (Dominican Today, February 13, 2012).

Large numbers of Dominican immigrants leave the island by yola every day. The usual course of such an expedition involves 26 hours to 2 days of crossing the treacherous Mona Canal between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. From 1966 to 2002, about 119,000 undocumented Dominican immigrants seeking to escape economic hardship have arrived at Puerto Rican shores. For most, the goal is to use Puerto Rico as a stepping stone to the United States’ mainland. The Custom and Border Protection Services (CBP) agency of the United States recently warned that the crossing of the Mona Passage leads to the highest numbers of death worldwide. The trip’s dangers have three potential outcomes: death at sea, criminal persecution upon arrival, and/or victimization by organizations of smugglers (Dominican Today, February 14, 2012).

These dire warnings have not prevented the migrations. In December 2011, the wife of a traveler found dead after a yola tragedy provided her testimony of his story. She reported that her husband said: “My love, I’m going to Puerto Rico, because we must change.”
She spoke of his aspirations to help change the family’s socioeconomic condition. His words echoed the hopes and dreams of those who have and have not survived migration.

Like this lost traveler, countless numbers of immigrants from poverty stricken nations move across borders seeking to transform their social circumstances. The consequences of border-crossings may be contextual changes, in addition to changes to the individual and collective consciousness of those who cross. Anzaldúa (2007) poetically explored the act of crossing over to new lands, using the term *Borderlands.* She defined the border as a space within and between nations (Negrón-Muntaner, 2006). This idea of borderlands has become one of the most important concepts in Latino/a studies. Anzaldúa (2007) proposed that Chicanos constitute “*un puente tendido del mundo gabacho al del mojado* (a bridge between the Anglo world and that of the wetback)” (p. 3). Negrón-Muntaner (2006) applied Anzaldúa’s border theory to the examination of Caribbean Latinos’ transnational experience, highlighting notions of “*Pensamiento fronterizo*” or “Border thinking” (p.273)—lives in-between context. In this theoretical exploration, Negrón-Muntaner reconfigured the locations and relationships between Caribbeans in the islands and those beyond.

The notion of *pensamiento fronterizo* aids understanding the unique experiences of Dominicans migrants, as they travel outside of the D.R. to serve as the bridge between the island carrying hopes, dreams, and loss to the land of opportunity. The application of border theory to Dominican migration connects this newer immigrant population to the larger Latina/o pan-ethnic group. The conceptualization of those often counted as “boatpeople” as border people also validates of the new sense of self that is constructed
in this transnational space. Border theorists suggest that a consequence of transnationalism is the transcendence of the duality between *allá y aquí* (here and there) (Negrón-Muntaner, 2006). Anzaldúa (2007) presented a “…new story to explain the world and our participation in it” in-between borders as a new consciousness, “a new *mestiza* consciousness…a consciousness of the Borderlands” (p. 99). Along these same lines, the current study sought to explore the new consciousness constructed by Dominicans living in transnational locations.

In *Quisqueya on the Hudson*, Duany (2008) drew attention to the Dominican experience in United States, particularly in the Washington Heights section of New York City. His model of transnationalism, referred to as the “direct and indirect connection or bridge across borders,” provided a lens to examine how this population not only maintained its strong cultural and familial ties, but also its attachment to Dominican notions of self and other. Duany’s (2002, 2008) anthropological works uncovered the transnational identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights, as a sense of self split between *mi país* (my country) and *este país* (this country) in ways that resonated with other diasporic communities (Duany, 2002). The current study made us of Duany’s (2008) conceptualization of transnationalism, “as the construction of dense social fields across national borders as a result of the circulation of people, ideas, practices…” (Duany, 2008, pp. 2). In this paper, transnationalism was framed as a social phenomenon and psychological process resulting from border-crossing activities and experiences of migrants living into two social contexts (Duany, 2008; Levitt & Waters, 2002).
In recent years transnational approaches have been critiqued as failing to capture the experience of uprooting from one’s land of origin and taking root in a new land (Torres-Saillant, 2000). Sociologists (Torres-Saillant, 2000; Ricourt, 2002) have argued that immigrants, such as Dominicans, have created permanent communities in the United States. These contend that Dominicans have shifted their focus more locally than transnationally (Aparicio, 2006). However, Duany (2008) urged the reconceptualizing of binary notions of transnationalism and local politics among Dominicans. He argued that this population has integrated into New York City politics, while at the same has reimmersed into Dominican social politics, regardless of distance and period of time abroad. Thus, even across borders Dominicans continue to be interested in and sustain the cultural values of their homeland. Moreover, they may be transformed as they adjust to a host culture that racializes them as members of a minority group.

Various sociopolitical factors influence people’s understandings of their transnational experience. “When people move across state borders, they enter not only a different labor market and political structure but also a new system of social stratification by class, race, ethnicity, and gender” (Duany, 1998, p. 147). This investigation sought to explore the new racial “consciousness of the Borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 2007, pp. 99) for Dominican immigrants entering into the U.S. racialized social strata. The social contexts of immigration and transnationalism (here, there, and in-between), bring together complex experiences with racialization. The focus of this inquiry was Dominican migrants’ own conceptualizations of their encounters with racialization both in the United States and their homeland. The main subject addressed is whether migration to a more
A racially stratified environment might influence revisiting or redefining previously held notions of race and of self as a racial being, leading to towards the development of a new transnational racial consciousness.

A prerequisite to understanding this “new consciousness” is to locate the original consciousness—the interpretations of self and the world developed at home in the D.R. Juxtaposing differences in the racial characteristics of Dominican and U.S. racial systems, Hoetink (1967) noted that “one and the same person may be considered white in the Dominican Republic… [and] a ‘Negro’ in Georgia” (pg, xii). These differences in racial classification stem from variations between two hierarchal social systems, or racialized social systems. Bonilla-Silva (1997) framed these systems as “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are…structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 469). Societies vary in their constructions of race, racial relationships, and racialized social practices. In order to find the pathway towards the psychological consequences produced in the in-between or integrated transnational locations, the political mechanisms that produce and maintain racialized systems must be understood.

Dominican race notions date back to its colonial birth and plantation system (Moya-Pons, 1998). The Dominican Republic was the first national Western product of the South Atlantic system. It linked the middle passage between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Following its emancipation from Spanish rule, an intricate system of racialization was devised and maintained. In the forty or so years since Hoetink’s (1967) observation, migration has brought together people of the two systems he identified.
Race in the United States is most often used to refer to characterizations of a group believed to share common hereditary traits, apparent in skin-color and other physical features (Cokley, 2007). Dominicans in the United States face a clear-cut racial structure dominated by the binary Black and White racial categories (Duany, 1996, 1998). In contrast, in the Dominican Republic, the dominant ideology purports the notion of racial mixture or mestizaje (Wade, 2005). Ideas of racial mixture have influenced the development of a continuum of categories based on skin-colors, as opposed to race (Golash-Boza, 2010). Here, mainstream notions hold that the mixture of White, Native, and some African races, has produced a racially mixed population. Bonilla-Silva and Dietrest (2008) described such societies as a tri-racial or plural social system. Such social systems include one or more intermediate categories. In the D.R. the intermediate category Indio/a (Indian colored) has been used to classify the majority of Dominicans with visible African ancestry (Candelario, 2001). This middle category also has various qualifiers such as Indio claro (light Indian colored) and Indio oscuro (dark Indian colored) to point to the diverse skin-tones that result from racial mixture. Sagas (2000) suggested that the Dominican Republic has in this way supported an idealization of an Amerindian ancestry. Moreover, terms such as Mestizo, Mulato (mulatto), Moreno (dark or brown), Pardo (brown), and various other intermediate labels dominate the Dominican language of skin-color labels (Golash-Boza, 2010; Wade, 2005). Although less explored in the scholarly literature, popular culture (i.e., music and street culture) has popularized terms like Negro (Black) and Prieto (pitch Black), commonly used to describe the skin-color of darker-skinned men and women (Martinez, 2003, p. 90). Martinez (2003) argued
that while the uses of these terms have not gained scholarly focus, they reflect subjective understandings of dark-skinned Dominicans who are low in the hierarchy of power and social status.

While both the United States and the Dominican Republic are racially stratified societies, there are important differences regarding their hierarchical characteristics and the mechanisms used for their maintenance. The dominant discourse of the Dominican Republic centers on an ideology of *racial democracy*, a theory that racial oppression does not exist in a culture presumed to be a product racial mixture (Cottrol, 2005). Nonetheless, in the Dominican context, as across Latin America, dark-skinned populations encounter racial oppression. Their oppression is manifested through limited access to education, under-employment, and political exclusion. These members of society suffer from some of the highest poverty rates in the region (Dixon, 2005). It is interesting to note the scholarly contention that awareness of racism in Latina/o contexts may be limited by the political emphasis on racial democracy and racial-cultural homogeneity (Dixon, 2005). Furthermore, Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2004) added that the racial democracy theory has buffered racial conflict, since it propagates the idea of the possibility of social mobility. Additionally, notions of racial mixture may actually highlight the depth of Black and dark-skinned marginalization. This is because the cultural proliferation of racial mixture exemplifies the belief that dark-skin is something that may be transcended (Golash-Boza, 2010). Whitening practices, which will be examined in further detail in Chapter Two, play a critical role in sustaining White
supremacy in tri-partite social systems, such as that of the D.R. (Bonilla Silva & Dietrich, 2008).

In the United States, racial oppression—the economic, social, and political domination of Whites by virtue of their power (Freire, 1971) in the lives of Black Americans has been well-documented in the social sciences literature on racism (hooks, 1994, 1995). Described as a system that justifies and crystallizes the racialized stratification (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), *racism* has been examined at individual, institutional, and societal levels (Sue, 2005). The sociopolitical experience of racism plays an essential role in the formation of psychological processes for understanding the social world as well as the self. Manifestations of heightened racial consciousness during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s (Cross, 1991; DeCuir-Genby, 2009) inspired an increased social science emphasis on issues of racism and colonization in relation to the self-concept. DuBois’ (1903) analysis of Negro (double) consciousness, Memmi’s (1965) examination of the colonized mentality, and Fanon’s (1963) theorizing on colonized African consciousness, were a few of the numerous philosophical works that influenced a theoretical focus on Black consciousness. These works led to a long line of psychological inquiry into the internalization of racism, its impact on racial awareness, understanding, and notions of self (DeCuir-Genby, 2009).

The connection between living in a racialized environment and individual awareness of the social environment has dominated multicultural counseling psychology theory and research (Cokley, 2007; Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007). U.S-based
investigations have related racism and racialization to overwhelming psychological outcomes, such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, somatization, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and lower self-esteem, among others (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2010; Clark et al., 1999; Klonoff et al., 1999). *Internalized racism*, the process whereby members of subordinate groups internalize racial stereotypes about their own group, also has been studied as a product of racism, and linked to psychosocial stress symptoms (Cokley, 2002).

Psychologists (Helms, 1995; Jackson, 1975; Thomas, 1971, as cited in Constantine et al., 1998) have proposed a number of theoretical models to explain the ways members of oppressed groups construct a racialized sense of self—the self-concept constructed in a climate of racism (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). These theories are based on the assumption that increases in awareness of “race and racism on self, others, and society” (Miville, 2010, p. 245), enable the possibility of constructing a positive sense of self. These models define racial consciousness as the awareness of racial information (Helms, 1984), and pay close attention to conceptualizations of racial identity. Cokley (2007) defined *racial identity* as the self-concept a people socialized to think of themselves as a collective racial group (Cokley, 2007). Racial identity theory describes the attitudes and beliefs that reflect the adjustments in worldview needed when socialized in the context of U.S oppression. These adjustments are made in the quest to overcoming internalized racism and achieving a positive or healthy racialized sense of self (Pierre & Mahalik, 2005).
Psychological theorizing on the racialized encounters faced by people from a tri-racial or plural social system, as well as the racialized encounters that result from migration to a different racial environment have not yet been proposed. Sociologists have suggested that a “growing racial consciousness in Afro-diasporic communities” across Latin America and the Caribbean has been linked to immigration (Bonilla-Silva, 2008; Dixon, 2005, p. 27; Golash-Boza, 2005; Telles & Sue, 2009; Watts, 2003). In these regions, the discourse on racial consciousness has been inspired by the philosophical writings of Freire (1971), who termed conscientização (critical consciousness) as “the process whereby the oppressed continually expand their levels of awareness and understanding of the social circumstance of oppression” (Freire, 1971; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 274).

Duany (1998) suggested that Dominican migrants to the United States face the challenge of adjusting and integrating into a social system that redefines them. In contrast to their homeland experiences, Dominicans are not often perceived as Indio/a in a U.S. context. Instead, they are usually racialized as Black or people of color (Duany, 1998; Torres-Saillant, 1998). To complicate the matter, most dark-skinned Spanish speaking immigrants are also introduced to the pan-ethnic terms “Hispanic” and “Latina/o” upon migration. Thus, for this population, the quest for a positive racialized sense of self in a transnational context may require a cognitive restructuring, to facilitate understanding their U.S racialization, as well as to negotiate their Dominican-based consciousness. Therefore, a critical pathway for psychologists to better conceptualize the experiences of this and other immigrant groups must incorporate inquiry into the racial consciousness
that is constructed in the social context of origin, as it may be conflict with the psychological negotiations that may be necessary for survival in the United States. To fully conceptualize the process of racialization and its psychological implications in the context of immigration, we must first recognize how immigrants are socialized to see themselves prior to border-crossing. This may pave the way towards understanding how migrants interact with the racialized material of the host culture in their way towards developing a new sense of self, or what Anzaldúa termed “a new consciousness of the Borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 99).

**Purpose of Study and Researcher Worldview**

In keeping with Freire and liberation theory (1971), in this study *racial consciousness* was generally defined as the process of increased awareness and understanding of the social, economic, and political contradictions of racial oppression (Freire, 1971; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). Similar to the goals of the emerging consciousness raising movements across Afro-diasporic Latina/o communities, the objective of this investigation was to highlight the psychological impacts of social oppression on a group of Dominican immigrants (Dixon, 2005). I sought to uncover the stories of those deeply affected by colonization and oppression within and across national borders.

This study aimed to explore the awareness and understanding of race, racialization, skin-color, and racism in the psychological processes of immigrants from the Dominican Republic. The researcher conducted interviews employing a grounded theory design to look at the racial consciousness of transnational migrants. Grounded
theory suggests a specific value and worldview, one which points to the reality of social oppression. Thus, it is important that I explicitly acknowledge my worldview and racial positionality. I write this paper and conducted this study as a first-generation U.S-born Black Dominican woman who grew-up somewhere between a poor/working-class Dominican community in New York City and a devastating poor town in Sabana de la Mar, Republica Dominicana. Throughout my life my parents has remained closely connected to our extended family back home. I spent much of my early childhood flying back to the D.R., until finally moving to N.Y at the age of eight. My social and educational experiences as the first English-speaking member of my family played a significant role in my socialization as a Black woman of Latina descent. Although I have continued to live in Dominican neighborhoods, my American education nurtured a racial consciousness different from that of my family members. That difference inspired my passion and interest in Dominican racial politics.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature focuses on varying constructions of skin-color, race, racism, and their impact on the individual consciousness. The chapter begins with an exploration of racialized social systems which create and maintain race notions, social inequalities, and psychological processes in two cultural contexts—the United States and the Dominican Republic. A summary of theoretical constructs for understanding racial consciousness are then presented, followed by an exploration of transnational migration and its implications for adding complexity to this psychological construct. In addition, the review emphasizes recently emerging empirical literature on immigration as a racialized encounter with implications for shifts in racial self-identification, awareness of racism, and the mental health outcomes associated with this process (Bailey, 2001; Duany, 1998; Howard, 2003; Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Finally, the chapter provides support for a qualitative research design on transnational racial consciousness among Dominican immigrants and describes the research questions that guided this study.

Racialized social systems

Any discussion relevant to issues of skin-color, race, and racial consciousness must be explored within the system in which it is embedded. Social contexts nurture the production and reproduction of the mechanisms, practices, and dynamics internalized as part of individual consciousness and identity (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Helms & Parham,
Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2004) provided a framework from which to understand societies racially organized, that is, *racialized social systems*. Within such systems, racial hierarchies serve as the organizational structures for social-relational interaction between groups. The racial group placed in the superior position or location of the hierarchy is granted greater access to economic opportunity, political participation, social privilege, as well as the power to create physical boundaries between itself and other groups (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Blauner (2001) noted that in the relationship produced, the privileged group is granted the power to dominate and control the movement of other groups. Thus, “the idea that there is an appropriate place—or set of roles and activities…and that other places and responsibilities are not proper or acceptable” (p. 37) is supported and maintained. Racialized systems therefore are defined as the institutional promotion of racial inequality via racism and shape race notions, racial classification, and social positionality (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

**The Social Construction of Race**

An essential element of racialized social systems is the placement of people into different locations in the racial stratification through the invention of racialized social groups or races (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1986). Races are engineered through the process of *racialization*, the assignment of meaning to perceived differences among people, in order to produce hierarchies of power and privilege (Burton et al., 2010). Omi and Winant (1986) defined *race* as a pattern of group categorization based on ascribing racial meanings to previously unclassified racial groups and relationships: “Race involves the assumption that individuals can be divided into groups based on
phenotype or genotype and that those groups have meaningful differences” (Burton et al., 2010, p. 440). Racial classifications have been generally based on phenotypical characterizes (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Burton et al., 2010; Carter, 1995). While social science has analyzed race from this social formation framework, this concept has historically been linked to biological roots, described as the characteristics a group is believed to inherently carry in blood (e.g., skin color, physical features, hair texture, and at times language and culture; Carter, 1995). As a result, race has grown to mean that human distinctions can be classified based on visible traits (Carter, 1995). In some contexts, education and social class have also been indicative of racial categorization (Burton et al., 2010).

The practice of categorizing groups of people into races is a political act, rooted in elite interests—associated with conquest, colonization, enslavement, indentured servitude, and most currently, colonial and neocolonial immigrant labor (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Miville, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1986). Moreover, the meanings attached to racial group differences have served to justify the various practices that maintain systems of exploitation and inequality. Consequently, in the United States, for example, the categories “Negro” and “Indian” and the meanings connected to these were constructed to justify the conquest and exploitation of individuals classified as so (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). People in specific social positions “do not occupy those positions because they are of X or Y race, but because X and Y has been socially defined as a race” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 472).
In sum, race scholars have pointed to the dialectical process through which phenotypical characteristics have been politically used to denote racial distinction, and therefore, access to political power (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; 2004; Carter, 1995; Crottol, 2005, Mateo-Diclo, 1998; Miville, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1986). Here power is defined as the capacity to materialize group interests (Bonilla-Silva, 1997); it is in this way that race becomes an independent operation and a social reality. Race not only serves as an element of social structuring, but also a phenomenon achieved through social interaction situated in social contexts (Burton et al., 2010).

**Racism and Hegemony**

Just as race is critical for social structuring, racism is an ingrained element of racialized systems (Burton et al., 2010). Bonilla-Silva’s framework (1997) described racism as the system that constructs racial meanings to justify and rationalize racial interactions at macro and micro levels. The system of racism serves the critical role of providing reason for the location granted to groups in the racial hierarchy. Racism serves the practical function of shaping the racial notions and stereotypes that become ideologies and mainstream beliefs (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2004b). For example, the stereotype that “Blacks are generally good athletes,” is not commonly held as an invention of the racialized system, but a mainstream belief divorced from its sociohistorical roots.

Racism has been examined at individual, institutional, and societal levels (Sue, 2005). Individual racism pertains to personal acts of racial discrimination, whereas institutional racism is the form present in the organization of societal policies, practices, and structuring of institutions (e.g., government, businesses, schools, churches, courts,
and law enforcement) (Jones, 1997; Sue, 2005). *Cultural racism* is the superordinate ideology that allows these two practices to flourish. It is the perpetuation of White domination through the production of race notions that uphold White supremacy (Sue, 2005). Miles (1989) conceptualized racism as an ideology that distorts, obscures, and clouds the social reality by hiding the exploitative relationship between the dominant group and others (Berman & Paradies, 2008).

The definitions, practices, and mechanisms constructed within a racialized apparatus provide the rules for perceiving the racial material of the social world. In this way, race assigns definition, social location, and determines level of access based on position in the stratification, whereas racism maintains the structure by providing explanations for its practices. These elements provide an “organizational map” guiding the actions of groups and individuals within a society (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). It is within racialized interactions that stratified social locations of subordination and superordination are learned and eventually internalized. Understanding the complex elements of racialized social systems is thus critical to the examination psychological consequences these nurture.

**The Internalization of Racialization**

The various definitions of racism have been summarized as that which maintains and exacerbates limited access to opportunities for non-dominant racial groups (Berman & Paradies, 2008). Watts-Jones (2002) made the connection between exposure to racism and *internalized racism*, the belief in racist ideologies as part of the worldview of members of a society (Berman & Paradies, 2008; Cokley; 2005). Berman and Paradies
(2008) highlighted two aspects of this internalization: internalized dominance (belief in the inferiority of other groups) and internalized inferiority (perceiving other groups are superior). Finally, they also added that racial groups are impacted by racism directly (unequal treatment, unequal access) as well as indirectly (equal treatment, unequal access) through interactions with the environment, institutions, and others (Berman & Paradies, 2008).

Socialization, the transmission of societal values and beliefs, plays an important role in learning and internalizing sociocultural norms (Carter, 1995). Racial socialization refers to the process through which socializing institutions (e.g., parents, families) shape an individual’s learning the racial meanings, values, and beliefs connected to racial group membership (McHale et al., 2006). Studies have shown that parental racial socialization practices influence individual awareness of the racial world and individual self-concept. In addition, racial socialization is influenced by the self-concept and race related experiences of parents (Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2010). The underlying supposition of these concepts is that context helps shape psychological development. Level of exposure to racial information, racialization experiences, and socialization influence the internalization of cognitive schemas and images of self. These help individuals learn the appropriate role for their racial group within the social context (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003).

Social scientists have examined the impact of racialization on individual psychological processes by focusing on the development of racial consciousness, the awareness of racial issues (Helms, 1984). Research has shown that racial consciousness
may begin as early as age three for children growing up in a racist environment (Caughy et al., 2006, Tatum, 1997). Proponents of this perspective have emphasized the connection between racialization, socialization, racial consciousness, and the development of self-concept (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). Accordingly, the development of a healthy self-concept entails doing away with internalized racism, for which heightened racial consciousness is required (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003).

*Mental colonization,* the “psychological hegemony of dominant groups over subordinate groups” is one of numerous concepts meant to capture the process of racial consciousness (Boykin, 1986 as cited in Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 272). Mental colonization is perpetuated through practices that induce the development of a false consciousness, or inaccurate ideas that uphold the control of the dominant (Jost, 1995). Quintana and Segura-Herrera (2003) suggested that a prerequisite condition for the development of a healthy self-concept, involves undoing mental colonization and transforming false consciousness through the development of a critical awareness of the racialized environment, termed *critical consciousness*.

Freire (1971) termed *conscientização* (critical consciousness) as the process whereby members of oppressed groups gradually develop awareness and understanding of oppression (Freire, 1971; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 274). Through this process, the oppressed engage in increased levels of self-awareness, as they understand the impact of the social, political, and economic contradictions that mark their social reality (Freire, 1971). Breaking through false consciousnesses is a result of dialogues and interactions that are consciousness raising. This concept of consciousness is described as
a deeply critical examination of self in the context of social inequality. *Conscientização* enables individual transformation, and the result is the development of an empowered sense of self and increased group allegiance. It is from such a critical consciousness that a struggle for sociopolitical change can emerge (Freire, 1970; Quintana, 2003).

The multicultural psychology literature has pointed to the relation between racial oppression and the development of a sense of wholeness (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003; Quintana, 2007; Sneed et al., 2006). Quintana and Segura-Herrera (2003) described this process as a *racialized sense of self*, a self-concept formed in the context of racism and oppression. Similarly, psychologists (Cross, 1971, 1995; Helms, 1984, 1990) have undertaken explorations of identity development. Identity development is essentially the process whereby individuals seek stable and consistent answers to the question, “[w]ho am I?” critical to finding a meaningful place in society (Carter, 1995, p.85). *Racial identity*, “the collective identity of a group of people socialized to think of themselves as a racial group,” (Cokley, 2007, p. 225) is a construct central to this line of research.

Theoretical models of racial identity stem from the idea that experiences within racialized contexts trigger psychological processes or identity exploration (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007). Racial identity theory is a framework from which to examine the various adjustments people are forced to make in the quest for a positive identity (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Helms, 1984, 1990). Described as racial identity attitudes, these adjustment or resolutions involve the beliefs, emotions, and behaviors directed toward one’s own and the dominant group (Helms, 1984). Studies have typically examined racial identity attitudes, as these may buffer the negative impacts of psychological symptoms or
significant. Racial identity has been found to be reflective of internal functioning (Carter & Helms, 1988), as well as linked to general self-concept (Wilson & Constantine, 1999), self-esteem (Munford, 1994), and psychiatric symptoms (Parham & Helms, 1985a, 1985b). For instance, more complex racial identity attitudes are negatively correlated with depression (Munford, 1994). In addition, racial identity has also been linked to experiences with racism or perceived discrimination (Seaton, Sellers, & Yip, 2009).

To review, the study of oppression, individual consciousness, and identity is historically rooted in the idea that aspects of self-concept are related to racialization or racialized experiences (i.e., racial socialization, racism) (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). Quintana and Segura-Herrera (2003) concluded that a prerequisite to the development of critical consciousness is “questioning the legitimacy of oppression” (p. 275). Moreover, members of oppressed groups who reported feeling connected their racial group, and a more positive racialized sense of self, have been found better able to cope with racism (Helms, 2010).

The concepts racial consciousness and racial identity are interrelated, since they capture the psychological processing of racial information. These concepts differ in that racial consciousness focuses on the awareness of racialization, racial group membership, and the understanding of its influence on intrapsychic, interpersonal, and systemic dynamics (Freire, 1971; Helms, 1990; Quintana & Segura-Herrera), whereas racial identity is concerned with the quality of that awareness or the numerous forms in which awareness can occur, termed identity resolutions (Helms, 1990). Racial Identity Theory describes resolutions reflective of attitudes, beliefs, and information processing strategies
used by individuals to make sense of racial stimuli. These various processes may be context specific since the characteristics of racialized social contexts differ. Racial Identity Theory was first developed to examine the heightened racial consciousness of U.S populations around Civil Rights and Black power eras (Helms, 1990). This model was mainly developed for and tested on populations socialized within the American racialized system.

Using Freire’s (1971) notion of critical consciousness, racial consciousness is defined in this paper as the awareness of one’s racialized self and racial circumstance within a context of oppression (Freire, 1971; Watts, 2003). This construct is useful since notions of awareness or understanding are more broadly applicable across social contexts. Making this distinction is important because the focus of this study was the racial consciousness that emerged in the context of immigration, as people moved from one racialized system to another. Inquiry into how transnational movement impacted individual processing of this experience, perspectives on racial group membership, group allegiance, and sense of self will be described next.

**Immigration and Transnationalism**

The characteristics of racialized systems vary across contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2004). Hence, race notions, racism, and racial socialization patterns may differ across culture or nation-state. It may be that people from different racialized environments internalize qualitatively different notions around racial issues, even when sharing phenotypical similarities. Immigrants thus may enter a new culture with a racial consciousness that may clash with the worldview of the host culture (Quintana & Segura-
Sue (2009) suggested that immigrants arrive with an intact racial identity, and that the racialized experiences they may have had in their countries of origins are quite different from those encountered in the United States. As a consequence the racial information of the new culture may be perceived through a different lens (Sue, 2009). Immigrants do not arrive in a culture as members of race X or race Y. Yet, after brief periods of adjustment or periods of being not-yet race X, they eventually become race X as they adapt to and internalize the present racialized context (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). This has been the case of European immigrants in the United States. For these immigrants, inclusion into the White racial group has meant class mobility. In the case of dark-skinned immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America, the struggle for class mobility has meant avoiding inclusion into an oppressed racial group. Bonilla-Silva (1997) contended that these immigrants experience a period of “I am not Black; I am Jamaican” (p. 473). Scholars (Hall & Carter, 2006; Waters, 2001) have suggested that immigrant distancing from Black Americans results from fear of stigmatization, marginalization, and racism. Contradictions between group identification and racialization are eventually resolved. They too internalize their racialization and accept the duality of a Black racial classification, while retaining their ethnic heritage (Hall & Carter, 2006).

Waters (1994) studied racial and ethnic identification with a sample of 83 second-generation adolescents of Caribbean descent. This study revealed three patterns of group identification. The first was racial-ethnic identification as Black American. The second was a hyphenated ethnic label (e.g., Jamaican-American), and the third was immigrant
ethnic identification (e.g., Jamaican). Participants who identified as Black American also reported higher levels of perceived racism. This investigation linked racial identification with awareness of the reality of racism. The Caribbean sample seemed to have internalized their U.S racialization as Black American and were more aware of their location in the U.S stratification.

Studies have also examined the experiences of first-generation (i.e., born in country of origin) immigrant populations. In a study of 82 first-generation (71%) and second-generation (27%) English-speaking Afro-Caribbeans, Hall and Carter (2006) found generational differences with regard to racial identity status attitudes. This portion of the sample displayed attitudes reflective of the successful integration of aspects of self-concept (personal, ethnic, etc.) with ascribed racial group identity membership. They were more internally secure, receptive to increasing knowledge about racial issues, as well as better able to function across groups. It is compelling that, similar to Waters’ (1994) findings, second-generation participants reported higher perceived discrimination. Based on the findings of these investigations, first-generation immigrants may be at a disadvantage, lacking the racial ability to understand their position in a new social context (Hall & Carter, 2006).

Biafora, Taylor, and their colleagues (1993) examined racial awareness among African Americans and recent Black immigrant groups. The data included a sample of 946 African Americans, 196 individuals of Haitian descent, and 186 participants from other Caribbean islands. One of the important findings of this study was that Haitians, particularly those born in Haiti, expressed the lowest level of awareness of the meaning
of Blackness in the United States. These researchers highlighted the importance of considering the role that national origins plays not only on level of racial awareness, but also how Black immigrant groups may be taught to view other Blacks, and how to deal with discrimination. This research uncovered the need for further research on the social, cultural, and ideological differences among members of a racial group, such as U.S Blacks (Biafaora, Taylor, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Vega, 1993).

Burton and colleagues (2010) argued that it is important that researchers be attentive to the racialized practices, systems, perceptions, and identities that immigrants bring with them to the United States. Immigrant groups are not passive recipients of racialization, and instead they actively interact with the racialized environment in which they find themselves. Consequently, deeper inquiry into the racial consciousness of first-generation immigrations seems necessary. This study sought to fill that gap and enable complex conceptualizations of how the racial consciousness of immigrants from the D.R. may differ from and/or may be similar to that of racial groups in host country.

As Lorenzo-Hernandez (1998) asserted “immigration is a social phenomenon with profound psychological and sociological repercussions” (p. 4). Some of the experiences of migrants have been linked to poor health, depression, and a number of psychological factors that place immigrations at higher psychological risks (Coffman et al., 2010). The literature has shown that migrants confront major changes to lifestyle and environment which challenges adaptation and may result in higher psychological and emotional distress (Aroian, 1990).
The movement of people across national borders has prompted scholars to grapple with conceptualizations of immigration and cultural adjustment (Hall, 2010). Yet few studies have examined immigrants’ distress (Aroian, 1990; Lorenzo-Hernandez, 1998). Research on the psychological consequences of immigration has centered on issues of adaptation and acculturation (Hall, 2010). Cultural adaptation has been described as a complex process that unfolds over time, as individuals resolve changes in the meanings of sociocultural phenomena. According to Aroian’s (1990) Psychological Adaptation to Immigration and Resettlement Model, as a result of the life changes that come with immigration, migrants are required to shift their ways of viewing the world and their assumptions of world phenomenon. Thought patterns must be renegotiated or given up, and new ones developed to fit new circumstances in the country of resettlement. Studies of immigrant adjustment have illustrated a process of stress and adaptation (Kim, 2007). These focus on the strategies used by migrants to meet the psychological demands imposed by the host culture (Hall, 2010). Studies with immigrant populations have uncovered that stress, also referred to as culture-shock, may stem from clashes between the ways the individual was viewed (e.g., racialized) in their culture of origin and the new. Culture shock may be trigger periods of psychological crisis (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Lysgaard, 1995, as cited in Hall, 2010). Successful adaptation or acculturation entails grappling with this crisis and renegotiating ways of viewing the social phenomena and the meanings these attribute to self. Berry (1997) referred to this as acculturative stress, and added that acculturation is a mutually transformative process. Both the migrant and the host culture must change in order for both to arrive at mutual
accommodation. A factor that plays an important role in facilitating or hindering adaptation is the migrants’ culture of origin. The characteristics of migrants’ culture of origin determine the cultural distance between the migrant and the host culture (Hall, 2010), meaning that if the characteristics of the culture of origin are similar to those of the new culture, less distance is to be expected and accommodation is facilitated.

Araujo Dawson and Panchanadeswaran (2010) investigated the relationship between discriminatory experiences and acculturative stress with a sample of 283 Dominican immigrants. Experiences with racial discrimination or racist events were found to be significant predictors of high levels of acculturative stress. These results demonstrate that understanding whether increased awareness of the racial context can possibly buffer acculturative stress may enable psychologists to help immigrant populations develop strategies for coping as well as contesting the oppressive environment.

Social science paradigms of immigration have shifted in recent years. Theories of immigration have evolved from emphasizing *assimilation*, the process whereby immigrants give up their values and beliefs to embrace those of the host culture, to theories of *acculturation*, which recognize multiple patterns of cultural adjustment. More recently, immigration scholars have once again shifted their attention by pointing to transnationalism. Transnationalist theorists have highlighted the multiple experiences and identities held by immigrants, particularly the ways in which they simultaneously maintain ties to their countries of origin while also adjusting to a new culture (Kimberlin, 2012). Classic frameworks of transnational migration broadly define the process whereby
immigrants sustain relations across borders, linking these to those of the country of settlement (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). According to Marger (2007), Sociopolitical integration refers to participation in social and political institutions of the larger society, that is, those external to the immigrants’ ethnic community. But it also entails socialization into the society’s shared beliefs, values and norms (Garcia, 1981; Plotke, 1999). Issues of sociopolitical integration, therefore, are intertwined with those related to levels of transnationalism (p. 884).

Moreover, in accord with Sanchez and Machado-Casas (2009), the framework of transnationalism is an important lens from which to conceptualize the experiences of immigrants. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) advanced the theory of transnationalism as a process through which migrants maintain and develop multiple networks or multiple relations across two or more cultures—the culture of origin and the culture of settlement. Duany (2008) argued that transnational networks connect people directly and indirectly across borders through the circulation of people, values, ideas, and cultural practices. Immigrants from the Dominican Republic have been said to sustain strong ties to Dominican traditional practices. They have been referred to as an immigrant group that has “been successful in creating a transnational life” (Sagas & Molina, 2004, p. 9 as cited in Duany, 2008, p. 13). Dominicans in the U.S. continue to hold a strong national identity, to assert their cultural values, and resist Americanization. Moreover, they retain strong connection to their families in the D.R., participating in transnational activities, such as frequent calling and sending money back home, engaging in social and political
activities, holding dual citizenship, and participating in Dominican elections, while at the same time, working to adjust to U.S. culture and politics (Duany, 2008). A few studies (Duany, 1998; Torres-Saillant, 1998) have sought to examine these transnational practices, focusing on patterns of racial-ethnic identification; they have proposed that transnational immigrants have created hybrid cultural practices and identities. Dominicans continue to be immersed, influenced, and maintain strong attachment to values and beliefs of both the D.R. and the U.S.

Limited conceptualizations on the racial consciousness that these immigrants carry and how these are integrated in the U.S. have been presented. Duany (2008) suggested that racial discrimination has delayed the incorporation of Dominican immigrants into maintain U.S. culture. He stated that “transnational identities may be interpreted as forms of population resistance to racialized social structures and cultural practices in the United States” (p. 6). Little is known about the racialization and the racial consciousness of Dominican immigrants. The framework of transnationalism will be employed in this inquiry in order to examine the complex ways in which of Dominican immigrants understand race notions and experiences with racialization. The key element of transnationalism that will aid this particular study is the transport of ideas or race notions that sustains the links to the different experiences with racialization across borders. The goal is to examine how they integrate the racial consciousness of their country of origin and adapt to the new.

Encountering a new system of racialization may require the revisiting of previously held racial ideologies. In the United States, racial group membership has most
often been based on visible phenotypical characteristics (i.e., skin-color). As a consequence of this practice, immigrants are “thrust into a group against their will” and treated accordingly (Carter, 1995, p. 86); immigrants thus face an unavoidable engagement with the American racialized system (Duany, 1998). In the case of dark-skinned immigrants, for example, racial classification as Black or minority group members in the United States may elicit psychological distress when such racialization is unfamiliar (Hall & Carter, 2006), resulting in internal conflicts and tensions that are difficult to negotiate (Lorenzo-Hernandez, 1998). Little has been investigated in relation to how recent immigrant groups understand their racialized experiences. Even less attention has been paid to the impact of racialization on racial consciousness, or whether immigrants internalize their racialization to construct a new self-concept. Furthermore, when a population is placed in a subordinate location upon migration, a heightened racial consciousness may aid understanding of the sociopolitical and economic circumstance in which they find themselves.

**The Racialization of Dominicans: Two Systems Juxtaposed**

Sociological research has more recently emphasized the experiences of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, looking at the impact of their transnational movement on race and racialization (Duany, 1996; Howard, 2003; Torres-Saillant, 1999). Jensen and colleagues (2005) contended that this immigrant group is becoming salient in research due to numerous reasons. First, they are the fourth largest and fastest growing Latino/a group, following Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Given their increased migration beginning around 1965, there are currently more than 1 million Dominicans
living in the United States (Howard, 2003). Second, the high rates of poverty experienced by this population have raised concerns about immigration and economic barriers. Finally, Dominicans who are usually dark-skinned Spanish speakers oftentimes have remained racially ambiguous in the U.S., and their location in the racial hierarchy remains unclear (Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Jensen et al., 2005).

Duany (1998) asserted that upon immigration, Dominicans are inserted into a racial stratification that does not coincide with the cultural understandings they bring (Duany, 1996, 1998). To illustrate, Duany described the experience of a Dominican colleague who “discovered” she was Black in the United States (p. 147). Additionally, these migrants are considered members of a large Latina/o panethnic group, at times presumed homogenous, given their commonalities in history, cultural traditions, and language (Miville, 2010). Duany (1996) has referred to such a complex racialized encounter as a traumatic racial experience, characterized by the distress of becoming aware of an ascribed racial identification other than Indio/a (Indian). As a way to understand the contradictory racialized frameworks between the D.R. and the U.S. (Duany, 1998; Torres-Saillant, 1998), their specific characteristics will be described next, followed by a discussion of the racialized experiences of Dominicans immigrants as they attempt to integrate into the United States.

In the process of immigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States, two racialized models are juxtaposed (Hall, 2010). In order to facilitate our conceptualization of the consciousness that results from transnational experiences of racialization, we first examine patterns of racialization that Dominican immigrants carry,
highlighting the similarities and differences between racialization in Dominican Republic and in the United States.

Rooted in a long history of slavery and colonization, the Dominican society has been identified as “the cradle of blackness in the Americas” (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 126). The island of Hispaniola, shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic, served as the port of entry to the first African slaves to be brought into Spain’s conquered territory, following Columbus’ 1492 voyage (Moya-Pons, 1995; Torres-Saillant, 1998). Contemporary Dominican society is made up of nearly 90 percent Blacks and people of mixed Black and White ancestry. However, despite its history as the territory that marked the “start of the black experience in the western hemisphere…no other country exhibits greater indeterminancy regarding the population’s sense of racial identity” (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 126). This historical backdrop led to the construction of a racially stratified structure (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Lemelle, 2002).

The decline with the plantation system in seventeenth century Dominican Republic played a crucial role in the country’s racial formation. By this time, the extreme decay of Spain’s plantation economy led to the development of a freed Black majority, and a breakdown in social barriers between the races. Racial intermixture has explained the emergence and significant presence of a mixture or Mulatto population. In this colonial context, Blackness was associated exclusively with slavery. Thus, conceptual space was constructed which allowed free Blacks and Mulattos (those of mixed ancestry) to move away from the circumstances of slavery (Torres-Saillant, 1998; Torres-Saillant & Hernandez, 1998, p. 135). According to Torres-Saillant (1998), it was through this
process that biological and social Blackness were divided, and social position surpassed skin-color or phenotypical characteristics as the basis for social status. He quoted Moya-Pons’ (1986, p. 239) observation, “white their skin gradually became darker, the mentality of Dominicans turned increasingly whiter.” By this time in Dominican history, Blacks and Mulattos had come close to the social location of their former masters.

Examining this history process through the lens of liberation theory, one may assert that by this time, those individuals oppressed by White supremacist elite had internalized the image of their oppressor. Freire (1971) outlined the relational dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed or the colonizer and the colonized:

…almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors or “sub-oppressor.” The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men, but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment, adopt an attitude of “adhesion” to the oppressor (p. 29-30).

Freire speaks of the duality that lays in the inner most being of the oppressed, who both desire freedom, yet fear it. This duality can be seen in the individuals as well as the collective bodies of the Dominican nation-state. While free Blacks and Mulattos cooperated and collaborated with the White against the country’s Black population, those still enslaved developed maroon communities (collectives of runaway slaves) of
resistance and organized movements of rebellion against their oppressors (Torres-Saillant, 1998).

By the early 1800’s, the Haitian revolution led to the abolition of slavery on the French side of the island, Black liberation in the Dominican Republic in 1822, and the unification of these two nations (Moya-Pons, 1986; Torres-Saillant, 1998). Despite public assertions that racism did not exist in what was labeled a “Mulatto nation,” the Dominican ruling class sustained White supremacist ideologies that urged separation from Haiti. A national anthem at the time proclaimed, “Raise up arms, oh Spaniards” (Franco, 1984, p. 160-161, as cited in Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 134), as the elite attempted to annex to Spain. The contributions of the African descent majority of the Dominican population led to continual resistance to Spanish control, who still owned slaves in Cuba and Puerto Rico (Torres-Saillant, 1998). Thus, to understand the full story of racial formation in this social context is to validate both a history of internalized oppression and anti-Black and anti-Haitian sentiments, as well as a history of Black affirmation, resistance, and cooperation with Haitian brethren.

On a final historical note, it must be acknowledged that Dominican racial consciousness consists not only of self-perception, but also of how they have been perceived by the nations with which they have been politically and economically linked. Nineteenth century U.S. observers hesitated to recognize Blackness in the Dominican Republic. They described the Dominican people as “made up of Spaniards, Spanish creoles and some Africans and people of color” (Courtney, 1860, p. 13 as cited in Torres-Saillant, 1998). As far as the twentieth century, during the Roosevelt administration, the
U.S continued to attest to Whiteness in the Dominican Republic. Two main themes were highlighted by U.S observers of the Dominican racial climate: first, the country’s support of racial democracy, and second, its magnification of Whiteness (Torres-Saillant, 1998).

The sociopolitical and racial formation of the Dominican Republic lead to the development of tri-level stratification, characterized by two essential elements: first, the ability of movement up or down hierarchal locations through marriage and/or social and ideological assimilation, referred to as porosity. Second, a pigmentocracy was produced, leading to the rank ordering of people according to phenotypical characteristics, gradations in skin-color, and social markers of status (i.e., education, social class) (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2008). It has been in this way that in the Dominican Republic, skin-color has been central to the maintenance of White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2008; Hersh, 2008; Mateo-Diclo, 1998). As a result, Dominicans do not often identify with racial terms, but rather cultural descriptors for color. Termed mestizaje, this is the belief that Native, Spanish, and some Africans came together to produce today’s Dominican majority population (Telles & Sue, 2009; Wade, 2005). An intricate vocabulary was been developed to highlight intermediate mestizo social locations. For example, jaba is a term used to describe someone with light-skin, whose hair texture and facial features would be more associated with Blackness (Bailey, 2002).

The popular construction of the Indio (Indian colored) skin-color label demonstrates the institutionalization of this ideology. The Indio category was further broken to indio claro (light colored), indio oscuro (dark colored), indio medio oscuro (medium dark) and indio medio claro (medium light) (Itzgsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000, p.
For dark skinned Dominicans, terms such as *Moreno* (Brown or dark-skinned), *indio oscuro* (dark Indian colored), and *indio oscuro oscuro* (dark dark Indian colored) have been created. The category of *Negro* (Black) has been stigmatized as only referring to those who are poor and of low social-classes (Sagas, 2000). *Negro* in the Dominican Republic is most commonly used to refer to their island neighbors in Haiti as well as Haitian immigrants in the D. R. (Bailey, 2002, p. 168-170). Three main categories for skin-color are *Blanco* (White), *Indio* (Indian or colored), and *Negro* (Black) (Itzgsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). The last census data including racial data in 1981, reported 16% of the Dominican population were *Blanco*, 73% were *Indio* and 11% were *Negro* (Bailey, 2002; Torres-Saillant, 1998).

This system of racialization and skin-color classification has developed through periods of harsh dictatorships and political unrest. For instance, the thirty year (1930-1961) regime of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo propagated racist/White supremacist ideology through institutional, cultural, and often violent means, such as media and educational curriculum (Martinez, 2003). Official racist polities towards Haitian immigrants nurtured a social climate of violent Whitening practices. The 1937 massacre of more than 20,000 Haitians living in the borderlands of Haiti and the D.R. was government-sponsored genocide (Mateo-Diclo, 1998; Williams, 1994). These sociohistorical events had a significant impact on the racial consciousness of Dominican nationals. Martinez (2003) has argued that the fatal conflict model between the D.R. and Haiti does not fully encompass the complex relationships of these two populations. He
suggested that little is known about the attitudes of ordinary, dark-skinned, poor Dominicans towards Haitians and towards Blackness.

Still, with notions of porosity, skin-color has come to be understood as a factor an individual has the power to transcend through the social practice of *Blancamiento* (Whitening) (Roth, 2008; Wade, 2005). Intermarriage also can lead to the acquisition of greater privilege. Moreover, money, education, and power can “whiten” a person (Bailey, 2002, p. 169). Wade (2005) described three types of Whitening practices, (a) *intergenerational whitening*, the practice of darker-skinned men and women seeking partnership or marriage with lighter-skinned persons as a way to produce lighter-skinned children, (b) *social whitening*, acquired through social class mobility, and (c) *cultural whitening*, granted through acculturation into Spanish heritage (Golash-Boza, 2010). These Whitening alternatives have been propagated as ways to transcend Blackness and its connotations (Cottrol, 2005; Golash-Boza, 2010; Roth, 2008).

Along side these cultural ideas, the public discourse of *racial democracy* has helped sustain a masked racialized system. Racial democracy is the political ideology that racial mixing, intermarriage, and an integrated social environment are evidence of a society in which racial oppression does not exist (Cottrol, 2005; Roth, 2008). Mateo-Diclo (1998) explored this idea of racial harmony by examining notions of cultural progress, such as the popular idea of *mejorar la raza* (improving of the race) through whitening practices. She argued that this idea overtly upholds the supremacy of Whiteness (Telles & Sue, 2009). This ideology has shaped many cultural definitions that are socially transmitted through socialization (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2008).
Roth (2008) investigated the impact of living in this social context, contending that while Dominicans reject foreign definitions of racism, the bias toward lighter-skin overtly disadvantages darker-skinned people. Nearly half the Dominicans sampled in this study maintained that racism did not exist in the Dominican Republic, yet reporting that colorism did. Colorism, defined as prejudice on the basis of skin-color or the preference for lighter skin over darker skin, has resulted in discrimination within communities of color (Wilson & Senices, 2008). In this study (Roth, 2008) darker-skinned participants initially reported not being treated unjustly, yet upon deeper probing shared discriminatory experiences with security guards, police officers, and housing authorities. Talking about their reluctance to share these experiences led to the revelation that in the Dominican Republic experiences with colorism are perceived by those affected as a sign of personal failure. Because color is seen as something an individual can control, failing to improve the family through whitening practices is perceived and internalized by many Dominicans as evidence of inferiority, and is accompanied with feelings of shame. Medium skin-toned participants expressed the most discomfort with the topic of color and their ability to access some privilege in the society, whereas lighter-skinned Dominicans were less reluctant to admit they benefitted from colorism. In addition, participants reported that understanding experiences as colorism or racism has meant being perceived by others as making excuses for their personal failings. They spoke of being blamed for having a “color complex” (Roth, 2008, p. 226).

Mateo-Diclo (1998) further argued that in the Dominican Republic, colorism is not the only construct to be explored, since racism is part of everyday consciousness.
Common sayings like “so and so is Black, but intelligent” or “a Black person, but very good person” are part of everyday language. Further, darker-skinned Dominicans experience discrimination in the form of less social acceptance and harsh social and economic barriers (Hersch, 2008). Some of these barriers include: social invisibility, cultural exclusion, political exclusion, exclusion from official history, or exclusion from a national identity. An additional obstacle is chronic marginalization, apparent in government neglect and the poorest living conditions (i.e., lack of education, lack of basic infrastructure, unemployment, low economic status, high child mortality rates, child labor abuse, homelessness, police brutality, and extra-judicial executions). Overall, the highest poverty rates and levels of government neglect in the country are those of darker skinned populations (Bailey, 2000). Finally, stereotyped ideas and images of dark-skinned people are dominant in the culture. Media portrayals depict men as musicians, athletes, or criminals, and women as maids and prostitutes (Dixon, 2005).

The implications of racism in a tri-racial system are complex. According to Bonilla-Silva (2004), tri-racial systems have constructed intermediate racial or color categories in order to buffer racial conflict. Through the division of groups on the basis of color and the propagation of racial democracy, unity on the basis of a common struggle is limited and perceived unnecessary (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2008). Dominican racial consciousness is constructed within this deracialized environment (Torres-Saillant, 1998). Therefore, Dominican immigrants bring along their understandings of racialization, color, and opportunity for social mobility.
A recent report by Dominican Human Rights Council of the United Nations (2008) documented some of the invisible aspects of Dominican history. Despite the emphasis on an Amerindian ancestry, according to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2007), the Dominican population currently is made-up of 8,200,000 people, 80% of whom were identified by the CERD as Black and 20% as people of mixed race. These demographic indices contrast with CERD’s previous report about the D R., involving data collected prior to 1992, in which the majority (80%) of the country's population did not fit into discontinuous or binary categories. Instead an overwhelming number of “mulatto” individuals of both lighter and darker skin tones were identified by CERD as the majority.

The United States’ long history of slavery, followed by the legalization of a system of Jim Crow segregation, disenfranchisement, creation of ghettos, and other forms of institutionalized discrimination (Dixon, 2005; hooks, 1995) make-up the social formation and maintenance of a strict racial divide between the dichotomous categories of Black and White. Song (2002) examined the racial stratification of the United States, explaining that the foundational racial relationship resulting from the enslavement of Africans, created a hierarchal structure in which White Americans were on top, and Black Americans were on the bottom.

Since the nineteenth century, social scientists have theorized and researched race in an effort to explain and measure human difference (Smedley & Smedly, 2005). Theoretical discourse has evolved from arguments of biological determinism of racial character (Hernstein & Murray, 1996) and notions of Black American genetic inferiority,
to more recent contentions on the social construction of race (Miville, 2010; Smedley & Smedly, 2005). Race, according to Smedley and Smedley (2005),

...essentializes and stereotypes people, their social behaviors, and their social ranking. In the United States..., one cannot escape the process of racialization, it is a basic element of the social system and customs of the United States and is deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people (Smedley & Smedly, 2005, p. 22).

These notions cannot be divorced from their sociohistorical foundations, as discussions of race in the U.S. not only continue to perpetuate the hypo-descent rule, but also the inferiority of Black Americans (hooks, 1995). According to “one-drop” hypodescent rule, the racial category of Black is assigned to anyone with perceived presence of African ancestry via their phenotypical traits (Bailey, 2000).

The ordinary racial consciousness of the U.S population has been committed to upholding the one-drop rule (Glasgow, Shulman, & Covarrubias, 2009; Omi and Winant, 1986). Research on the impact of the one-drop rule demonstrates the internalization of this ideology. In a qualitative study, Khanna (2010) examined the racial identification of 40 Black-White biracial adults, finding that most of these participants internally identified as Black. These respondents related others’ (e.g., Blacks and Whites) perceptions of their racial group membership to their own patterns of racial identification. In other words, their racialization influenced their pattern of racial identification. An emerging post-civil rights racial thesis has added that the U.S system of racialization is moving towards including a third racial location to its current binary hierarchy (Bonilla-
Silva, 2004a). Although not yet empirically supported, recent discussions of biracial, multiracial, White Latino/a identities, among others, have added to the complexity of U.S race notions.

Resources have historically been allocated differently on the basis of race in the U.S., through the maintenance of practices that unevenly distribute access to power (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Here, the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation and normalized violence against people of color has served to dehumanize, devalue, demean, and disadvantage those who are considered Black (Gold, 2004; hooks, 1995; Sue et al., 2004).

Modern conceptual discussions have called racism into question, arguing that it has been eradicated (Giroux, 2010; West, 2001; Winant, 2002). However, race scholars continue to observe that “white supremacy is hardly dead” (Winant, 2002, p. 33). The debate centers on societal changes following the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). To understand the shift in U.S racial practices, scholars have identified its subtler manifestations, referring to aversive racism, implicit racism, modern racism, new racism, colorblind racism, and racial microaggressions (Gushue et al., 2007; Foster, 1999; Sue et al., 2008; Winant, 2002). Finally, research findings have demonstrated that individual experiences with racism are linked to adverse mental health outcomes (Carter, 2007). Relationships between racism and race-related encounters, with stress, symptoms of trauma, depression, lower self-concept, lower self-esteem, lower self-actualization, and lower life-satisfaction, and other long-lasting psychological symptoms (i.e., depression, anxiety, hostility, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, somatizations) have been
found in lives of those victimized (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Carter et al., 2004; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999).

In sum, the juxtaposition of the two social models at work in the D.R. and the U.S. highlights their similarities and elaborate their differences. Both models are socioracial structures rooted in the histories of European colonization, enslavement, and exploitation. Both have resulted in the production and reproduction of racial stratification in which those defined as White are placed in the highest position of the social hierarchy. Yet, whereas race and color have played a critical role in the formation of Dominican consciousness, this racialized model has been historically presented as diffused, with a focus on skin-color and intricate physical and social characteristics (Duany, 1998), and sustained through notions of racial transcendence and racial democracy. In the United States, on the other hand, race and racism have been more clearly defined and overtly sustained as a two-tiered division between Whites and people of color. Dominican immigrants thus carry the constructs of their socializing context into the U.S. As they move to the United States and encounter a system in which race and racialized social locations cannot be transcended, it is critical to examine the racial consciousness that evolves in this transnational space.

**The Empirical Literature on Dominicans Immigrants**

The majority of empirical studies focused on racialization, racism, and racial consciousness has been conducted on Black American populations (Ponterotto et al., 2001). More recently, researchers have begun to highlight the racialized experiences of immigrants as well as people of African ancestry across the Diaspora. The empirical
investigations presented in the following section of this review represent some of the current sociological and anthropological contributions to the discourse on racialized experiences of Dominican immigrants. These studies center on patterns of self-identification and experiences with racism. Although many of these investigations did not examine the psychological process undergone by people in the quest for a racial label, these studies remain valuable because they identify shifts or changes in racial awareness as a result of immigration. This study attempted to address this gap by focusing on Dominican immigrants’ own understandings of skin-color, race, racism, and racialization in the context of immigration, termed transnational racial consciousness.

Much of the empirical research with Dominican immigrants has focused on the relationship between the labor market and gender in the experiences of migrant women (Guarnizo, 1994; Howard, 2003). A number of contemporary investigations have sought to address the impact of race and ethnicity on cultural adjustment (Duany, 1996, 1998; Torres-Saillant, 1999). Levitt (2001), for instance, explored the racialized experience of this migrant community, suggesting that transnationalism influences the development of several fluid and, at times, conflicting ideas of race and the racialized self.

Howard (2003) examined the experiences of the migration and settlement of 74 Dominican participants, half of whom resided in New York City, and half who were returned migrants living in the Dominican Republic. Unlike Levitt (2001), Howard (2003) argued that the transnational process of this population has “failed to lead to a full re-evaluation of racial awareness” (p. 339). Contrary to what may be expected, their racial awareness has remained intact, active, and often even reinforced in the United
States. Interviews with Dominican born immigrants in New York City focused on ideas of racial identification and racism, and although participants used a range of terms, the majority continued to adhere to the term Indio/a. Participants also reported holding negative images of Black identities, and they separated notions of Blackness from notions of Dominicanidad (Dominicanness). Although more of the returning migrants identified as White, the term Indio remained popular. In addition, a higher number of returned migrants identified with the terms Mulato and Negro in the island. For these participants, a minimum of 12 months in New York led to their revising ideas of race and racism. In short, they returned home with a wider recognition of their African Dominican descent. Both groups reported experiences of discrimination as result of language differences, as well as expressed racist stereotypes which led to maintaining distance from Black Americans and other Spanish-speaking groups. These findings demonstrate that diasporic encounters can destabilize racial perceptions. However, the specific racialized encounters and psychological processes that differentiated those for whom the pattern of self-identification did shift were not discussed in this study.

A study by Itzigsohn, Giorguli, and Vazquez (2005) examined the racial identification patterns of Dominican immigrants with a sample of 259 participants in New York City and 159 in Rhode Island. Participants were asked to respond to a closed-ended list of racial categories, an open-ended question about racial identification, and a question of how they thought they were perceived by American society. Responses to the open-ended question of racial identification, yielded a sample that self-identified as largely Hispanic (21%), Indio/a (10%), or Dominican (10%), with few identifying as
either Black (5%) or White (3%). Interestingly, responses to a closed-ended racial classification question resulted in an increase in the selections of Black (16%), White (11%), or Hispanic (20%) categories. An increase in Black self-identification also was apparent when they were asked about others’ perceptions of them. 36% reported that they were perceived as Black in American society and 30% as Hispanic. Participants were asked about experiences with discrimination. 17% of those who reported experiences of discrimination self-identified as Black, whereas 13% identified as Indio/a, and 26% were Hispanic. These findings demonstrate an awareness of differences between racialization and self-identification. The researchers did not examine the ways participants understood these differences.

Arguing that Dominican immigrants adopt a Hispanic or Latina/o racial identification in the process of adjustment American life, Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) used both quantitative and qualitative methods for studying first-generation immigrants. The majority of the sample self-identified as “Hispanos” (47%) or “Latinos” (17%). Further, this portion of the sample was found to have been in the U.S. for a longer period of time. Others identified as Black (23%) and White (8%). Additionally, participants provided the racial categories they adhered to in the Dominican Republic; 38% identified as Black, 40% as Indio/a, and 7% as White. Seventy-two % of the sample reported that Dominicans are discriminated against by other Latinos/as. Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) concluded that the panethnic identifications (i.e., “Hispano” and “Latino”) function as intermediate racial category as the category “Indio/a” did in the Dominican Republic. These authors did not question the meaning constructed by
participants who self-identified as Black, White, or Dominican, as this pattern of self-identification decreased upon immigration.

An ethnographic study by Jensen, Cohen, Toribio, De Jong, and Rodriguez (2006) on the relationship between skin-color, language ability, years in the United States, and racial-ethnic self-identification yielded similar results. A sample of 65 Dominican adult participants used two patterns of identification. The first was the use of a panethnic label (Latino/a, Hispano/a); these participants were lighter in skin-tone and usually had more years in the U.S. The second pattern included adherence to ethnic self-identification (Dominicano/a). Several of the participants who identified as dark-skinned Dominican recognized that others regarded them as Black in the U.S. How these participants negotiated identification and racialization was not elaborated.

Bailey (2001) examined the meanings that 30 second generation high school students attributed to race. These participants reported awareness of their European and African ancestry, yet chose national, linguistic, or cultural labels, and made distinctions between race and ethnicity. Additionally, Bailey (2001) contended that growing up in the United States made the second-generation more able to recognize their African ancestry and Black racialization. Another case study by Bailey (2000) yielded similar results. Language (Spanish) was used to resist racial categorization for those that experienced Black racialization.

Duany (1998) examined how Dominican immigrants restructured their racial-cultural conceptualizations. Three-fourths of a New York sample was categorized as Black, Mulatto, or Mestizo by researchers’ impressions. Most participants pointed to their
skin-color when asked to report racial group membership. Duany (1998) noted that Dominican immigrants to New York faced racial discrimination as a result of a stricter racialized system in the U.S. Despite phenotypical proximity, however, most Dominicans distanced themselves from Black Americans by emphasizing their ethnic differences.

The racial consciousness literature has highlighted a connection between awareness of racism and understandings of the system of racial oppression (Freire, 1970; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). In the last few decades, social scientists have begun to examine the impact of racism in the lives of immigrant groups, and have established a relationship between racism, life changes, and mental health outcomes of immigrant populations (Araujo Dawson, 2009). For example, Araujo Dawson (2009) explored the relationships between discrimination, stress, and acculturation with a sample of 246 Dominican women. Results yielded a significant positive relationship between everyday discrimination (e.g., being denied service in a store), major experiences with racism (e.g., job discrimination), and stress. Additionally, low acculturation was found to moderate this relationship. Low acculturation level may act as a protective factor, altering the impact of discriminatory on stress levels. Thus, when immigrants were less adjusted to the host system and less aware of racism, they were less emotionally affected.

Oropesa and Leif (2010) studied experiences with institutional and interpersonal racism among of 61 Dominican immigrants to examine the extent to which these related to racial markers (i.e., skin color). Results from an ethnosurvey indicated that 42% of the sample perceived discriminatory treatment by institutions. A positive correlation between
perceiving discrimination and skin-tone was found. Perceiving discrimination increased with darkness of skin-color. In terms of interpersonal discrimination, a minority (30%) of the sample reported experiences of discrimination at least one per month.

Hersch (2008) examined how Dominicans and Puerto Ricans understood racial discrimination. Some of the major themes that emerged from the experiences of the Dominican sample included a denial of discrimination on the basis of skin-color or race. Participants with longer time in the U.S. perceived discrimination on the basis of Hispanic or Latina/o origins as well as cultural and language differences. Many participants also believed that economic opportunities were equally available, and looked down at those who used skin-color as an excuse for failure to achieve. Interestingly enough, a connection between racial awareness and social class also emerged as a major theme. As Dominican immigrants entered middle-class status, they appeared to become aware that skin-color mattered. Of all the college educated participants who reported workplace discrimination, 75% were dark-skinned, 63% were of medium skin-tone, and 50% were light-skinned. These participants described an awareness of a social context in which skin-color related to occupational, residential, and economic opportunities, and social acceptance.

Overall, studies of Latino/a immigrants have noted a relationship between racial appearance or skin-color (Lopez, 2008, p. 102) and psychological outcomes, such that darker-skinned Latinos/as experience worse outcomes (Ramos, Jaccard, & Guilamo-Ramos, 2003). Several studies have highlighted a number of complex factors in the experience of racialization, immigration, and the internalization of racialization as part of
racial consciousness. Focused on the impact of immigration or transnational movement on ideas on race and patterns of self-identification (Levitt, 2001), these investigations present some common themes as well as inconsistent findings. In terms of racial self-identification, some studies have shown the potential shifts to racial awareness as a result of migration to the U.S. (Howard, 2003). Others point to the idea that racial self-identification with the discrete racial categories Black, White, or Indio/a, decrease after migration and with increased contact with the host culture (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). These studies also highlighted the internalization of Latina/o or Hispanic panethnic labels, in addition to linking perceptions of discrimination to this group membership (Howard, 2003; Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Itzigsohn et al., 2005).

Making the connection between patterns of racial self-identification, Jensen and colleagues (2006) revealed that light-skinned Dominicans with longer time in the U.S. more often adhere to panethnic labels, whereas medium to dark-skinned participants self-identified as Dominican. Others (Bailey, 2000, 2001) have emphasized the diffusion between understandings of racial and ethnic notions, and the use of language to resist Black racialization. According to Duany’s (1998) analysis, the process of restructuring racial consciousness in the U.S. may follow a similar pattern as to that at home, with a focus on skin-color, racial mixture, and distancing from connotations associate with Blackness.

Among Dominican immigrants, perceived racism has also been associated with skin-color, as Oropesa and Leif (2010) found darker-skinned Dominicans to be more aware of discrimination. Hersch (2008) added that perceived racism as well increased
racial awareness may be linked to social class. Finally, perceptions of racism also seemed to positively relate to stress, and to interact with acculturation (Araujo Dawson, 2009). However, despite the finding that lower acculturation and lower perceived racism related to lower levels of stress, this population experiences racism through institutional and cultural mechanisms that limit their access to power. Research on how the racialized experiences of Dominicans in the United States and the strategies needed for coping with oppression thus are called for. Research has begun to examine the contradictions between public racial perception and self-identification in relation to cultural adjustment (Duany, 1998). Yet, theoretical underdevelopment of racial consciousness, the process whereby individuals develop an understanding of racialized self within a context of oppression (Freire, 1970; Watts, 2003) remains nonexistent for application to a population socialized within a tri-racial system. This study proposed to better understand and explain the development of racial consciousness among immigrant Dominicans living in the U.S.

**Purpose of the Study**

Numerous psychological phenomena (i.e., internalized oppression, racial identity status attitudes, mental colonization, and false consciousness) have been found to result from socialization within racialized social systems. These constructs have been related to adverse mental health outcomes (Boykin, 1986; Carter, 1995; Cokley, 2007; Jost, 1995; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). Psychologists (e.g., Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2010) have also made connections between racial socialization practices, and the development an empowered self-concept, increased group cohesion, and a
positive racialized sense of self or racial identity (Cokley, 2007; Helms, 1990; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003) in the lives of oppressed populations in the United States.

For immigrants from the Dominican Republic, socialization around race and skin-color seems to emphasize intermediate notions of color, and the belief that race and racial classification can be transcended (Roth, 2008). Therefore, adjustment to a social context where race and racialization are more rigidly defined and where race cannot be transcended may mean that immigrants to the U.S. revisit the racial ideologies developed in the Dominican Republic (Duany, 1998).

The research literature on this process of racialized redefinition has mainly emphasized on changes to patterns of racial self-identification (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006). However, none of these empirical investigations have explored the ways Dominicans construct meaning or understand race notions, racialized experiences, and/or their social location in the racial stratification of either the U.S. or the D.R. Further, theoretical frameworks from which to examine the shifts in racial consciousness that result from transnational movement (Landale & Oropesa, 2002) remain underdeveloped. According to Landale and Oropesa (2002), different levels of awareness of self and the racialized social situation may become salient in one situation, and dormant in another.

This investigation proposed to contribute toward the psychological understanding of the complexities, conflicts, and tensions that may arise in the process of immigration, with a focus on individuals’ interactions and understandings of the racialized information of two sociocultural contexts. Using the qualitative method of grounded theory, this study
aimed to construct a rich conceptualization grounded in the voices of Dominican immigrants. In sum, the purpose of this grounded theory investigation was to understand and bring to light the process of racial consciousness in the experience of Dominican immigrants to the United States. Racial consciousness was generally defined as the process whereby people develop an awareness and understanding of the racialized self and racial circumstance in which they find themselves within an oppressive social context (Freire, 1971; Watts, 2003). The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What is the racial consciousness of Dominican immigrants?
   How do Dominican immigrants understand skin-color, race, and experiences of racialization, and group membership? What perceptions/feelings do Dominican immigrants have about their racial group membership(s)? What perceptions/feelings do Dominican immigrants have about racism?

2. How does immigration to the United States affect the racial consciousness of Dominican immigrants?
   Do Dominican immigrants undergo a process of redefinition of racial consciousness?
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study sought to understand the meanings and processes of transnational racial consciousness for immigrants from the Dominican Republic. The qualitative research methodology used in this study was Grounded Theory (GT; Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Heppner & Heppner, 2004). GT is rooted in the sociological research of Glaser and Strauss (1967), who developed a methodology of study founded in symbolic interactionism, where sociocultural contexts and social interaction are central (Fassinger, 2005). Thus, the basic assumption of GT is that meaning is rooted in people’s understandings of social interaction (Creswell, 2007). Because race and the developmental processes of racial consciousnesses are products of racialized relationships (Bonilla-Silva, 1994), this method allowed for inquiry into the ways that individuals defined and actively constructed their realities and notions of self, based on their own understandings of racialized interactions and contexts.

Context of the Study

The origins of immigrants to the United States have greatly diversified since the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments (INAA) of 1965 (Oropesa & Jensen, 2010). Following the enactment of the INAA, immigration from the D.R. increased. Immigrants from the D.R. now represent the fourth largest immigrant group from Latin American and the Spanish speaking Caribbean (U.S Bureau of Census, 2010;
Jensen et al., 2006). For the majority of Dominican immigrants, the metropolitan areas surrounding New York have been the primary destination (Oropesa & Jenses, 2010).

Numerous studies have documented the economic disadvantages faced by Dominican immigrants in the United States (National Research Council, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Dominicans arrive with little to no knowledge of the English language, educational credentials which are non-transferable to the U.S., and low work skills (Itzigsohn, 2008). The first waves of Dominican immigrants to the Northeast entered the manufacturing labor market. With the decline of manufacturing jobs, this population has seen a significant loss in economic opportunity. Although some third generation Dominican Americans have achieved economic mobility, most members of this generation continue to belong to the working-class. Those who have entered into the middle class tend to be among the lower-middle class (Itzigsohn, 2008).

Given that the largest concentration of Dominican immigrants continues to reside in New York City, this study was conducted here. One in every three Dominicans resides in Washington Heights in upper Manhattan, known as Quisqueya Heights or “Little D.R” (Duany, 2008; Hernandez et al., 2000). Dominicans also are found in the neighborhoods clustered along the northwestern section of Manhattan, from 110th Street into 207th east of Broadway. These are multiethnic working-class neighborhoods settled as well by other Latin Americans (Colombians, Ecuadorians, Salvadorians, Mexicans, and others), Black/African Americans, West Indian immigrants, and older Jewish, Irish, Greek, and Cuban immigrants of the 1970’s (Duany, 2008).
In addition to Manhattan, nearly as many Dominicans inhabit the ethnic enclaves of another New York City borough, the Bronx. The gentrification of upper Manhattan in the last decade has encouraged a new surge of students and young professionals residing in this area. As a consequence, many Manhattan neighborhoods have undergone significant changes, such as increases in rent and cost of living in these areas. Consequently, many Dominican residents relocated to the Bronx in search of lower living costs. Most of the participants interviewed in this study resided in the Bronx neighborhoods of University Heights, Tremont, and Morris. Many individuals have found lower income neighborhoods, subsidized housing, and a more affordable quality of life in these sections of the inner city. The demographics of the Bronx are characterized by a Hispanic/Latino majority and the lowest numbers of Whites of any New York City borough. The racial makeup of this borough in 2010 was as follows: 53.5% Hispanic/Latino, 36.5% Black or African American, 3.6% Asian, 10.9% White, and 5.3% other or more than two races. The majority of Bronx Hispanics self-identified as Puerto Rican (%?), while 14.5% identified as Dominican (US Bureau of Census, 2010).

In terms of economic demographics, the unemployment rate of Dominicans living in Bronx neighborhoods has long been significantly lower than the U.S. national rate. A total of 11.5% of Bronx residents over the age of 16 were unemployed in 2011, nearly two times higher than 8.7% for the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). It should be noted that Bronx County currently faces the highest rate of unemployment among NY-NJ-PA metropolitan areas. In 2011, 28.3% of Bronx residents lived below the poverty line, nearly twice as high as the national poverty rate of 15.1%. The median Bronx
household income in 2010 was approximately $33,000. Although these statistics are
typical of neglected urban centers in the United States populated by people of color and
immigrant groups, it is important to highlight that the 16th Congressional district in the
Bronx (which includes the neighborhoods of Bedford Park, East Tremont, Fordham,
Hunts Point, Melrose, Highbridge, Morrisania, Mott Haven and University Heights.
Yankee Stadium, Fordham University, and the Bronx Zoo) was the poorest of the nation's
435 present districts in 2000, with 42.2% of its residents below the poverty line.

Participants

Studies using a GT research approach have varied in their range of sample size
(Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Levitt, Butler, &
Hide, 2006). Patton (1990; as cited in Morrow & Smith, 2000) proposed that,

[T]here are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size
depends on what [the researcher] want[s] to know, the purpose of the
inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility,
and what can be done with available time and resources (p.184).

Morrow (2005) argued that quantity of data does not ensure quality of data. Morrow and
Smith (2000) suggested that a “sample size less than a dozen participants may be
justified if a large amount and variety of data are collected from each participant” (p.
218). This is true of many qualitative studies since diverse and large amounts of data
were collected from most participants (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Morrow, 2005).

Participants. In this study, the participants consisted of 15 adult residents of the
United States, recruited through postings, handing out of flyers, snowball sampling, and
word-of-mouth. I first sought out participants through announcements at the City University of New York CUNY Dominican Studies Institute (DSI), community centers, and local churches. The majority of recruitment took place during informal conversations with community members during the 2011 Bronx Dominican Day Parade. Most participants were excited about the topic of the study and recommended friends, family members, and neighbors.

Fifteen (n = 15) self-identified Dominican men and women who immigrated after the age of fifteen were interviewed. Migration after the age of fifteen was an inclusion criterion to ensure that much, if not most, of participants’ socialization took place in their country of origin. Eleven of the participants were residents of the Bronx, two resided in Washington Heights in Manhattan, and two others lived in Providence, Rhode Island (see Table 1); names of all participants have been changed for the purpose of protecting participant confidentiality. Ten participants were women and five were men. Recruiting men was a challenge throughout the course of the study. About halfway through data collection, I shared this dilemma with a male participant who helped by referring three male participants, two neighbors and one co-worker. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 61, with a mean age of 41 years. The majority of the participants were in their 40’s and 50’s. Efforts to find younger participants were made as the study progressed by reaching out to undergraduate students at through CUNY’s DSI.

Studies (e.g. Howard, 2003) have shown that length of time in the host country has an impact on people’s level of interaction with socializing institutions, and that the number of years spent in the U.S. may allow for deeper understand about the adaptations
and adjustments needed in a transnational context. Participants ranged in the number of years they had spent in the United States, from 3 years to 46 years, with a mean of 17 years. One participant relocated to the Dominican Republic and returned to the United States for 6 months to a year at a time in order to spend time with family and seek medical treatment. The age at the time of immigration from the D.R. to the U.S. ranged from 15 to 47, with a mean of 24 years of age at the time of relocation.

In line with previous studies on identification patterns among Dominicans (Duany, 1998), participants used a variety of labels for racial identification. Seven participants identified as Hispanic, seven identified Dominican, while one participant chose not to identify with the category of race. Demographic information relevant to ethnicity, skin-color, education social class, socioeconomic background, language, and the composition of their current neighborhood and that in which they grew up were also collected from participants and presented in Table 1.

**Procedure**

*Data collection.* Prior to the time of the interview, potential participants were provided with a written informed consent form, which included a description of the study, participant rights, and risks and benefits for participation, and ensured that participants had ample time to make their decision about participating in research. At the time of the interview, participants also were provided with an oral explanation of informed consent procedures, as well as given additional written copies. Time was allotted for participants to ask questions and seek clarification before, during, and after the interview. Participants were provided with my contact information at the end of the
interview if they had questions or decided to withdraw from the study, none did so. They were informed that they may be contacted in the future if further data was needed from them. Participants were given ten dollars cash for their participation in the study. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. I conducted all interviews and transcribed eight in order to remain connected with the data, as analysis and data collection occurred in a cyclical manner. However, as I began to engage in analysis and continued to seek further data, I used the services of two professional transcribers in order to facilitate the process of analysis and theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling, a process in which the collection of data and analysis happens concurrently, allows for gaps in data to be addressed, questions to be answered, and ideas to be developed (Fassinger, 2005).

An advanced doctoral student in counseling psychology with expertise in qualitative research volunteered to serve as a peer reviewer of data analyses. She was an international student from Jamaica who had an in-depth understanding of transnational issues. The peer reviewer had previous training in grounded theory analyses.

**Demographic Data.** Participants were asked to report demographic data (see Appendix A), such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, skin-color, year of immigration, years in the United States, education, socioeconomic status, and racial social context (neighborhood composition). Although a form was devised to collect demographic data, these questions were asked orally rather than in written form in order to begin to establish rapport and trust with participants.
Interview Protocol. GT scholars suggest the use of some degree of structure in the organization of interview questions to allow participants to openly share their stories (Fassinger, 2005). A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was developed based on the study’s research questions (see Appendix B). Although Chapter Two discussed assumptions about the construct of critical consciousness, the questions in the interviews did not emphasize these theoretical assumptions (e.g. false consciousness and internalized racism). In keeping with Charmaz’s (2006) suggestions for GT data gathering, a few broad questions were developed to invite participants to reflect on their views, meanings, and experiences with issues of racialization in the context of immigration. The goal was for themes to emerge from the data with regard to how participants understood these experiences. Prompts were minimal and mainly focused on process and elaboration. The first question, “Can you tell me about your response to the question of skin-color—how did you come to identify as x?” was a follow-up to the demographic data question.

Most of the interviews were approximately 30 to 45 minutes, yet they varied in duration, ranging from 15 minutes to two hours. Still, regardless of the length of the interviews, the responses provided by participants were rich in content. Some participants were referred to participate in the study by neighbors who were aware of the participant’s financial circumstances or unemployment status. These participants expressed a need for the ten dollars in cash. Despite seeking participation for this reason, these participants became engaged in the study and seemed interested and energized while sharing their experiences. Participants whose interviews and narratives were longer in length appeared
to be significantly more comfortable discussing skin-color and race. These participants shared vivid examples of experiences with racialization and discrimination within Dominican as well as U.S contexts. Most interviews were conducted and transcribed in Spanish. Most participants who identified as bilingual explained that they felt better able to express their thoughts and feelings more thoroughly using their native tongue. Five interviews were conducted in English, even though they could be better described as Spanglish (i.e., a mixture of English and Spanish), because participants struggled to find English words to translate some Dominican ideas. Most interviews took place at neighborhood locations chosen by participants, such as local public libraries, places of employment, or homes in order to make the spaces as convenient and confidential for participants as possible.

Data Analyses

A GT study may be conceptualized from a range of philosophical positions ranging from poststructural and postpositivist to constructivist or critical (Charmaz, 2006). This particular research inquiry was guided by a constructivist perspective, as recently introduced by Charmaz (2005). The constructivist grounded theory approach implies that knowledge and meaning are actively created by people through experience in their social environment (interpersonal/relational, community). Therefore, there is no one objective reality for any one group of people; rather, there are multiple constructions of reality (Fassinger, 2005). Additionally, a critical social justice perspective was incorporated in this study, with a focus on power imbalances as a result of oppression. This critical social justice approach acknowledges the relationships that both the
researcher and participants have with social hierarchies of power. It recognizes that knowledge is co-constructed in the interaction between researchers and participants. In order to acknowledge these relationships throughout the course of the study, as I engaged in dialogue with participants, the peer reviewer and I engaged in dialogue about perceptions, experiences, and our own processes (Fassinger, 2005). This approach highlights the importance of constant reflection about the embedded position of the researcher in the phenomenon or process under study (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, this study was considered reflexive, as my process was made explicit through memo-writing during the data collection and data analysis phases of the study, as well as through dialogue with the peer reviewer about possible codes, categories, and major propositions (Fassinger, 2005).

**Researcher Worldview.** I feel the need to share my own location and transnational positionality by exploring my worldview about racial notions, experiences, and identity as I embark in this study. As implied by adherence to constructivist and critical social justice perspectives, I have learned value awareness of sociopolitical conditions. I have come to understand that structural oppression/White supremacy and must be addressed by communities and individuals with urgency. I recognize that my beliefs, biases, and experiences fueled this investigation. I write this paper as a first-generation (U.S born) self-identified Black Dominican woman who grew up in a working poor family that migrated from the Dominican Republic, to Washington Heights and the Bronx, New York in the early 1980’s. My mother moved to the United States as a young woman in search of economic opportunity. Her migration was facilitated by her skin-color
privilege, since her Dominican categorization as “India-clara” meant she possessed enough “buena presencia” (good presence) to represent the country in the exterior. My own light-skin is symbolic of my dark-skinned father’s quest to “mejorar la raza” (improve the race), and what my maternal grandmother referred to as my mother’s step-backwards. Throughout my life my skin-color has played a significant role in my own social experiences, which have been quite different from those of my parents’. While my early encounters as an English as a Second Language (E.S.L) student highlighted the significance of my ethnic background, after transferring to a mainstream classroom I was met with external and internal dissonance around the meaning of my racial difference. My middle to high school experiences quickly taught me that my skin-color, facial features, and hair texture made me different from some of my Spanish-speaking classmates. This recognition was one I faced with confusion, as my family emphasized our Dominicanness, as well as embraced a Hispanic/Latino identification. While I was drawn to connect with my Black Caribbean and African American peers, I continued to feel like an “outsider” because they often described me as “Spanish.” Throughout all of this, there were intense periods of anger, sadness, and confusion about my lacking place of belonging in the community and larger society. Images of Spanish-speaking darker-skin people were not represented in the culture. My racialized experience was left unexplained. However, my parents and other family members appeared to be secure and trusting of the ways they had been taught to understand the meaning of their background. As I questioned the racialized world around me, my parents’ explanations were no longer able to help me understand others’ perceptions, expectations, and treatments. This
internal conflict when encountering acts of racism, has driven my quest for awareness as well as my yearning to aid others’ in understanding their own social context.

If I were to describe my racial consciousness, I would say that my race, my Blackness represent a U.S sociopolitical position in the racialized system. To me, this means that in the United States despite ancestry and heritage, those assumed and placed in the collective Black location within the racial hierarchy, face social and economic marginalization and oppression. Freire (1970) suggests that the struggle for social justice entails continually engaging in praxis, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 36). In recent years, the deepest levels of reflection around my own perceptions of Dominican racial issues have been inspired by interactions and conversations with Dominican nationals during trips back to the island. Their reactions to my contentions on race have taught me to be open and sensitive to a racial understanding that is different from my own. The experiences I have had in Santo Domingo have opened my eyes to the fact that when there I carry a U.S constructed identity and education, but that in the Dominican context I continue to be received as “India-clara.” This Dominican identification colors my experiences, interactions, and access to opportunities that are vastly different from those of my darker-skin brothers and sisters. There, I am welcomed into museums, restaurants, private social clubs, and government agencies without question. Thus, in the Dominican racial context I am granted a skin-color privilege that greatly matters, while in the United States I have been challenged to understand my experience through a lens of Black oppression. The contradictions that embody my experience fuel my desire to further understand these experiences.
In GT, theory is derived from an elaborate system of coding and conceptualizing. Traditional GT emphasizes conducting analysis of not only actions described by participants, but also the process they experience (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of GT requires engagement in multiple readings of the transcript to systematically code the major themes that emerge. The analytic process in GT has been described as cyclical (Charmaz, 2006). This means that data collection and analysis took place simultaneously in this study, as I returned for further data collection in order to continue to investigate identified categories or redefine emerging categories. This cyclical process also involved constant comparison of codes across and within transcripts, in order to exhaust codes and achieve saturation of data.

Analysis entailed three types of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective codes which will be described later. Glaser and Strauss (1967) outlined a number of criteria to demonstrate the reliability of a study. In each step of coding, the emerging theory must conform to the following criteria: (a) it must remain close to the data, (b) possess usefulness, (c) have conceptual density, (d) have durability over time, (e) be modifiable, and (f) have explanatory power (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the primary researcher, I completed the majority of the analysis, and the peer reviewer reviewed various levels of coding. We engaged in dialogue, challenges, and questioning, as she suggested modifications in order to agree on the codes and then categories that best illustrated participants’ reported experiences. The final step used to ensure reliability was consultation with an auditor. The auditor used was a faculty member of the Counseling Psychology program and the sponsor of this study. Her feedback, questions, and
suggestions led to further refinement of codes and theoretical categories. The purpose of auditing of data analysis was to guarantee that coding procedures were grounded in conceptualization of the data. The goal of this study was to represent the voices of participants effectively. Thus, the peer review and audit approaches provided opportunities to uncover and manage research bias. Fassinger (2005) suggests that such monitoring increases the trustworthiness of the data and grounded theory analysis.

**Coding**

The GT system of coding is the link between the actual data collected and the emergent theory. Through coding, the actions being described by participants begin to be defined, as meanings are progressively constructed. According to Charmaz (2006), two processes take place through coding—the gathering of theoretical and generalizable statements which transcend context (time and place), and the gathering of contextual actions and events. She states that it is this qualitative coding that “guides our learning” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46), and thus, begins to make sense of participants’ worldviews.

From the start of the coding process, the peer reviewer read all codes and provided her reactions, questions, and recommendations through memo-writing and in-person conversation.

*Open coding.* Open coding involved the word-by-word, line-by-line, incident-by-incident labeling of segments of data using short, simple, and active descriptors or concepts to depict and remain close to participants’ words (Fassinger, 2005). During this first phase in coding, using “in vivo codes” or the specific words of participants was crucial in order to remain as close and open to the meanings and experiences described
by participants (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). This phase of coding did not yet allow for the separation, studying, sorting, and synthesizing of data to take place, although the development of numerous ideas began emerging. Pragmatically, this process involved creating short, simple, active, and precise codes that allowed for comparison, and also illuminated areas where additional data might be necessary (Charmaz, 2006). As a way to remain close to participants’ voices, these codes were kept in the language in which the interview was conducted (Spanish or Spanglish). This open coding process resulted in a total of 2381 initial codes. An excerpt of a transcript with initial codes is presented in Appendix C.

Focused and axial coding. The second largest part of coding involved the direct selection of the most significant and/or frequent initial codes. Focused codes emerged as data were scrutinized and the researcher began to define the meanings across participants. This phase also involved comparing and contrasting data, followed by comparing data to focused codes in order to refine these codes. The aim of this phase in the coding process was to highlight and develop the most salient categories in large groups of data. This was the phase where theoretical integration also began to take place, as it is here that the researcher began to conceptualize concepts more abstractly (Charmaz, 2006, p. 59). Approximately 20 focused codes were yielded in this phase of analysis.

Focused codes were the larger themes that emerged and appeared consistently throughout transcripts, whereas axial codes allowed for the construction of major categories or key categories with specific properties and dimensions. Seven axial codes or key categories were identified. Each of these key categories was further described in
terms of their properties (characteristics of a code). The next step in this phase of analysis involved outlining the dimensions of these properties (location along a spectrum or continuum). The purpose of axial coding was to move from segments of data to larger themes. Describing the function of axial coding, Charmaz (2006) adds that these answer the questions, “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” of an action (p. 60). The answers to these questions allowed the researchers to understand the experiences of participants more in-depth. Here we were better able to conceptualize larger amounts of data, while adding an analytic frame to define the relationships between categories. Strauss and Corbin (1967, as cited in Charmaz, 2006) suggest the following three organizational components during this phase of coding: (1) focus on conditions, circumstances or situations, (2) focus on actions and interactions, routines or strategic responses to events, problems, or issues, and (3) focus on consequences, or outcomes of actions and interactions. An additional essential aspect of axial coding involved constant comparison, a method of comparing incidents to each category, in addition to integrating categories and properties (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Focused coding and axial coding was conducted simultaneously in this study. At this stage of data analysis, most coding was completed in English, while those codes that most accurately described the experiences of participants’ in Spanish were kept in their original language (with translation). Examples of focused codes and axial codes are presented in Appendix D.

*Theoretical/ selective coding.* Charmaz (2006) describes theoretical coding as the most sophisticated level of coding, involving possible relationships between identified
key categories. The purpose here was to conceptualize integration among categories, specifying a clear, coherent, and comprehensive link between the general context of experiences described by participants, conditions that allow change, and consequences (or outcomes of actions and interactions). The relationships between strategic responses and processes were made here as well. This final phase in the analysis was the actual construction of a theoretical frame. It entailed selective coding to discern a central or “core” category that brings together all other categories into an “explanatory whole” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 161; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Here, we were able to construct a story that included essential pieces of participants’ overall narrative and the ways these related to one another. In this stage, the emerging theory was once again compared to the data as a way to ensure that it was grounded in the voices of participants. The emerging theory also was compared to existing literature to further enrich understanding. Finally, as GT researchers have encouraged, in this study an analytic diagram was created to illustrate the emerging theory (Fassinger, 2006).

**Memo-writing.** This ongoing activity in the data analysis process allowed us to place analyses into social context. Charmaz (2006) advised researchers to stop and write down all ideas or hunches. The main purpose of memo-writing was to remain involved in coding and increase levels of theoretical thinking. Memo-writing served as a form of self-talk and dialogue with the peer reviewer that provided a space to develop ideas, explain, and deconstruct the meaning of codes and categories, as well as separate codes. Memos also highlighted patterns in the material and refined further data gathering. Memo-writing was most often done in informal, unofficial language, as these were for personal use from
the beginning of the research. Charmaz (2006) also suggested using raw data or verbatim material in memos in order to remain consistent through all aspects of analysis. Methods such as clustering themes and free writing also were helpful in getting started (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memos became more complex as the process of data analysis progressed. Memos focused on self examination were essential to data collection, transcription, and analysis because they allowed us to self-locate as we aimed to capture or “see the world as our research participants do—from the inside” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14).

Data analysis continued until an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied human experience of participants emerged (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Interrogating the meanings created by participants in relation to their transnational experiences with racialization guided our ability to discover how this group of immigrants defined their experiences (Fassinger, 2005). In this study, a core category emerged that enabled us to connect the various themes or codes. We arrived at this core narrative as we struggled to find the relationships among major themes in the transnational experiences of participants. Initially, we considered the contrasts of shared humanity versus external differences, but this did not seem to tell the full story. As we continued to return to the data, we realized that all of the categories appeared to be reflective of participants’ struggle to negotiate conflicting or contradicting notions of racialization. The following chapter describes in greater detail the findings of our analyses.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

An emerging theory of how Dominican immigrants who participated in this study understood issues of race, skin-color, racism, and group membership is presented in Figure 1. The figure represents Dominicans’ experiences of racialization within a transnational process. As described in Chapter Two, transnationalism is the process by which immigrants simultaneously maintain ties to the ideas and practices of their country of origin while also adjusting to those of the host culture. A core narrative, transnational racial consciousness “Negotiating Contradictions” emerged from the data, which is depicted on the bottom of the diagram. This core category is the central idea or phenomenon, related to all other categories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define the core category as the story line of the study. The story is the descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon, while the line is the conceptualization of this story (Pandit, 1996). The core category is further illustrated as “the sun, standing in orderly systematic relationships to its planets” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 124). Therefore, in grounded theory the core category is the main construct, encompassing the experiences described by participants. This main construct is embedded in contextual factors and results in actions and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 in Fassinger, 2004).

The top left box in Figure 1, labeled “Deracialized consciousness,” represents the dominant discourse on skin-color and racialization in Dominican culture. Orey (2006) defined deracialization as a political concept used to avoid any explicit reference to race-specific issues, while emphasizing ideas of racial transcendence. Social contexts that
support deracialized notions propagate strategies of social mobility in race-neutral ways. These ideas further support the development of a deracialized consciousness through the proliferation of deracialized cultural values in the midst of cultural hegemony (Torres-Saillant, 1998). The box on the top right labeled “Racialized encounters” represents direct and in-direct experiences with racism and racialization. These are mainly social interactions that highlight differences in treatments or barriers as a result of skin-color, and various other differences. These two conflicting experiences serve as barriers (deracialized notions) to or support (racial encounters) the development of racial consciousness, since they have a direct impact on psychological processes (emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal). Thus, both factors directly relate to the negotiations made as people attempt to adjust across contexts. The boxes in Figure 1 represent different constructs. Solid boxes represent the social realities in which transnational racial consciousness seems to emerge, whereas dashed circles (i.e., interactions and reactions) represent fluid and ever-changing processes. The arrows represent influences rather than causes. The three arrows on the bottom of the model each represent the three main transnational locations described by participants (i.e., more here than there, more there than here, and both here and there). That is, negotiating contradictions in the transnational process seemed to exist on a continuum that ranged from being either mainly immersed and connected to the racial consciousness of the Dominican Republic or the United States, or somewhere in between by negotiating ways to balance both racialized constructions. Themes from the interviews stressed the importance of negotiating conflicting or contradicting social meanings attached to race and skin-color, and the
zigzag line symbolizes these conflicts. The ways in which people engaged in negotiating ideas about race and skin-color were described throughout the interviews as participants shares meaning making, emotional reactions, and interpersonal responses—these were found to be crucial to and interchangeable with the process of transnational racial consciousness.

The model that emerged represents a dynamic understanding of transnational racial experiences, influencing the core category of “negotiating contradictions” that includes internal and external factors (i.e., social interactions, notions of self). These constructs seemed to be mutually influenced (i.e., greater interaction with external conflicts led to a greater internal negotiation, and vice versa). So that for instance, a woman racialized asMorena in the D.R. and Black in the U.S may encounter many similar messages about the self across cultures. Therefore, she may not need to engage in as much negotiation to understand her experiences. Encountering different experiences required people redefine their understandings of racial issues.

The various components of the model described above will be presented using the direct quotations of participants, emphasizing the importance of the voices of participants in qualitative research (see Table 2 for summary listing of model components). In this study I transcribed and presented the words of participants as they were spoken. Their words appear in Spanish, Span-glish, and nuances of grammar and accent. This was meant to remain as close to the participants’ voice as possible, rather than negating their speech and language by presenting these in Standard English form. I not only conducted these interviews in Spanish, Span-glish, and English because Spanish was my first
language, but because the voices of Spanish-speaking immigrants have been excluded from research. Hazuda (1994) pointed to the “invisibility of non-English speakers” and the lack of linguistic diversity in the qualitative research literature. I should also note that while my Spanish fluency facilitated the process of data gathering, my connection to the language also allowed me to understand deep elements of meaning that are often lost in translation. Lopez, Figueroa, Connor, and Maliski (2008) stated that when conducting qualitative research the language translation reproduced is expected to be as accurate as possible. They stress that translations should use the natural form of participants’ language and express all aspects of the meanings conveyed. In this study, six interviews were conducted in Spanish, five were conducted in English, and the rest may be described as Span-glish. However, categorizing them in such a discrete way is challenging because participants’ integrated languages and meanings throughout their interviews. English speaking participants used Spanish to convey Dominicans cultural terms which the English language did not allow them to access. Spanish speaking participants also made use of the English language to describe ideas which were difficult to describe in Spanish. More specifically, and to use my own experience as an example—Spanish as my first language has often felt more intimate, deeply personal, and emotionally filled, as the language spoke at home. Thus, I would characterize the interviews conducted in Spanish as filled with feeling of hesitation, at times anxiety and pain. We struggled to find the language to fully describe or verbalize ideas of race and racialization. One bilingual participant shared that using the term “Black” felt a lot less aggressive, insulting, and disrespectful than using the term “Negro” in Spanish.
Participants who were fluent in English appeared better able to verbalize their ideas around issues of race and racism. These interviews were longer in length and provided greater details. I generally believe that fully emotional meanings cannot be sufficiently translated from one language to another, yet presenting the narratives of participants is meant to express the relay the meanings and emotions of these Dominican immigrants as closely as possible.

Fine (1994) examined the tensions that arise in qualitative research on oppressed populations. She argued that research most often reinforces a colonizing discourse by “other-ing” participants. Fine (1994) quotes hooks’ words (1995), “no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself” (p. 151). While this paper conforms to the Standard English conventions of academia, I want to acknowledge that as a first-generation Dominican immigrant, I speak differently outside of academic circles. The direct quotations of participants emerged from conversations in which we both engaged in Spanish, Span-English, and a Dominican-New York English dialect. Presenting their direct quotations is an attempt to represent their voices authentically rather than simply speak about them, without negating the classed and cultural differences that exist in research.

In line with other grounded theory studies in counseling psychology (Romero, 2010), this study will utilize terminologies to present participant responses such as: “participants,” “most,” “the majority,” and “usually,” to help indicate responses endorsed by 10 or more participants. Terms such as: “several,” “a number,” “various,” and “some” are meant to point to responses endorsed by 5 to 10 participants. Finally, terms such as “a
few” and at times more specific numbers (“two,” “one”) indicate responses from 4 or less participants.

Core story: Creating a transnational racial-consciousness through negotiating contradictions

Participants in this study captured the importance of negotiating their understanding of two contradicting sociocultural experiences and notions of self. The interview questions, “What were some of the messages you received about skin-color growing up?” “Were people treated differently based on skin-color back home?” and “Do you think skin-color matters in the United States?” led to the most intricate narratives of personal, interpersonal, and cultural experiences in negotiating conflicting messages about race. As participants discussed detailed differences between “here and there,” and about the meanings each constructed, the tensions between growing-up in a context that minimized race-specific discussions, while encountering experiences with racialization, the importance of making negotiations became clear.

Negotiating Contradicting Cultural Scripts

Throughout the interviews participants described the process of negotiating contradicting cultural experiences. They vividly highlighted the differences between the cultural meanings around race and skin-color in the Dominican Republic (D.R.) and the United States (U.S.). Most spoke of the United States as a highly racially divided environment. Pati, captured this theme as she discussed racial and ethnic segregation in the U.S. in contrast to her experiences in the D.R. Pati, is a 61 year-old light-skinned Dominican woman who has lived in Washington Heights since age 15. While her features
were ambiguous and her hair was thin and curly, she presented as someone that would be racialized as a person of color in the U.S., despite her “fine” features. She was open to talking about issues of race and ethnicity and passionately shared her thoughts and confusions using Span-glish. Pati, checked-in with me for clarification numerous times. She spoke of there being specific racial enclaves based on difference in the U.S,

…after a while living in this country, yea. They try you know to, like everybody separate…You know, because you Dominican you over here, and you, because you Black stay in your place. That’s what I see now, everybody is like a dividing? Because they different.

Later on in the interview she shared some of her fears as she considered living somewhere other than her Washington Heights neighborhood: “Because maybe you feel strange to move someplace else... If I go to someplace else, oh my goodness, I’m gonna feel really, you know, nervous about it...” Similarly, Alejandro compared the U.S system to that of the Dominican Republic. Alejandro is a 39 year-old brown-skinned Dominican national with what appeared to be straight hair. At the time of our meeting he was visiting his parents’ Washington Heights apartment from the Dominican Republic. Alejandro shared that he moved to New York at age 19. He relocated to the D.R. during his senior year of high school. He talked about struggling to adjust to the U.S. system. As we started the interview, Alejandro seemed hesitant to enter the discussion. He had strong reactions to the questions of how he described his skin-color and race. Initially these questions as well as U.S. notions of race were evaluated as “ridiculous” by Alejandro. Learning about my own perspectives on race as a social construction allowed us to create some rapport.
With time he was able to share many of his experiences and conceptualizations in fluent English, using Spanish metaphors and cultural proverbs. Now a law student in the D.R., Alejandro first experienced college life in the United States: “I realized that this country [the U.S.] was problematic because it was very compartmentalized.” In his comparison of these two nations, he stated that: “Back home you can see segregation, but it’s not a segregated society.” Alejandro described a segregated society as,

In this neighborhood you have people of African descent. In this neighborhood you have … And there’s also a social psychology [of] emotional segregation. So if I arrive at a place and there’s a bunch of people like me sitting over there, I go and sit with them.

Alejandro went on to explain that because of his Dominican socialization he often defied segregation. He resisted the pressure of relating to others solely based on shared physical characteristics (i.e., skin-color). He understood the U.S as highly focused on collective notions of identity when compared to the D.R, “I didn’t want that. So I went back to D.R. Yeah, it’s much more comfortable there. Identity-wise. There I’m [Alejandro]. That’s it. Here, I’m a Hispanic.” He added: “… identity is a very, uh in the Dominican Republic I find it less asphyxiating than here. Over there it’s easier for you to develop a personal identity, an individual identity, not as much as a collective one as you do here.”

**Negotiating Contradicting Notions of Self**

Participants made explicit comparisons between ascribed meanings of *self* in the D.R. versus the U.S. Ramon, is a 33 year-old tanned complexion straight haired man, whose style of dress seemed traditionally Dominican. While he completed high school in
the states, he seemed insecure about his English proficiency. He asked to conduct the interview in English, but only used a few English words throughout the course of our two hour conversation. Ramon seemed very comfortable and social. He was open about his critiques of the U.S system of racism and classism. He was not at all as critical of the D.R. Ramon shared that while he learned to label his skin-color as *Indio* (Indian), this label did not hold much significance in the D.R. “*En Santo Domingo la gente no se identifica tanto por colores*” (In Santo Domingo the people don’t identify by colors as much). Along the same lines, Domingo, a dark-skinned man who also identified as *Indio*, suggested that “…*allá no hay diferencia de color, allá no hay color*” (…there [the D.R], there is no color difference, there, there is no color). He added that after years of living in the U.S., he has learned that “*Aquí sí, aquí sí hay mucho, aunque ellos dicen que no aquí hay racismo.*” (Here, yes, here yes there is a lot, even though they say that none, here there is racism). Racialization, skin-color, nationality, and language influenced the need to negotiate the ways in which many participants understood themselves and their experiences.

A few participants discussed internal negotiations in terms of racial, cultural, and color identification choices. Esther captured this theme:

Here in the United States, I’m Black, and I do believe that I’m Black. As far as the Dominican Republic, I’m *trigueña*, which is a mixture of three different blood types, I guess. But to me, and my family, I am still Black, not as Black as other people in my family, but I am still dark.
Esther is a light brown-skinned tall woman with long relaxed hair. Her facial features would identify her as person of African descent in the U.S. I met with her at her place of employment. She worked as the office manager at an university office. She shared that she moved to the states at the age of 15. She completed her high school education and a college degree in the U.S. Esther was both comfortable and fluent in English and Spanish. She began the interview by sharing that this was a topic she often talked about with colleagues in the college. She fluctuated in language and mood, as she talked in length about a process through which she learned questioned Dominican ideas, such as the *trigueña* skin-color label. “Why would I be *trigueña*? That color doesn’t even exist,” she stated. This participant learned about her racialization within the United States’ racial system,

Now that I’m here, I’ve been living here since, what seventeen years now, in the United States. So it doesn’t make any sense for me to say that I’m either *trigueña*, light *trigueña*, dark *trigueña*, what’s that? Once I got here, I was like okay, so there’s some White people, there some Black people, there’s some in-betweens, and I’m not gonna be an in-between, I’m either one or the other, not at the middle, even though my skin says something else, I don’t wanna be the one in the middle.

Many participants spoke of the need to negotiate or reconceptualize their understandings of self in racial terms. Pati, expressed complex reactions about feeling pushed to redefine herself or accept U.S ascribed racial categories. She first came across the Hispanic label in the U.S., and this led her to question and to resist,
…I never use that word back in my country…I am Hispanic you know…

But it feel like they, they putting everybody in, you belong to this group, you belong to that group…I feel so upset that I, I say I’m not going to write down which group I belong to.

Pati stated that she usually chooses not to identify racially when asked to do so in forms and government documents. Ramon said that in the D.R he is classified as Indio, yet here, he has been perceived as Black or African American. He expressed strong sentiments, “…ya tú, e tiene un poquito de color ya tú eres Moreno ya para ellos, o un Latino, como ello ellos lo quieren llamar” (…when you have a little bit of color you are Moreno (Brown) to them, or Latino, however the they want to call you). Ramon also shared that although he continued to see himself as Indio and mainly Dominican, here he was Hispano, which he defined as: “Hispanos somos todos esos que hablamos la lengua Española” (Hispanics are all of us who speak the Spanish tongue). At the same time, he discussed learning to perceive physical similarities between himself and African Americans, such as: “…que nosotros tenemos la piel casi igual que la de ellos” (…that we have the skin almost like theirs). He spoke of shared experiences with racialization, as he shared being racially profiled by police: “Aunque ellos [policia] no tengan el derecho siempre te pregunta, ‘Oh, tú te vez, sospechozo’” (Even when they [police] do not have the right, they always ask you, “Oh, you look, suspicious”). When I asked Ramon if he could imagine these experiences of discrimination with law enforcement taking pace back home he responded, “No, no no no, no en Santo Domingo no.” (No, no no no, no in Santo Domingo no).
An important distinction emerged between participants that ascribed to different skin-color labels back in the D.R. The few participants that identified as *Morena* (Brown) or *Negro* (Black) seemed to engage in less negotiation—both in terms of analyzing their sociocultural experiences and notions of self. Martinez is a 59 year-old dark-skinned man. He was open and melancholic throughout the course of our interview. He spoke of racism as an unquestionable reality. Although he was unclear about the meaning of race, he was very clearly aware of his social position as a dark-skinned man in the D.R. and the U.S. Martinez stated that he recognized that his skin-color was *Negro* from an early age. He did not make significant distinctions between his experiences here in the U.S. and those back in the D.R: “…*se que tanto aquí en este país como... República Dominicana, si existe el racismo.*” (…I know that here in this country like...Dominican Republic, racism does exist).

The labels used by participants to identify their skin-color seemed related to their experiences with discrimination here in the U.S. and the D.R. Some of these racialized encounters will be presented in the following sections. Highly racialized experiences appeared to support a heightened racial consciousness within a transnational context, within the Dominican community, and the society at large. Some of the racialization experiences faced by participants influenced the development of complex meanings, intense emotional reactions, and guided social interactions. However, there were various demographic and socializing factors that seemed to obstruct the development of a heightened racial consciousness. Deracialized understandings of the social environment seemed to influence confusion, dissonance, and problems with adjustment. Moreover,
adding to the complexity of this process, it was apparent that those who seemed to internalize U.S. based race notions also struggled to adjust to the Dominican world—they too experienced confusion and dissonance when interacting in Dominican cultural contexts, and expressed feeling like outsiders there.

As participants talked about the various versions of negotiation that they constantly needed to make in order to engage in transnational and cross-cultural exchanges, they expressed holding both deracialized cultural values as well as constructing critical understandings as a result of racialized encounters (i.e., colorism, racism, and classism). The barriers to racial consciousness and conditions that support racial awareness are described in the sections that follow.

A DERACIALIZED CONSCIOUSNESS

“La gente no se identifica” (People don’t identify)

Shared humanity. Participants identified a number of deracialized cultural values that interfered with understanding oneself in a transnational social context. Throughout the interviews all participants endorsed the belief that Ana Maria made explicit, “somos toditos humanos” (we are all humans). Ana Maria is a young dark-skinned woman, while long relaxed hair who had only lived in the states for about two years. She anxiously expressed various contradictory ideas from the onset of our conversation. To her equality existed in the D.R., alongside racism towards Haitian immigrants. She often laughed nervously as she struggled to explain her believes. Santa spoke most passionately about shared humanity across race. “Yo me he dado cuenta que no importa el color. Todos somos iguales. Todos tenemos los mismos derechos, todos tenemos los mismo deseo,
todos tenemos la gana de hechar pa’lante...” (I have noticed that color does not matter. We are all the same. We all have the same rights, we all have the same desires, we all have the wish to progress…).

Similarly, Martinez stated: “No hay una diferencia en que yo sea de piel oscura y usted sea de piel clara” (There is not a difference in that I be of dark skin and you be of light skin). Pati explained her understanding of shared humanity, as “We not different, we all the same. It’s like the apple. We have yellow apple, we have green apple and we have red apple, when you cut them in half, they are the same inside, you see. So that’s what we are. The human race that’s what we are. We are different color but inside we are the same. Finally, along these same lines, Ramon stated “Tu sabes que, en Santo Domingo la gente no se identifica tanto por colores. Como hay Blanco, Morenos… Para nosotros los Blancos, los Morenos, are all the same.” (You, in Santo Domingo the people do not identify as much through colors. Since there are Whites, Morenos (Browns)…For us the Whites, the Browns, are all the same).

**Socialized around silence.** Several participants talked about there being limited or no dialogue around issues of skin-color and difference throughout their developmental experience. While most participants recognized that they noticed differences based on skin-color at a young age, they highlighted a lack of discussion about the meaning of these differences within their families, communities, and education. Nancy a young brown-skinned woman with chemically process hair mentioned: “no yo no escuchaba nada” (no I did not hear anything). Nancy remained vague, short, and somewhat timid as we began the interview. I asked her if she preferred to speak in English or Spanish, to
which she responded (in Spanish) that the language did not matter. We proceed to have a Spanish conversation. I was unsure whether her short responses were in reactions to me, to the sensitivity of the topic, too her reaction about my asking these questions, or all of the above. I asked about this, normalizing the discomfort related to these issues. Nancy denied feeling any discomfort. Her socialization as well as Pati’s centered around silence. Pati spoke of her family socialization as she stated: “She [her mother] never say anything about color, you know, like, to tell you the truth, we never talk about color in my family, at least we, I don’t know…” Pati explained that there was no need for talk about skin-color difference, since difference was the norm. She said: “because… in my family we have people my color, and I have, like I told you, people like your color…” She understood that within a family diverse in terms of skin-color there was no need to highlight differences.

Alejandro talked about the reasons for the lack of public discourse around differences based on skin-color, ethnicity, or race. “It’s like people in Nigeria. Why would they be like, “I’m proud that I’m Black.” He explained that a nation that is racially homogenous did not need to affirm themselves and each other by using labels. He also intersected this lack of discussion to limited knowledge and limited education, so that “The extent to which they understand it will vary because of their education.” Alejandro further explained,

Like it’s all about culture in the end. With Dominicans, this is what happens. That we have such a Eurocentric education. From the moment we pick up our history book in the Dominican Republic, you have the history of the Tainos, the history of Spain, and then you have the colony. But they never talk to you about Africa. In the books. When you go to high school they don’t ever talk to you about it either. And when you go to
university they never talk about it either. So it’s natural that people won’t know that. Here you have the access to it. But people don’t … know it anyways.

At the same time, participants reflected on the meaning of hearing people discuss skin color issues in their hometowns in the D.R. Ana Maria discussed some of the every day talk she grew up with in her town. Others, like Margarita and Jocelyn spoke of hearing comments about skin-color in the neighborhoods. To Jocelyn talking about skin-color issues mainly focused on darker skinned people filled with discomfort. “Cuando uno dice Negro asi, or Black, I feel like, como que una falta el respeto.” (When one says Negro, or Black, it’s like one is disrespectful). Jocelyn is a young brown-skinned woman with straightened hair and noticeable African features. I met Jocelyn at the one bedroom apartment that her family shared. She presented as guarded from our initial meeting. In attempts to create rapport, I began by talking to her about colleague that recommended her to participant in this study. We then discussed informed consent, a period throughout which Jocelyn commented on my status as a graduate student. She congratulated me and shared her interest in studying psychology. While she warmed-up to me with time, she remained somewhat protected in terms of expression of affect. My own social location as a lighter skinned graduate student from an Ivey League institution may have played into this. At the end of our interview I asked Nancy whether she felt comfortable with me. She stated that she did, yet many reactions remained unspoken during our interaction.

**Buena presenca (Good presence).** A few participants talked about a Dominican cultural value of buena presencia (good appearance). To these participants, in the
Dominican Republic skin-color was not as socially significant as various other personal attributes. Alejandro described this notion,

…people’s focus on like, like more and more focus on…como tú presenta…buena presencia…(like your presence…good presence)…There is an obsession with how you look when you dress. But that should never be looked as something bigger or standing in the way of the fact that we are obsessed with, um you know like forwarding the race, or bettering the race, as we say it in Spanish. And those two things make us over appreciate anything that is light skinned or European…You know. Or or get as far as possible from the European, from the African roots.

Santa spoke of learning the physical attributes most valued in the culture at an early age because she and her sister appeared physically different. “...Ella era siempre bonita, que tenia unos ojos tan bonitos azules y que era la rubia de la familia y que siempre estaban dandole a ella complemento” (She was always pretty, she had blue eyes so pretty and she was the blonde of the family and that they were always giving her compliments).

Margarita described those that look better or “hold” good presence, as “buenamosos” (good looking) as compared to “personas que no son bien, que no son elegantes” (persons that are not that, that are not elegant). Leydi is a young light-skinned woman with natural long flowing curls. She looked like a woman who could pass as a Latina from any country in Latin America due to her ambiguous features. She confidently and very openly spoke of racism in the D.R. Leydi spoke English with a noticeable accent, soon into our conversation we were incautiously talking in quick Dominican Span-glish. Although she spoke of growing-up in a racist culture and being seen as dark in the context of her Dominican neighborhood, she added: “Ello allá ven mucho el físico, y como la gente es. Y ya por eso piensan que es mayor trabajado” (They over there see the physical, and how the person is. And because of that determine who is a better worker).
She elaborated, “O tambien si tú tienes el pelo riso, dicen o tú eres una trabajadora. Osea, la precepcion es que tu trabajas como tú sabes ...una sirvienta... allá te piden foto en tú resume...” (Or if your hair is curly, they say you are a worker. Meaning, the perception is that you work you know...a maid...there they ask for your photo with your resume…). Leydi now lived in Queens, in a South American community.

Additionally, Esther implied that social class related to notions of buena presencia. She spoke of being labeled “…una Dominicana fina, because tu habla muy fino.” (…one fine Dominican, because you speak very fine). As a result of her language use, she has been perceived as someone from a “good family.” “You were raised in a good family…Your family must have a lot of money,” stated Esther.

“Dichotomy doesn’t work!”

Challenging the binary. This category captures participant views of social groups, including the idea that their socialization challenged binary notions of racial group difference. Most spoke of a varying degree of social categories, ranging from three to multiple groups, classes, or categories of people. “...en Santo Domingo siempre, uno aprende la historia que hay la clase Indio, Morena, y la clase Blanca” (...in Santo Domingo, one learned the history that there is the Indian class, Morena, and the White), shared Ramon. He identified “tres” (three) groups rather than two opposing categories. Leydi directly stated: “Yo escuchaba que le decían a la gente de mi color, ella es India. Pero nunca decían ella es Blanca o ella es Morenita. India, ella es India” (I would heard people say to people of my color, she is India. But never she is White or she is Morenita.
India, she is India. Esther spoke of the social roles played by three groups. She stated, “...it depends on whether you play the role of White, Black, or in the middle.”

An important distinction emerged between participants who identified as members of a clear-cut racial group (Black/White). Martinez who identified as Negro, pointed to light skinned people and dark-skinned people as the only meaningful groups. Similarly, Mercedes who self-identified as White understood other groups as members of the same group. She noted, “To be trigueño [is] to be Black.” Mercedes is a young White woman with long straight dark hair. Although she seemed to struggle to convey her thoughts in English she chose not to complete the interview in Spanish, although Spanish terms were used somewhat frequently. Mercedes was short and conscience as she denied inequality in the D.R., yet she expressed strong negative emotions about the discrimination she had faced in the U.S.

**Focus on mixture.** Almost all participants talked about the significance of mixture or people whose ancestry encompasses various skin-colors and backgrounds. Some participants spoke of a middle-group, which they defined as mixed White and Moreno. Others spoke of the mixture of various groups, labeled as Indios or Trigueños (olive-skinned). For example, Ramon explained: “la mezcla Blanca, Negra, sale Indio, piel Morena” (the mixture of White, Negro, comes out Indian, skin Morena).

Additionally, many participants identified mixed people as the majority population of the Dominican Republic. “La mayoría a de nosotros somos raza India” (the majority of us are Indian race), said Ramon.
Jocelyn defined mixed people by stating: “...que no son Negro” (that are not Negro). Likewise, Coco a short light-skinned man with a curly hairstyle, stated: “Trigueños, como una persona ma o meno no muy Blanca si no como un poquito ni Negro ni muy Blanco pero si Trigueno. En el medio.” (Trigueños, like a person more or less not too much White yes no like a little not Negro not too White but yes Trigueño. In the middle). Coco is a community member who express financial need, sharing the difficulty he had faced in finding employment. Nonetheless, he provided a rich an honest narrative. He was open and direct. His affect fluctuated with the content of our conversation—as he laughed and expressed sadness in relation to the issues he spoke of. He spoke of inequality as a result of skin color in the U.S., and interpreted the barriers faced by Dominicans in the U.S. as a result of language difference and immigration status.

**Racial undertones**

*It’s color, not race.* Several participants talked about the significant of skin-color in Dominican cultural contexts. All participants were able to articulate and identify skin-color variations and identifiers. They spoke of these as merely identifying labels. Others discussed the deeper significance of these labels. Esther described skin-color as a social identifier. “It’s more color, I wouldn’t call it race, I would say like, what color would you define yourself, and you pick a color that’s how I see it.” Teofilo, a man who identified as *Indio*, equated skin-color differences to differences in eye color. “... *cuando yo fui a sacar la cédula allá, e. Y le preguntan ¿qué color son los ojos? Marones, negros. Y ¿qué color es usted, Indio? ¿Tú ves? (...when I went to take out an identification card over
there, um. And they ask you, what color are your eyes? Brown, Black. And what color are you, Indian? You see?). Another male participants suggested Teofilo participate in this study because he was currently experiencing financial struggles. He was a tall dark-skinned man with defined African descent features. In the U.S. context he would be racialized as Black, although his lack of knowledge of the English language quickly identifies him as a Latino/a immigrant. I met with Teofilo at a Bronx public library. He was eager to engage in the study, but he struggled to respond to some of the questions. He appeared to work hard to justify his Indio identification. He described his parents’, siblings’, and other family members’ skin-color. Teofilo seemed anxious as spoke of family members who were White and Spanish as well as those who lived abroad in Spain. He minimized the significance of skin-color, while at the same expressing negative views of darker-skinned Dominicans and Haitians.

Ana Maria explained skin-color labels as categories that highlight distinctions among people. “Como distinguir más o menos verdad. Tu color, el mio. Una distincio.” (Like distinguishing more or less right. Your color, my color. A distinction). Santa added to this point. She stated: “Pa’ distinguirlos, I think, to distinguish Haitians. Ellos dicen ‘ese es mas Negro que yo’.” (To distinguish, I think, to distinguish Haitians. They say, ‘he is more Negro than I’).

**Elaborate descriptors.** All participants made use of various descriptors to differentiate groups of people. These intricate identifiers ranged from vague to highly detailed. Although some only made mention of “gente oscura” (dark people) and “gente clara” (light people), other participants were more intricate in the labels they used to
describe individuals. Esther suggested that the identifier “Trigueña” can be broken down: “either Trigueña, light Trigueña, dark Trigueña” (either olive skinned, light olive skinned, dark olive skinned).

Ana Maria mentioned labels such as: “Gente Blanco, Moreno, unas mas claros, ve el color de la piel, tu sabes, porque en Santo Domingo no hay gente Blanco.” (White people, Morenos (Browns), some more light, see the color of skin, you know, because in Santo Domingo there are no Whites). Later on, she added categories such as “Prieto,” which she defined as “oscuo oscuro” (dark dark), Moreno (brown skinned) and “Panfilo” described as, “una gente que es como un Blanco detenia” (a person that is like White pale). Santa was also highly detailed in her use of skin-color descriptors. She described Dominicans as,

Los indios, los indiécitos, los indiécitos. Negro, Negro es cuando son bien Black bien color dark. So indiécitos son mas clarito más claro que los Blancos...Indiécita (pauses). Morenita pero no, let me explain something to you. Morenita is like a little dark...they call you Negra es que you are Black. Your skin is Black. (The Indians, the little Indians, the little Indians. Negro, Negro is when they are really Black really color dark. So little Indians are lighter than the Whites...Little Indians (pauses). Brown but no, let me explain something to you. Brown is like a little dark...they call you Negra is that you are Black. Your skin is Black).

Fluid definitions of race. Most participants had reactions to the term “race.”

Many participants struggled to conceptualized its signifiance, or identified it as an American construct. Some provided clear explanations of what this construct had come to mean to them, given their migration to the United States. A few related race to notions of skin-color, while others related race to national origins. Still some linked race to ancestry or descendence whereas only a small number of participants were able to share clear and
complex conceptualization of race. Finally, a few participants spoke of race as encompassing of language, nationality, education, social class, regional origins, and family background. Two associated race with power relations.

Esther described her understanding of race as one that developed in the United States. “As far as D.R, yes it is important, your skin color, but as far as here, it’s more like your race is what defines you. What tells them who you are.”

Ramon struggled to define what race meant to him. He defined race as a construct that related to skin-color, notions of preference, and race as nationality or country of origin.

... lo único que yo entiendo como raza es Moreno, raza India, raza Morena, y raza Blanca porque yo no...Vamos a decir eso (pause) se puede explicar como preferencia por un color tiene que ser. Verdad? O sea, o sea, como. Hay hay me, hay como te explico esa palabra (pause) Raza. (pause). Vamo a decir, raza eso es como un eh (pause) como el color de (pause). El color o la nacionalidad de una persona. Eso tiene que ser la raza. (For us, let’s say like the Mexicans, the race (pause). No because, the only thing I understand as race is Brown, Indian race, Brown race, and White race because I no...Let’s say that (pause) it can explain like preference for one color it has to be. Right? Or like like, how. Wow wow I, wow how do I explain that term (pause). Race. Let say, race is like um (pause) like the color of (pause). The color or the nationality of a person. That has to be the race).

Later on in his interview Ramon stated, “como te voy a decir, porque la raza, vamos a decir, ese significa como diferente país” (how am I gonna tell you, because the race, let say, that means like different countries).

Jocelyn distinguished her understading of race in Dominican contexts to that of the U.S. In the D.R. race highlighted: “....Indios, de los Españoles, o de los Africanos.” (…Indians, the Spanish, or from the Africans). As far as the U.S: “Pues, que aquí una la
A few participants connected notions of race to ideas about descendance.

Martinez spoke in detail about notions of racial ancestry. He described his family background as: “Una descendencia de España. Y otro descendencia de Afro Americano.” (One descendant’s from Spanish. And other descendant’s from Afro-America).

Alejandro talked about the relationship between race and power. He defined race as a problematic social construct. “It doesn’t mean anything. I don’t use it. I don’t. Ever. I don’t say “race.” I don’t say “racial. “I don’t say “racist.”” He further stated,

Like the etymology of the word “Black” and “White” and “race.” “Race” is a 19th Century construct used by people in the natural sciences when they didn’t have enough information to be able to know what we know today. You know? So there aren’t any races. That’s been biologically proven to be wrong. And, socially, it only has strength when you set different groups in different power relations. Powerlessness. Powerfulness. You know? Or empower- however you want to call it. You know? And even that flips with time. Who is power- Who’s [in power ?] and who’s not.

RACIALIZED ENCOUNTERS

Encounters with Colorism

Attitudes about colors. Several participants talked about growing up being exposed to negative attitudes towards dark-skinned people. Many described hearing negative comments, jokes, and insults towards Haitians and dark skinned Dominicans in
the country. When talking about ideas about skin-color, Jocelyn focused on dominant views towards dark-skinned people. She said that those with darker skin receive the most negative attention. “*Cuando uno dice Negro así, or Black, I feel like, como que una falta el respecto*” (When one says Negro like that, or Black, I feel like, like one is being disrespectful). To Jocelyn the terms Negro or Black carried negative connotations. She stated often hearing, “*Si es Negro, ya tu sabes, to’ el tiempo llamandole negro. No faltandole el respecto, sino dice este Negro!..Como si fuera un insulto*.” (If one is Black, you know, all the time calling them Negro. Not being disrespectful, but saying that Negro!..As if it was an insult.”

Margarita is a 56 year-old dark-skinned woman with long relaxed hair. Throughout the course of our interview she seemed surprised at the questions and the discussion. She was rapid in her responses, quickly labeling racism in the D.R. At the same time, she appeared mistrustful and self-protective as she spoke to me, even when she seemed to be holding back tears. As I validating the intense emotions as well as thanked her for speaking to me Margarita looked at me in intense silence. Her sadness was very present and her words were intentional and thought-out. She also talked about hearing negative comments about people with dark skin. “*Antes de de donde nosotros viviamos yo ohia a los viejos siempre comentarios... alla la gente le dicen ‘es demaciado fea, es muy morena o muy prieta*” (Before from from where we used to live I would hear the old people always making comments...back there the people say ‘she’s too ugly, she’s too brown or blackish). Margarita denied direct experiences with verbal racial assaults, yet her affect and her hesitation communicated the opposite. Leydi shared: “*Mi abuelo*
My grandfather was Black, and my grandmother would tell me that they did not like him in her family. They never cared for him because of that, because he was Black…They say it. Clear. What are you doing with a Moreno so ugly. Even the Blacks say something about Blacks).

Finally, Esther talked about the connotations associated with “Mulato,”

Like mulato, I used to hear that, and that’s a lot, a lot worse than being Black, because Mulat, most of the people use to derogate like, a mule. That’s how they compared, so calling you Mulato was worse than just calling you Black. It was more like an insult…between being Black, but not just being Black, a mule was representing, it was like a mule or something like that, I don’t know some weird stuff.

**Hierarchy of skin colors.**

Participants also pointed to some skin-color being perceived as better than others. Coco spoke of as Indios as “normales” (normals); while according to Martinez described Indios and lighter-skinned Dominican as a group that is granted more rights or privileges: “él de piel clara tiene los derechos de todo y que... por encima del de piel oscura” (the light-skinned has more rights of all and that...above the dark-skinned). Similarly, Esther suggested

There are certain times that its better for you to be light skinned …if you were Black you were supposed to have nappy, kinky hair. Your family,
your parents would be doing all the dirty jobs, therefore you were
supposed to be really really poor.

Esther also spoke in detail about the experiences of those in the middle position. She stated:

The middle kids, were like the ‘weird’ kids (laughs), because by being in
the middle you’re not one thing not the other, you have like a little bit of
both. So, in front of the White kids, yea, you were Black, but in front of
the Black kids you were not ‘Black,’ you were not White, but you were a
little bit higher than them.

**Discrimination towards dark-skinned people.** A number of participants talked
about witnessing or experiencing discrimination in the Dominican and linked these to
issues of skin color. Most participants openly talked about anti-Haitianism in the D.R.
Ramon stated. “… a los Haitianos si lo tratan ya diferente” (… the Haitians yes they are
treated differently). There was a range in discussion around these issues, as some
participants pointed to the existence of *antiHaitianismo*, others mentioned negative
treatment towards dark-skinned people in general, and others elaborated on acts of overt
discrimination towards dark-skinned people. Only a few shared their own
experiences of colorism or racism.

Esther openly discussed the discriminatory views she was socialized around and
experiences with colorism in the D.R. She said, “Yea, you’re Black, you’re the Black
sheep’ someone would say, ‘the Black sheep of the family.’ She recalled: “I remember
when I was little, like, there was a couple of blonde girls…because they were blonde
everybody else was brunette, so they demanded to be treated different ...” Along the lines of differences in treatment, Ana Maria talked about racism in the D.R. She shared that “si yo quiero entra a donde tú puedes entra y ami no me quieren aceptar y ati te dejan entra, porque alla existe eso mucho” (if I want to enter where you can enter and for me, they won’t want to accept me and for you, they let you enter, because that exists there that a lot). A number of participants talked about skin-color having an impact on access to opportunity. Martinez stated:

> En muchísimas compañías hay personas de piel clara y muchas veces da más oportunidades que es, qu, del piel oscura. Menosprecian persona muy- muy- bien Negra... siempre se ven Blanco, de piel clara y de piel oscura, siempre le dan preferencia al de piel clara. Sí. (In many companies there are people with light skin and many times that gives them more opportunities than those with dark skin. They look down on people real… real Negra/Black…also you see White, light skin and dark skin, always they give preference to light skin. Yes.)

Only two participants shared having direct experiences with racism. Alejandro expressed as great deal of conflict as he first minimized the significance of racism in the D.R, and later on spoke in great detail about direct experiences with racism as a young child. He also shared being discriminated against in social and educational settings.

> And other experiences I had in Santo Domingo, you know. Like teachers saying this stupid, really racist stuff…the teachers would take more liberty with the pain, with the physical pain, inflicting methods of coercion and teaching, with the darker skinned kids. So, I had like a counting rule, where if they first hit the darker kid in the room, then I would begin a countdown to me. So I counted how many people darker than me were in between the darkest kid that just got whipped and myself. And that’s how many whippings were before I would get whipped. Because they would give themselves more liberty using physical pain with kids who were darker than lighter skinned kids. I noticed it.
Color is classed. A number of participants talked about the impact that skin-color has on people’s opportunities for economic mobility. Alejandro, who shared being assumed poor in the D.R. as a result of his brown skin-color, talked about the various ways in which darker-skinned Dominicans are economically oppression: “… it [color] has an impact on everything. Education. Economics. Access to wealth. Access to information. Uh, the quality of education itself that you get, on top of the fact that you get or you don’t get an education.” He linked awareness of the racialized system of the Dominican Republic to social class. “The extent to which they understand it will vary because of their education” He added, “Some people do recognize themselves as that [people of African descent] over there. But, of course, like here? They’re the minority. And it’s a small minority that, like it’s looked upon as like hippy-ish. You know? Lefty-ish. Dreamy-ish. Idealistic-ish. Santa is a 45 year-old medium brown-skinned woman with blonde and relaxed hair. She spoke in a lively Span-glish in an open and energetic manner. Santa was recruited by another participant. She expressed being pleased to help me complete my school requirement. She was explicit about wanting to be as honest as possible. Santa lived in a South Bronx Puerto Rican and Black community. She shared developing an awareness of discrimination in the context of her poor and working class neighborhood. She also spoke of social class differences as drastically different in the D.R.

Lo que si veo diferencia si es de la economia. De quién esta mas poderoso quién no esta más poderoso. Quién tiene y quién no tiene. Tú sabe, quién es el más pobre, lo que tienen más, lo hechan a un lado. Por que no son
parte de su sociedad. (What I see as difference, yes, is economic. Who has more power and who has less power. Who has and who does not have. You know, who is the poorest, those who have more, they set them aside. Because they are not part of the society).

In terms of access to power, Martinez stated:” Que él de piel clara tiene los derechos de todo y que, por encima del de piel oscura” (That the light skinned has more rights of all and that above the dark skin). One participant also linked skin-color, the notion of “mejorar la raza” (forwarding the race), to social class mobility. Alejandro shared:

This guy had a Masters degree. He was the nicest guy in the world. Hard working. Intelligent. Spoke English. And he went and looked for this illiterate campesinita (peasant girl) from like the campito (country-side), near the town where we lived, just because she was blond, natural blondish Dominican with light blue eyes. That’s the only reason... ‘Está levantando la raza’ (Uplifiting the race).

A few participants such as Ramon related the exploitation of Haitians in the D.R. to poverty and oppression. Martinez suggested that: “a los de piel oscura eran los que mantenían como esclavos, pues, así eso todavía existen” (those with dark skin were maintained as slaves, well, that still exists).

U.S Racialization

Immigration & the American Dream. The participants talked about economic need and the desire for social mobility as their main reason for immigrating to United States. Immigration was framed as access to economic opportunity. Jocelyn spoke about
her expectations, “Si, yo pensé que todas las oportunidades hivan hacer diferentes, más fácil. Algunas cosas fueron así como yo pensé, pero otros no” (Yes, I thought that all the opportunities would be different, easier. Some were like I thought, others not).

Ramon described his parents’ reasons for immigrating as “el sueño Americano” (the American dream). Teolifo talked about economic reasons for moving as well:

“Bueno, yo decidí mudarme a los Estados Unidos por la economía allá. Porque ya la economía allá estaba, estaba demasiado mala. El dinero no alcanzaba a uno para nada. No había. Había poco trabajo.” (Well, I decided to move to the United States due to the economy there. Because the economy there was, was too bad. The money was not enough for anything. There was no…there was very little work."

Santa is one participant who vividly captured this experience: “Yo allá era demasiado pobre. Cuando llegamos aquí teníamos agua to’ el tiempo, luz todo el tiempo. Comida todo el tiempo.” (there I was too poor. When we arrived here we had water all time, light all the time…Food all time).

**Facing U.S. racial categories.** Participants talked about first encountering racial categorization upon moving to the United States. They were introduced to racial classification and identification as Black, White, and/or Hispanic/Latino through U.S forms and documents as well as through social interactions in U.S social settings (i.e., agencies, schools). Participants made use of diverse and at times fluid labels for racial identification. For most, their skin-color and race represented distinct parts of their identity. Most talked about feeling connected to a larger racial group (Latino/Hispanic).
This racial identification was usually linked to language, and ideas about nationality Spanish ancestry.

A few participants questioned the meaning of panethnic labels. Pati questioned the meaning of the Latino label and its importance in terms of identification.

Yea, well, when I started filling out paper for college and all the social security whatever, you know I said Hispanic, what that mean? Because I never heard that word in my country so I was, I ask what Hispanic mean? So you could tell me what Hispanic mean to you? Because, I don’t know, sometimes I feel like leaving it on blank.

Nancy, who moved to the U.S during her adolescent years, talked about learning about the term Hispanic while in high school. She defined this as, “Hispano, como que significa que hablo Español” (Hispanic, like that signifies that I speak Spanish). She expressed feeling connected to this group membership. “Hispanos, hay es lindo... hay si es un orgullo, pueden decir Hispanics, todos los que hablan Espanol y uno se siente como alegre, es algo bello (laughs)” (Hispanics, oh it’s nice...oh yes its a pride, they can say Hispanics, all that speak Spanish and one feels like joy, it’s something beautiful). Nancy continued to identify as India, and learned that her racial group membership was Hispanic.

A few participants shared the process they underwent as they entered the U.S system of racial classification. Esther talked moving from identifying with the skin-color Trigueña to Black. She shared that in most social service agencies she struggled to self-classify. She talked about learning to self-identify as Hispanic, yet expressed not feeling
particularly proud this group membership since it did not capture her identity as Black Dominican, nor is it an identity that is recognized in the D.R. She explained,

…they either ask you for your race, you’re either White, Hispanic, Black, or Native American, so those three are like closed out, but since you come from a Spanish-speaking country, you have to put yourself as a Hispanic, so like they narrow it down for you. If you speak Spanish this is where you belong, put it there…cause I think its interesting, cause its usually written “White, non-Hispanic” “Black, non-Hispanic” and “Hispanic” and…they don’t put a color to that, because White and Black they’re telling you are separate from Hispanic… I guess I was born in it, I guess I have to go with flow (laughs)… Yea that’s how I feel cause I was like, if I was like proud that means that like, I feel glad that they neglect me when I go to D.R., that they make me feel like I don’t belong there and that’s how it is.

**Encountering racism.** Most participants talked about encounters with racism in the United States. They related these encounters to skin-color, racial background, and language differences. Jocelyn described racism as: "*Blanco a Negro, que no lo toleran a los Negros. Como los Blanco tratan a los Negros, haci con lejanía, algunos.*" (White toward Black, that they don’t tolerate the Blacks. Like the Whites treat the Blacks, like that like distant, some). Later on she added: "*Si, uno tambien es Hispano si, cualquiera que sea Moreno si, son todos lo mismo. Diferente a, gente Blanca o clara.*" (Yes, one also is Hispanic, yes, anyone that is Brown yes, are all the same. Different from White people or light).

Santa captured this theme as she talked about becoming aware of overt acts of racism in the U.S. She discussed the way in which she became aware of racism:

*Yo empecé a darme cuenta después que ya tenía aquí como algunos años, viendo como lo tratan. Como la gente habla de la gente, de los Morenos aquí, que los, puedo decir la palabra? Que los Black, ‘lo Black, lo Black.’ ....aquí hay mucha diferencia con la gente Latina, con los American Black, y los Americanos ojos azules. .... Pero yo llegue, yo estaba inocente*
Martinez spoke about racism in the U.S. He was aware of having civil rights, and also aware of the limited access granted to darker-skinned people. “Todavía está. Hay lugares que el del piel clara todavía que el de piel oscura no tiene los mismos derechos que tiene el de piel clara.” (It exists. There are places that light skinned people still that dark skinned people do not have the same rights as the light skinned).

Martinez, Coco, and Ramon talked about experiences with racial profiling. Coco talked spoke of being perceived as a criminal. “Tu ve, a vece creen hasta que tú ere un delicuente diria yo” (You see, at times they even look at you and believe that you are a criminal I would say). Ramon spoke in detail about experiences with the police. He recalled being stopped by police officers. “Aunque ellos no tengan el derecho siempre te pregunta, Oh, tu te vez, sospechoso”(Even if they don’t have the right they always ask you, ‘Oh, you look suspicious’).

In line with other forms of institutional racism, Jocelyn stated: Como the Whites consiguen trabajo donde sea, y a los Hispanos lo cojen un poco en cuenta tu sabes y entonces a los Negros también le hacen la vida difícil para un trabajo” (Like the Whites find work anywhere, and Hispanics are only a bit recognized and then also for Blacks they make their lives impossible for a job). Ramon also talked about numerous experiences with racism at places of employment in the U.S. For instance,
Cuando yo estaba trabajando en esa compañía…Pero el me dice ami, ‘oh, que tu haces por aquí.’ ¿Cómo que que yo hago por aquí? Yo trabajo aquí, dame la razón por la que yo no puedo cruzar por aquí,’ tu me entiendes. Pero es que la razón es porque el no quiere saber de los Hispanos.  (When I was working for that company…But he [coworker] would say to me, ‘oh, what are you doing here’ ‘What do you mean what am I doing here? I work here, give me a reason that I can’t pass through here,’ you understand me. But it’s that the reason is because he does not want anything to do with Hispanics!)

A number of participants shared experiences with U.S racism which they attributed to being Latina/Hispanic, being an immigrant, and speaking a different language. Mercedes recognized discrimination in the U.S by noticing how she and her family were perceived. “Like you go to a different place that you never been before that just American people, they look at you… they look at you like what the hell you doing here.” Moreover she spoke an impact on access to opportunity in the U.S, “They think because just we Hispanics they have lower expectations, especially in the studies and all of that.” Nancy saw the similarities in her experiences to those of other immigrants to the United States. “…racismo es pal otro país… como para México, hay es el que yo veo como el racismo” (…racism is for other country…like for Mexico, there is where I see like the racism).

**INTERACTIONS AND REACTIONS**

*Racialized Interactions.* Most participants discussed social interactions that relayed direct and indirect messages pertaining to notions of difference, race, skin-color, and the location of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the U.S. These interactions ranged from infrequent to frequent social contact with White Americans, Black Americans, other groups of color such as Native Americans, and other Latinos/as including within group
interactions within the Dominican community. These social interactions were thus socialization experiences that heightened understanding of both the Dominican and U.S system of racialization. Some of these interactions conflicted with socialization experiences in the D.R. Interactions in which participants felt they were treated as different, treated as outsiders, treated as minority, as well as those in which they recognized greater or less access to opportunity contradicted previous social experiences in the D.R. Only one participant saw his experiences as clearly consistent in both the U.S. and D.R.

A few participants, such as Mercedes, described public social interactions in which she felt stereotyped and looked down upon by “White American yes.” These experiences conflicted with her experiences back home. Ramon also spoke of social interactions in which he had been assumed to be Moreno (Brown) by White and Black Americans. He said, “Aveces uno entra a un sitio donde hay dos o tres Morenos, y los Morenos desde que te ven ‘oh’ y te hablen y cree que tu es Moreno no ve.”(Sometime one enters into a place where there are two or three Morenos (Browns), and the Morenos as soon as they see you, ‘oh’ and they talk to you and think that you are Moreno, see).

Esther also spoke of interactions with Latinos in the U.S. as racialized encounters. “Someone thought that I was like an African American I guess. And she started saying a whole bunch of mean things about me, and when I said something in Spanish, she wanted to die.”

Nancy as well as Jocelyn have limited their social interactions outside of the Dominican community as a result of challenges with the English language. Jocelyn expressed much
conflict as she spoke of learning at school as well observing street interactions through which she learned about race: “Aquí por ejemplo cuando ve todas esas situaciones de los Negros, ayer ami me quitaron un telefono, un Negro si entonces tu sabes, como que depues uno se confunde…” (Here for example, when you see all these situations with Blacks, yesterday my phone was stolen, a Black yes, you know, like that confuses you).

Santa spoke of learning about U.S. notions of race through exposure to various socialization methods. “En los trabajos, en la calle, en los trenes, en la television. En todas partes hay un bombardeo de racistas” (At work, on the streets, on the trains, on television. In all places there is a bombardment of racists). Upon moving to the U.S., her interactions with other Dominicans communicated messages about Black Americans. “…la manera que la gente hablaban de ello. Que ‘cuida con ese Moreno, cuidao con ese Moreno,’ que tu sabe, que ‘agarrate la cartera, porque es Moreno’ (...the way that people talked about them. That ‘be careful with that Moreno, be careful with that Moreno,’ that you know, that ‘hold on to your purse because of that Moreno’).

Both Ana Maria and Margarita spoke of racialized social interactions in the D.R. As mentioned in previous sections, they spoke of experiences with rejection, such as not being allowed into certain social settings as a result of their darker skin. In contrast, coming into contact with African Americans working in government offices and social settings in the U.S. contradicted their expectations.

Martinez was the only participant who described his social interactions in the U.S as consistent with those of the D.R. He talked about witnessing overt displays of racism, “Lo he visto aquí y lo he visto en Santo Domingo. Realmente.” (I have seen it here and
seen it in Santo Domingo. Really). He described confrontational situations in which dark-skinned people attempt to contend discriminatory treatment, but are put down by light skinned people.

*Se puede poner e agresivo. Tal vez dice, “Mira, tú estás equivocado porque tú y yo somos igualitos…” Tal vez esta persona se va sentir como, en su mente, puede pensar de que, “No, no, tú estás loco. Yo soy de piel clara, “no igual” o lo que sea… tú eres Negro.”* (It can become aggressive. Maybe he says, “Look, you are mistaken because you and I are equal… Maybe that person will feel like like, in his mind, can think that, “No, no, you are crazy. I am of light skin, “not equal” or whatever…you are Black).

**Meaning Making.** Several participants talked openly about the meanings they have constructed in attempts to understand their varying and conflicting experiencing with racialization, ideas around skin-color, and social difference. A few participants understood their experiences as in the United States to be a result of racism. Coco, Domingo, Mercedes, and Martinez interpreted their experiences in this way. Coco shared realizing that, “*Hay mucho racista*” (There is a lot of racism). Similarly, Santa understood experiences of racialization as linked to racism. She said, “*Aquí hay mucha diferencia con la gente Latina, con los American Black, y los Americanos ojos azules…*” (Here there is a lot of difference with the Latino people, with the Black Americans, and with the Americans with blue eyes).

Jocelyn spoke of recognizing similarities in the situations of groups of color. “*A la persona Negro lo toman un poco menos en cuenta, o menos en cuenta que a los otros*” (The Black person is taken a little or less into consideration, or is less considered than others). She added, “*...si, uno también es Hispano si, cualquiera que sea Moreno si, son*”
todos lo mismo.” (...yes, one is also Hispanic yes, anyone that is Moreno yes, are all the same).

Esther talked in-depth about the complexity of these issues. She intersected skin-color with notions of American privilege and social class.

...as long as you are born here that means that you have more money than those that are from there, therefore, you’re not worth it in pesos, you’re worth in dollars now, so it makes you a little bit better. Money plays a big role in how they define you as well... Someone like I don’t know, my son is darker than me, but he’s worth dollars, so he’s still worth more than me, cause I’m still Dominican no matter what I do, I’m still Dominican born in DR and he was born here.

Ramon also shared an understanding of American and White preferences, “...porque la mayoría, lo que más siempre lo Blanco son la preferencia...” (...because the majority, that mostly always the Whites are the preference...). He related notions of White privilege to social class:

Vamos a decir como hay muchos Blancos si tú le dice, ‘oh vete a recojer la basura,’ ellos dicen ‘yo recojer basura.’ ¿Cuando tú vez alguien recogiendo basura a quien tú vez? ... Es difícil que tú vea un Blanco trabajando recojiendo la basura. (Let’s say like there are any Whites if you tell them, ‘oh go pick up the garbage,’ they say ‘me pick up garbage?’ When you see someone picking garbage who do you see?...It’s hard to see a White working picking garbage).
Finally, along these same lines, Alejandro understood notions of racialization as connected to power. He stated: “…there aren’t any races. That’s been biologically proven to be wrong. And, socially, it only has strength when you set different groups in different power relations. Powerlessness. Powerfulness.”

**Emotional reactions.** Most participants expressed a range of complex emotional reactions triggered by their experiences with racialization. These reactions range from subtle to intensely painful or strong feelings. Participants’ reactions appeared to relate to their racialization experiences, and the more conflicting their racialization (in the U.S versus the D.R), the greater emotional dissonance. More specifically, participants who were part of Dominican majority groups, such as White, *Indio*, and *Trigueño* expressed complex and highly conflicted feelings, as they realized they had entered into a minority group upon migration.

A few participants expressed culture shock and confusion upon entering the United States. For instance, Nancy was overwhelmed by how different this country seemed when compared to Dominican culture. “*Hay tantas cosas diferentes, hay Dios mio, otro mundo!*” (Wow, so many things that are different, oh my God, another world!). She added: “*Hay Dios mio tantas cosas. Primero el idioma, después tú tienes que abrir tu mente para poder entrar al mundo Americano.*” (Oh my God so many things! [anxious laughter] First the language, then you have to open your mind to be able to enter into the American world.). Coco stated that his way of coping with culture shock was by not thinking about it. “*Ya uno no le para hay porque tanta cosas ahora que ya uno no no le*
da ni mente a eso” (By now one doesn’t stop there because there are many things now that one doesn’t think about).

Esther spoke of learning to avoid racial conflicts as she also expressed ambivalence about her racial group membership, “…so it’s like, so where do I belong, you just go with the flow… try to avoid trouble.” A few participants talked continuing to feel confused as they became increasingly aware of some of the social inequalities. Ana Maria, for instance, expressed confusion around the root of the social barriers she encountered because, unlike her experiences in the D.R., dark-skinned people in the U.S. were allowed into social settings. “…aquí yo veo que donde entra un Clarito entra un Morenito entra to’ el mundo, no hay diferencia para nadie” (...here I see that where a light skinned one enters a Brown person enters, all people, no difference for no one).

Pati as well as Jocelyn and Esther, expressed complex feelings including shock, confusion, defensive feelings, and anger in relation to notions of group membership. Pati expressed her confusion: “Because you can see me I’m not White, but I’m not Black, so what color am I? I don’t know.” Pati also expressed feelings of anger and resistance toward the U.S. system. She stated, “I, I, and sometime I don’t, I feel so upset that I, I say I’m not going to write down which group I belong to.” As Ramon shared experiences with discrimination in work settings, he also expressed intense anger as he has experienced racist treatment. Ramon has been able use his knowledge and his education to defend himself against racist assaults. He said: “Aquí todos tenemos las mismas, osea las misma ley se le aplica a todo el mundo, supuestamente...” (Here we all have the same, well the same laws apply to everybody, supposedly…).
Esther also expressed complex and intense feelings throughout the course of her interview. Her experiences with racialization have led to anger that has helped her to challenge others’ perceptions. She shared vivid experiences with racialization in the U.S.: “…someone thought that I was like an African American, I guess. And she started saying a whole bunch of mean things about me… and I was like, ‘you’re so ignorant, it’s not even funny.’” She added that she has felt a sense of disconnect from Dominican community members, “… like I don’t feel that I blend in with them with them for some reason.” When asked if these experiences had been painful she stated, “Well (pause) that’s why I try to avoid that and I don’t go there.”

Santa also shared complex feelings as a result of her different experiences with racialization. She was the only participant that spoke of feelings of initial fear. She said, “A mi me daba miedo” (I used to get scared) as she spoke of internalizing some of the stereotypes of African Americans in her neighborhood. She explained, “…porque para mi yo pensaba que los Morenos eran gente, todo eran peligroso, todo eran delincuente, todo eran drogadicto, todo eran tiguere.” (…because for me I thought that all Brown people were, all were dangerous, all were criminals, all were drug addicts, all were thugs). Santa talked about developing connections with Black Americans as a way to challenge these stereotypes. She added, “…me di cuenta que no. Que no todos son iguales, igual que nosotros.” (…I realized that no. That no we all are equal, equal to us).

A few participants expressed holding on the same feelings across cultural context. For instance, Martinez spoke of confrontational experiences with racism both here and the D.R. He expressed feelings of suffering with regards to being in a position of
disadvantage. “Bueno, muchas veces uno, aunque se sienta bien incómodo y le molesta bastante, pero por tomar en cuenta de no llegar a una agresión tal vez más a, desagradable, mejor uno se lo sufre y lo deja así tranquilo.” (Well, many times one, even if he feels really uncomfortable and it bothers him greatly, but to take into account not getting aggressive maybe more, unpleasant, better for one to suffer and leave it alone).

**Change in Attitude.** A few participants spoke of changes to their views of others and their views about issues of difference as result of immigration. Santa talked about at first holding racist. Upon moving to the U.S. and interacting with other racial groups her thinking about these issues has transformed. She spoke of her reactions when witnessing discriminatory treatment in the D.R., especially when Haitians are treated differently.

*No me gusta. Bueno... no me gusta, porque ellos [Haitianos] son personas como nosotros y lo que quieren es, si nosotros emigramos para los Estados Unidos, para hacer un mejor futuro... O sea a mi me molesta que lo traten como menos que nosotros...* (I don’t like it. Well...I don’t like it, because they [Haitians] are people like us and what they want is, yes we immigrated to the United States, to make a better future…. Well it bothers me that they treat them as less than us…).

Esther spoke of changes to Dominican cultural values. She talked about conflict between her views in terms of race, skin-color, and racism, but also to issues of gender, “… cause everybody has an expectation of you being Dominican and you’re supposed to follow rules and things that sometimes I don’t believe and I’m not supposed to because
I’m Dominican and this is what being Dominican means.” Although, Esther spoke of trying to avoid trouble, she went against the “rules” as a result of immigration:

...like you don’t let your kids go, I don’t know, anywhere without an adult, which I believe in, you have to protect your kids but you also have to teach them to protect themselves. In D.R. I was still being driven around when I was 15 back and forth from school because they were scared that something would happen to me. Here we don’t have that possibility, because you have to do with what you have and I cannot be, I can’t stay home.

A final theme in this category was captured by Nancy, as she spoke of seeing Dominicans through a darker lens. She stated that when she travels to the D.R: “Las personas se me ven más Morenas” (The people look more Morenas to me). As she continued to explain this change in her way of seeing people back in the island, she explained: “... Puede ser los Morenos, si puede ser, por los Morenos de aquí, ... algunos [Dominicanos] se parecen a los Morenos de aquí...”(...It can be the Morenos, yes it can be, because of the Morenos from here… some [Dominicans] look like the Morenos from here…).

**Transformed sense of self.** A number of participants spoke of transformations to their sense of self or identification as a result of their experiences with racialization in the U.S. Some talked about learning to identify as part of a Latino/Hispanic collective. A few embraced new Black or Morena skin-color identification. It should be noted, though, that even for these participants, race and skin-color were not synonymous. For instance,
Esther explained that given her experiences in the U.S., she underwent a process of learning to challenge understanding of color:

…well, when I was in the D.R. I always thought that I was better, because I was not Black, not as good as White, but I am not Black. …when I was younger I always thought that I was better than Black people because I was the Trigueña, and my hair was not like their hair and my nose was not like their nose...

She explained that as a result of her U.S. racialization, she now labeled herself Black in terms of skin-color. She said that while family members continue to say, “tú eres clara” (you are light) in the D.R., she has learned that perceptions of skin-color change transnationally. Her response was “but that’s over here, not over there, over there I’m Black.” Esther spoke of feeling rejected by the Latino community in the U.S. as a result of the changes to her views of self and other. She defined “Latino” as an American identity that further distanced her from the Dominican community.

In contrast, Santa, like Martinez and Margarita, learned to identify as Morena in the D.R. and Hispanic in the U.S. She said, “Me decían Negrita, Morenita. Eso viene de allá.” (They call me Black, Brown. That comes from there). She explained coming to learn the meaning of Hispanic.

Si me cambio porque aquí sí que hay mucha variedad de color y mucho de cultura. Allá no porque allá tu esta acostumbrado a ver todo somo Dominicano. Entonces ya uno ve un Morenito, Indiecito, un Morenito mas Moreno un indiecito, un Blanquito para nosotros todo somo Dominicano. Pero aquí tenemos todas las razas juntas… O sea fue aquí que yo me distinguí, me distinguí Hispana. (Yes it changed because here there are many variety of colors and cultures. There [D.R.] no because there you are used to seeing all as Dominican. So if one sees a Brown skinned, an Indian
skinned, a Brown skinned more Brown than an Indian, a White, to us all are Dominican. But here we have all the races together...Meaning it was here that I distinguish, I distinguish Hispanic).

A few participants talked about developing a sense of connection to other Hispanics or Latinos as a result of language and history of Spanish colonization. Ramon and Nancy spoke of developing a strong Hispanic identity and a sense of pride and connection with Hispanic racial group membership. Ramon said, “Me siento feliz, yo yo mi raza yo, bien, yo no lo veo como ninguna minoria, ni ninguna majority” (I fee happy, I my race I, good, I don’t see it as either minority or majority). Nancy shared developing a sense of self-pride her Hispanic identification. “Hay si es un orgullo, pueden decir Hispanics, todos los que hablan Espanol y uno se siente como alegre, el algo bello (Oh yes it’s a pride, they can say Hispanic, all that speak Spanish and one feels a sense of joy, it’s something beautiful).

Additionally, although some participants talked about changes to their self-perceptions in relation to notions of skin color and racial group membership, even participants who did not voice changes to their sense of self talked about feeling “different” as a result of their transnational experiences. Domingo a –year-old dark-skinned man with straight hair, who identified as Indio expressed intense feelings of sadness as he sharing having left many family members begin in the D.R. He said, “uno se adapta a la vida de aquí,... digo que vuelvo allá y ya estoy desubicado” (one adapts to life here...I say that I return there and already I am misplaced). As he reminisced about his life here and the lives of family members left behind, he sadly stated, “La mayor diferencia es que ya la gente crece.” (The biggest difference is that people grow). This
final idea was filled with conflicting feelings, as Domingo shared a strong identification with his Dominican cultural background, yet felt so changed by the U.S. system that he feared feeling “desubicado” (dislocated, misplaced, out of place) in his Dominican homeland.

Summary

Negotiating contradicting cultural notions about skin-color, race, and racism emerged as a core narrative in this study, related to racial consciousness in the context of transnational movement. The concept of negotiating contradictions, tensions, or conflicts is at once psychological, emotional, and interpersonal. Participants discussed experiences that influence the need for negotiation in different contexts. These experiences were linked in complex ways to consistent negotiation by Dominicans immigrants. Moreover, participants talked about encounters that heightened their awareness of racialization and racism, which increased the need revisit their previously held beliefs about the meanings of race, skin-color, racism, and racialization in order to engage in negotiation. Revisiting Dominican cultural views about racialization was critical to developing a transnational racial consciousness. Participants described Dominican cultural views that emphasized deracialized notions of difference which in turn made understanding U.S. racialization extremely challenging. The emergent theoretical model suggest that immigrants from the Dominican Republic engage in transnational internal and external processes, in their attempts to make negotiations between a home consciousness and develop a new consciousness. However, encounters with systems of oppression are deeply painful and extremely difficult to adjust to. The mental health implications of internalizing of
oppression make the development of a critical racial consciousness crucial to coping and challenging with oppression across transnational borders.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study explored racial consciousness conceptualized as conscientização (critical consciousness), the processes through which racially oppressed people become aware of their oppression in the context of transnational migration (Duany, 2008; Freire, 1970; Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). More specifically, the impact that movement between a “tri-racial or plural racial order” (Bonilla-Silva, 2009, p. 1072) to a biracial system—has on the consciousness of those who migrate was explored. The study sought to describe these experiences at a broader level than traditional models of racial identity, which emphasize the resolutions people arrive at in the quest for a positive sense of self (Helms, 1990; Carter, 1995). Rather, the focus of this study was on people’s awareness of the impact of skin-color, race, racialization, and racism across different racialized systems. This study intended to answer several questions about the understandings, meanings, perceptions, and reactions that characterize the construction of racial consciousness.

A major assumption of this investigation was that immigrants from the Dominican Republic live in oppressed circumstances as a result of individual, cultural, and institutionalized White supremacy/racism and capitalism/classism (Howard, 2001), both in the D.R. and the U.S. As Freire (1971) stated, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (p. 45). Thus, an additional assumption was that all people possess awareness of their own social
condition, and that they are able to articulate their experiences and conceptualizations of the system of oppression in which they are embedded. In the interviews, participants spoke of experiencing or witnessing racism, discrimination, and struggle. Each participant voiced ways they had grown to understand racialization, and pointed to the factors that have influenced their awareness.

**Negotiating Contradictions Theory**

The theoretical framework that emerged from analysis of the data, presented in Figure 1, is a person-environment (Fassinger et al., 2004) model of racial consciousness, situated in a transnational context. The grounded theory model that emerged highlighted the complex negotiations that participants make as they attempt to both adjust to the U.S system of racialization and maintain ties to the D.R’s. *Transnational racial consciousness* reflects a process of negotiating contradictions. These contradictions include holding multiple threads of consciousnesses—first, the dominant Dominican discourse that race and racial discrimination, alongside the culturally sanctioned, yet at times invisible, magnification of Whiteness conveyed through notions of *buena presencia* (Torres-Saillant, 1998). Additionally, upon migration, participants were introduced to the less diffused and more clearly stratified system of the U.S. Here, participants were ascribed minority group memberships as both Latino/a or Hispanic, and at times, Black or African descent.

Participants’ social interactions, cognitive and emotional reactions, attitudes, and sense of self appeared to be essential components of racial consciousness. In this chapter the results of this study will be summarized. The theme of racialized social interactions
will be discussed in further detail as it relates to racial consciousness and was significant in the experiences of participants. Finally, the strengths and limitations of this investigation will be presented, followed by the implications that this study pose to research, psychological practice, and training.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The model that emerged from data analyses served to answer the questions that guided this investigation. The main questions of “What is the racial consciousness of Dominican immigrants?” and “How does immigration to the United States affect the racial consciousness of Dominicans?” were addressed by the core narrative of “Negotiating Contradictions” both at macro (cultural) and at micro (individual) levels. Complex negotiations guided the “Interactions and Reactions” that participants’ struggled with as a consequence of conflicts between a “Deracialized consciousness,” while being forced to contend with “Racialized encounters” in both the Dominican Republic and in the United States.

**Deracialized consciousness.** According to Torres-Saillant (1998; 2009), a number of sociohistorical events have influenced the development of a deracialized racial consciousness among Dominicans of color or of African descent. Hispaniola’s long history of European colonization, the progressive decay of the plantation system, the early exodus of White settlers, and the cultural and institutional application of the term *Black* solely to people living in slavery are just some of these events.

This theoretical category captured the public discourse about matters of race, skin-color, and racism. In the public sphere, race-specific issues were avoided, ideas
about social mobility were divorced of racial explanations, and an ideology of racial transcendence was emphasized. Participants emphasized that in the D. R., “la gente no se identifica” (people don’t identify) with distinct social categories. Consistent with this point, Bailey (2001) pointed to the absence of race as a recognized social construct in the D.R.

Participants spoke of the importance of “buena presencia” (good presence), a notion that referred to standards of beauty and cultural etiquette, that exists in public discussions of hair, dress, attractiveness, and professionalism (Torres-Saillant, 2009). In agreeing with the narrative of participants such as Leydi, Alejandro, Margarita, and Santa, Howard (2001) discussed Dominican standards of beauty as an idealization of Whiteness. For example, in Dominican contexts, visible employment advertisements seek people with buena presencia, buena apariencia, or as participant Margarita described, “gente buen moza,” meaning White and light-skinned people. These White standards of beauty lead to the exclusion and marginalization of people of color, particularly Black women. Alejandro suggested that “…if you look at the media, if you look at TV and you look at the interactions in Society, you see that the hierarchy or the pyramid usually at the top has very light-skinned people.” Consistent with Howard’s (2001) analysis, Alejandro described the relationship between racialization and gendered politics. He spoke of the objectification of women of color, stating that, “en la calle el gender es más poderoso que cualquier otra cosa” (in the street gender is more powerful than any other thing). Therefore, although some interpreted “good presence” as an ideal that deracializes notions of worth, this term may actually confirm the opposite. Thus, the process of
uplifting or improving the race remains closely linked to White supremacist ideologies in the minds of many Dominicans, despite the positive self-affirmation of a large portion of the mostly Black population (Torres-Saillant, 2009).

Along the lines of deracialized thinking, participants all discussed ideas of shared humanity. Several participants minimized the salience of skin-color in the D.R., such that access or social mobility had little or nothing to do with skin-color. For instance, “we are not different, we are all the same.” Ramon spoke of the importance of education and individual efforts on achievement. Alejandro, who spoke very passionately of the need for African consciousness, also described the D.R. as a place in which he felt a sense of free-will and individualism that was not afforded to him in the U.S.

Finally, an additional theme of silence around issues of skin-color and difference was critical to participants’ racial socialization. Consistent with the sociological literature on Afro-Latino/a communities across Latin America and the U.S. (Dixon, 2005; Golash-Boza, 2010; Mateo-Diclo, 1998), these participants pointed to the social invisibility of race matters in a culture that presents itself as racially democratic (Roth, 2008). These perspectives resemble some pre-encounter attitudes and characteristics as described by Cross’ racial identity model (1995). More specifically, these low salience race attitudes seemed to place value on aspects of people’s social circumstances other than racialization (e.g., humanism). Additionally, and in line with Cross (1995), Alejandro spoke explicitly about the impact of miseducation and lack of discourse on issues of social oppression. He stated that a “Eurocentric education” meant that Dominican history excluded the contributions of people of African descent (Torres-
Saillant, 1998). Thus, the nation’s majority, having been socialized through the narrative of elite ideals, may have internalized distorted understandings of Dominican history, culture, politics, and national identity.

**Notions of Color versus Race.** Participants explained that the characteristics of the Dominican racial system lacked binary or oppositional notions of difference. The theme, “dichotomy does not work,” pointed to the continued maintenance of a pigmentocracy among Dominicans. Color, including phenotypical characteristics, seemed essential to social classification and positionality (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gomez, 2008; Wilson & Senices, 2008). As described by Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2008), the emphasis on intermediate labels for “color, not race,” such as *Indio* or *Trigueño*, challenged the U.S.’s dichotomous norms (Gomez, 2008; Wilson & Senices, 2008).

When asked about the meaning of this mixed identity, participants explained their background was comprised of the mixture of White, European, and African races. The contention of participants in this study was consistent with previous studies that suggested that Dominicans recognize a color continuum to denote degree of racial mixture (Duany, 1998; Howard, 2003).

Golash-Boza (2010) argued that, unlike racial categories, skin-color labels are not meant to refer to specific groups, nor do they lead to group identification (Golash-Boza, 2010). However, it seemed that for some of the Dominican immigrants in this sample, their skin-color had a significant impact on social experience and sense of self. Therefore, it may be that although skin-color labels are not as rigidly defined as racial group memberships, they signaled some level of access to privilege or lack thereof.
Additionally, unlike Golash-Boza’s (2010) finding, the participants in this study who identified as Trigueno or Indio spoke of the institutionalization of these categories through the Cedula (identification) system. Cédula de Identidad (identification card) also known as cédula de ciudadanía (citizenship card) or Documento de identidad (DNI, document of identity) is a national system used to document identification in which individuals are ascribed a color, such as “Indio.”

Most participants in this study identified as people of mixed background as well as resisted binary racial group membership. These participants continued to identify with their skin-color labels. In contrast, those who self-identified as Negro, Morena or Black in terms of their skin-color tended to minimize the presence of intermediate locations. These participants placed greater emphasis on the binary ends of the continuum—light and dark/White and Black. These results support Roth’s (2008) findings that darker-skinned people are less able to avoid or escape Blackness across social context. Golash-Boza (2010) also revealed that the Black category was seen as fixed, meaning it was not a location that could be transcended by Peruvians of African descent.

**U.S. Racialization.** Facing U.S. constructions of race led to participant feelings of uncertainty, increased reflection, and attempts at adjustments of racial consciousness. This is because in the U.S., the Black/White binary has been maintained as the dominant frame for racial relationships. Kumashiro (2001) asserted that, although the United States has historically defined racial groups in opposition to one another, in reality people exceed binary categories. Moreover, binary groups are have been defined in comparison to third groups. These third, at times even fourth, groups are often ostracized or
pathologized as “traitors” or “abnormals,” such as Black/White and biracial, heterosexual/homosexual and bisexual. According to Kumashiro (2001), these third parties’ transgressions of boundaries obscures divisions between oppressed and oppressor/ margin and center. Nonetheless, in The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice, Robles Sundstrom (2008) exerted that despite the existence of third parties, the permanence of the Black/White polarity continues to be representative of the U.S.’s continued anti-Black oppression. The social reality that results from this dichotomous stratum has color-coded the experiences immigrants must to adapt to.

**Conceptualizations of Race.** Participants expressed fluid understandings of the construct of race. Most struggled to define race, as well as expressed dissonance while attempting to racially identify (Itzigsohn et al., 2005). They presented varied understandings of race, as definitions ranged from a phenomenon linked to skin-color to one that combined nationality, and, at times, ancestry, language, and social class among other variables (Bailey, 2001). These findings seemed consistent with studies that postulate diversity in patterns of adjustment to the U.S. racial system (Jensen et al., 2006). Similar to studies of racial identification patterns among Dominicans, these participants also differed in the labels they used to define their race. Most identified outside of the Black/White dichotomy in terms of race, varying from Hispanic/Latino to Dominican. Consistent with Bailey’s (2001) findings, many participants combined language, national origins, and racial/ethnic notions. The pan-ethnic term Hispanic was often equated to being Spanish-speaking, framing race in non-phenotypic terms. It should be noted that some participants were able to differentiate their skin-color label from racial
identification. Those who identified as darker-skinned were more likely identify to equate their race with national origins, Dominican. Golash-Boza (2006) explained that some Latino immigrants hold on to national origins, and others hyphenate themselves or assume a Latino/Hispanic identity. Surprisingly, the current findings were not consistent with Jensen and colleagues’ (2006) findings that identifying with a pan-ethnic label (Latino/Hispanic) related to stronger English language ability, lighter skin, more years in the U.S., and a higher socioeconomic status. The main commonality among participants in this study who used a U.S. panethnic label as a racial identity was that they were more likely to demonstrate greater awareness of racism. Yet, there was no clear pattern of demographic data linked to their perceived racism.

**Encountering Racism.** Participants spoke of encountering racism, colorism, and racialization in the D.R. For instance, they spoke passionately of the negative attitudes towards dark-skinned Dominicans and Haitian immigrants both in public and private spaces. Participants in this sample demonstrated a great level of conflict or ambivalence in this area, yet more than half of these participants maintained that racism or colorism exists in the D.R. These Dominican immigrants linked notions of skin-color and phenotype to standards of beauty, self-esteem, mental health and access to opportunity. These participants were aware of a cultural preference for lighter-skin (Gomez, 2008); and recognized the social and economic impact of having darker-skin, pointing to an awareness of the social stigma that is associated with Blackness.

Many participants realized a “hierarchy of skin-colors,” at a very young age. Racial identity models highlight the development of early awareness of racial material
In their discussion of critical consciousness, Quintana and Segura-Herrera (2003) suggested that young children of color run the risk of developing a false consciousness. Participants who identified as Black spoke of direct and indirect experiences with discrimination within the Dominican community. Given a lack of racial socialization within families, communities, or institutions, these participants may have not been equipped to understand these contradictions in their experiences. Torres-Saillant (1998) argued that the deracialized racial consciousness of Dominican immigrants has “protected them from the mental atrophy” (p. 136) that likely would result from awareness of oppression. This was not the case of darker-skinned identified participants, who expressed intense and distressing emotions that related to experiencing racism, such as “suffering” as they shared their experiences. One of the earliest studies on skin-color and phenotype among Latinos/as revealed that darker-skinned individuals suffered higher rates of depression regardless of income, education, and English proficiency (Codina & Montalvo 1994, as cited in Gomez, 2008). These scholars linked psychological outcomes to greater exposure to racism; such may be the case for some of the members of this sample.

Consistent with Roth’s (2008) findings, dark-skinned participants were initially hesitant to give voice to their feelings and experiences. Upon further probing they shared experiences of unjust and unfair treatment, humiliation, and attributed limited access to opportunity to skin-color. A few participants expressed strong feelings of shame, embarrassment, and misfortune in relation to their skin-color, signaling their internalization of oppression. In Quintana and Segura-Herrera’s (2003) exploration of
internalized oppression, the connection between extended exposure to racism and the internalization of negative images of self was also linked to internalized inferiority, including a tolerance of injustice (Jost, 1995 as cited in Quintana and Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 271). Dark-skinned participants in this study expressed suffering in isolation and remaining silent when confronted with acts of direct racism.

**Perceptions of Racism.** Scholars (Pieterse & Carter, 2010) have sought to understand the variability in perceptions of racism among Black Americans, contending that a Black person’s perception of racism may depend on his or her degree of awareness of being members of an oppressed group or racial identity status. Pieterse and Carter (2010) found that those whose racial consciousness was reflective of White dominant notions reported less stress and more positive psychological well-being. In the case of this sample, it may be that those who embraced dominant Dominican ideas of racial harmony and racial-cultural homogeneity experienced less distress. However, most participants expressed some level of recognition of injustice. The majority of Dominican immigrants in this sample spoke of Whites and light-skinned people as exemplars of privilege.

**Intersections of Racism and Classism.** A number of participants in this study related their understandings of skin-color, race, and racism to their social class experiences. In the D.R., color has great social implications because it correlates to social class, and participants spoke of barriers to social mobility as a result of their social group memberships, including skin-color, nationality, language, and regional background (i.e., town of origin). For instance, Esther was born and raised in Santiago, a region of the D.R.
known as home of powerful, wealthy, and White Dominicans. She discussed people’s reactions to learning this was her community of origin as filled with an awe she understood was related to her darker skin color. She added that others often assumed she derived from a wealthy and educated background as a result. Thus, when describing her experiences with racism, Esther included the complexity of her classed experiences to these. Both She and Alejandro shared experiences with direct acts of racism in the D.R., despite being members of the Dominican middle-class. Morena-identified Santa paid attention to the concrete class differences in her experiences of migration. She said that, unlike the U.S., the majority of dark-skinned Dominican towns in the D.R. lacked basic resources like running water and electricity.

Participants also related immigration to classed matters. Most shared stories of relocating in search of resources, education, employment, and other forms of economic opportunity. In their discussion of the impact of national origins on immigrant experiences, Rumbaut and Komaie (2010) documented that Dominican immigrants are the one group facing the greatest gaps in social and economic access, including the highest poverty rates.

Breland-Noble and colleagues (2008) discussed the connection between skin-color and social class in the U.S. These authors outlined how a color-based caste system played a role in the establishment of the Black American middle-class as a disproportionately lighter skinned population. For instance, lighter-skinned Black Americans earn higher wages and higher prestige positions than their darker-skinned counterparts (Goldsmith et al., 2006). The same phenomenon has been found among
Latinos/as. Skin-color has been linked to stratification in terms of social class (Howard, 2001). Participants in this study spoke of becoming conscious of their oppression in the context of racialized encounters within work setting, community settings, and the context of poverty.

**Interactions and Reactions: Negotiating Contradictions**

Based on the results of this study, several elements of racial identity theory may have relevance to Dominican immigrants. According to Helms (1989), “…a racial climate of some sort must always exist, though it may vary from locale to locale, environmental setting to environmental setting” (Helms, 1989, p. 231). She further argued that individuals make sense of racial stimuli as a result of intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics within racialized environments. Helms (1995) proposed that environmental context or various types of climates as well as interpersonal relationships or interactions may begin or result in responses to overt or covert racial events. These racialized interactions range from couples (dyads), to group interactions, and global societal movements (Helms, 1995). Similarly, this group of Dominican participants discussed social encounters or interpersonal interactions both in the D.R. and in the U.S. that socialized their racialization and also triggered intrapsychic processes and emotional reactions to such events. In examining the nature of racialized interactions, Helms (1989; 1995) described four types of relationships or social environments: parallel, or similar racial attitudes; regressive, interactions in which the party with the greater social power has a less sophisticated understanding; progressive, those with greater social power have
more advanced understanding; and finally, crossed interactions in which point to opposing perspectives of racial matters.

Interactions were described by participants that involved regressive experiences in which dark-skinned Dominicans were excluded from settings in which lighter skinned people were welcomed. They understood these marginalizing experiences as a result of racism in the U.S. Participants also pointed to crossed interactions in the U.S., where they faced racialization experiences that contradicted their Dominican experiences, such as being perceived as Black by most other Americans, including White Americans, Black Americans, and other Latinos/as, including Dominicans. Progressive interactions were also described, as participants spoke of relating to diverse racial groups and as a result, challenging their own stereotypes, for example, of Black Americans. Only one participant pointed to parallel interactions, as he understood both the Dominican and the U.S racial contexts as racialized and racist.

Complex and contradictory emotions were triggered by experiences with racialization in the context of interpersonal interactions. As participants expressed feelings of confusion, dissonance, ambivalence, and fear in the transnational context, the results of this study support findings that relate to immigration culture shock and acculturative stress (Cheung & Rockville, 1982). Acculturative stress is defined as the reactions to cultural adjustment process and to cross-cultural interactions and has been linked to negative mental health outcomes (Torres et al., 2012). Participants expressed that pressures to learn a new language, negotiating differing cultural values and daily cross-cultural experiences may contribute to such stress responses. Researchers (Dawson
& Panchanadeswaran, 2010) have pointed to a relationship between experiences with
discrimination and acculturative stress. A study by Torres, Driscoll, and Voell (2012)
found that acculturative stress mediated the relationship between perceived
discrimination and psychological distress among a sample of Latinos/as. Therefore, it
may be that the more aware participants were of racism and discrimination within their
interactions, the greater their level of distress.

Participants also expressed intense feelings of anger, sadness, and grief about not
fitting into U.S.’s system of racial group membership. The experiences that accompany
transnational migration may be understood as a type of “encounter” as they enter into a
social context that may relocate them into different location in the social strata. This is
consistent with findings by Newby and Dowling (2007) who illustrated the conflicts
faced by Afro-Cuban immigrants as they struggled to find their place within U.S racial
categories. Ramon, who identified as Indio, expressed anxiety, anger, and resentment
toward a U.S. system that racialized him as Black; he and other male participants spoke
of encounters with law enforcement as experiences that heightened awareness of their
racialization. Participants also gave voice to the intense emotions resulting from feeling
rejected by mainstream as well as local Latino/a groups as result of skin-color and
racialization. More specifically and linked with skin-color, darker-skinned participants
expressed feelings of sadness, labeled “suffering” and “misfortune.” These participants
were more likely to perceive discrimination than other members of this sample (Arce et
al., 1987).
Reconceptualizing the Racial World and Transnationalism. Finally, the results of this study highlight the potential for shifts in attitudes and beliefs about race and racism, as well as the ways in which participants experience influences changes in self-identification. For these transnational participants, the development of a racial consciousness varied in numerous ways. The findings here support Itzigsohn and Dore Cabral’s (2000) contention that Dominican immigrants adopt Hispanic/Latino/a panethnic identities. Additionally, it may be that in their attempts to maintain ties to the Dominicanidad, they remain connected to the color consciousness of home. Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999) determined that “transnational migration is a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relations in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated. In the context of transnational migration, people literally live their lives across international borders” (p. 344). The problem with this definition is that it does not explicitly establish the particular activities that may be described as transnational. In this study, the focus was a psychological process of transnationalism, in which transnational migrants described the intricate ways in which they integrated a consciousness of home (D.R.) with new patterns for understanding racialization (U.S.) in order to construct a new racial consciousness to navigate their complex border-crossing experiences.

Upon migration to the U.S., participants struggled to reconceptualize many notions they learned back home. In the process of negotiating between differences in the racial models, many of these participants soon learned that they were members of a
minority group in the U.S., leading to a growing awareness of racism. Many attributed the obstacles they faced in access to mobility to nationality and language. Consistent with Bailey’s study of racial identification patterns, none of these participants embraced a Black racial group membership. Rather, they used the “Spanish” language and their national origins to denote group membership. Those who expressed a greater struggle to understand race and racialization contested racialization as Black as well as questioned the purpose of racial classification in general. Although participants recognized commonalities between themselves and Black Americans, most focused on the cultural differences that set them apart from Black Americans, such as language. Interestingly, even those who were discriminated against by other Latinos/as, and reported shifts to their sense of self, such as Esther who explained that Black was her skin-color, not her race, continued to distance themselves from Black Americans regardless of phenotype.

Studies of transnationalism (Howard, 2003) have suggested that Dominican immigrants resist Black or Afro-Dominican terms based on anti-Black Dominican sentiments as well as to actively challenge U.S. racialization. However, some of the participants in this study embraced labels such as Morena, Black, and Negro, perhaps as result of U.S racialization. In sum, the transnational process involves continually negotiating adjustments necessary to construct a consciousness from which to understand the racial material of the culture of settlement as well as maintain social and psychological ties to the consciousness of home.

In the process of transforming attitudes around race and self, three distinct locations on the continuum transnational racial consciousness emerged, each with
contradicting emotions. First, *more here than there*, described as participants who internalized the racialization of the United States (Black or Hispanic/Latino/a), and expressed feeling less connection to the racialization and cultural values of home. Esther’s narrative is a great example of such a narrative, as she described some of the ways in which she challenges and critiques Dominican notions and identities; nonetheless, she continued to negotiate these two racial models. She seemed to adjust her two cultural scripts by conceptualizing her new Black identity as her skin-color, while continuing to struggle to dissect notions of race. Second is a location that is *more there than here*, for participants who remained connected to the consciousness of home (e.g., *trigueno/India/Morena/Negra*), while rejecting U.S. notions of race. Domingo’s narrative was representative of this location. While developing some awareness of U.S. notions, he also continued to hold on to his *Indio* color label and used Dominican as his racial identification. Ramon’s narrative also captured this positionality, and was one that fit the majority of this sample. Despite his years in the U.S. and his countless experiences with racism, he resisted his racialization and maintained a consciousness constructed in the D.R. The third location, *both here and there*, describes the consciousness of those who seemed to balance Dominican and U.S. notions of color, race, and power. Participants, like Martinez and Alejandro, demonstrated more balanced level of awareness. They were critical of racism and oppression in both social contexts.

*Sociopolitical Racial Consciousness.* Bailey (2001) framed the transnational practices of most Dominicans, as resistance to internalizing the ascribed category of Black and resistance against U.S. racism. At time same time, I would add that this
distancing from Blackness, while serving as resistance to U.S. racialization, also serves the purpose of supporting racism both here and in the D.R. Given that racialized social systems allocate political, economic, social, and psychological privileges along racialized groupings, it is only through a collective process of political contestation that oppression may be dismantled (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Movements of racial contestation have been developed as groups have woken up to an awareness of their collective positionality as members of an oppressed class. The distancing of Dominicans of African descent from Black may demonstrate a limited awareness of where they stand with respect to social or political power. Racism/White supremacy has not only interfered with the well-being of dark-skinned Dominicans in the U.S., but of all Dominican nationals. Wade (2005) examined the ideology of *mestizaje* (mixture) as a process that hides the reality of racism, as the conditions of those counted as people of mixed descent is closest to that of Blacks than that of Whites in Latino contexts. Moreover, according to Bonilla-Silva (2004), Latin American societies have been more effective at maintaining White supremacy because groups are not consciousness of their social location and do not act as a collective. In this way, mestizaje notions have helped buffer racial conflict and collective movements to eradicate racism. Those who make-up the oppressed class must develop greater sociopolitical awareness of their circumstance in to challenge the social order.

**Racial Consciousness Raising:** For these transnational migrants, racialized encounters within conceptualizations of racial consciousness described through this text: “Liberation is a system of healing [from oppression] that embraces critical consciousness” (Hernandez et al., 2005). *Racial consciousness*, the development of
critical awareness of individual experience in the context of social and political oppression, also is embedded in interpersonal interaction, termed dialogue (Freire, 1970). Hernandez and colleagues (1994) examined consciousness-raising in the context of the multiple systems, including the family. They identified consciousness-raising as a process of learning to look at self in relation to others within concrete social and political locations of power, privilege, and oppression.

Martin-Baro (1994) elaborated on the development of critical consciousness and its impact, explaining that 1) the progressive decoding of the social world as individuals begin to understand the mechanism of oppression leads to increased critiques of reality (as it has been constructed by those in power) to bring greater possibility to those ascribed to an oppressive social location; and 2) new knowledge and understanding of self and of one’s social identity aids transforming self and more actively transforming reality (Hernandez et al., 2005).

The development of a racial consciousness may be deeply challenging for those also undergoing a transnational process, since they are attempting to decode two social environments. In this study, participants expressed a wide range of awareness, including racism, classism, and social injustice. In their transnational experiences, they described progressively understanding their social locations as people of darker-skin in the D.R. or people of color in the U.S. While darker-skinned identified participants experienced a greater degree of awareness of their social positionality, these participants seemed to lack the empowered sense of self to contest their oppressed conditions (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003).
**Summary.** The challenge for transnational immigra
tions involves learning to understand and dismantle false consciousnesses in their own country of origin (D.R.) as well as the host country (U.S.). Thus, contesting the legitimacy of the global system of oppression on the basis of racialization entails the development of a critical perspective of systems of oppression and the development of group alliance as an oppressed collective (Quinta & Segura-Herrera, 2003). Encountering and becoming aware of oppression heightened the racial consciousness of many participants. At the same time, their resistance to Americanization and the loss of Dominican consciousness interacted with this process for some of the members of this sample.

**Strengths, Personal Reflections, and Limitations**

**Strengths.** In line with the grounded theory (GT) and other social justice methods of analyses, this study was based on the voices and experiences of immigrants from the Dominican Republic. Liberation theorists (Martin-Baro, 1996) have pointed to the act of excluding the voices of the oppressed as reflective of the enmeshment of psychology in perpetuating a dominant culture of marginalization. The aim of using a methodological approach through which theory could be informed by and grounded on the voices of the community stakeholders was meant to lessen the likelihood of producing additional forms of oppression.

The continual verification of codes and categories throughout the simultaneous process of data gathering and analysis that is unique to GT points to rigor of the methodology itself (Creswell, 1998; Fassinger, 2005). Several qualitative researchers and grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2005; Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005) have presented a
number of criteria from which to evaluate the quality and credibility of a GT study. A central criteria for assessing the credibility of research findings is “trustworthiness.” Defined as the conceptual soundness of a study, trustworthiness has been linked to validity, reliability, generalizability, and objectivity in quantitative research. It can be obtained through taking various steps towards credibility, dependability/auditability, transferability, and conformability in qualitative research (Fassinger, 2005). In this study, trustworthiness was sought through immersion into the community setting (Charmaz, 2005). Being a member of the community, a first generation Dominican woman living in a Dominican neighborhood in the Bronx, helped me to quickly develop trusting relationships with other members of the community and potential participants. However, my identification with the community also led to inner struggles, contradictions, and tensions. I was both an insider as a community member and the daughter of Dominican immigrants and an outsider as a graduate student from prestigious university seeking to collect data for research. Processing my own social positionality through memo-writing and dialogue with the peer reviewer, aided my ability to be transparent, clear, and open with participants about my intentions. They welcomed me into their homes and into their families and expressed a great deal of investment in my education—they shared feeling proud of me and glad to contribute to the development of the community by helping me graduate. Familiarity with the environmental context is invaluable to social justice research (Charmaz, 2005). Nonetheless, the closeness of my social location both aided and problematized the research. Tuhiwait Smith (1999) has suggested that researchers with “insider” positions may enter into the work with assumptions, biases, and presumed
explanations for the experiences of those who occupy similar locations. Smith and colleagues (2009) argued that these biases, when unexamined, invalidate the unique lived experiences of community members. Moreover, the supposed neutrality of the traditional scientist model is also critiqued by social justice research perspectives (Smith et al., 2009; Tuhiwait Smith, 1999).

**Personal reflections on the findings.** Skin-color, race and racism are sensitive topics, filled with emotion. Without a doubt, participants’ sharing of their awareness of their social location could have been affected by my own social location—my skin-color, identity and self-label as an Afro-Dominicana, even my generation. Charmaz (2006) and the constructivist grounded theory perspectives emphasize the social construction of meaning (interaction/dialogue), with real social implications and salient, concrete consequences. In this study, each and every participant identified skin-color, race, and racism as real and salient constructs. They also frequently provided contradictory views at different points of the same interview about the impact that these constructs had in their lived experience. At the least, this was how both the peer reviewer and I interpreted their stories. Their perceptions of skin-color, race, and racism were best understood as the manifestations of racial consciousness. Race was filled with both feelings of connection and tension. Race as connection reflected a theme of “Dominicans seen as a racial group that is all as the same,” whereas race as oppressive or tense reflected experiences with racism.

In order to remain aware of my assumptions and worldview, and to work against invalidating participants, and lessen the level of data contamination, I shared my
intentions to prioritize participants’ voices and experiences from the onset of the interview session. This practice was critical to working towards transferability or usefulness of the research towards social change (Charmaz, 2005). Understanding the racial consciousness of immigrants from a distinct social system has significant implications for paradigms of racism and racial identity in research, practice, and community work that relates to transnational settings.

Charmaz (2005) highlighted the importance of resonance in GT, describing this as the relationship between individual human experience and social systems. In the study, the rich and vivid personal stories of participants reflect this interaction between individual and context in the experiences of Dominican immigrants. Finally, an additional strength of this study is its “originality” (Charmaz, 2005), as this study aimed to bring to light the experiences of challenges in developing a racial consciousness in the lives of a transnational population.

**Limitations.** The purpose of this study was to begin to generate a conceptual a transnational racial consciousness theory. Therefore, one major limitation of this study is the narrow scope of the model presented, since the theoretical framework is only based on the reported local experiences of the participants in this study (Fassinger, 2005), a majority of whom were New York City residents. These participants came from well-known Dominican enclaves in the city, which may mean that, unlike the Dominican immigrants in Washington D.C from Candelario’s (2001) study who integrated into an African American community, this sample could be made up of individuals who already were recognized, at least by other New Yorkers, as people as Dominican descent.
Therefore, the experiences of Dominicans in other U.S. communities, such as Washington, D.C., Miami, FL, or Chicago, IL, may reveal different complexities regarding racial consciousness and transnationalism.

A second limitation is that the sample of this study was a self-selected group of Dominican immigrants who were informed in advance about the topic of research. Thus, those who volunteered to participate may have been particularly interested or invested in the issues of skin-color, race, and racism, which limits the applicability of these results to other Dominican immigrants. Additionally, the sample was mainly gathered through the method of snowballing. As discussed in Chapter Three, the GT paradigm highly recommends the use of a theoretical sample. Nonetheless, time constraints were a consideration, and snowballing was a more convenient means of recruiting participants.

Another limitation of using GT was that sound theoretical production relies on lengthy and detailed narratives, yet the interviews conducted in this study varied in length. While most participants were open and highly verbal, there were some who were more guarded, and provided shorter and possibly incomplete narratives. Moreover, as a result of the time constraints of this study, I was unable to return to participants to seek further information. Finally, qualitative researchers (Fassinger, 2005) have recommended the use of the process of triangulation and participant-checking. Triangulation is the use of multiple methodological approaches and sources of data, such as participant observations or archival data. In this study the only source of data were the interviews with participants. Participant checks, which involve interviewee review of transcripts
and/or analysis, also were not able to be utilized. By the time of transcript writing and analysis, I was no longer living in the state where the data was gathered.

In spite of these limitations, this unique study does provide a great contribution to counseling psychology and multicultural research as it begin the process of opening up theoretical dialogue on transnational experiences and conceptualization of racialization and racial oppression that may have implications for immigrants of color from plural social systems. The main purpose of qualitative inquiry is not to generalize findings to all populations (Morrow et al., 2001), but to aid continued theory building. The conceptual theory that emerged from data analysis represents a local theory of transnational racial consciousness. However, this model does appear to resonate with previous research on Dominican immigrants’ views of race and racism.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH & PRACTICE**

*Research Implications:*

This study sought to examine the experiences, meanings, and understandings of skin-color, race, racism, racialization, and group membership for a sample of Dominican immigrants. The grounded theory model (Figure 1) that emerged here suggests that racial consciousness is a process that develops through many interactions within multiple social contexts, institutions, and individuals in a variety of cultural environments or nation-states. For Dominican immigrants these involve interactions with often contradicting definitions of racial concepts, leading to the development of a racial consciousness that involves negotiating both internal and external contradictions.
Future research could continue to examine the process of negotiation in relation to critical consciousness, as well as the specific interpersonal interactions that influence consciousness-raising. To influence consciousness-raising or critical consciousness, social justice or liberation paradigms such as participatory action research (Smith et al., 2009) and other qualitative methods could aid the developmental of socially just research that can further examine the experiences and psychological process of oppressed populations within their own context and from their perspectives.

A very valuable implication of this study is the importance of deeper analysis of the experiences of diverse groups within Latino/a psychology theories of identity (Miville, 2010). Additionally, implications also hold for the study of Black psychology and Black racial consciousness and identity paradigms. Both bodies of research dichotomize these populations. Black and Latino/a racial consciousness and identity theories should be expanded to include within group differences in terms of ethnicity and nationality. Constantine (1998) stated that such racial identity models have tended to propose that all Blacks or Latinos/as understand or experience issues of skin-color and racialization in similar ways. Much of the Black identity literature emphasizes the experiences and process of African Americans, and Latino/a identity literature typically highlights those of Mexican and Puerto Rican American populations. The experiences of those who may be categorized as both Latino/a, as a result of language and culture, as well as Black as a consequence of skin-color and descent have yet to be examined. The impact of diasporic disbursement on the consciousness of people of African descent across the Americas and the Caribbean also has yet to be explored in psychological
literature (Constantine, 1998; Miville, 2010). Moreover, theories relevant to racialization also need to acknowledge and integrate current information on the impact of societal forces and events, such as transnational migration, war, dictatorships, political persecution (i.e., genocide), and poverty on psychological processes. Future research on how the process of racial consciousness as critical consciousness of self and social world can be disrupted by such societal forces would also be important. The model presented here demonstrates that continuing the process of consciousness-raising in a transnational context is a process that is neither linear nor clear-cut. Yet, across the seas, people may continue to actively work to make sense of their environment by utilizing the internal resources they have available for decoding their world.

**Implications for Counseling Training and Practice:**

Counseling psychology practice has recently proposed the importance of counselors playing the active role of promoting social justice agendas (Smith et al., 2009), including training and advocacy work. The experiences of these Dominicans immigrants support the needs for counselors, educators, and supervisors to take a systematic approach when working with transnational or immigrant populations.

It is important for psychologists to consider the multiple locales in which immigrants are embedded, and the bonds, connections, ties, psychological processes, and relationships they have with these multiple social systems. Arredondo (1999) suggested that awareness of own cultural worldview is essential to culturally competent practice. Thus, exploration of presumptions and biases, even when working with clients of presumably similar backgrounds, is crucial. Counselors must examine the frameworks
they have internalized as a result of their own racialization around race, skin-color, and racial group memberships, develop their own sense of racial consciousness, as well as the impact of their skin-color on their social positionality when working with clients from outside of the U.S. Only by doing so can they aid clients’ own exploration of these issues across sociopolitical contexts. Along these lines, it will be important for counseling psychology training programs to develop models from which to integrate awareness of racial social systems that may contradict the U.S. racial and racial identity model, yet collide as a result of migration. Currently transnationalism concerns are excluded from counseling training, and counseling issues of Afro-Latinos/as are not included in training.

This study has particular implications for psychotherapy with immigrants from Latino/a and Afro-diasporic communities. Counselors must consider that cultural ways of understanding the world are important to people, particularly immigrants, who have experienced loss. It is important to explore how immigrants have learned to understand the racial world—and to self-define in terms of color and race—simply by exploring how they learned what it meant to be of their color or group or race back home. Miville (2010) suggested employing the Culture-centered clinical interview (CCCI) (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002 as cited in Miville, 2010) to guide discussions relevant to connection to home culture, immigration, acculturation, acculturative stress, sociopolitical circumstance, identity, and indigenous healers, when speaking to clients about strengths and stressors. As presented in this study, Dominican immigrants’ experiences and consciousness are varied and diverse, as are the labels they use to describe themselves and others. Exploring the meanings that individuals attribute to the terms they use to describe their skin-color
and racial-ethnic identity, without assuming or presuming level of attachment or understanding will also be critical. For immigrants, adhering to a label may indicate sociopolitical experiences and acculturation (Miville, 2012) as well as, in the case of many Dominican immigrants, selection of a racial label may indicate transnational processes or maintaining cultural alliances to home.

In line with critical consciousness theory, assessing clients’ experiences of racial and cultural oppression both in the U.S and in the Dominican Republic is also important. Although many of these participants spoke of awareness of the U.S. culture of racism, most lacked a critical consciousness from which to examine the sociopolitical implications of their own racialization. Thus, mental health professionals must uphold the responsibility of addressing racism and the unjust social circumstances of those oppressed by it. Additionally, they must engage in the moral imperative of consciousness raising, for example, by helping immigrants understand their experiences of racism so they do not internalize these, leading to potential mental and physical concerns. As advocates, counseling psychologists can work beyond traditional psychological practice to use their positions to influence and improve mental health practice (Smith et al., 2009).

This study suggests that Dominican immigrants construct a transnational racial consciousness by negotiating contradicting cultural scripts and notions of self. Additionally, it brought to light the grievances and suffering of darker-skinned Dominican immigrants who face racism both “here and there.” Research (Telzer & Vazquez Garcia, 2009) has also pointed to a relationship between skin color and self-perception, particularly for darker-skinned Latinas who tend to have poor self-perception.
Furthermore, darker-skinned Latinos/as perceive racism more often than lighter skinned Latinos (Arce et al., 1987); such perceptions have been linked to lower self-esteem and depressive symptoms (Greene et al., 2006). Ramos and colleagues (YEAR) provided an overall picture in which dark-skinned or Afro-Latinos demonstrated the highest risk of depression. These authors concluded that dual minority group memberships in the U.S. (both Black and Hispanic/Latino) served as stressors. Thus, the relationship between clients’ experiences with race and racialization may be significant to aspects of the therapeutic work.

La Conciencia Navegante

From this study of transnational racial consciousness a theoretical model emerged, suggesting that immigrants from the Dominican Republic construct and reconstruct understandings of race and racialization by negotiating contradicting cultural scripts and notions of self. This theory explains that transnational racial consciousness is an active process of developing awareness of two social and political systems of racial oppression. The institutionalization of White supremacy both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States make decoding racial material rather difficult; meaning that those marginalized by oppression must place a great deal of effort and psychological energy to understanding their social environment.

Itzigsohn (1998) argued that adjusting to the American system means internalizing ascribed stratified locations. The narrative of this group of Dominicans highlights their attempts to oppose U.S. racialization. “The persistence of a Dominican identity in the U.S. may be interpreted in part as resistance to the prevailing racial order” (Duany, 1998,
As noted by Duany (1998) in the process of transnationalism, this population has actively resisted American subordination and attempted to redefine racial notions in their own familiar terms. Yet, it must be recognized that while Dominicans resist U.S racism, their racialization has still significantly impacted their access to social mobility and inclusion. The racism and stereotypes often ascribed to Black Americans and people of African descent may be extended to brown and dark-skinned Dominicans as well. Thus, despite their resistance, racialization has real, concrete, practical, and material consequences. For immigrants who may not be familiar with the characteristics of the U.S racial system, the psychological impact of racism may be profound.

The Dominican historian Moya-Pons (1986) concluded that the process of self-redefinition encountered upon immigration may prove to be a “traumatic racial experience” (p. 241). Further research should explore issues relevant to the racial identity of immigrants of color, particularly those of African descent. As immigrants of mixed background are forced to confront Blackness, moving to the U.S. may signify coming to terms with aspects of their own history that have often been suppressed (Duany, 1998). Such painful encounters may also serve as an opportunity for liberation and the development of racial consciousness. Finally, it must be recognized a global anti-racism struggle must be forged; in the words of Bonilla-Silva (2004) “[m]embers of a ‘collective black’ must be backbone of the movement” (p. 944) against White supremacy.

The new consciousness that emerges in the transnational process of Dominican resonates with Anzaldúa’s (2007) celebration of the mestiza consciousness. Nonetheless, the new perspective described by this Dominican narrative does not bloom at the
borderlands—it is nurtured between the currents of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. This new consciousness is one I envision as *una conciencia navegante* (a navigating consciousness) that is not statically situated. Rather, it is one that has the capacity to adapt and to self-transform. *La conciencia navegante* grapples with multiple extremes of resistance and oppression. It has encountered vast possibilities in this space, as well as a loss of that which was stable. *Como cualquier navegante trae sus bultos* (As any navigator carrying his or her bags), Dominicans pack and unpack the dualities of home, the lessons of the elite, and the inner consciousness of the maroons. *La conciencia navegante* may go beyond a triple-consciousness, *porque ahora bajo esta nueva ola* (because now under this new wave), it comes across as a new language of power and privilege. Here, *sueños Americanos* (American dreams) are sought, then shattered by an awareness of the concrete harsh realities of capitalism and oppression, wearing a new face. *Para resistir la/el navegante usa algunas de las herramientas que fueron útil en casa* (To resist, the navigator uses some of the tools that were useful at home). Some have aided our survival; others cannot be translated *porque aquí se necesita una nueva lengua* (because here a new language will be needed).
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Hispaniola Books Corporation.


Appendix A

Demographic Data Sheet

Please check or fill in the response that best fits you:

1. What is your age? ______

2. What is your gender
   _____ a. Female
   _____ b. Male
   _____ c. Transgender
   _____ d. Other

3a. What is your race?

                                                             ________________________________

3b. What is your ethnicity?

                                                             ________________________________

4. How would you describe your skin-color?

                                                             ________________________________

5. Where were you born (country, city)?

                                                             ________________________________

6. At what age did you move to the U.S.?

                                                             ________________________________

7. What language(s) do you primarily speak?
   _____ a. English
   _____ b. Spanish
   _____ c. Bilingual/Multilingual, please specify:______________________________

8. What is your highest level of education?
   _____ a) Did not attend school
b) Grade school—Grade completed: ____________________

c) High school or equivalent Grade completed: ____________________
d) Trade/technical school

e) Associate degree (A.A.) or 2-year degree

f) Bachelor’s degree

g) Master’s degree (e.g., M.S.)
h) Doctoral degree

i) Other professional degree (e.g., Law, Medical)

9. Where did you acquire your education (check all that apply)?
a) United States
b) Dominican Republic
c) Other (please identify: ____________________________)

10. What is the approximate composition of your current neighborhood?
a) Nearly 100% Dominican
b) 75% Dominican
c) 50% Dominican
d) 25% Dominican
e) Nearly 100% non-Dominican

11a. Where did you grow up (prior to the age of 16)?
_______________________________________________________________

11b. What was the approximate skin-color composition of the neighborhood where you grew up?
a) Nearly 100% dark-skinned
b) 75% dark-skinned
c) 50% dark-skinned
d) 25% dark-skinned
e) Nearly 100% White

12. Are you currently...(check all that apply)
a) Unemployed
b) Seeking employment
c) Employee, specify field of work_____________________
d) Student, specify major______________________________

13. How would characterize your socio-economic status?
a) below poverty
b) poor
c) upper class
d) middle class
e) working class
14. What is the approximate level of your household income?
   _____ a) under $15,000            _____ d) $51,000-70,000
   _____ b) $15,000-30,000           _____ e) $71,000-90,000
   _____ c) $31,000-50,000           _____ f) over $90,000
Por favor, complete la respuesta más apropiada para usted:

1. ¿Cuál es su edad? ____

2. Cuál es su género
   _____a. Hembra
   _____b. Varón
   _____c. Trans
   _____d. Otra/o

3a. ¿Cuál es su raza?
   _____________________________________________________________

3b. ¿Cuál es su pertenencia étnica?
   _____________________________________________________________

4. ¿Cómo usted describiría el color de piel?
   _____________________________________________________________

5. ¿Dónde nacido usted (país, ciudad)?
   _____________________________________________________________

6. ¿Ha qué edad inmigró a los Estados Unidos.? ____

7. ¿Qué idiomas usted habla?
   _____a. Inglés
   _____b. Español
   _____c. Bilingüe/multilingüe, especifique por favor:
   _____________________________________________________________

8. ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación más alto?
   __ a) No atendió a la escuela
   __ b) Escuela Elementaria—Grado completado: __________________
   __ c) Secundaria o el grado equivalente terminó: __________________
   __ d) Escuela comercial/técnica
   __ e) Grado asociado (A.A.) o Universidad de 2 años
   __ f) Licenciatura (B.S.) o Universidad de 4 años
   __ g) Maestria (e.g., M.S.)
   __ h) Grado doctoral
   __ i) Otro grado profesional (e.g., ley, médicas)

9. ¿Dónde adquirió su educación (compruebe todo el que aplique)?
____a) Estados Unidos  
____b) República Dominicana  
____c) Otro (identifique por favor: ___________________________)

10. ¿Cuál es la composición aproximada de su vecindad actual?  
_____a) casi 100% Dominicano  
_____b) el 75% Dominicano  
_____c) el 50% Dominicano  
_____d) el 25% Dominicano  
_____e) casi 100% no-Dominicano

11a. ¿Dónde se crio usted (antes de la edad de 16)?  
____________________________________________________________

11b. ¿Cuál era la composición aproximada de la piel-color de la vecindad en donde usted creció?  
_____a) casi 100% de piel morena  
_____b) el 75% de piel morena  
_____c) el 50% de piel morena  
_____d) el 25% de piel morena  
_____e) casi 100% piel Blanca

12. ¿Es usted ...? (compruebe todo el que aplique)  
_____a) Desempleado  
_____b) Busco Empleo  
_____c) Estudiante, de:______________________________  
_____d) Empleado, especifique campo de trabajo __________________

13. ¿Cómo describiría su situación socio-económica?  
_____a) por debajo de la pobreza  
_____b) pobre  
_____c) clase obrera  
_____d) clase media  
_____e) clase alta

14. ¿Cuál es el nivel aproximado de los ingresos de su hogar?  
_____a) menos de $15,000  
_____b) $15,000-30,000  
_____c) $31,000-50,000  
_____d) $51,000-70,000  
_____e) $71,000-90,000  
_____f) over $90,000

**Gracias por su participación!**
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me about your response to the question of skin-color—how did you come to identify as ___ (enter label used by participant)? (Probe for meaning of skin-color label)

2. Can you recall the first time you noticed skin-color(s)? Are people treated differently based on skin-color back home?

3. What are some of the messages you received about skin-color growing up? Where did you learn these messages? What other terms are used for skin-color? What do these terms mean in the Dominican Republic? What do these mean to you? What is the meaning of “race” in the D.R?

4. Does skin-color affect people’s opportunities for economic success? Has your skin-color affected your opportunities? Can you share a specific experience that comes to mind? (Prompt: feelings/thoughts). Does “racism” exist in the D.R? If so, what has been your experience with racism?

5. Can you tell me about your decision to move to the United States? What were/are your expectations?

6. Do you think skin-color matters in the United States? If so, how? Can you recall the first time you realized this? What are some of the messages you’ve received about skin-color in the U.S? Where did these come from? What do these mean to you?
7. Has the way you see yourself (or identify) in terms of skin-color changed after moving? If so, how and how come? How do you understand this change? If the same, how and how come?

8. In filling out forms, what boxes do you check-off for “race” in the U.S? What does being ____ mean to you? (Probe current study’s open-ended demographic form).
   a. What does being a member of this group mean to you? How do you feel about being a member of this group?
   b. Have you ever been perceived as a member of a different group? (Prompt: thoughts/feelings?)
   c. Are people treated differently in the U.S. based on race? (Probe for connection between race and skin-color)? Is this different from your experience in the D. R?
   d. Does racism exists in the U.S? Have you experienced racism? (Prompt: does a specific experience come to mind? Feelings/thoughts?)

9. Has moving to the U.S influenced the way you see others’? If so, how?

10. Do you travel to the D.R. often? Has moving to the U.S influenced how you identify and see others there?
1. ¿Puede usted decirme sobre su respuesta a la pregunta del color de su piel—cómo llego usted a identificarse como_ (enter label used by participant)? (Significado del significado de color)

2. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los mensajes que usted recibió sobre el color de piel durante su desarrollo? ¿Dónde aprendió estos mensajes? ¿Qué otros términos se utilizan para el color de piel? ¿Qué significan estos términos en la República Dominicana? ¿Qué significan para usted? ¿Cuál es el significado la raza en la D.R?

3. ¿Puede usted recordar la primera vez que usted notó las diferencias basadas en color? ¿Es la gente tratada basada diferentemente en color en la D.R?

4. ¿Afecta (el color de piel) a las oportunidades para el éxito económico? ¿Ha sido usted afectado por el color de su piel? ¿Puede usted compartir una experiencia específica relacionada? (reacciones emocionales/pensamientos). ¿Existe el racismo en la D.R? ¿Si es así cuál ha sido su experiencia con racismo?

5. ¿Puede decirme sobre su decisión de inmigrar a los Estados Unidos? ¿Cuáles eran/son sus expectativas?

6. ¿Usted piensa que el color de piel importa en los Estados Unidos? ¿Si es así cómo? ¿Puede usted recordar la primera vez que usted realizó esta importancia? ¿Cómo usted realizó esto? ¿Cuáles son algunos de los mensajes que usted recibió sobre piel-color después de mudarse? ¿De dónde vieron estos mensajes?
7. ¿Ha cambiado la manera que usted se ve (o identifica) en términos de piel-color después de mudarse? ¿Si es diferente, por qué? ¿Cómo usted entiende este cambio?

8. ¿En rellenar formas, qué cajas chequea para “raza” en los Estados Unidos? ¿Qué significó esto para usted?
   a. Cuestione: La forma demográfica de este estudio.
   b. ¿Cómo se siente ser miembro de este grupo?
   c. ¿Le han percibido como miembro de otro grupo? (Cuestione: pensamientos/reacciones?)
   d. ¿Tratan a la gente diferentemente en los E.E.U.U. basados en la raza? ¿(piel-color)? ¿Es esto diferente a su experiencia en la D.R?
   e. ¿Existe el racismo existe en los E.E.U.U? ¿Ha tenido experiencias con el racismo? (Cuestione: ¿una experiencia específica viene a mente?
      reacciones/pensamientos?)

9. ¿Ha influenciado la manera que usted percibe a los demos haverce mudado a los E.E.U.U?¿Si es así cómo?

10. ¿Usted viaja a la D.R. a menudo? ¿Mudarse a los E.E.U.U ha influenciado cómo usted identifica y ve otros allí?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Skin-color</th>
<th>Age at migration</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Community Compositio n</th>
<th>Community of origin</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Indio</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>25% Dominican</td>
<td>75% Dark Skinned</td>
<td>Seeking Employment</td>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>25% Dominican</td>
<td>25% Dark Skinned</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>31,000-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Honey Color</td>
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Appendix C

Excerpt of Transcript with Initial Codes

I: Interviewer
P: Participant

I: How do you feel about that? Like about not, not having a box?

P: Yea, I know, maybe I should put that I’m, you know, since the Asian are like pale color? But I’m not Asian, you know so it’s difficult…¹

I: Um hmm.

P: It’s difficult for me because I don’t know, which, what color am I?²

I: Yea

P: I don’t know.³

I: Yea. It sounds confusing, también

P: Yeeea. Because you can see me I’m not White, but I’m not Black, so what color am I? I don’t know. You gonna say that I am white (laughs) it, it’s hard.⁴

I: Yea. What would it be like to say that you’re white?

P: But I not.

I: Yea.

P: I woulda say no, I not, you know?

I: Right.

P: It, to be honest with you I rather to, to people say well you, you Black because I got Black in my blood because my father was dark skin, he was real dark.⁶

I: Yea…

¹ It’s difficult to find a group that fits my color
² Struggling to define myself based on color
³ Expressing confusion
⁴ Confused because I am not White or Black
⁵ Wishing she was ascribed a label, like Black
⁶ Identified my connection to Blackness
P: So, you know...

I: Yea.

P: My mother is my color, so. 7

I: What does she say that she is?

P: She never say anything about color, you know, like, to tell you the truth, we never talk about color in my family, at least we, I don’t know... 8

I: Yea.

P: because we we we have, in my family we have people my color, and I have, like I told you, people like your color... 9

I: Um Hmm...

---

7 Identifying my mother’s color as light than my father’s
8 Sharing that skin-color was not talked about within my family
9 Describing the various skin-colors within my family
Appendix D

**Phase 2: Focused Codes** (from various initial codes)

1. No binary notions of difference (n=13)
   Most talked about 3 groups/classes/categories/races; or Multiple groups (Ana Maria); only one participant mentioned 2 groups (Martinez): light and dark skinned

2. Mixture/middle group (n=13)
   Most mentioned *Indios* (between *blancos* and *morenos*); only 2 participants did not mention mixture--one who identified as Morena (Margarita); and one who identified as White (Mercedes)

3. Dominicans don’t really focus on race (or color) (n=9)
   Most talked about race not being emphasized in the island (Alejandro) talked about a black country not needing to identify as black (Ramon) said Dominicans don’t focus on color (Esther) said the focus is not on race is on color

**Phase 3: Axial Codes**

*“Dichotomy doesn’t work”* (participant 11, pg. 25)

**Property 1:** challenging binary notions of difference
   Participants talked about the idea that unlike the US, in the DR there are no two opposing groups or categories
   **Dimension:** we are all Dominicans/same nationality no need to say we’re X –to the DR is a multicultural

**Property 2:** Mixture/middle groups or categories
   **Dimension:** Indios are a mixture of White and Moreno –to there are countless mixtures of people (trigueño, indios, indios canola, morenitos, indiecitos, jaboa, panfila)

   (Exception: (Mercedes) is the only one who did not see trigueño and blacks are difference—hence, she proposed there only being whites and others)
Figure 1: TRANSNATIONAL RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Deracialized Consciousness
- Racial democracy theory
- Plural social order
- Mestizo majority
- Colorblind/shared humanity
- Cultural Whitening (good presence)
- Cultural silence
- No binary
- Cultural hegemony

Racialized Encounters
- Pigmentocracy/Colorism
- Stratification
- Discrimination
- Racism/White Supremacy
- Intersections of color and class
- Immigration
- U.S racial

Interactions & Reactions

NEGOTIATING CONTRADICTIONS

There  In-between  Here
Table 2

**TRANSNATIONAL RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Core: Negotiating Contradictions</th>
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<td>Categories:</td>
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<td>Deracialized Consciousness</td>
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<td>Racialized Encounters</td>
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<td>Interactions and Reactions</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories:</th>
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<tr>
<td>▪ <em>La gente no se identifica</em> (The people don’t identify)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shared humanity</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Socialized around silence</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <em>Buena presencia</em> (Good presence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Dichotomy doesn’t work</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Challenging the binary</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Focus on mixture</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Racial undertones</td>
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<td>- Elaborate descriptors</td>
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<td>- Fluid definitions of race</td>
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<td>▪ Encountering colorism</td>
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<td>- Attitudes about color</td>
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<td>- Discrimination towards dark-skinned people</td>
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<td>▪ U.S. Racialization</td>
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<td>- Immigration and the American dream</td>
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<td>- Facing the U.S. racial categories</td>
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<td>- Meaning making</td>
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<td>- Emotional reactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Change in attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Transformed sense of self</td>
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