

“I’M INTELLIGENT TOO”: HIGHLY EDUCATED LATIN AMERICAN
IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION IN THE US

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On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The topic of highly educated immigrant incorporation has been studied through the integration paradox within Eastern European immigrant communities. This paradox argues that highly educated immigrants turn away from the host society, rather than becoming more incorporated with it. However, this research has not adequately addressed highly educated Latin American immigrant communities in the US. Additionally, this research has not sufficiently addressed an added layer of the paradox of how the intersection of race and class may play a role in immigrant incorporation experiences. Therefore, this paper will address highly educated Latin American immigrants with special attention to the intersection of race and class. Specifically, this paper will examine how the intersection of race and class plays a role in the incorporation experiences of highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US; furthermore, how highly educated Latin American immigrants make meaning of their incorporation experiences in the US. The data was collected through intensive interviews with highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US. The main findings are: 1) participants have feelings of resentment from experienced micro-aggressions and stereotypes, 2) participants with lighter skin are self-aware of their privileges and recognize that race is a correlation to class for Latin Americans, 3) the participants disengage from the US society because they feel deprived of their previous social and class status they experienced in their home country, 4) many of the participants felt that Americans devalued their intelligence and overall capabilities, and 5) highly educated Latin American immigrants have a lost or confused identity after spending time in the US. This paper demonstrates the significance that the intersection of race and class has on the incorporation experiences of highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US.

INTRODUCTION

Latin Americans are often racialized through their social class and skin tone. Latin Americans with lighter skin and those who appear to be “whiter,” are generally a part of a higher social class in both Latin America and in the US (Ortiz and Telles 2012). In the US, Latin Americans are lumped into one group, no matter the level of education, class status, skin color or language ability. Therefore, this paper will examine how the intersection of race and class plays a role in the incorporation experiences of highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US; furthermore, how highly educated Latin American immigrants make meaning of their incorporation experiences in the US.

According to the integration paradox, highly educated immigrants are more likely to turn away from the host society rather than becoming incorporated within it (Verkuyten 2016). Highly educated immigrants may be more likely to compare themselves with the more highly educated members of the host society; therefore, they may perceive more deprivation because they believe that they are at an unfair disadvantage (Verkuyten 2016). Within the framework of the integration paradox, there are a few key concepts: relative deprivation, perceived discrimination and host society disengagement. A concept of relative deprivation states that the “perception that oneself or one’s group is at an unfair disadvantage in comparison with others” (Pettigrew et al. 2008). Perceived discrimination occurs when immigrants interact with majority group members, which is especially prevalent with groups of highly educated immigrants because they participate in settings containing a lot of individuals from the majority group (Verkuyten 2016). Finally, host society disengagement is prevalent when immigrants experience discrimination and the discrimination therefore makes them

identify more strongly with their ethnic minority group and ultimately distance themselves from the majority host society (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999). The integration paradox is a concept that is studied within European immigrant groups (van Doorn et al. 2013). However, immigrant incorporation research with Latin American groups contains an added layer to the paradox: the intersection of race and class.

In the US, Latin Americans are racialized and labeled as “outsiders and “foreigners” (Adela de la Torre and Beatriz Pesquera 1993). These labels are formed through the intersection of skin color, culture and language. Additionally, Latin Americans are racialized within their own groups (Ortiz and Telles 2012). Latin Americans with lighter skin tones generally have more cultural capital and belong to a higher social class in both Latin America and the US. On the other hand, Latin Americans with darker skin belong to a lower social class (Ortiz and Telles 2012). However, the difference in race and social class is made clearer in Latin America than in the US. In the US, both these groups are associated as “Latin Americans.” Therefore, race plays a significant role in how Latin American immigrants are perceived, racialized and treated in the US. This added layer of the intersection of race and class within highly educated Latin American immigrant communities motivates this research in that compared to lower educated immigrants, highly educated immigrants may experience different levels of discrimination and stereotypes through their incorporation experience in the US.

In this paper, I examine how the intersection of race and class plays a role in the incorporation experiences of highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US; additionally, how highly educated Latin American immigrants make meaning of their

incorporation experiences in the US. The main themes from this study are: 1) participants have feelings of resentment from experienced micro-aggressions and stereotypes 2) participants with lighter skin are self-aware of their privileges and recognize that race is a correlation to class for Latin Americans, 3) the participants disengage from the US society because they feel deprived of their previous social and class status they experienced in their home country, 4) many of the participants felt that Americans devalued their intelligence and capabilities, and 5) highly educated Latin American immigrants have a lost or confused identity after spending time in the US.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration Paradox

Previous literature examines the concept of the integration paradox within immigrant communities. According to Maykel Verkuyten, the integration paradox is the “phenomenon of the more highly educated and structurally integrated immigrants turning away from the host society, rather than becoming more oriented toward it” (2016:583). On the basis of this concept, education hinders developing a positive attitude towards the citizens in the host country because higher educated immigrants feel somewhat deprived. Additionally, highly educated immigrants perceive that members from their group get fewer opportunities for the same educational investments in society. Verkuyten states that “level of host country education rather than origin country education was associated with a perceived lack of respect” (2016:589). The integration paradox is complex, containing many different concepts to explain it.

Relative deprivation.

The first aspect of the integration paradox is relative deprivation. One reason highly educated immigrants tend to turn away from the host society is that they feel deprived of opportunities such as employment positions or advancing education. A concept of relative deprivation states that the “perception that oneself or one’s group is at an unfair disadvantage in comparison with others” (Pettigrew et al. 2008). Within this conceptual framework, more advantaged members of minority groups are more likely to compare themselves to more advantaged members in the majority group (Taylor and Moghaddam 1994). More advantaged members can often be described as having more social and cultural capital (Edwards 2003). Social capital can be defined as: “the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both results in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships” (Edwards 2003:305). Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital can be described as “cultural attitudes, preferences and behaviors [that] are conceptualized as ‘tastes’ which are being mobilized for social selection” (Lamont and Lareau 1988:155). Higher education increases immigrants’ contact opportunities with majority members (Kalmijn and van Tubergen 2006); therefore, it makes the majority members a better comparison group for the highly educated immigrants. The immigrants are now a part of a society where they may not be the most advantaged members of the group; they feel that they need to compete with the highly educated Americans.

Another aspect of relative deprivation is the theory of rising expectations. This theory explains that immigrants who are highly educated and who want to achieve a high position in society develop higher expectations for their societal advancements (Entzinger and Dourleijn 2008). Because of the high expectations they set for themselves, highly

educated immigrants are more likely than low education minority members to be disappointed about unequal opportunities relative to majority group members (whites). Again, the higher educated immigrants feel a sense of relative deprivation in relation to societal advancements.

Education and perceived discrimination.

The second feature of the integration paradox is education and perceived discrimination. A study conducted in the Netherlands demonstrates that higher educated people perceive more discrimination and lower social acceptance (van Doorn et al. 2013). The probability of being discriminated against is higher when immigrants interact with majority group members, which is especially prevalent with groups of highly educated immigrants because they participate in settings containing a lot of individuals from the majority group. Because highly educated immigrants perceive more discrimination, they will ultimately feel less accepted in the host country and have a less favorable attitude toward the majority population (Verkuyten 2016).

Two following examples outline the perceived discrimination and disrespect that immigrants feel when engaging with the majority culture. The most common complaints from immigrants in a study on Latino immigrants in northern New Jersey is that Americans are “offensively complacent, ignorant of other cultures and smug in their own sense of superiority” (Baumgartner 1998:161). Americans are perceived as rude and disrespectful to the immigrants. In another example, a Korean college student had feelings of pressure to fit in with the other American students (Baumgartner 1998). The student dealt with this feeling of pressure by agreeing with the American students when she was with them but tried to avoid contact with them as much as possible. She rarely

went to the student center to avoid contact with the majority students. Her social life revolved around fellow Koreans outside the college which disengages her even more from the host society. Through this, she had to go against her own personal beliefs and values in order to fit in and not be discriminated against.

While higher educated immigrants are faced with discrimination, they are also more likely to be employed as well as stay in the educational system for longer than immigrants with a lower education (Kogan 2011). This also may increase the highly educated immigrants' chance of interacting with majority members and lead to even more discrimination because there is more exposure to the majority members of the host society. Additionally, higher educated individuals participate more in associations and are therefore exposed to more government policies and laws in the host countries. In a study conducted in the Netherlands regarding the integration paradox, it was found that highly educated immigrants indicated that their foreign education was not valued and that their job is below their education level (van Doorn et al. 2013). While these immigrants are more likely to stay within the education system, they still feel that their education and hard work is not valued; they feel a sense of discrimination.

Discrimination and host society disengagement.

An additional piece of the integration paradox is discrimination and host society disengagement. The rejection-identification model can help to explain how discrimination is correlated with host society disengagement. This model indicates that experiencing discrimination makes immigrants identify more strongly with their ethnic minority group and distance themselves from the majority host society (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999). In addition to discrimination, experiencing microaggressions

has this same effect. Microaggressions are “common place or verbal indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Wing Sue 2010:8). Perceiving negative events from discrimination and microaggressions is threatening to overall well-being; consequently, minority groups cope with this by identifying more with their ingroup. In addition to the rejection-identification model, the personal-group discrimination discrepancy can help explain the link between discrimination/microaggressions and host society disengagement. This concept illustrates that “immigrants are prone to perceiving more discrimination towards their own ethnic group than towards themselves personally” (Taylor et al. 1990:255).

A longitudinal study on Latino college students tested support for activism as another outcome variable of perceived discrimination (Cronin et al. 2011). The researchers predicted that minority group identification serves as a mediator for the relationship between discrimination and well-being as well as identification mediating the relationship between discrimination and activism. The results concluded that students who perceived more ethnic discrimination identified more with their own ethnic group; those with higher ethnic identification exhibited greater well-being and activism. Aligning with the rejection-identification model, the researchers found that ethnic identification is a group-based coping mechanism in response to perceived discrimination. Additionally, activism is another coping mechanism that can increase ethnic identification.

Another way in which immigrants increase ethnic identification is through sharing complaints and grievances. Offensive behavior (discrimination) is often talked about in social immigrant groups, which increases the group solidarity (Baumgartner 1998). These conversations are not normally reported to outsiders (majority groups). It is unlikely to

confront individuals who are being discriminatory towards immigrants which is why hardships are only talked about within the social ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The literature discussed above gives an in-depth explanation of the integration paradox and what may motivate discrimination within highly educated immigrant communities. While there is present literature regarding the integration paradox in eastern European countries, there is not much research on the integration paradox in the US with highly educated Latin American immigrants. In particular, Latin Americans are racialized in the US in ways that are different from the studies in Europe. For example, in a Midwestern study on the history of sugar beet agriculture, Eastern Europeans who were recruited for this work were eventually able to settle in the region under home steading laws. However, when Mexican immigrants were recruited for the same work, they were treated as temporary seasonal workers, who received no access to settlement programs (Valdés 1991). In the US there is a racialized image of Latin American immigrants being seen as “cheap labor” (González 2002). Latina women in particular have been labeled and racialized as “outsiders” and “foreigners” even though their families have lived in the US for generations (Adela de la Torre and Beatriz Pesquera 1993). This racialization is formed from skin color, culture and language. These characteristics play a large role in the racialization of Latin Americans as compared to European immigrants. The components form the labels of the “outsider” or “alien” simply because the Latin Americans appear to be significantly different from the white Americans (Villanueva 2011). Whereas European immigrants are not seen as large outsiders because they contain similar cultural characteristics to other Europeans.

Denise Segura states that “ideologically, politically and economically, racial oppression has maintained Chicanas in a subordinate position to the white majority via discrimination and the growth of labor market segmentation” (1984: 90). In a final study on how education, racial characteristics and social interactions relate to racial outcomes of Mexican Americans, the researchers found that darker Mexican Americans, people who appeared more Mexican, experienced more discrimination (Ortiz and Telles 2012). Additionally, the researchers found that more educated Mexican Americans experienced more discrimination than their less educated counterparts because the highly educated group had a greater contact with Whites.

Because of the history of the intersection of race and class with Latin American communities living in the US, studying highly educated Latin American immigrants presents deeper experiences of discrimination than the discrimination experienced with European immigrants. Skin color plays a major role in how Latin Americans are racialized, perceived and treated in the US. This literature will motivate my research about how highly educated Latin American immigrants make meaning of their incorporation experience in the US in that it unpacks some concepts of deprivation and discrimination and helps to explain how these theories arise through the integration paradox. These concepts will ultimately help to better understand how the intersection of race and class plays a role in the highly educated immigrants’ incorporation experiences in the US.

METHODS

This study, which focuses on how highly educated Latin American immigrants make meaning of their incorporation process in the US, is based on eight intensive

interviews. The participant ages ranged from 19-65 years old, all of whom are from Latin America. The majority of participants had light skin, and a few had medium-dark skin. All of the participants are highly educated Latin American immigrants who are currently living in the US. The younger participants are currently enrolled in American colleges and older ones are teachers, professors or retired.

Interviews were used for the data collection in order to gather rich data (Charmaz 2010) in hopes to inform the lived experience of the participants. Purposive as well as snowball sampling were used to select the interview participants. Because this research is investigating such a specific population, purposive sampling was needed in order to approach individuals with specific characteristics such as highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US. In addition, snowball sampling was used in order to obtain more participants because the specific characteristics needed for individuals in this study is sometimes difficult to find. In order to recruit the participants, emails and phone calls were used in order to contact the potential participants.

The interviews were 30-45 minutes long either in person or on the phone. The in-person interviews were conducted in the participants' offices where they felt most comfortable. The phone interviews were conducted in a quiet space where the interviewer had the participant's full attention. The interviews were semi-structured with an interview guide that contained conversational questions regarding the participants' immigration process as well as their incorporation process in the US in social, school and work settings. They were asked questions like, "Can you tell me about the first friend you made in the US?" or "can you tell me about a time where you needed extra help in a class at school?" These questions were asked in order to prompt the participants to discuss

their incorporation experiences in the US. Once the participants started to open up about their experience, the interview became less structured and flowed more like a conversation. This was helpful in that it made the participants feel more comfortable discussing their experiences with the researcher. The interviews were recorded; however, the participants' identities did remain anonymous by the exclusion of their names during the transcription stage of the methods. Participants were not asked to disclose their immigration status, as it was another measure used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Some participants may not be documented and in order to build a trusting relationship with them as a researcher, I did not want them to feel uncomfortable disclosing that information.

Following the interviews, the data was transcribed and then imported into a qualitative data analysis program (NVivo) in order to code the data into themes. Some of the themes that were coded for are: micro-aggressions/stereotypes, discussions about race ("passing whiteness"), host society disengagement, perceived lack of intelligence and confused identity. Narrative analysis was used in order to help code these themes in that the primary focus was on the participants' lived experiences and stories.

FINDINGS

Resentment from experienced Micro-Aggressions/Stereotypes

Highly educated Latin American participants experienced forms of racist and classist micro-aggressions and stereotypes from Americans while living in the US. These micro-aggressions were based off of historical stereotypes, such as Latin Americans being used for cheap labor or viewed as "aliens" and "outsiders" as explained in the literature. This racialization is an extremely significant factor in the relationship between

Americans and the highly educated Latin American immigrant participants in this study. Participants in this study explained how they were racialized solely because they are Latin American. The Americans in the participants' communities had preconceived notions surrounding Latin Americans and therefore, automatically labeled them as "outsiders" or "others" because they appeared to be different than the majority group members (Americans). Highly educated Latin American participants were lumped into an overall Latin American category in the US. They discussed how their high-class status they experienced in their home countries was disregarded and therefore, they have feelings of resentment about being lumped with all other Latin Americans.

One female participant discussed some of the micro-aggressions she experienced while in graduate school in the US: "I cried a lot in classes. I was seen as the emotional Hispanic... that never helped me." The American students gave this participant a stereotypical label of being an "emotional Latina woman," which ultimately made students not take her as seriously. The following example explains her additional frustration.

Suddenly I was being called spicy and asked if I knew how to salsa dance... I have had students in my student evaluation ask for my phone number, ask me to marry them, because of that stereotype.

The participant explained how these micro-aggressions made the participant feel that she was not respected as a professor or even a normal human for that matter. This participant was automatically stereotyped because people around her knew that she was from Latin America based on her appearance, accent and language she spoke. The Americans took their preconceived notions about Latinas and assumed that this participant fell into that

category of being “spicy” and “emotional.” She was racialized, and therefore undervalued in her capabilities because of these preconceptions and stereotypes that some have surrounding Latina women.

So I got all of these microaggressions without realizing what it is and then putting it together. Like oh for you I’m this Latina woman so that’s why you think it’s ok to flirt with me, that’s why you think it’s ok to not respect me, that’s why you think that I’m not intelligent. Right, you actually don’t think I’m intelligent.

The participant explained how at first, she did not realize that she was getting labeled and experiencing micro-aggressions. However, she eventually recognized that she was being sexualized and disrespected because she was a Latina woman. Her level of education and high-class status was disregarded, and she was automatically placed into a category where all Latina women are sexualized and disrespected.

A male participant described some of the stereotypes he experienced with Americans in graduate school as well.

[People thought] that I didn’t have any options in [my home country] or that I came running away from I don’t know... Your classic set of stereotypes from your home country. Like coming from a dictatorship or running away...

He described how people saw him as someone who had escaped his country and as someone who was not highly educated. The participant explained feelings of frustration because again, his achievements were devalued because he was Latino. His exposure to a community of highly educated, upper-class Americans reduced his high-class status that he experienced in his home country. Now, the highly educated Americans held the most social and cultural capital. As an upper-class, highly educated Latino, this participant felt

frustrated that people were labeling him with these stereotypes because in his home country, he explained how he had a lot of social and cultural capital. People in his home country saw him as someone who was educated and from the highest social class. However, his capabilities and social capital were disregarded when he came to the US. The participant expressed how Americans assumed that because he was Latino, he was running away from something in his home country and that he needed to escape to the US to improve his life. In actuality, the participant came to the US in order to further his career in literature and as an academic.

A male student explained how Americans at his current American college were not culturally educated. He felt that the micro-aggressions and stereotypes towards him were strongest through interactions with people with a lack of a cultural education. He said, “there was this one kid who kept telling me to go back to Mexico.” This participant in fact, is from Colombia.

One thing that bothers me is like I walk into a room and someone’s like, ‘Oh shit you’re from Colombia?! Haha Pablo Escobar.’... The only thing that a lot of people have learned about Colombia is that it was like the center of the worldwide cocaine trade.

This participant expressed that the American students were ignorant and not educated enough about other cultures and therefore, the students fell back on the racist labels that the US has formed surrounding Colombia. The participant was aware of these stereotypes before arriving to the US. However, one may think that because of their high-class status in Latin America, that may help reduce the extent of stereotypes and micro-aggressions experienced in the US. That is clearly not the case. In reality, the high-class status that the

participants experienced in their home countries did not protect them from negative stereotypes about Latin America. This specific stereotype surrounding Colombia came up more than once across the interviews.

In a final example, a participant felt patronized in regard to a micro-aggression towards him. He said,

Some people think because I'm an ethnic minority, I am supposed to be disadvantaged. It is condescending and it feels like some people pity me.

Similarly to other participants, he explained how he sometimes felt discriminated against because he was seen as coming from a minority group. The high-class Latin Americans in this study are not used to being subject to negative racialized stereotypes in their home country. Their class status is decreased in the US because they are no longer a part of the majority group with the highest class status. In the US, the highly educated Latin Americans are now lumped into a "Latin American" group no matter the level of education or the class status experienced in their home country. Therefore, there is some resentment felt from the highly educated participants about being lumped into an overall Latin American category. They feel that their cultural and social capital that they experienced in their home country should be valued in the US.

Passing Whiteness. Intersection of Race and Class

Another theme that was displayed in many of the interviews was "passing whiteness." The participants experienced and discussed how different skin tones translate into their class status in the US and how others view them. In Latin America, there are different races that generally relate to class status. For example, some Latin Americans appear to have lighter skin because they come from a European descent; this translates

into a higher-class status. The following examples represent how the highly educated Latin American participants with lighter skin became self-aware of their privilege and recognized that race is a correlation to class for Latin Americans. The majority of the participants acknowledged this self-awareness through their interactions with Chicanos or other Latin Americans with darker skin.

In a first example one participant described himself as a more “white-passing Latino:”

I am a more white passing Latino... also the fact that I lived in the US, so I sound American when I speak. All that contributes to me passing for white.

This participant is fluent in English and has an American accent when he speaks, and he has lighter skin, so according to him, his American peers see him as more Americanized. Therefore, he explained how he experiences less race and class discrimination than his darker skinned Latino peers: “I’m probably the most Colombian on campus which is wild. If you know me, I am very white and Americanized.” This participant has spent a lot of his life in the US and he is extremely Americanized because of his American accent when he speaks English, the American music he listens to and the American sports he watches. If an outsider saw him in a group setting, one may not immediately think of him as a Latino. However, he is somewhat contradicting himself in this statement above because he is saying that out of all of the Colombians on campus, he is the most Colombian. The participant then went onto explain how the other Colombians on campus are half Colombian, or that they have spent their whole lives in the US, so they are more Americanized than this participant.

Another participant discussed a similar sense of “whiteness.” This participant was explaining how Chicano students told her that she had advantages in society because of her white cultural capital. The participant explains in the following example that the Chicano students were correct in that the participant did have advantages coming into American society. She said,

I always want to clarify that I am the whitest Latina person that you could find because I came here via France. With a French education and passport... [The Chicano students] were right because I was getting an opportunity that they weren't getting because I was being read as white than them.

In this conversation the participant was describing how she did not have a strong relationship with the Chicano students at her school in the US.

There is a class and cultural difference, because I as an international student, was understood by Chicano students as being from upper-middle class. Whereas they were lower social class in the US. Their parents were agricultural workers, their parents had to flee their home countries and they themselves didn't speak Spanish. So I didn't feel welcome which was very shocking. Now I understand the complexity of class and race but in that moment, it really shocked me.

The complexity that the participant is describing is significant within Latin American communities because one's race will reflect how others label and interact with the Latin American immigrants. She described how when she first arrived to the US, she did not understand why the Chicano students did not want to be her friend. She then became self-aware of her privilege and her “whiteness” and was able to acknowledge the benefits and

opportunities that come with having lighter skin. Interactions with the Chicano students was the turning point in her self-awareness about her privilege.

In some situations, “whiteness” and privilege may even impact how Latin Americans interact with each other. Chicanos are also aware of the cultural capital that comes being more “white-passing.” For example, one participant described herself as being a “white Latina.”

I had one Chicano friend and he called me princess because of the class difference. He’s like ‘hi princesita, how’s it going?’ And he was very excited to practice Spanish with me and very sweet, but he made that difference known.

Like I’m in the US with a student visa and come from a middle-class background. I’m different.

In this example, the Chicano student made this difference of class status and cultural capital known by giving the participant a nickname that represents a high societal class. These examples represent a level of self-awareness from both Chicanos and “white-passing” Latin Americans. Another participant described similar interactions with Chicano students at his school.

I’ve come from a very privileged background... A lot of [Chicano students] come from situations where racism and discrimination is not just ethnically based, but it’s also class based... I’ve had a lot of privilege to protect me throughout my life and in interactions with other people.

The highly educated Latin American participants recognize their privilege and recognize that race is a correlation to class for Latin Americans. Lighter skin gives the participants more cultural capital to succeed in American society. Through interactions with Chicanos

and other Latin Americans with darker skin, many of the participants were made self-aware of their social status. Through these interactions, the lighter skinned participants were able to recognize that they had more privileges than their darker skinned peers. Even though some of the participants with light skin may be at a disadvantage in American society compared to their fellow highly educated American peers, the participants still have more cultural capital than Latin Americans with darker skin.

It is common knowledge for the participants that race does make a difference in regard to how one is treated and how one can advance in society.

I just want to say that I was able to access the United States because I was coming from France and I was coming with a French passport and I was coming with so much cultural capital because French is something that I can commodify and capitalize. If I were coming from Guatemala directly, I wouldn't have made it. It's just because I came from France to teach French and then the US racialized me Latina.

This participant described herself as “making it” with the privilege of having lighter skin and coming from France. Some Americans may treat someone with this background differently than a Chicano student because they value the cultural capital that comes with being white or having European language skills.

I love being with Latinos. Host Society Disengagement

Highly educated Latin American immigrants tend to find other Latin Americans when they move to the US. Their social circles are mainly made up of Latin Americans or other international immigrants. The participants discussed how they feel more comfortable spending time with people who are similar to them when they arrive in a

new place (US). Therefore, within the framework of the integration paradox, some immigrants tend to disengage from the US society because they feel deprived of their previous social status, they experienced in their home country. One college participant said,

I Instantly found the Latin Americans. I had the predispositions to engage with other Latin Americans because I felt that he could trust them.

He described a sense of comfortability and familiarity with the Latin Americans when he first arrived in the US because he was in a completely different place than what he was used to. Another similar participant testimony states,

I love being with Latinos... I love being able to speak Spanish because I can be myself... But it's beautiful to be able to be with people who speak your language and know your culture. You cannot compare that.

Again, a sense of comfortability being with people from one's home country was prevalent across the majority of the interviews. In this case, the participants were disengaging from the host society culture when they first arrived to the US because they felt more comfortable with their fellow Latin Americans.

In the following example, one participant went in depth about the reasoning behind this feeling of familiarity and comfortability. She said,

I valued feeling like I had friends from everywhere... like we had a shared experience. We were foreigners, we were international students. We had to worry about our passports and our visas, and we couldn't work and we had all these restrictions. And we were broke like we couldn't go anywhere for Thanksgiving or Christmas. The winter is miserable, so battling that depression and the cold. I

didn't even have a coat the first winter, or boots. Those things, like you're broke. And my parents didn't really help. I was on my own. So, I think that's what brought us together.

Highly educated Latin Americans explained how they joined together in order to create a support network while living in a competitive, new country. It is significant that highly educated Latin Americans are gravitating towards each other instead of befriending other Americans because the highly educated Latin Americans are now in a society where they have to compete with highly educated Americans. The participants are no longer seen as being at the top of their social class like they were in their home countries. While the participants are highly educated, they still lack cultural capital compared to their white, American counterparts. Being able to lean on each other and experience the same hardships of now competing with Americans with more cultural capital brought the Latin Americans closer together. Therefore, they are disengaging from the host society, which in this case, is the US.

One participant described how he did not spend the majority of his time with Americans because it is sometimes hard to navigate social settings in the US. He therefore prefers to surround himself with people who are similar to him, ultimately further disengaging from the US society.

I don't understand all of the implicit expectations of American culture in regard to certain behavior or actions. I can't navigate as smoothly with people here as I could in Colombia. I don't feel as confident in social settings. The norms of what's acceptable and what's not, have been clashing.

He expressed that he could not properly express himself in American social settings. Therefore, he explained how he felt more comfortable spending time in Latin American groups. This participant communicated that he did not have the tools to navigate these social interactions with Americans. He explained feeling less confident in social settings in the US. This may be because of a lack of social status of being a part of a minority group in the US; therefore, leaving the participant feeling uncomfortable and less confident. Lacking confidence and having doubts about how to navigate social settings in the US will ultimately make the participant want to disengage from the US society.

I'm educated too. Perceived Lack of Intelligence

Many of the participants discussed how they felt that Americans devalued their intelligence and overall capabilities. Because the participants had been previously educated in their host countries in Latin America, Americans assumed that their education level was not up to standards for being able to succeed in school and work in the US. In regard to the integration paradox, participants perceived discrimination in academic settings because they were now interacting with highly educated Americans. One participant describes her frustrating experience below.

So I lived with this host family and she was a psychology professor. So all of her friends were really educated and I wanted to tell them that I'm educated too. But if you don't have the language you cannot demonstrate that... I studied literature in my home country...and I wanted to show them that I know too, but I couldn't express myself properly.

In this situation, the participant's level of English was somewhat low before coming to the US. However, she explained that she had a high level of education in her home

country. Her feelings of frustration are apparent because she knows she would be able to participate in the intellectual conversations, but she did not feel comfortable enough with her English.

In another situation, a participant described how she was devalued as a student: “my white peers would tell me that I only got this fellowship because I was Latina.” She explained that she felt like the other students thought she was a charity case and that the leaders of the fellowship program only picked her for diversity. The Americans in her community were racializing her in a way that made her appear to be incapable solely because she was a Latina woman.

Another participant had a different experience in that her English was strong, however, she discussed that her peers and some professors did not believe she was capable of performing and succeeding.

My first advisor for my MA literally told me to not apply for the PHD because I wouldn't get it.

This participant explained how she felt she had no support from her advisor and ultimately perceived discrimination. She felt upset because she believed that she had the skills and was capable of getting into the program. She attributed the lack of support to what she believed was her advisor's preconceived notion that because she was Latina and because English was not her first language, the participant would not get into the program. This same participant also experienced similar feelings with her fellow peers.

Yeah I remember getting paired in groups and the person next to me saying like ‘I wrote the paper.’ And I would be like awesome, I don't have to do the work. But

looking back, that was really fucked up. Like you didn't even give me an opportunity to do anything.

Again, she explained how her peers didn't believe that the participant could perform on the project, so they took over without giving her a chance. These examples highlight the encounters that the majority of the participants experienced with professors, advisors and peers. The majority of the participants felt devalued in their intelligence and academic capabilities and therefore, felt discriminated against. Americans had predispositions to believe that because the highly educated Latin American participants have an accent when they speak English or that they were educated in Latin America, they are not intelligent, or they are not capable of performing up to the standards as their American peers.

On the contrary, one participant discussed how her daughter's teacher was extremely supportive. This participant's daughter only spoke Portuguese and no English, so she struggled in the classroom because she did not understand what her peers and teacher were saying. The teacher asked the participant to come into her daughter's fourth grade classroom to read the class a story in Portuguese.

So at the end of the book the teacher asked the class, 'Who liked the book? Who understood the story?' So the only one that raised her hand was [my daughter]. So then [the teacher] told the class 'see, now I want you guys to understand how hard it's been for [the participant's daughter] to participate in the class.' Until today I still get goose bumps. I cried, I really did. [The teacher] told the class 'I want you guys to understand and be kind to her, and understand how hard it is for her to follow the class. As you guys understand everything, she can't follow as well. The

same way she understood the book and you guys didn't understand anything.' So it was really a lesson for them to feel how she was feeling, how she could not get it

In this situation, the participant and her daughter had full support from the teacher. The teacher wanted to help the other students realize that it is difficult to understand a new language. Even though the participant's daughter had trouble with English in the beginning, it did not mean that she was incapable of succeeding in the fourth grade. This situation is different than those of other participants because the majority of the participants had opposite experiences where professors or advisors were not supportive of their academic career. However, in this situation, the teacher wanted to highlight to the other students that the participant's daughter was capable and did have the intelligence to succeed, but she just needed extra help with the language barrier.

Confused Identity

A final theme that was prevalent across interviews was the fact that many participants explained how their host country identity had been lost or confused. The longer the participants have been in the US, the more confused they are with their identity. Many of them had trouble being able to truly express themselves in the US.

Being able to be me can be really hard. Because sometimes you are performing here. I miss being able to say whatever I want, let loose.

A second participant discussed feeling tired after speaking English for long periods of time.

After half an hour of speaking English I get tired and I cannot... I feel the main thing is that I cannot properly express myself.

In these two situations, participants explained how they could not properly express themselves due to a language barrier. Because English is not their first language, they expressed how they sometimes have difficulties conveying their personalities, thoughts and feelings. In regard to the integration paradox explained in the literature, these participants may occasionally be disengaging from the host society because they feel more comfortable interacting with people from their home country. In these examples the participants explain how they still have their home country identity and have not lost parts of their roots such as language and culture.

On the other hand, other participants revealed that they have a mixed identity of their host country and the US.

I mean it has to do a lot with this idea of me having kind of like a blended identity. Whenever I'm here in the US the vast majority of the music I listen to is reggaeton. And then whenever I'm in Colombia, the vast majority of music I listen to is like, like hip hop, like rap.

This participant explained how he felt confused and felt the need to hold onto both cultures. This participant in particular has spent more time in the US than the other participants in this study. Therefore, this mixed identity may relate to how long he has been in the US. In this case, the participant described how he wanted to keep both his Latino identity and American identity because he felt that he related equally with both cultures after having spent so much time in the US. This participant may be more engaged with the host society culture than other participants in this study.

Finally, a participant questioned what it means to be “Americanized.” She wondered if the longer one spends in the US, the more Americanized one becomes.

I always wonder what it means to be Americanized. Losing your identity? If it's about that, then I have been losing some of my identity because I have been here for 10 years. I don't want to lose my identity.

She was concerned that because she had spent so much time in the US, that her Colombia identity would disappear. She then went on to describe how she keeps her Colombian culture present in her daily life. In this situation, the participant had spent many years in the US, but instead of wanting to incorporate both a US identity and a Colombian identity, she was afraid that she was going to lose her Colombian identity. Therefore, she made more of an effort to save her Colombian heritage. This participant seems to be somewhat engaged with the host society culture, but at the same time she is afraid of losing her roots from Colombia.

DISCUSSION

The first finding the research displayed was that highly educated Latin American immigrants endured forms of racist and classist micro-aggressions and stereotypes from white Americans while living in the US, leaving the participants with feelings of resentment. Many of these micro-aggressions were rooted in historic stereotypes of Latinos such as being seen as "spicy" or being asked if they "know how to dance salsa." The highly educated Latin American immigrant participants in this study came from a high social class in their home countries. Therefore, they were not accustomed to being subject to negative racialized stereotypes in their home country. When they arrived to the US, their class status was completely disregarded and they were consistently lumped into a "Latin American" group. As a result, the participants felt resentment about being grouped into one association. They felt that their previously experienced social and

cultural capital should be respected in the US. Participants' testimonies about micro-aggressions, stereotypes and a loss of their previous social status ultimately hindered them to develop a positive attitude towards US society. As a result, the participants turned away from the host society, rather than becoming more oriented toward it.

Participants in this study also discussed an intersection of race and class through "passing whiteness." This concept of "passing whiteness" occurred when a Latin American participant with light skin was accepted as being "white" by white Americans. Skin color played a huge role in how the participants were racialized, perceived and treated in the US. "Passing whiteness" ultimately translates to being from a higher class and being more Americanized. This concept added an additional layer to the integration paradox, more specifically, relative deprivation, in that participants recognized their privilege in US society compared to darker skinned Latin Americans. The highly educated Latin American participants with lighter skin become self-aware of their privilege and recognize that race is a correlation to class for Latin Americans. The majority of the participants acknowledged this self-awareness during their interactions with Chicanos or other Latin Americans with darker skin. A few participants described interactions with Chicanos and US born Latinos who made it known to the lighter skinned participants that Chicanos experience more discrimination because of their darker skin. Chicanos recognize that they are a part of a lower class than the "white passing" Latin Americans.

In regard to relative deprivation within the framework of the integration paradox, it was prevalent throughout interviews that the participants disengaged from US society because they felt deprived of their previous social and class status they experienced in

their home country. It is significant that highly educated Latin Americans gravitated towards each other instead of befriending other Americans because the highly educated Latin Americans are now in a society where they have to compete with highly educated Americans. The participants were accustomed to being at the top of the social hierarchy in their home countries and now interacting with high-class Americans, makes the participants feel less confident and deprived of their previous social status through these interactions with majority groups.

An additional concept that arose throughout this study was that Latin American immigrants explained how their education and intelligence was devalued because they were not educated in the US. Because the participants had been previously educated in their home countries in Latin America, Americans perceived them to be incapable because their education level was not up to US standards. Participants were frustrated because they themselves knew that they were highly educated. However, white Americans consistently labeled them as unintelligent or incapable because of the Latin Americans' race and class.

Towards the end of the participants' interviews, many of them mentioned how their identity was either being lost or disrupted from living in the US. There was a sense of confusion for participants who have lived in the US for longer because while they wanted to keep their home country identity, they were also becoming more "Americanized" and incorporated into the US culture. At the same time, Latin American immigrants also felt that they could not truly express themselves fully because of a cultural and language boundary.

The various themes presented in the findings of this study can help us understand an added layer to the integration paradox: the intersection of race and class. Based on the findings, the intersection of race and class play a role in the highly education Latin American immigrants' incorporation experiences in the US. The racialization of Latin Americans is formed from skin color, culture and language. For both Latin Americans and white Americans, skin color translates into class status and overall, how Latin Americans are treated and perceived. In the US, Latin Americans are associated as one group no matter the level of education or previous social status. Highly educated Latin Americans feel frustrated in that their previous class status is not valued in the US. The intersection of race and class presents a new element of the integration paradox in that it helps to explain participants' testimonies about micro-aggressions and stereotypes they endured. Additionally, participants felt that their social status was lost when they came to the US. Consequently, these encounters hindered the participants to develop a positive attitude towards US society.

As a white American who has spent three years living in Latin America and interacted daily with highly educated Latin Americans, immigrant incorporation is something that I have become more aware of. As a highly educated white American who is a member of the majority group in the US, I recognize that I do have the social and cultural capital to succeed in US society. Because of my positionality, I have more advantages than a highly educated Latina woman. With this knowledge I was able to better understand how the intersection of race and class plays a role in the incorporation experiences of highly educated Latin American immigrants in the US. I was able to trust and relate well to the participants. After conducting my research, many of the participants

were excited to read my research and expressed that their voices needed to be heard surrounding the complexities of race and class discrimination among Latin American immigrants in the US.

Because this study had a small sample with eight participants, this study may not be as credible as one with more participants. While there were themes surrounding Latin American immigrant incorporation in the US, more participants would allow for a more in depth understanding of the issues of race and the discrimination that participants experienced. With more interviews, the findings may present the extent of how much skin tone and class play a factor in incorporation experiences and discrimination.

In regard to future research, the findings presented a new group to be studied: Chicanos. Chicanos were not interviewed for the purpose of this study. However, the majority of the participants discussed their relationships with Chicano groups in the US. The participants recognized that they were more privileged than their Chicano acquaintances because of the participants' lighter skin tones. Therefore, a possibility for future research could be to study Chicano groups in regard to their experiences of how race and class play a role in their lives in the US.

Another question that many participants brought up was, "what does it mean to be Americanized?" Participants discussed this question when they were talking about how their identity has changed since being in the US. This would be an interesting question to further pursue with Latin American immigrants living in the US. One could focus on how Latin American immigrants' identities have changed or stayed the same while living in the US and ultimately discover what it actually means to be Americanized.

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