

## *Where Are You From and Why Are You Here? Microaggressions, Racialization, and Mexican College Students in a New Destination\**

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Previous sociological research on U.S. Mexicans has concentrated on their assimilation, especially educational patterns. While recent research has shifted focus to Mexicans settling in “new destinations” away from the Southwest, there have been few examinations of the microlevel dynamics through which this group’s young people have been received in new destinations. Moreover, an emphasis remains on how well this group is assimilating. Using in-depth interviews, sociology of race perspectives, and racial microaggressions, this article analyzes Mexican students’ treatment in a predominantly white university, town, and high schools in a northeastern state. While assimilation perspectives would view these students’ presence in college as an early indicator of structural assimilation into the dominant white middle class, interviews paint a more nuanced picture. Notably there is a pattern of racial microaggressions, or everyday slights, typically coming from white students and school officials. Through these microaggressions, respondents are racialized as nonwhite, juxtaposed as inferior to whites, and come to learn of their group’s lower status. Nonetheless, respondents are advancing toward college graduation given the support and resources they use.

### **Introduction**

Previous sociological research on Mexicans in the United States has concentrated on their assimilation patterns, especially their educational attainment (Alba and Nee 2003; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Much of this work has been on their relatively high rate of high school dropout, low rate of college enrollment, and sociopolitical dynamics and structural obstacles to their educational success. Even though recent research has shifted focus to Mexicans in “new destinations” away from the U.S. Southwest (Massey 2008; Zúñiga and Hernandez-Leon 2005) there have been few examinations of the microlevel dynamics through which this group’s young people have been received in these new locations (see Smith 2006 for exception). Moreover, an emphasis remains on how well this group is adapting in this country. Despite a growing literature on immigrants’ racialization, as well as continuing anti-immigrant policies and sentiments, immigration sociologists and others continue to rely on integration and assimilation to

comprehend Mexicans' circumstances in the United States (Feagin and Cobas 2014; Romero 2008; Sáenz and Douglas 2015). As sociological immigration research tends to focus on assimilation and mobility, neither the discrimination that immigrants and their children encounter nor the larger-scale advantages and privileges afforded to native-born whites are seriously examined (Feagin and Cobas 2014; Romero 2008). This oversight reinforces the notion that Mexicans and other immigrants who are not upwardly mobile fail because of their shortcomings, discounts their varied experiences of discrimination, and assumes they will be welcomed into the dominant white middle class. Consequently, this obfuscates structural realities, dismisses racial domination, and reinforces this country's racial hierarchy.

Using in-depth interviews, sociology of race perspectives, and psychological research on racial microaggressions, this article analyzes the ways in which thirty 1.5- and second-generation<sup>1</sup> Mexicans have been received at Victory University<sup>2</sup> and their predominantly white high schools in a northeastern state. While assimilation perspectives would view students' college enrollment as an early indicator of their structural assimilation into the dominant white middle class, interviews paint a more nuanced picture. Markedly there is a pattern of racial microaggressions, or slights, which respondents face mostly from white students and school officials. Microaggressions generally fit under three general and overlapping mechanisms—spatial whiteness, interpersonal subordination, and exclusion—which reproduce systemic racism. Through these mechanisms, respondents encounter racialization as nonwhite, are juxtaposed as inferior to whites, and come to learn about their group's lower status in the United States. As such, this study provides empirical evidence as to how racism can potentially structure immigrants' and their children's opportunities. Nonetheless, respondents are generally advancing toward college graduation given the support and resources they use.

This article is broken into four parts. Part 1 specifies how the racialization of Latinx<sup>3</sup> and Mexicans can be contextualized using contributions from the sociology of race, as well as how racial microaggressions fit into sociological analyses. In Part 2, the data and methods are reviewed. Part 3 details the various microaggressions that respondents experienced in their school settings as well as some main effects. This article concludes with a discussion about the implications of this research in relation to the low educational attainment of Mexican students.

### **Racialization of Immigration Studies**

Immigration studies typically employ either a new or segmented assimilation perspective. The former is distinctive in prioritizing the role of certain institutions, through civil rights enforcement by the state, in facilitating

assimilation, a social process explicated mostly by socioeconomic outcomes occurring over several generations (see Alba and Nee 2003). The latter is premised on an unequal society where post-1965 immigrants and their children's trajectories depend on their group's human capital, context of reception, family structure, and community structure (see Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Since Gordon's (1964) specification of assimilation's multiple facets, researchers emphasize structural assimilation, the establishing of primary relations between immigrant and native-born individuals, as the most crucial for immigrants' mobility. The blurring of social boundaries between immigrant and native groups, hinging on enduring and intimate contact between groups, leads to significant changes (Alba and Nee 2003). Irrespective of the variant or focus, a crucial flaw of assimilation research is that it ignores the primary white agents who control major societal processes of adaptation and instead focuses on the immigrants who are usually the least powerful in this process of assimilation (Feagin and Cobas 2014: 6). Given this focus, immigration scholars tend to disregard white privilege as well as the structural inequalities that exist between native-born whites, people of color, and immigrants of color (Feagin and Cobas 2014; Romero 2008).

Furthermore, this emphasis on assimilation tends to overlook the varied difficulties that Latinx and Mexicans face, whether U.S.-born or not, given their racialization<sup>4</sup> as nonwhite, "a threat," "illegals," and "criminals" (Chavez 2013; Cobas, Duany, and Feagin 2009; Dowling 2014; Feagin and Cobas 2014; O'Brien 2008; Romero 2011; Sáenz and Douglas 2015; Smith 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Vasquez 2011). Difficulties include discrimination in the workplace, in schools, in public accommodations, anti-Spanish hostility and discrimination, racial profiling by law enforcement, and violence (Cobas, Duany, and Feagin 2009; Dowling 2014; Feagin 2014; Feagin and Cobas 2014; O'Brien 2008; Romero 2011; Smith 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Vasquez 2011). However, these studies do not examine Mexican young adults' experiences in predominantly white educational settings nor in new destinations. This study aims to address this gap given the little that is known about young Mexicans who are coming of age in new destinations and how racism may impact their opportunities.

Because of assimilation research's shortcomings, race critical scholars have argued the need for sociology of race perspectives in immigration studies. Specifically, three important sociology of race contributions not seriously considered in the sociology of immigration—the persistence of racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014; Omi and Winant 2014), the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014), and the ideological justifications of racial inequalities and white domination (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014)—serve to contextualize

Mexicans' racialization, discrimination, their broader experiences, and their low educational attainment. The theory of systemic racism brings these important contributions together where interconnected and codependent institutions continue to imbed racial oppression (Feagin 2006), people of color are denied wealth accumulation and other material advantages, these inequalities are reproduced over time, and racial oppression is rationalized (Feagin 2014). Rationalization is accomplished through a white racial frame that provides "a socially imbedded set of racial stereotypes, images, and emotions that is widely accepted and critical to maintaining white subordination of people of color" (Feagin 2014: 26).

Through this societal white racial frame, Latinx are racialized as a "dangerous, threatening, "foreign," [and] "un-American" nonwhite group with a recurrent emphasis on their alleged criminality (Feagin and Cobas 2014: 29). Latinx' phenotype, language, and other characteristics—whether real or imagined—are also framed negatively (Cobas, Duany, and Feagin 2009; Feagin and Cobas 2014). According to Feagin, whites developed the white racial frame to interpret and defend their privileges and advantages as meritorious, define themselves as superior, and people of color as inferior and deserving of their subordinate status across society (2014). Systemic racial inequalities and white supremacy also persist given that color-blind racism, an ideology that upholds an unequal racial hierarchy using race-neutral terms, allows most whites to ignore, consciously and unconsciously, their racial privileges (Bonilla-Silva 2014). Thus, the white racial frame and color-blind racism justify the discrimination, racialization, and inequities faced by Latinx and others.

### ***Bringing Racial Microaggressions into Sociological Analyses***

As post-Civil Rights racism is subtle, institutional, and seemingly non-racial (Bonilla-Silva 2014), it is crucial to identify the ways in which it manifests. Equally vital is to examine how racism affects various groups in different settings in order to get a fuller picture of where Latinx and other intermediate racial groups will be positioned within the U.S. racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2015). Examining how racism manifests in contemporary immigrants' lives also provides an alternative to assimilation in gauging their treatment. Incorporating racial microaggressions into sociological analyses of racism and immigrants is one way of assessing Mexicans' treatment in new destinations, whether they are experiencing racism, and the extent of their racialization. Racial microaggressions are useful in examining these issues as they encompass "brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities," intentional or not, communicating "hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" to a person or group (Sue et al. 2007: 273). Psychologist Derald Sue and his colleagues have extensively analyzed racial microaggressions and identify three

types: (1) microassaults or explicit and derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks, (2) microinsults or subtle but insensitive and rude snubs which degrade a person's racial identity or heritage, and (3) microinvalidations or comments that exclude or nullify a person of color's experiences, thoughts, and histories. Taken together, racial microaggressions suggest that people of color<sup>5</sup> are criminally inclined, foreign, unintelligent, and ultimately deserving of their low social status in society (Sue et al. 2007).

Still, Sue and colleagues do not link the microlevel dynamics of racial microaggressions with larger structural forces. Sue et al. (2007:272) posit that racial microaggressions best describe the everyday occurrence of contemporary racism; there is an emphasis on the subtle and unintentional aspects of interpersonal interactions. As such racial microaggressions are not contextualized within persistent racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014; Omi and Winant 2014), the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014), and the ideological justifications of racial inequalities and white domination (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014). These sociological contributions, especially systemic racism, help to ameliorate Sue and his colleagues' limitations and extend our understanding of racial microaggressions as part of structural phenomenon. Simultaneously, racial microaggressions exemplify the recurring and unequal relationships that recreate the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin 2014).

In addition, examining Mexican students is crucial for better understanding how different people of color experience microaggressions *and* if Latinx subgroups experience microaggressions differently. Given the tendency of racial microaggressions to manifest at an interpersonal level, they are also a useful tool in examining respondents' experiences with racism in their relatively new and predominantly white educational settings.

### **Methods and Data**

The interviews analyzed here are part of a larger research project examining the factors facilitating Mexican students' transition into college. Mexicans were selected because they have one of lowest rates of high school completion of any racial or ethnic group (Alba and Nee 2003; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Interview questions focused on students' educational experiences in high school and college; any challenges encountered along the way; encouragement and support received; and relationships with parents, school officials, and friends. Thirty interviews with 1.5- and second-generation Mexicans<sup>6</sup> enrolled at Victory University, a northeastern public state school, were conducted. White students make up more than 60 percent of the more than 40,000 students enrolled, while Latinx

students make up <10 percent of the student body. Interviews were conducted between January 2014 and December 2015, averaged 75 min, and were tape-recorded and transcribed. Follow-up email surveys asking about demographic information such as year of arrival to the United States and more specific themes emerging during interviews were collected after face-to-face interviews. Students were recruited during the university's Mexican student organization meetings, solicitation through email and the organizations' closed Facebook group, and referrals from interviewees and university officials who work with this population.

As of December 2016, 19 students in the study have graduated from college. Twenty-seven respondents were born, raised, or have lived in the same northeastern state prior to attending Victory. Twenty-two of these students came from small and mostly white suburban towns in this state. This is significant given that not much is known about the children of immigrants coming of age in new destinations, let alone those in college. The other three students came from major cities in the Midwest and the Southwest. Focusing on students' high school experiences is crucial because this provides eight communities inside the same northeastern state, as opposed to only one if Victory were the only focus, within which to gauge how Mexicans are treated. Moreover, the focus on high schools also provides a longer period of time within which microaggressions and racialization may be observed in the lives of respondents. Almost 50 percent of respondents, 14 interviewees, were born in the United States. Among the Mexican-born, age of arrival ranged from five to fourteen years old. In total, 14 of the respondents were female.

Despite a vast majority of students characterizing their high school and college experiences as uneventful, if not positive, most still related multiple examples where they and/or other Mexicans had negative experiences because of being nonwhite in majority white settings. Such experiences complicate assimilation perspectives' view of college enrollment, especially in a predominantly white university, as an initial step toward assimilating into the dominant white middle class. Although much research documents the stereotypes, discrimination, and microaggressions that Latinx and other students of color experience within U.S. colleges and universities (see Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot 2005; Feagin 2014; Mueller, Dirks, and Picca 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Yosso et al. 2009), few studies tell us about the extent to which Latinx face microaggressions in high schools. One exception is Kohli and Solórzano (2012) who found that Latinx and other students of color faced microaggressions in the form of teachers mispronouncing their names from kindergarten through high school; students experienced feelings of inferiority. Other high school studies, although not focused on microaggressions, document instances of school officials stereotyping and discriminating against Latinx

students by assuming they do not care about their education and by holding low academic expectations (Conchas 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela 1999). Thus, this study contributes to Mexican educational attainment research by focusing on those coming of age and attending college in a new destination and microaggressions research by examining Latinx' college and high school settings.

### Findings

All students reported experiencing multiple microaggressions—ranging from having their academic capabilities questioned, Mexicans being perceived as “foreign,” hearing derogatory comments and stereotypes, to being constantly asked about their national origin, phenotype, and implicitly their citizenship status—within their white dominated settings. Most incidents described below occurred in educational settings, but this does preclude respondents experiencing them elsewhere; interviews focused on educational settings. For instance, of the twenty-seven respondents who reported being subjected to or familiar with derogatory comments or stereotypes against Mexicans, seven students encountered one or two incidents, while the rest described at least three incidents; one student described eight separate incidents, another recalled six incidents, and two reported zero incidents. While students' descriptions of these encounters fall under ten distinct categories of stereotypes or derogatory comments,<sup>7</sup> this article focuses on the general/derogatory, academic, drugs/criminal, and national origin/“foreign,” categories.

Below, these microaggressions are contextualized within three overlapping mechanisms—spatial whiteness, interpersonal subordination, and interpersonal exclusion. The ways in which each mechanism helps to reproduce systemic racism is also detailed. The section before the conclusion discusses the broader social effects of these microaggressions with an emphasis on the racialization and low status of Mexicans. This article concludes discussing the implications of this research in relation to the low educational attainment of Mexican students in the United States.

#### *Spatial Whiteness*

People of color must navigate important spaces and institutions, including educational settings, that are often white controlled (Anderson 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2015; Evans and Moore 2015; Feagin 2014; Feagin and Cobas 2014). The whiteness of these spaces is a consequence of their histories, structures, practices, and discourses that reproduce racial inequalities as well as the assumed superiority of whites and assumed inferiority of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Evans and Moore 2015; Feagin and Cobas 2014). Unlike other research, this study found that microaggressions (re)produced the spatial

whiteness of respondents' educational settings by making them feel unwelcome and inferior. All but five respondents recalled these types of incidents in high school and at Victory University. In separate predominantly white high schools, five respondents believed that the teachers there were not invested in or did not care about Latinx students (Conchas 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela 1999). Six other students perceived that white high school students "looked down upon" Latinx students because of their language or accents; all but one of these students had a noticeable accent. For Alma,<sup>8</sup> who is 1.5 generation and had a subtle accent, this involved students *and* some teachers making fun of her name. Wendy, who arrived in the United States as a teenager and had a thick accent, encountered "belittling" at the hands of white and Mexican American students "[since] I don't understand them, they talk to me and they get mad because I don't understand and they say things that I don't understand. They laughed about it and that made me feel bad and discouraged." These examples are part of a larger pattern where whites disparage Spanish, its speakers, and their accents given that they are assumed deficient and inferior in juxtaposition to white unaccented English speakers who are deemed superior (Feagin and Cobas 2014).

Other institutional microaggressions<sup>9</sup> that made students feel unwelcome include high school administrations' actions and inactions. At Moyses' high school, Latinx students were called "wetback" and "spic," yet according to Moyses, the administration and teachers overlooked these incidents and "nothing was ever done." This inaction normalized the use of slurs against Latinx students and marked them as inferior. At a different high school, the administration there changed the Latinx student group's name from "Latinx Working Together" "to "We All Work Together"<sup>10</sup> given white parents' objections that the former name was racist. Here the administration's siding with the white parents communicated that Latinx students do not need to be recognized by the administration, do not belong, and are less valued than whites (Sue et al. 2007). Such practices not only reinforced the white domination of these spaces but more broadly, the various microaggressions reported perpetuate racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism within respondents' respective high schools (Feagin 2014).

Once at Victory University these practices continued, a majority of respondents implicitly conveyed feeling unwelcomed and uncomfortable in a variety of ways. For ten students, the predominantly white student body was a surprise given that they expected a diverse setting from how Victory, and most college and universities, emphasize diversity. These respondents questioned the lack of diversity and wondered where all the Latinx students were. Henry, a U.S.-born respondent who attended an urban high school with a substantial number of Asian, Black, Latinx, and white students, shared "I honestly believe that this is

not fair how they have to reach a 70 percent white quota.<sup>11</sup> ” Recall that the student population at Victory is more than 60 percent white, while <10 percent is Latinx. Historically white universities do not provide genuine diversity or equal access and opportunities to students of color; instead, they provide diversity of convenience where these universities seemingly admit students of color to enrich the experiences of white students (Yosso et al. 2009). Given that these universities and other white institutional spaces are built on the exclusion of people of color, these spaces are entrenched with white discourses, ideologies, and privilege so that the people of color now present in these spaces are consequently subjugated (Evans and Moore 2015). More importantly, spatial whiteness is a characteristic of white institutional spaces, including Victory, as a consequence of the embedded nature of white racial domination across U.S. institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014).

Therefore, a lack of other students like themselves signaled to respondents that they are outsiders at Victory (Sue et al. 2007). Other students explicitly noted feeling out of place because of these predominantly white settings. One student did not join any non-minority groups because she felt out of place in predominantly white groups; another quit her campus job because she felt treated unfairly; another felt that white students did not talk to Mexicans because they are “not Caucasian;” and several others believed there was no integration between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Some other students felt unwelcomed through the many “stares” and “weird looks” they received from white students on campus and in the town when they were together with other Mexican students. These experiences are part of the discriminatory barriers students of color face in and around historically white colleges and universities (Feagin 2014). Regardless of students’ national origin, gender, phenotype, and where they attended high school, most felt out of place or unwelcomed because of being nonwhite in this historically white university. Still, the specific reasons for these feelings varied.

Besides the focus on diversity across college campuses, another common theme, especially over the last several years, has been the engagement by mostly white students in racially themed parties and cross-racial costuming (see Feagin 2014; Mueller, Dirks, and Picca 2007). A few years ago, members of a white fraternity were photographed at a Halloween party on Victory’s campus in “Mexican” costumes that included fake mustaches, sombreros, and ponchos. Cross-racial costuming is typically guided by stereotypes, where success is determined by how well the racial group is “physically” and “behaviorally” captured (Mueller, Dirks, and Picca 2007). Thus, white students holding up signs reinforcing stereotypes and the white racial framing of Mexicans as low-wage workers, “illegal,” and drug dealers was no coincidence. Students in the photograph, as well as the fraternity chapter, faced much criticism and

backlash. However, Victory's administration only issued a statement expressing its disappointment with the students' behavior and how it did not reflect the university's values. This (in)action exemplifies an institutional microaggression (Yosso et al. 2009), demonstrates the persistence of a strongly white-oriented campus culture at this historically white institution (Feagin 2014), and further marked Latinx students as inferior.

Six respondents<sup>12</sup> believed that Victory's administration did not do enough to address the fraternity members' derogatory actions. Gerardo, a 1.5-generation respondent who was the most involved in student organizations, believed that he fit in pretty well at Victory. However, he had the following to say about the university's handling of this incident as well as diversity overall:

Gerardo I feel like that [the incident] was handled pretty poorly...overall [Victory] sent out the wrong message. Like "don't do it because you make us look bad" instead of, you know, instilling a sense of diversity in the university. They tried to fix it but in the wrong way. I feel like there are a lot of promises that were not kept.

Me Do you think that is a broader issue on campus?

Gerardo Yea, I think that it is a bigger issue. Like for example when we have [Noche Mexicana<sup>13</sup>], the majority of the people there were Latino. You know, there is no, again the university says diversity this or that, and maybe some people are trying to make that push but at the end of the day how many non-Latino students did you have at [Noche Mexicana] or [Noche Hispana]? When that [incident] happened, there were going to be all these programs for diversity, and they may exist, but they are not being advertised [nor] being pushed [by Victory].

Here and later in the interview, Gerardo questions whether Victory is as invested in publicizing Mexican and Latinx student organization events as it is in white students' events, namely fraternity and sorority related events. Two other respondents, like Gerardo, who were involved with multiple Latinx student groups, shared his sentiments. Victory's inertia left the impression that Mexicans students' concerns (Yosso et al. 2009) and events celebrating their cultural heritage are irrelevant. Not only did the university's response legitimize students' white racial framing and racialization of Mexicans as drug dealers (Feagin and Cobas 2014) but as a result, whether intentionally or not, Victory is reproduced as a white dominated institution (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014) where whites are assumed superior and people of color are assumed inferior (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Evans and Moore 2015; Feagin and Cobas 2014).

*Interpersonal Subordination: Stereotypes, Derogatory Comments, and Jokes*

Another mechanism reproducing systemic racism in respondents' educational settings was interpersonal subordination; this refers to microaggressions that explicitly denigrated respondents and other Mexicans because of being Mexican. Almost all respondents discussed experiencing and familiarity with Mexican stereotypes, or what they termed slurs, racist comments, and other derogatory comments made against Mexicans. This is a common theme in other research examining the collegiate experiences of students of color (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot 2005; García 2004; Yosso et al. 2009).

However, five respondents specifically described the comments they heard directed at Mexicans at their predominantly white high schools as either racial or racist, while another five were called a slur in either high school or college. Ernesto, a U.S.-born respondent and the darkest-skinned of all respondents, recalled white high school students telling he and other Mexican students to "go back to your country" and being called "apple picker[s] and other racist terms" given that Mexicans were seasonally employed in the local apple fields. Alma, who was among the lightest-skinned of respondents, also recalled how white students at her high school were cruel in calling Mexicans "beaners" and "other nasty comments;" she herself was not the target of these comments. Regarding hearing derogatory comments about Mexicans in high school, those with darker complexions were more often personally targeted than those with lighter complexions. At a Latinx student group social event at Victory, a Dominican student also called Maleno, another 1.5-generation respondent, a "beaner." However, Maleno was unsure why this student used the slur because he did not know the student and believed that his light-brown complexion made him look like he could be from any Latin American country. Although Latinx individuals are not immune from espousing a white racial framing of Mexicans and others (Feagin and Cobas 2014), the above incident was the only instance reported where nonwhite individuals directed derogatory comments at respondents.

Moses, who considers himself an easy going and friendly person, and has a medium to dark complexion, had the following experience at Victory:

Well I actually had a very interesting first night out . . . For my scholarship . . . it required for us to come to the university a week before most students . . . The first night my cousin was taking [other Mexican students in this program and I] downtown to just walk around and stuff and we were walking by the student center and this group of white kids walked by us and one of them said, "oh my god these spics are taking over [town] now." So, it was interesting because I feel like you always hear that [this part of the Northeast] is kind of racist and this and that, but to experience that the first night, so I was like oh shit, like okay, maybe there is some truth . . .

This example demonstrates how strong and negative the white racial framing of Latinx is among a group of white students given that the presence of four students is enough to be deemed a “takeover” of a historically white university town and triggered the use of a slur. Overall, the students described so far in this section experienced microassaults, while others who heard Mexicans being perceived in what they referred to as closeminded, negative, and stereotypical ways were subjected to microinsults (Sue et al. 2007). All of these instances encompass the recurring and unequal relationships, which recreate the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin 2014).

Seven other students reported personally experiencing or hearing Mexican stereotypes or slurs in jokes or in a joking manner. These encounters qualify as microassaults given that the telling of any joke is intentional (Yosso et al. 2009). Daniela, who is half-white and Mexican, recalled her boyfriends’ friends in high school, all of whom are white, “constantly,” but jokingly, referring to her using slurs. This did not bother Daniela’s boyfriend, but instead, he attributed her taking issue with these slurs to her being a “fiery Latina.” Regarding her white roommates at Victory, Alma detailed how their treatment of her changed once they found out she is Mexican:

But I never understand like why that happened. Just like I feel that after I tell them that I am different, that they kind of point out certain things like “oh well you say this sort of funny because you are Mexican” sort of thing. Or even stereotypical things like if it’s my turn to do the dishes, they say yeah “you do that because you are good at it.” But they may think that it’s funny, but I don’t find it funny.

Racialized joking premised on stereotypes and slurs as experienced by Alma and others is part of the broader societal white racial frame which is critical to the maintenance of the subordination of people of color given that it signals the inferiority of people of color and that stereotypes and slurs are often viewed as harmless by the white individuals perpetrating the jokes (Feagin 2014).

Respondents were additionally subordinated through others’ assumptions of Mexicans being inclined to use drugs or commit crimes. One-third of the sample mentioned at least one occasion, typically on Victory’s campus, during which they encountered such assumptions. Describing the perceptions others have about Mexicans, Wendy recounted:

I think, like, most of the people they think that Mexicans are criminals and that they use drugs. These are some of the things I’ve heard from students. Yea, because I know some people that when I talk to them they think that Mexicans, all of them are criminals. When I talk to them I have to say that not everyone is the same way, it’s only a stereotype. . . For example

my roommate, I think she knew Hispanic people before, but not Mexicans so much. So I had to talk to her about Mexicans and now she knows more about Mexicans.

Wendy's experiences of hearing others stereotype Mexicans as criminals is not a consequence of politician Donald Trump's discourse, all interviews in this study occurred prior to his public denigration of Mexicans and immigrants. Instead, this stereotype is part of the long-standing racialization of Latinx as criminals (Feagin and Cobas 2014). As was the case with Alma not being targeted with derogatory comments, Wendy also was not the target of these stereotypes.

However, male students were more often the targets of derogatory comments and especially assumptions of criminality. Isaac, born and raised in a southwestern city with a predominantly Mexican population, related an example of being "singled out" and what he termed "subtle" racism. As one of three minorities among 60 students on his dorm floor during freshman year, white students asked Isaac if he was in a gang and specifically "Are you associated with Latin Kings?" Further, Maleno discussed the residents of the predominantly white college town as follows:

I think that they feel [Mexicans] are inferior to them, because I have seen them, just look at us different when we go to one of the restaurants. . . And also like the really old people, they are really just kind of scared of you. One time I was in the Burger King in town, and I was behind an [old white couple] and the guy just saw me behind him and they just moved away from me because they thought that I was going to rob them or something.

Still, this negative framing of Mexicans as alleged criminals is part of the racialization of this nonwhite group as "dangerous, threatening, "foreign," [and] "un-American" (Feagin and Cobas 2014: 29) and is so prominent that students are able to recognize their individual experiences as part of a broader phenomenon.

Although all students who experienced these jokes and comments had to spend time and energy in dealing with them, their reactions varied (Yosso et al. 2009). Only a few reported pushing back. Many respondents were so used to these jokes and comments that they were not "phased" by them. Daniela especially was affected as the jokes and her boyfriends' reaction to them were, according to her, partly responsible for her having identity issues given her mixed-race status. Regardless of students' reactions to these comments and other microaggressions, they themselves decided on the best course of action to take. Broadly speaking, the students were made aware of their status as non-white given the subordination and differences that were made apparent through the jokes, comments, and stereotypes they were subjected to at the hands of mostly white individuals. Here, again, students faced microassaults (Sue et al. 2007) which facilitated interpersonal subordination. Students' subordination

demonstrates the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014) buttressed by the white racial frame. More broadly, most of the encounters described in this section marked Mexicans in general, and the students themselves, as criminally inclined, poor, and ultimately not belonging (Sue et al. 2007) at the university.

### *Interpersonal Exclusion*

Another way that respondents were marked as not belonging at the university was through assumptions about their education and intelligence. These assumptions implied that respondents, other Mexicans, and to a lesser extent Latinx should be excluded from higher education. While similar to the mechanism of spatial whiteness, interpersonal exclusion is unique in that there is an emphasis on doubting respondents' capacities. Eighteen respondents described experiences where their academic capabilities, accomplishments, or pursuits were questioned (Rivera, Forquer, and Rangel 2010). Respondents reported multiple ways that this occurred. For some, their academic achievements were doubted. Ernesto, who was one of the few Mexicans in his classes, remembered some teachers being "prejudiced toward Mexicans."

My 11th grade history teacher would stand behind me every exam. . .He would walk around and always end up behind my desk. . .And every exam it was the same thing, he thought I was cheating because I would score 97, 98, good grades. So he would always expect something, so he would always be monitoring me. And in my work he would mark it really specific, he would take off all these little points and I would talk to my [white] friends in class and ask if he took off for them. . .he wouldn't take off half the stuff he took off me.

Other respondents were steered toward community colleges or away from "good" 4-year universities by white high school counselors. Katherine, a 1.5-generation respondent who attended a small town high school and was the first person in her family to go college, described her relationship with her guidance counselor as follows:

Katherine We have our high school advisor, but I didn't have a good relationship with him. Junior year of high school you are supposed to go in a meeting with them and they are supposed to advise you on college and which ones to go to. And when I went to him, he asked me if I wanted to go to college and which ones, and I mentioned [Victory], and he said "oh that's for rich white people, why don't we look into a community college." So I just got up and left (laughs).

Me How did that make you feel?

Katherine I felt stupid at first because I thought okay, so I'm dreaming, maybe there's no way I can go to [Victory] and I should consider community college. . .

Two other respondents had the same experience with this counselor, as, in his opinion, these students stood a better chance of getting into a community college. Other students, regardless of where they were born, also had white counselors discourage them from applying to Victory University because they were perceived as not capable of meeting the entrance standards. These students were particularly affected by their counselors' stereotypes of all Mexicans being uneducated (Lee and Zhou 2015) given that most of them reported good grades and SAT scores. In these examples, we see clearly how a white racial framing of Mexican students has the potential to reproduce educational and other inequalities given how difficult it is for community college students to transfer and graduate from a 4-year university.

In the case of other students, they were explicitly told that Mexican and Latinx students did not deserve to be at Victory, as they only get there because of affirmative action (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot 2005). Although Reina, who was born and raised in a northeastern city, described being in love with attending Victory, she also detailed what she did not like:

Reina I don't like that out of the 40,000 students on this campus, 2,000 of us are Hispanic or Latino. And I think a little bit less that are black. I don't think that is fair. It is like maybe 4,000 of us out of 40,000 and that is insane to me.

Me What specifically about this bothers you?

Reina I think there is also a stigma attached to it here, I have heard multiple times some other non-Hispanic, mostly white, students they have been like "oh but you have so many opportunities because you are Hispanic, you are underrepresented, you definitely got here more easily than us or you get more aid because of that. Because of your race or whatever, and you get it easier because people give you more opportunities" and all this stuff, and (*more sarcastically*) I guess it was so easy not having the money or resources or finances to be here and stress everything, I guess okay you make sense. (*Sounding more agitated*) That to me is some of the most ignorant things that they don't know what they are talking about, they do not know what we have to go through to get here.

In this instance, Reina connects Victory's lack of diversity with students' white framing of minority students at historically white universities and how this carries added stigma for such students given that they are erroneously perceived to have unfair advantages over white students.

In another variation of this theme, six respondents recalled fellow Victory students being surprised that they were doing well in "harder" STEM majors. Kevin, a science major, who was born and raised in the Southwest but attended high school in the Northeast, shared:

I feel with the general student body, the perception that there is, is that Hispanics are less capable. I feel that that is pretty persistent. So like, there is always this extra admiration when, like, people are like "you are so competitive." Its like, are you surprised because I am Hispanic? I think that is where I see it.

Some of the experiences detailed under this section qualify as microinsults as the students and teachers are not described as having acted consciously (Sue et al. 2007). For Claudia, a science major that was born and raised in a major Midwestern city, and two other female students, gender played a role in the microinsults targeting their educational capabilities:

Like a lot of the [Mexican male students] when I first met them and told them my major, they were like, "oh really?" Like, they didn't believe I was a science major, they thought my GPA was really bad. . . Like I was having a conversation with a guy who graduated, and I told him my major and he was like "no way." I was like not knowing what to say. And he started asking me all these questions about my major. . . He was testing me.

Although Claudia and the other two students recalled others doubting their educational pursuits because of being Mexican, as they recalled, more often they were doubted because pursuing college was not seen as compatible by their families and what they viewed as the traditional womanly duties of having a family, children, and tending to the home by their mid-twenties.

As most of the instances recounted in this section show, respondents experienced a reinforcement of the stereotype that Mexicans are poorly educated or less intelligent (Chavez 2013; Dowling 2014; Lee and Zhou 2015; Vasquez 2011; Yosso et al. 2009) especially in relation to their white peers. The instances where white counselors and students told respondents that they, and people like them, did not belong at Victory qualify as microassaults (Sue et al. 2007) given that there were conscious actions on their part. Together these microaggressions assume that respondents are not capable of getting good grades, meeting 4-year university entrances standards, and succeeding in majors that are perceived more as difficult. As such, most of these instances represent the recurring and unequal relationships that recreate the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin 2014). These

instances also imply that respondents, other Mexicans, and to a lesser extent other Latinx should be excluded from higher education.

***Citizenship Status, Phenotype, and National Origin***

The microaggressions detailed in the section above focused on Mexicans being perceived as not belonging in higher education. However, this is not the only form of exclusion respondents faced. Gloria, born and raised in a major southwestern city with a large Mexican American population, and who has a medium complexion, reflected on being Mexican American:

Gloria     Have you seen the movie *Selena*?

Me         Yes

Gloria     Do you remember when Edward James Olmos' character said

Me         Yea, I know exactly what you are going to say. "You have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans"

Gloria     "And more American than the Americans" (both laugh). You have to know your shit because like my cousins, who were from Mexico, would tell me that I was a "pinche gringa" [whitewashed Mexican] and I was... Still, there is a constant idea that you are a perpetual foreigner here, irrespective of your birth status. It doesn't matter if you have citizenship or if you were born here, when they look at you they assume you are "other" and I am talking about here [at Victory and this town] and back in [home state] too.

As Gloria's narrative and other research shows, Mexicans, regardless of citizenship status, are generally perceived as foreign and "illegal" in the United States. Twelve respondents reported hearing comments that assumed that all Mexicans, including themselves, were foreign or "illegal;" mainly the former. Most typically this involved the students, both 1.5-generation and U.S.-born, being told to "go back to your country" by white students in high school. These and other incidents are only some of the microinvalidations marking Latinx as not American (Sue et al. 2007).

Almost all respondents recounted instances, usually at Victory, upon first meeting white peers where they were asked where they were from, what they were, were not believed that they were Mexican, or had their national origin questioned. Questions like these function as a "racist hoop," although most of the respondents found these questions benign, given stereotypical assumptions about Mexicans' "foreignness" (O'Brien 2008: 129). Some respondents recalled, "Where are you from?" being the first question that people ask when

meeting them, or being asked this “a lot.” Cristina arrived in the United States at a young age. She had no apparent accent, a light-to-medium complexion, and had been asked this question so many times that she wondered “Do I look like I am not from here?” In four other respondents’ experiences, the person inquiring brings up the word “originally” when the respondent answered the small northeastern town they come from. One of these respondents articulated how these encounters affected her:

Sofia      In the beginning when I would meet people and they would ask “Where you are from?” I would always say I am from [northeastern town], and they are like “Where is that, is it here in [the Northeast]? Then they would ask where I was from again, that is when I started saying that I am originally from Mexico and that would be enough. But before when I say [northeastern state], they were just like no.

Me          How did that make you feel, for them to keep asking you?

Sofia      That really hurt me in a way because I think that I can’t say that I am just Mexican or that I am just American because I am not just American since I grew up here. But I am Mexican, I feel like I am both and when they ask me that it is like they are denying the fact that I consider myself American too.

Although Sofia has no discernable accent when speaking English, in the eyes of her white peers, her nonwhite phenotype signals her as not American.

Sasha, much darker in complexion and with no discernable accent, recounted experiences where others at Victory asked about her racial identity:

I mean I do say I am Mexican and they are like right away thinking that, you know, I was born in Mexico. I get it, I don’t get offended, but it’s just like please stop assuming. I was born in [northeastern state], I get it consistently from people. I was born and raised here.

Sofia, Sasha, and others dealt with distress because of assumptions about their phenotypes. Three other respondents were asked where they are from so much that in response they developed a strategy (O’Brien 2008) so when they are asked where they are from, these respondents come up with a random country to try to throw off the person who is asking. Still, the underlying assumption behind these examples is that being American means being white (Feagin and Cobas 2014; O’Brien 2008; Romero 2011) given that this country’s persistent white racial framing of Latinx racializes them as foreign and un-American. Such assumptions and framing exclude respondents and other Mexicans from being considered American. This was especially true and more explicit for interviewees who had noticeably nonwhite complexions.

Conversely, a few other respondents had their Mexican identity questioned because they were assumed to be too light-skinned and thus did not “look Mexican” in the minds of those asking about their background. These types of encounters are microinvalidations as these deny the varied phenotypes that exist among Mexicans and deny respondents their heritage (Rivera, Forquer, and Rangel 2010). In Sara’s case, she suffered a double-invalidation as assumptions about phenotype, citizenship, and national origin combine to render her both not American and not Mexican in the eyes of other Mexicans and whites:

Sara        When people ask me where I’m from, I say I’m from [northeastern town], but then they are like “No, like where are you really from? Because you don’t look American,” but then again what is American?...But I’m also Mexican, I was born in Mexico, and I speak Spanish and I have Mexican culture and traditions. I speak Spanish with my parents. I like music in Spanish, I have the best of both worlds really.

Me            So when you say you are Mexican, does it vary by who is asking?

Sara        No, I tell everyone that I’m Mexican. Most people don’t believe it, they are like you are so white [and have green eyes], you don’t look Mexican. I’m like wait to you see my mom.

Daniela, who is half-white and Mexican, also experienced a double-invalidation as she is not perceived as Latinx because of her light complexion, lack of Spanish, and lack of Mexican culture, and yet she is also not perceived as fully white because of her mixed-race status. Sofia’s, Sara’s, Daniela’s, and other respondents’ experiences remind us that Mexicans and other Latinx live complex racial realities in this country. Given how their varied phenotypes, cultural practices, languages spoken, and other characteristics are assumed as accurate, yet in some cases contradictory, measures of their racial, ethnic, and or national backgrounds and authenticity, they are subject to be considered, sometimes simultaneously, neither American nor Mexican. As has been detailed in this section, young Mexicans are racialized as un-American, perceived as “forever foreigners” (Tuan 1998) regardless of citizenship status at Victory University and elsewhere, and thus they are excluded from being considered American. As an old Mexican saying goes, respondents are perceived as being “ni de aqui, ni de alla” [neither from here nor from there].

### ***Social Effects of Racial Microaggressions***

The principal social effect of the microaggressions described above is the racialization of respondents and Mexicans in general. Microaggressions marked

respondents as nonwhite, inferior, foreign, and to different degrees made the students aware of Mexicans' low status in this society, especially in relation to white individuals. A majority of the respondents explicitly acknowledged this. Discussing whether they expected to face any challenges upon graduating, eleven respondents specifically mentioned their being "Hispanic"<sup>14</sup> "or Mexican as something that may work as a disadvantage in getting hired, continuing their education, or in their future. Nora, who is 1.5-generation and had a lighter complexion than most respondents had, answered, "I mean it is not easy and mostly it's because I'm Mexican, it's not easy, I'm expecting to have a rocky path." Nelson, a U.S.-born respondent with a medium complexion, shared "sometimes just being Hispanic, you never know like if that could be an advantage or disadvantage" in the workforce. Claudia, who was among the darkest of respondents, remarked "I don't know why, I've always had this idea that whenever an employer sees my name on a resume, they are going to subconsciously discriminate against me because I am Hispanic" given the perception that "all Mexicans are illegal." Recognizing that Mexicans have low status in this country does not appear to be influenced by a student's phenotype because there was no one group of students—those with either lighter, medium, or darker complexions—who were more likely to discuss this issue than the others.

In addition, six other students described being aware of the differences in the opportunities, resources, and privileges that white students have but that Latinx students do not; and how they considered this unfair. Minerva, a 1.5-generation respondent who was one of the lightest-skinned students, pointed to some of these privileges when asked if she had anything else to share to end her interview:

I know that being like Hispanic in general and having to compete with the white students, I know, I kind of see that, not as challenging, but I know that we have, like a I don't know how to put it. I feel like we have to try harder than them cuz I know they have it more, like more easy, like they are privileged in that sense and that sort of stuff pisses me off a lot. Cuz I know for a fact that I try really really hard in my school work and in trying to get everything done, but yet for me I feel like that's never enough to meet some aspects. And because they are white and privileged they have easy access to jobs and can do anything. I know that for a fact because one of my roommates, she is in the exact same major and she doesn't really try all that much. She goes out three to four nights a week. She doesn't go to class and doesn't do anything but just by her being white gives her an advantage compared to me. I feel like she doesn't do work, but I have to try ten times harder just because I know that I'm different. It's more of a challenge not just being a woman but by being a Hispanic woman and having to prove myself. So seeing that in comparison to the white students here, that's really tough and it really pisses me off because its 2014 and you would think that we wouldn't have to face all these challenges but they are still here and out there. So it is challenging.

Here and elsewhere in her interview Minerva makes an important connection. “Hispanics,” especially in her small town, do not have access to the same resources that white students, like her roommate, do—for example, college educated middle-class parents who are fluent in English, who can advocate for them to be placed in college readiness classes, and pay for college readiness programs—in high school. Once in college, Minerva and other working-class “Hispanics” usually have to work to afford tuition, whereas her roommate and other middle-class white students may not. The differences between Minerva and her roommate echo those described by Armstrong and Hamilton’s (2013) *Paying for the Party* where affluent young women with substantial home support systems can afford to “party” their way through college. This “party pathway” is result of a university structure that attracts students who can pay full tuition, most of whom enroll in “easy” majors and do not pursue careers, as well as continued support from the fraternity and sorority system.

Still, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) only focus on white women of different class backgrounds. Minerva makes another vital connection demonstrating the importance that whiteness plays in the collegiate experience in emphasizing the cumulative burdens of being a “Hispanic woman” where she has to work “ten times harder” to “prove” herself in a white male dominated society. There was only one additional reported instance where female respondents discussed a combined racial and gendered microaggression. It is important to remember that a lack of racial and gendered microaggressions among respondents, regardless of gender identification, does not mean they do not occur. However, for the respondents described in this section, the microaggressions they faced as well as their broader experiences in their white dominated settings made them come to the realization that Mexicans occupy a low status in this country. This status is a result of the systemic racism Mexicans continue to experience and the white racial framing that upholds it (Feagin 2014).

### Discussion

This article set out to analyze Mexican students’ treatment at Victory University and other predominantly white areas in a northeastern state. Under assimilation perspectives, these students’ presence in college provides an early indicator of their structural assimilation into the dominant white middle class. However, respondents’ experiences in such settings complicate this assumption. As the focus in sociological immigration research is still on assimilation and mobility, neither the discrimination that immigrants and their children encounter nor the profound advantages afforded to native-born whites are seriously examined (Feagin and Cobas 2014; Romero 2008). Thus, this study employed sociology of race perspectives and racial microaggressions to analyze the experiences of 1.5- and second-generation Mexicans in multiple new destination

communities in the same state across a substantial period of time (from the beginning of high school through the end of college for some students). Interviews showed that students encountered various racial microaggressions, or slights—having their academic capabilities questioned, all Mexicans being perceived as “foreign,” being subjected to racist jokes and stereotypes, and having their national origin questioned—mostly from their white peers as well as school officials. These microaggressions operated through three overlapping mechanisms—spatial whiteness, interpersonal subordination, and exclusion—to racialize respondents, and make them aware of Mexicans’ low racial status as inferior and foreign. More specifically, microaggressions resulted from a persistent white racial framing and recurring and unequal relationships present in students’ northeastern settings. Taken together, these mechanisms worked to reproduce the embedded white racial domination of the educational institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Feagin 2014) respondents attended, namely Victory University, but to a lesser extent, their high schools as well.

Three additional findings with implications for further research were present. Despite respondents generally being aware of the discrimination and inequalities that Latinx and Mexicans face, many respondents downplayed the microaggressions and discrimination they themselves and others around them experienced. Only five students perceived their own experiences, those of other Mexican and Latinx students, and to a lesser extent, the experiences of blacks as part of a larger system that explicitly disadvantages them because of their nonwhite status. All other students typically used a few different explanations for why white students and adults around them had stereotyped, made derogatory comments about, or treated them and other Mexicans differently. Overall, these explanations centered on the perpetrators being ignorant, lacking experience with nonwhites, or that respondents themselves did not pay attention to those types of things. Multiple factors play into respondents’ downplaying the significance of the microaggressions and discrimination they encountered. As sociologist Eileen O’Brien (2008) argues, because Asians and Latinx face preconceived notions of being foreign, it is particularly risky for them to discuss racial discrimination given that this runs counter to the United States’ ideals of equal opportunity, and would render such individuals even more “un-American.” Such thinking may be present among respondents given that a majority of them were already aware that Mexicans, and in some cases they themselves, are perceived as different, nonwhite, and or foreign by people in their educational settings as well as in the broader society. It may also be that respondents have internalized parts of the societal white racial frame (Feagin and Cobas 2014).

Similarly, Dowling (2014) found that Mexicans who identify as racially white use colorblind racism, particularly the abstract liberalism and

minimization of racism frames (Bonilla-Silva 2014), and assertions of whiteness to downplay their experiences with discrimination. Further, Dowling's (2014) respondents believed that calling attention to racial differences perpetuates racial division and instead of blaming racism for their experiences, they emphasized an individual ability to overcome instances of discrimination. Such strategies were used to gain acceptance as American and to ward off additional racism (Dowling 2014). Students in this study tended to espouse perseverance, hard work, and an adherence to the "American Dream" as ways that other Latinx and Mexican students can make it college. Still, further research is needed, including a more in-depth analysis of the respondents in this study that cannot be covered in this article, regarding the extent to which the internalization of racial ideology in general, and the white racial frame and the frames of color-blind racism specifically, influences how children of immigrants interpret the significance of racism.

While this article examined Mexican students' experiences with microaggressions and systemic racism in their educational settings in a northeastern state, much complexity still remains to be further examined. For instance, students with darker complexions were more often targets of derogatory comments than those with lighter complexions while simultaneously male students were more often the targets of derogatory comments, especially assumptions of criminality, than female students. Future research then should investigate not only how phenotype and gender affect Mexicans' and others' likelihood of experiencing microaggressions and systemic racism, but also if there are any specifics to these experiences. Other social characteristics to consider further are accents, national origin, among others.

In addition, in spite of facing various microaggressions in their predominantly white hometowns, high schools, college town, and college campus, respondents have attained a measure of success in transitioning to college; even more so, for the 19 respondents who have already graduated from college. This is especially true considering that the vast majority of respondents' parents come from Mexico with very low levels of education and work low-wage and menial jobs in the United States and that the majority of respondents are the first in their family to attend a 4-year university. How is this possible? One explanation is the support, encouragement, and resources they had available in their transition from high school to college *and* during college. The best example of this are students who were told that they were not qualified enough to attend Victory University by their white high school counselors. For them, like for other working-class minority and immigrant students, it was the *combination* of family support, powerful institutional agents, other non-family support, and institutional resources that helped them transition to college (García 2004; Louie 2012; Stanton-Salazar 2001). More research is necessary

to analyze the relationship between racial microaggressions, access to support and resources, and the low educational attainment of marginalized students. Still, the various racial microaggressions respondents experienced, whether at the hand of their counselors or others, resulted from a persistent white racial framing and recurring and unequal relationships present in students' northeastern settings. As a result, respondents' improbable transition from high school into a predominately white university was made much more difficult and stressful especially in relation to their white and mostly middle-class peers.

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>1.5-generation refers to those born in Mexico and arriving in the United States between ages 5 and 14. Second-generation refers to those born in the United States. All respondents born in Mexico have already attained some sort of U.S. citizenship status. No respondent discussed citizenship status in relation to the issues covered by this study.

<sup>2</sup>University name is fictitious.

<sup>3</sup>An alternative to Hispanic, Latino/a, and Latin@ aiming to include the various identities of Latin American-descent peoples, especially those who identify as gender nonconforming, trans, queer, agender, or gender fluid.

<sup>4</sup>In this study, racialization is a process by which an individual or group is ascribed negative racial characteristics.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to suggest that experiences of Asians, Latinx, blacks, and other groups are the same. For example, Asians and Latinx are more likely than blacks to be perceived as foreign, blacks are most likely to be perceived as criminally inclined, and Latinx and blacks are more likely to be perceived as less intelligent (Sue et al. 2007).

<sup>6</sup>From this point on, I refer to respondents as Mexican(s) as all but four answered Mexican when asked how they primarily identify; of those four, three answered Mexican American and one answered Hispanic/Latino.

<sup>7</sup>These categories include general, academic, being lazy, being poor or manual laborers, being criminals, associations with drugs, associations with undocumented status or being "illegal," taking jobs or advantage of the system, all Latinx being Mexican, and comments dealing with the Spanish language.

<sup>8</sup>This and all names of students are pseudonyms.

<sup>9</sup>Defined as (Yosso et al. 2009: 674) "marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color."

<sup>10</sup>These student group names are fictitious.

<sup>11</sup>Victory University does not have any official quota for any racial groups.

<sup>12</sup>As of December 2016, eighteen respondents have returned questions specifically about this incident. The six respondents referenced were the only ones who mentioned the administration in their answers. Seven other respondents reported not being offended by the incident, while two respondents found the incident to be racist, two others found it ignorant, and one respondent chose

not to comment on the incident. Any further discussion on respondents' views on this incident is much longer and complicated than the space allotted here.

<sup>13</sup>This and all other names for events are fictitious. These are cultural events put on by Latinx students at Victory to celebrate their heritage.

<sup>14</sup>I use the term Hispanic here because it is the label some students explicitly used during their interviews.

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