

The Fuzziness of Whiteness: An Exploration of Latinx Discrimination through the Use of  
Dehumanization

by

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### **Abstract**

Latinx people have now surpassed African Americans as the largest minority in the United States and immigration from Latin America is a prominent political issue. In this paper, I explore the positionality of Latinx folks within the United States. I start from the philosophical literature, focusing on the position of Latinx individuals and conceptions of race and immigration. I then use this to ground a novel psychological experiment to test how dehumanizing language affects perceptions of Latinx targets. From the philosophical perspective, I begin with Foucault then move through Mills, Yancy, Harris, and Martinez to get at the racial division of a nonwhite subgroup that has placed Latinx Americans on the border of white and American identity. A discussion of language and its uses in regard to Latinx immigrants leads to a psychological experiment that explores the effects of dehumanizing metaphors. The experiment's results demonstrate that insect dehumanizing metaphors towards Latinx targets produce colder feelings of Latinx people. My conclusion raises questions about how this dehumanization may affect tolerances of violence that has been seen in other studies and previous historical moments.

## The Fuzziness of Whiteness:

### An Exploration of Latinx Discrimination through the Use of Dehumanization

#### Introduction

Latinx people have now surpassed African Americans as the largest minority in the United States and their presence is becoming more pronounced.<sup>1</sup> At least nine Latinx and/or Hispanic musicians are on the line-up for Coachella, one of the largest music festivals in the US. Spanish is the second most spoken language within the United States. Latinx immigration has become one of the fundamental issues of the current presidential administration. Ever since land was annexed from Mexico, Latinx folks have been in the United States. In this historical moment, the movement of Latinx immigrants and refugees fleeing from violence in Central and South America has sparked conversations about border walls, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, and the treatment these groups deserve from the United States. In such a moment, the social, political, and legal position of Latinx folks is, thus, a question that presses on us today perhaps more than ever.

In this paper, I explore the positionality of Latinx people in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Whereas many Latinx folks can already tell you that they suffer from racism and discrimination, their status in the US census as “White or Caucasian” with “Hispanic” ethnicity highlights their unusual position as both racialized and white. The media and politicians use directed language

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<sup>1</sup> Silvia Abad-Merino, Anna-Kaisa Newheiser, John F. Dovidio, Carmen Tabernero, and Ignacio González, “The Dynamics of Intergroup Helping: The Case of Subtle Bias Against Latinos,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 19, no.4 (2013): 445. Further referred to as: Abad-Merino, et. al, “Case of Subtle Bias”

<sup>2</sup> I specifically use the term “Latinx” because of its gender neutrality and increased usage locally as well as its reference to Latin American nationalities, including Brazil, instead of the term “Hispanic,” which refers to Spanish-speaking persons, which would exclude Brazil and include Spaniards. Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “What’s the Difference Between Hispanic and Latino?” Encyclopedia Britannica.; Dania Santana, “What Makes a Latino, Hispanic or Latinx?” Embracing Diversity.

that places Latinx immigrants at a distance from being “American,” through terms such as “illegals,” “disease,” “insects,” or others that allude to Latinx individuals as nonhuman or outside of the US. Philosophy and Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) has begun to have more conversations about Latinx identity and the function of xenophobia in their discrimination, but I want to further the conversation about how Latinx folks are traditionally not included as part of the United States. Psychology and its research into dehumanization becomes useful here in how public discourse may influence perceptions of and tolerances of violence towards Latinx Americans.

My overall goal is to start from the philosophical literature focusing on the positionality of Latinx individuals and conceptions of race and immigration. I will then use this to ground a novel psychological experiment to test how dehumanizing language affects perceptions of Latinx targets compared to other minority members. From the philosophical perspective, I begin with Foucault then move through Mills, Yancy, Harris, and Martinez to get at the division of subgroup and outgroup that has placed Latinx Americans on the border of white and American identity. From here, I use Alcoff’s concept of “ethnorace” to argue that Latinx Americans should actually be considered a racial category. This discussion of language and its uses in regard to Latinx folks leads to a psychological exploration of the function of dehumanization in discrimination. I examine the way dehumanization functions—using hypotheses of dehumanization as either domain specific or domain general—and what that might mean in regard to Latinx Americans. The results of the study demonstrate that dehumanization towards Latinx folks is occurring with insect metaphors. I conclude with questions about how this dehumanization may affect tolerances of violence that has been seen in other dehumanization

studies and previous historical moments. It is Foucault and his modern conception of racism that first demonstrates how discrimination justifies violence towards the outgroup.

### **Latinx Discrimination**

For Foucault, the notion of sovereign power is the right to decide life and death.<sup>3</sup> For much of the pre-modern period, this sovereign power ruled over subjects. War was waged in the name of the sovereign to be defended by the people. His power was the power to appropriate wealth, labor, blood, goods and services levied on the subjects. This right of seizure over “things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself,” was the privilege of seizing “hold of life in order to suppress it.”<sup>4</sup> The power of the sovereign over life is exercised most concretely in its ability to kill or restrain from killing, the public execution and the power to pardon the legal and political manifestations of this power.<sup>5</sup> However, with the emergence of modernity, or what Foucault calls “the Classical period,” he notes a shift in power from this sovereign power of “deduction” to what he calls “biopower.”

As Foucault writes, the old right to “*take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death.”<sup>6</sup> The management of life became the power of regulation that lead to various techniques for the “subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.”<sup>7</sup> Key to this shift was a change in the logic that organizes power, the logic of the “norm” coming to replace the logic of law. In sovereign power, the exercise of power was controlled through the

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life.” In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, (Durham: Duke University Press 2013), 40. Further reference as: Foucault, “Right of Death”

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, “Right of Death,” 42.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, “‘Society Must Be Defended,’ Lecture at the Collège de France, March 17, 1976.” In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, (Durham: Duke University Press 2013), 62. Further referred to as Foucault, “Society”

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, “Right of Death,” 43.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, “Right of Death,” 45.; “Society,” 67.

application of law, the law punishing those bodies that did not do what the sovereign desired. For Foucault, law needs to be armed, for those who transgress it will be met with “absolute menace,” death.<sup>8</sup> Biopower, on the other hand, operates through the logic of the norm, which circulates between the power of regulation and the power of discipline. The norm is applied to a body as well as to a population, this norm organizes the continuance of life or its neglect through the regulation of statistics, medicine, hygiene, reproduction, etc.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the exclusion or pardon of life under sovereign power, biopower engages a much more ubiquitous, “micro-physics” of power that directs and manipulates not through the threat of direct death but through an indirect encouraging of life as a whole. The most important site of this biopolitical management, for Foucault, is racism.

Racism “intervenes” within biopolitics on Foucault’s account as a basic exercise of power in modern states. The first function of racism is “to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum,” in an effort to create different “races” or biologies within the population. The second function of racism lies in its establishment of a positive relation: “The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live.”<sup>10</sup> Racism makes possible a relationship between one’s own life and death and that of other subjects not on the model of war or military, but at the level of biology. The elimination of the biological threat of the “other,” the cleansing of life of its impurities or pathological elements is the vehicle that allows the “healthier” and “purer” elements of life to flourish.<sup>11</sup> Within the normalizing society, created through biopower, “race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable.”<sup>12</sup> Modern racism, for Foucault, is not

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault, “Right of Death,” 48.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, “Society,” 72.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, “Society,” 74.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault “Society,” 75.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault “Society,” 74-75.

bound up with “mentalities [or] ideologies”<sup>13</sup> but rather as a technology of biopower. The right to take life, by the justification of racism, secured the life and authority of the “dominant” population.<sup>14</sup> Hence, at the heart of Foucault’s account of racism is the notion that racism operates to both marginalize “non-white” populations and to legitimize a certain “white” population. This logic is usefully elaborated in Charles Mills’ discussion of the Racial Contract.

*The Racial Contract* gives a detailed picture of the operation of racism. According to Mills, establishing personhood and subpersonhood along the same lines as Foucault’s conception of biopolitics.<sup>15</sup> The historical foundation of the Racial Contract is grounded in three previous forms or “contracts,” for Mills: the expropriation contract, the slavery contract, and the colonial contract. These contracts were formed by the white dominant group to determine the geopolitical, economic, and cultural domination of nonwhite groups.<sup>16</sup> The expropriation contract was about white geopolitical power being reinforced through the European conquest of the Native Americans, stating that their land belonged, rather, to the Christians and that the Native Americans only had right of occupancy and not right of property. The slavery contract created a doctrine of inherent inferiority of Native Americans and Africans that gave Europeans the right of enslavement and use for production, establishing white economic power.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the colonial contract towards nations in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, which ignored the native cultures, established “white,” European culture as the only “true” culture.<sup>18</sup> This historic tracing of the three contracts formally expresses the subordinate status of nonwhites that regulated their treatment and allowed for the appropriation of their resources. In line with Foucault, this creation

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault “Society,” 77.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault “Society,” 76.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 43-44, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 25.

of the subperson status of nonwhites thus establishes “white” Europeans and their subsequent whiteness as the dominant population. This exclusion of blackness is, however, more than economic, political, and cultural, Mills argues that it also requires a certain epistemology, one in which whites must both recognize and not recognize their presumed superiority.

In addition to the various racial contracts outlined by Mills, there is also, he argues, an epistemology of ignorance built into the Racial Contract, a pattern “of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions” that make whites misunderstand the very world created by white supremacy.<sup>19</sup> This blindness and epistemology of ignorance develops, Mills demonstrates, in response to the forces of the World Wars. World War I had the redistribution of territory among the European powers that maintained their white dominant status as being the political, economic, and cultural authority.<sup>20</sup> This shifted in World War II with “the Jewish Holocaust—misleadingly designated as *the* Holocaust.”<sup>21</sup> In line with the colonial contract, Hitler saw himself as applying this same tradition of economic, political, and cultural domination of the white, European population over the subperson group of the Jewish, European population.<sup>22</sup> Following the win of the Allies, white Europeans are lead to deny the Racial Contract and the existence of white supremacy that then makes it impossible for them to explain the world as it was created from white supremacy. This is the epistemology of ignorance, for Mills, in which whites cannot talk about or even be allowed to know of the white supremacy that created the modern world. This epistemology of ignorance is apparent alongside the differentiation within the group of whiteness itself and how it evolves over time that makes it hard for whites to understand themselves or the world that is continually being reproduced.

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<sup>19</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 102.

<sup>22</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 102-104.

This evolutionary aspect of the Racial Contract accounts for the shifts in criteria for who *counts* as white and nonwhite over time. This is demonstrated by the Nazis and their conception of Jews as nonwhite as well as within the United States where Irish and Italians were at once not considered white either.<sup>23</sup> Mills claim that over time race is “debiologized” makes its political foundations explicit and challenges us to analyze the historical shifts of the conception of race.<sup>24</sup> The debiologization of race, on Mills account, expands Foucault to exclude the historical grounding and can allow for whites to maintain a colorblind perception of the world. This demonstrates that, for Mills, “*whiteness is not really a color at all, but a set of power relations.*”<sup>25</sup> Thus, even with the phenotypical body there are no set lines of who is white or nonwhite. This “fuzzifying” of the categories of white and nonwhite, to which Mills draws attention, brings a different dimension to how racism functions.<sup>26</sup> As he states: “All whites are equal, then, but some are more white, and so more equal, than others, and all nonwhites are unequal, but some are blacker, and so more unequal than others.”<sup>27</sup> This points to the fuzziness and complexity of racial categories, demonstrating that even within a white supremacist social formation, the very categories of “white” and “nonwhite” remains complex, thus complicating the epistemological understanding of whiteness. If whiteness becomes a power relation unconnected to phenotype, then it can expand past those who may be phenotypically white or nonwhite.

Mills is not the only figure in Critical Race Theory to take up the fuzziness or complexity of whiteness. For example, George Yancy, in his book *Look, A White!*, takes a phenomenological

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<sup>23</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 72. Linda Martin Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015), 12-14.

<sup>24</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Mills, *Racial Contract*, 80.

approach to whiteness in which for white people, “whiteness is the transcendental norm in terms of which they live their lives as persons, individuals.”<sup>28</sup> This and the color line that Yancy discusses demonstrates how race demarks space and “thus inhibit[s] mobility” for nonwhite bodies within spaces.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that whiteness is more than just a regulation of bodies, but is also a regulation of spaces. Similarly, Cheryl Harris takes whiteness as a form of property and legal rights: “whiteness—the right to white identity as embraced by the law—is property if by property one means all of a person’s legal rights.”<sup>30</sup> This form of property allows for white people to have access to certain spaces both geographical and conceptual; the space of the courtroom as well as the concepts of law and justice within them taking on a racialized character. Key to both Yancy’s and Harris’s accounts is the idea that this access, given to one through whiteness, is not visible to white people; whites are unable to see, a la Mills, the historical realities that create the very space of whiteness. Yet, this question of white spatiality opens up, for Harris, a certain logic of “passing” that allowed, for example, her light-skinned, black grandmother to get a job in an upscale department store with white women. Within the space of the department store, she could “pass” and be seen as a white woman, but upon the return to where she lived she was marked as “nonwhite.”<sup>31</sup> For both Yancy and Harris, it is not the physical bodies that are changing between these spaces, but different spaces create access for different bodies and changes how these bodies are perceived. The complexity of race and whiteness is not solely in the phenotypical perception of bodies, but in the spaces these bodies

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<sup>28</sup> George Yancy, *Look, A White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Yancy, *Look, A White!*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, (New York: The New Press, 1995), 280.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” 276-277.

are occupying or are kept from occupying. While much has been written about the racialization of space and “passing,” this racialization is especially important in regard to Latinx folks.<sup>32</sup>

George A. Martinez describes the history of Mexican-Americans in the United States and the way in which their status as white or non-white changed based on the space they occupy.<sup>33</sup> For example, in a court case of a Mexican-American murderer, the defendant argued that, in line with the Fourteenth Amendment, Mexican-Americans needed to be on the jury deciding his fate. Yet, the court decided to “recognize only two classes as falling within the guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment: the white race and the black race,” the court contending that Mexican-Americans were white for the Amendment’s use.<sup>34</sup> However, this view of Mexican-Americans as legally “white” did not follow to outside of the court. Mexican-Americans were still greeted with discrimination through segregation into “Mexican Colony” communities and low-wage jobs, demonstrating that within the social space they were considered “Other” and nonwhite.<sup>35</sup> For Martinez, there is a sense that legally and within the court room, Mexican-Americans are white and not black, but within the social sphere, their treatment still suggests a “not quite” white status. This circumscribing of the notion of race by the black/white binary, seen in the above court case, also informs and limits our theoretical approaches to race.

Historically, the black/white binary limits accounts of racism to where racial prejudice is most visible as prejudice towards African Americans.<sup>36</sup> This exclusion of groups can be seen in

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<sup>32</sup> Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape.” *Landscape Journal* 26, no.1 (2007).

<sup>33</sup> George Martinez, “Mexican Americans and Whiteness,” In *Critical White Studies*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 210-212.

<sup>34</sup> Martinez, “Mexican Americans and Whiteness,” 211.

<sup>35</sup> Martinez, “Mexican Americans and Whiteness,” 211-212.

<sup>36</sup> Kathryn T. Gines, “Introduction Critical Philosophy of Race Beyond the Black/White Binary” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no.1 (2013): 28-29.

the colloquial differences between ethnicity and race. Latinx or Hispanic is considered an ethnicity under the racial category: white, but African Americans are under the racial category: black without further ethnicity, demonstrating that one is a racial category that can experience “racism,” while the ethnicity group must experience some other sort of discrimination that is not tied to race. This binary ignores the specific types of oppression and discrimination that different groups experience under white supremacy such as xenophobia and nativism, elements that may not be present in racism applied to African Americans.<sup>37</sup> If one cannot be racist towards “white” people, because white supremacy means oppression of nonwhite groups, then Latinx and Asian folks are excluded from discussions of racism and oppression. This is not to say that there’s not prejudice towards these “ethnic” white groups, but the prejudiced attitudes would not function on the same systematic level as racism. There is a significant movement in Latinx Critical Race Theory and Asian Critical Race Theory working to dismantle this binary and expand an understanding of racism to further incorporate the discrimination of groups who are spatially and socially nonwhite but are construed as “white” in legal and academic spaces.<sup>38</sup>

Alcoff suggests the term “ethnorace” in order to erase a part of this binary through the distinction of ethnicity versus race.<sup>39</sup> She contends that there are three commonalities between race and ethnicity that indicate semantic and political similarities to suggest a collapsing of the two terms. The first commonality is that “a social group identified as an ethnic group will reproduce internally to create a genealogically related biological unit, or a race.”<sup>40</sup> The second commonality is that both race and ethnicity are characterized as having essential and common

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<sup>37</sup> Sundstrom and Haekwon Kim, “Xenophobia and Racism,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no.1 (2014): 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017): 92-95.

<sup>39</sup> Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XLVII (2009): 117-118.

<sup>40</sup> Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary,” 118-119.

identities. The last commonality describes that both race and ethnic groups are perceived and treated as a political threat that results in the manifestation of in-group loyalty.<sup>41</sup> Her point is further demonstrated in the supposedly “ethnic,” but actually racial breakdown of Latin American countries listed within travel brochures that list percentages for “blacks, mulattos, mestizos, whites.”<sup>42</sup> Latinx people within the US—and outside of it—walk along this fuzzy spatial boundary of white and nonwhite. They are considered white in census and statistical analyses, marked by their ethnicity, but still face racism in specific ways. This concept of ethnorace, from Alcoff, makes a case for allowing Latinx people to be included as a racial nonwhite category. This is not to ignore the differences between discrimination but to understand how Latinx racism occurs with xenophobic language that sets it apart from anti-black racism.

Language is a key element in how Latinx people move between white and nonwhite spaces. This is seen from the ethnicity/race problem that Alcoff discussed as well as through the specific racist language that is used to discuss different racial categories. We can see this importance of language in how immigrant and immigration has come to define Latinx folks, influencing the discrimination they face. For example, Otto Santa Ana, in his semiotic analysis of news stories, found that the networks failed to differentiate between Mexican-origin, Central American-origin, and other Latinx communities and the journalists also failed to make distinctions between generation (immigrant, US born, later generations) and legal status (unauthorized or authorized immigrant).<sup>43</sup> Commonly, Latinx people (immigrants or not) will be mistaken for being “Mexican” in news stories as well as socially. In Santa Ana’s study, the main stories that featured Latinx folks presented them as being dangerous or separate from natural

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<sup>41</sup> Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary,” 119.

<sup>42</sup> Alcoff, “Latinos Beyond the Binary,” 120.

<sup>43</sup> Otto Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundred*, (Austin: University of Texas Press 2013) 6.

citizens by marking them with the term *illegal*. The terms *illegal*, *undocumented*, or *unauthorized* allows for the figurations of Latinx folks as subpersons rather than legal persons.<sup>44</sup>

Other common associations made in news stories involves comparing Latinx subjects to animals, immigration being seen as an *invasion*, and the immigrants themselves as being a *disease*.<sup>45</sup> This type of language not only creates the idea of immigrants as animals, but more specifically, figures them as non-human “insects” that invade the country. The language of *foreigner*, *illegal*, *parasite* etc. along with xenophobia all function to place Latinx folks outside of America and to make them a class of subpersons following Foucault’s logic of a biological caesura. This status as subpersons applies both to the bodies of Latinx people as well as to certain space, positioning them as not having a right to be in the US. This nativist claim of who counts as a “real” American works to legitimates those who are white, and black as “real Americans,” as they are typically not associated with immigration, and excludes Latinx Americans as “real” citizens or persons. This construction of ingroup and outgroup or subgroup through the use of language such as dehumanization is a well-studied area within the field of psychology.

Within psychology, dehumanization is located within the social-cognitive dimensions that affect how one perceives ingroups and outgroups. Nicholas Haslam, a famed dehumanization researcher, provides a model of dehumanization that explains two types: animalistic and mechanistic. Mechanistic dehumanization is when traits that are seen as normative or fundamental to humans (human nature, HN), such as emotional responsiveness, individuality, and cognitive openness, are denied. Animalistic dehumanization is when

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<sup>44</sup> Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundre,d* 159-160.; Kevin R. Johnson “Aliens’ and the U.S. Immigration Laws: The Social and Legal Construction of NonPersons” *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 28, no.2 (1997).

<sup>45</sup> Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse*, (Austin: University of Texas Press 2002): 82-83, 69.

characteristics that make us uniquely human (HU) and not animals, such as maturity, moral sensibility, and rationality, are denied to a certain group.<sup>46</sup> Other important aspects of the model include semiotics and distinctive features. Semiotics, a method to study signs and symbols, demonstrates the representation of animalistic dehumanization in language where those dehumanized are described as subhuman. Distinctive features approaches propose that subtler forms of dehumanization exist in everyday life in cases where stereotypes deny humanness to groups.<sup>47</sup> Animalistic dehumanization is the form most observed to underlie dehumanization as a form of racism.

In the field of psychology, dehumanization is typically studied around how ingroups perceive outgroups. This research also touches on how dehumanization affects ingroup attitudes towards African Americans. Philip Goff and his colleagues found that even when participants are unaware of the historical metaphors of dehumanization, such as the Black-Ape metaphor, people still use them.<sup>48</sup> Participants still compared African Americans with Apes even when unaware of its historical origins. Even a mere awareness of stereotypes can lead to its activation in both low and high prejudiced people.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that regularly used stereotypes and dehumanizing metaphors may become automatic and difficult to alter after they have been established. Goff and his colleagues demonstrated that when primed with Apes, participants were more likely to justify police violence against African Americans.<sup>50</sup> When primed with the Ape-Black metaphor, participants perceived African American children as less innocent and lead to increased tolerance

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<sup>46</sup> Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no.3 (2006): 257.

<sup>47</sup> Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review," 258-259

<sup>48</sup> Philip Atiba Goff, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, Melissa J. Williams, and Matthew Christian Jackson, "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no.2 (2008): 296, 298, 300, 301. Further referred to as Goff et. al, "Not Yet Human"

<sup>49</sup> Lorella Lepore and Rupert Brown, "Category and Stereotype Activation: Is Prejudice Inevitable?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72, no.2 (1997): 279, 281, 283.

<sup>50</sup> Goff, et. al, "Not Yet Human," 302

of police violence against African American children.<sup>51</sup> This result was found in both random participants and police officers that work day to day in these communities.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Yara Mekawi and colleagues provide evidence that the level of dehumanization towards African Americans was positively correlated with shooting biases towards African Americans in a simulation.<sup>53</sup>

Dehumanizing metaphors have a broad effect on perceptions of outgroups by the ingroup. Within the current research, the authors only suggest that racism functions differently towards Latinx people due to their exclusion from American national identity.<sup>54</sup> There is a lack of psychological research that focuses on prejudice and dehumanization towards Latinx folks. This gap within the psychology literature and this raising of questions of whiteness from the philosophical literature inspired me to design a study that would use the concepts from Santa Ana and Goff and colleagues to see if and how Latinx folks are dehumanized. My goal was to produce results that may begin the research on Latinx folks and the discrimination that they uniquely experience as existing between spaces and as bodies as white and nonwhite in different contexts.

## **Psychology Study- Latinx Dehumanization**

### *Procedure*

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<sup>51</sup> Philip Atiba Goff, Matthew Christian Jackson, Brooke Allison Lewis Di Leone, Carmen Marie Culotta, and Natalie Ann DiTomasso, "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no.4 (2014): 529, 532, 539. Further referred to as: Goff, et. al, "Essence of Innocence."

<sup>52</sup> Goff, et. al, "Essence of Innocence," 535, 536.

<sup>53</sup> Yara Mekawi, Konrad Bresin, Carla D. Hunter, "White Fear, Dehumanization, and Low Empathy: Lethal Combinations for Shooting Biases," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 22, no.3 (2016): 328-329.

<sup>54</sup> Abad-Merino, et. al, "Case of Subtle Bias," 450-451.

A total of 263 participants at Appalachian State University completed an online study. The study was completed through the SONA system and the link included the present study and another unrelated study. The present study was always run second to avoid any possible spillover effects. Participants received research credit for current psychology courses. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions in the 2 (Agent: Latinx vs. African American) x 3 (Dehumanization Language: Control vs. Insect vs. Ape/Brute) study.

Participants were told that they would be reading a short story about two individuals. This story was only going to be shown once and they were instructed to read the descriptions carefully. The vignette was developed to include two racially-valent names in order to signal the racial categories.<sup>55</sup> In the Latinx condition, I used the names José Rodriguez and Juan Lopez for the targets in the vignettes, and in the African American condition, I used Tyrone Jackson and Jerome Williams as the names of the targets. There were three different places where the dehumanization appeared in the story. For the control condition, non-descript or neutral words were used to describe the targets to avoid inducing dehumanization. In the insect condition, the words “crawling,” “swarmed,” and “infest” were used to describe the targets. This came from Santa Ana’s semiotic analyses about Latinx folks and how news stories presented immigrants.<sup>56</sup> For the Ape/Brute condition, the words “stalking,” “stampeded,” and “drug jungle” were chosen from a previous study done by Goff and colleagues in which they analyzed what words were being used within news stories and developed a coding list of words that elicited the idea of *ape*, *monkey*, or *gorilla*.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Appendix A- Full Vignettes

<sup>56</sup> Santa Ana, *Brown Tide Rising*, 82-83.

<sup>57</sup> Goff et. al, “Not Yet Human,” 304.

Following the story, the participants responded to a mindedness scale. This scale measures how much “mind” a participant attributes to a target. This was a unipolar scale that tested for emotional and cognitive dehumanization of the targets.<sup>58</sup> For the cognitive dehumanization questions, participants were asked about the two characters, José and Juan or Tyrone and Jerome, and if they are “culturally refined,” “rational and logical” and if they “lack self-restraint.” For the emotional dehumanization, participants were asked if the two characters are “emotionally responsive,” “warm towards others,” and “rigid and cold.”<sup>59</sup> After the mindedness questions, the participants were asked to use a feelings thermometer to rate how warm or cold they felt towards the characters.<sup>60</sup> The participants could move the scale up and down from the midpoint of 5 in which 10 was one feeling very warm and 0 was one feeling very cold towards the characters.

Next, participants responded to the Attitudes Towards Blacks (ATB) Scale.<sup>61</sup> This scale consists of ten statements that were in a random order and participants indicated their agreement/disagreement on a 7-point scale. This scale was modified to have language that would not specifically point to African Americans or Latinx groups such as the use of the phrase “black joke” was modified to say “racial joke.” Instead of using the term African American, the term “black people” was used in the scale. An example of the scale is: “It would not bother me if my new roommate was **[black / Latinx]**.”

Following the ATB, participants completed a modified Modern Racism Scale(MRS).<sup>62</sup> The original MRS developed by McConahay and colleagues included both explicit and implicit

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<sup>58</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>59</sup> Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review,” 257.

<sup>60</sup> Appendix C.

<sup>61</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>62</sup> Appendix E

racist statements in order for them to track the shift from explicit to implicit anti-African American racism in the population. However, I believed that the traditional MRS would not account for the xenophobic and immigrant language that is tied into Latinx Americans. Abad-Merino and his colleagues thought this same thing when developing their study and modified an Asian Modern Racism Scale. I could not find their exact modification, but I did locate the original Asian Modern Racism Scale developed by Son Hing and colleagues.<sup>63</sup> The original contained 9 statements that could be easily modified for Latinx Americans, but not for African Americans. Thus, I reduced the scale to 6 statements which included “Many [**Latinx / Black**] people do not bother to learn proper English” and “It is too easy for [**Latinx / Black**] people to illegally arrive in the United States and receive refugee status.” These statements, I believe, bring more attention to the immigrant connection to Latinx people that is not as strong for African Americans. After this modified MRS, the participants were asked to complete the demographics questionnaire and were debriefed.

### *Results*

The present study contrasts two hypotheses regarding the effect of dehumanizing language on prejudice. The domain general hypothesis predicts that any kind of dehumanizing language (either insect or ape/brute) will activate prejudicial stereotypes and increase dehumanization and prejudice towards both Latinx and African American targets. Contrastingly, the domain specific hypothesis predicts that the type of dehumanizing language must “match” stereotypes about the group that it is directed towards. On this hypothesis, insect-related

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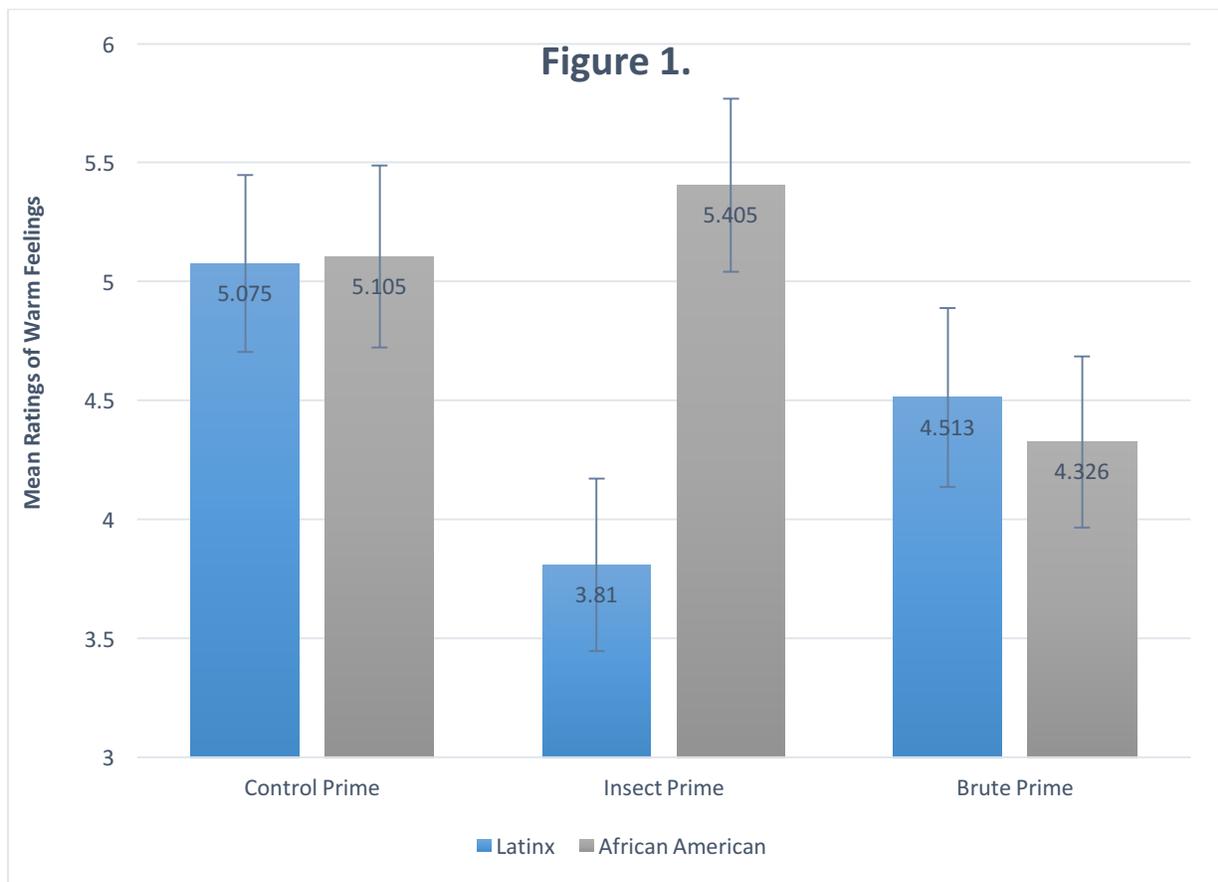
<sup>63</sup>Leanne S. Son Hing, Greg A. Chung-Yan, Leah K. Hamilton, and Mark P. Zanna, “A Two-Dimensional Model that Employs Explicit and Implicit Attitudes to Characterize Prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no.6 (2008): 987.

dehumanizing language should increase dehumanization and prejudice only for Latinx targets, and ape/brute-related dehumanizing language should increase dehumanization and prejudice only for African American targets.

We ran a 2(Agent: Latinx vs. African American) x 3(Language: Control vs. Insect vs. Ape/Brute) between-subjects ANOVA to test these hypothesized interactions. Consistent with the domain specific hypothesis, there was a significant agent x language interaction,  $F(2,238) = 3.53, p = .031$ . Planned contrasts showed that insect-related language increased prejudice (as measured by colder feelings on the feelings thermometer) towards Latinx characters ( $M = 3.81, SE = 0.36$ ) compared to the African American characters ( $M = 5.41, SE = 0.36$ ),  $F(1,238) = 9.63, p = 0.002$ . There was also a marginally significant effect  $F(2,238) = 2.98, p = 0.053$  for the Latinx characters when in the control dehumanization condition ( $M = 5.07, SE = 0.37$ ) being perceived as warmer than the Latinx characters in the insect dehumanization language condition ( $M = 3.81, SE = 0.36$ )(See Figure 1).

The only other notable comparisons were in the emotional dehumanization and cognitive dehumanization mindedness scale statements. The emotional dehumanization statements were consistent with the domain specific hypothesis again where there was a marginally significant interaction between agent x language,  $F(2,257) = 2.37, p = 0.096$ . Planned contrasts showed that the Latinx characters with the insect dehumanization language condition ( $M = 3.78, SE = 0.13$ ) were higher (and thus more dehumanized) than the African American characters with the insect dehumanization language condition ( $M = 3.35, SE = 3.09$ ),  $F(1,257) = 5.31, p = 0.02$ . For the cognitive dehumanization statements the interaction between agent x language was not significant,  $F(2,257) = 0.21, p = 0.81$ . However, planned contrasts showed that the Ape/Brute language increased dehumanization for both Latinx and African American characters ( $M = 4.46,$

$SE = 0.15$ ;  $M = 4.24$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ) relative to control language ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ;  $M = 3.79$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ). There was also a marginally significant interaction in which Latinx characters were generally more dehumanized than African American characters,  $F(2,257) = 2.64$ ,  $p = 0.07$  which demonstrates a consistency with the domain general hypothesis. However, when both dehumanization scores were combined for an overall dehumanization, the interaction disappeared,  $F(2,257) = 1.27$ ,  $p = 0.28$ . In the planned contrasts, within the insect dehumanization language condition, there was a small main effect of Latinx characters ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ) being more dehumanized than African American characters ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ),  $F(1,257) = 5.73$ ,  $p = 0.02$ . For both the ATB and the MRS scales, there were no significant scores in either the interactions or planned contrasts.



## *Discussion*

There were mixed results for supporting the hypotheses. There was ample evidence in both the feelings thermometer and the emotional dehumanization scale that suggests supporting the domain specific hypothesis. Both measures demonstrated that dehumanization or colder feelings was increased when the insect dehumanizing language was paired with the Latinx characters. However, there was only one main effect in the cognitive dehumanization scale in which ape/brute dehumanization language increased dehumanization for African American characters, which is inconsistent with previous studies. There was also the general main effect of Latinx characters being more dehumanized than African American characters found in the cognitive dehumanization scale and thus supports the domain general hypothesis rather than domain specific. Neither the ATB or the MRS gave any insight on how participants thought or saw the African American or Latinx characters in a more prejudiced way.

There could be a few reasons for these mixed results. Since there were no pretests done on the specific words used in either of the insect or ape/brute dehumanization language, there is a possibility that it did not prime the correct metaphors. This could explain why the ape/brute language increased dehumanization for African American characters in only one main effect and not overall. It might also explain why there were no effects seen in either the ATB or MRS scales. There is also a possibility that the names for the characters were not enough to associate to a certain race. This, again, would explain the rejection or null effect of the domain specific hypothesis as well as the lack of significance in the ATB and MRS. Another possibility is that the language in the ATB and the MRS scales was too explicit in its measuring of prejudice. There could be the effect that the participants are aware of what is and is not “politically correct” and may be wary to rate some of the statements on the higher end of the scale. There is also the

possibility that Santa Ana raises in which the insect-immigrant metaphor and connection with Latinx folks is giving way more to a criminal/illegal connection.<sup>64</sup> This would explain when Latinx folks are generally more dehumanized than African Americans. A connection with criminality and dehumanization may also be what is accounting for the lack of differences between Latinx folks and insect dehumanization language and African Americans and the ape/brute dehumanization language.

## **Conclusion**

My project began with a philosophical discussion of race and racism that pointed to Latinx folks unique position. Foucault's logic of biopower demonstrates how one racial group becomes legitimated by the separation of the subperson groups along supposedly "biological" lines. Mills' Racial Contract demonstrates how this division is maintained through power relations and an epistemology of ignorance as the racial categories themselves become debiologized and complex. This fuzziness of the category of whiteness for bodies is expanded into spaces by Harris and Yancy. Martinez demonstrates the importance of this bodily and spatial complexity in regard to Latinx folks and the historic black/white binary that has dominated American discourse and Critical Race Theory. Alcoff and her conception of ethnorace collapses this binary to suggest that while prejudice and racism will work differently for African American, Latinx, and Asian people, each group is still subordinated along similar lines that can be traced back to the basic claims of thinkers such as Foucault and Mills. Language then becomes an important site for understanding race and the complexities of space through the uses of *immigrant*, *illegal*, *parasite*, and *disease* that place Latinx folks outside of the United States.

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<sup>64</sup> Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundred*, 159-160.

Psychology then became a useful discipline to analyze the interactions between dehumanizing language and racist or prejudiced attitudes due to its extensive previous research into ingroup and outgroup relations, especially in regard to the Ape-Black metaphor that has historically existed. My study was constructed to build on the previous research in psychology by combining the language from Santa Ana to see if and how dehumanization for Latinx folks is different for African Americans along a domain general vs domain specific hypothesis.

The results of the study were mixed in supporting either the domain general or domain specific hypothesis. However, there was ample evidence to suggest that there are colder feelings towards Latinx folks with the use of insect dehumanizing language. Many of the other results were only marginally significant in which it is not enough to draw a confident conclusion. Even with this, the study seems to demonstrate the interesting space that Latinx folks and their bodies have access to. This feeling thermometer really hits at thoughts that may be more hidden and ingrained than people realize and suggests that this insect dehumanization language is important to Latinx discrimination. There is a long history of insect metaphors being used at specific historical time periods. The most well-known being perhaps the Nazis use of insect language in reference to Jewish people. The rise of the insect metaphor around Latinx folks could and should signal a concern about how Latinx racism is different from Asian and African American racism. The use of insect as dehumanizing has assumptions and implications that come along with it. When one thinks of a swarm or an infestation of insects, there is a strong connection to the need for extermination. We can easily see how this played out in Nazi politics and their use of dehumanization that led to genocidal actions.

In the United States, this points to an important social and political shift that has occurred with the current administration's actions towards Latinx immigrants who are attempting to seek

asylum in the United States as well as those who already live and work here. There is increased military presence near the border as well as in the camps where ICE and border patrol hold recent immigrants. Deportations and ICE raids are common and bolder, especially within North Carolina where many Latinx immigrants have come to work. Currently we can see how this suggests a mission to remove the infestation from the United States underneath the current administration's leadership. While the direct connection of Latinx with immigrants does not always occur, we can see through the focus on a border wall along Mexico and targeted raids of ICE that there is a racial and spatial element involved. My project does not extend this far and can only speculate into how insect dehumanization language may be playing out in the immigration camps and deportation structures of ICE. Yet, it is this speculation that calls for further research and questioning around the use of this dehumanization language in this historical moment where questions of immigration are fundamental to politics.

My project suggests that the deployment of insect and infestation language increases dehumanization of Latinx folks. This insect dehumanization language has consequences and implications that have yet to be explored within either philosophy or psychology, but is present and prominent within the United States social and political discourse. Latinx folks are commonly seen as a threat to the American people. To return to Foucault and his account of modern racism, these "biological caesuras" that are being created between white and black Americans towards Latinx Americans is what will justify any violence towards Latinx folks. From the normalizing society, through biopower, "race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable" and those racial "others" are seen as biological impurities, or "parasites."<sup>65</sup> This logic is already being played out within the United States as Latinx folks and immigrants are not only seen as not

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault, "Society," 74-75.

belonging but also as making the country a worse place. Psychology has done the research into the violence done towards African Americans for shooting biases with dehumanizing metaphors. The research for Latinx folks is lacking and more so, it is necessary to begin considering what this dehumanization will be doing in the near future.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A- Vignettes*

**Dehumanization conditions: [ insect / brute / control]**

**Agent conditions: [José Rodriguez and Juan Lopez / Tyrone Jackson and Jerome Williams] Latinx / African American**

Two weeks ago local police arrested two men under conflicted circumstances.

The police report stated that the while the officers were on patrol, they responded to a neighborhood watch alert call. The caller reported that there were, "these same two guys are always **[crawling around / stalking / on]** the corner and it looks like they're selling bags of something."

The officers responded to the call, and a few minutes later saw **[José Rodriguez and Juan Lopez / Tyrone Jackson and Jerome Williams]** walking away from the corner described in the call. The officers approached the men and called out for them to stop. At this point the officers said that **[Rodriguez and Lopez / Jackson and Williams] [swarmed all over / stampeded towards / approached]** them, and fearing for their safety, the officers were forced to use their nightsticks to subdue the suspects. The post-action report showed that the officers sustained minor cuts and bruises to their arms and hands, while the suspects had several large lacerations on their arms and face.

During the bail hearing the suspects were described by family as "loving husbands and fathers;" while the district prosecutor noted that the men have a "serious criminal record of **[infesting the community with drugs / turning the community into a drug jungle / drug charges.]**"

*Appendix B- Mindedness Scale*

Rated 0-6 from: “Not at all” (0) to “Extremely” (6)

1. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** are culturally refined.
2. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** are rational and logical.
3. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** lack self-restraint.
4. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** are emotionally responsive.
5. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** are warm towards others.
6. **[José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome]** are rigid and cold.

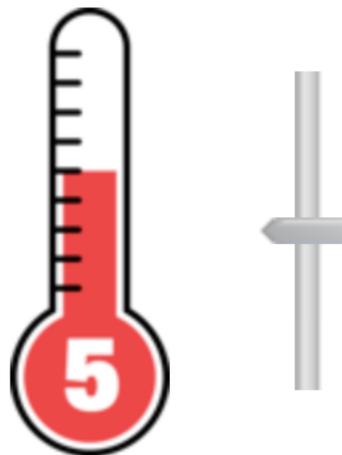
Statements 1-3: Cognitive Dehumanization

Statements 4-6: Emotional Dehumanization

*Appendix C- Feelings Thermometer*

Directions: “Please use the feelings thermometer below to rate how warm or cold you feel towards [**José and Juan / Tyrone and Jerome**].”

0 = very cold. 10= very warm. Participants slide the scale to desired “temperature.”



*Appendix D- Attitudes Towards Blacks (ATB) Scale*

Rated on 7-point scale: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Somewhat Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Somewhat Agree; Agree; Strongly Agree

Directions: "Please indicate your agreement/disagree with each of the following statements, using the scale."

1. I would rather not have [**Latinx / Black**] people live in the same apartment I live in.
2. I get very upset what I hear someone make a prejudicial remark about [**Latinx / Black**] people.
3. It would not bother me if my new roommate was [**Latinx / Black**].
4. We should support [**Latinx / Black**] groups in their struggle against discrimination.
5. If a [**Latinx / Black**] person were put in charge of me, I would not mind taking advice and direction from him or her.
6. The federal government should take decisive steps to override the injustices [**Latinx / Black**] people suffer.
7. I would probably feel somewhat self-conscious dancing with a [**Latinx / Black**] person in a public place.
8. I enjoy a funny racial joke, even if some people may find it offensive.
9. If I had a chance to introduce a visitor who was [**Latinx / Black**] to my friends and neighbors, I would be pleased to do so.
10. [**Latinx / Black**] people are inherently equal to other people.

*Appendix E- Modified Asian Modern Racism Scale (A-MRS)*

Rated on a 9-point scale:

Very Strongly Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Moderately Disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Moderately Agree; Strongly Agree; Very Strongly Agree

Directions: “Please indicate your agreement/disagree with each of the following statements, using the scale.”

1. Intermarriage between [**Latinx / Black**] and White people is a good thing for the United States.
2. It is not fair that so many scholarships and awards are awarded to [**Latinx / Black**] students.
3. It is too easy for [**Latinx / Black**] people to illegally arrive in the United States and receive refugee status.
4. Many [**Latinx / Black**] people do not bother to learn proper English.
5. Discrimination against [**Latinx / Black**] people is no longer a problem in the United States.
6. It’s good to live in a country where there are so many [**Latinx / Black**] people.