16

THE PROBLEM WITH LATINX AS A RACIAL CONSTRUCT VIS-À-VIS LANGUAGE AND BILINGUALISM

Toward Recognizing Multiple Colonialisms in the Racialization of Latinidad

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This chapter is a conceptual essay meant to introduce readers to and stimulate discussion about the racialization of Latinxs. The author aims to speak to readers who may question whether or how Latinxs form a racial category. Asserting Latinx is a racial group, the author argues that Latinxs' racialization is founded on – even bounded by – the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism, even if these are implied and even though she later argues for this definition to be reconceptualized. She problematizes defining Latinidad's racial boundaries with the constructs of language/bilingualism, because this definition erases Spanish colonialism from the racialization of Latinidad. She also touches on the issue of who is included as Latinx. The author concludes by inviting scholars of race and education, Latinx education, and bilingual education to conceptualize Latinxs as a racial group that is defined by multiple colonialisms, including contemporary U.S. imperialism.

In the first edition of the *Handbook of Latinos and Education*, Rolstad and MacSwan's (2010) chapter provides a helpful overview of the linguistic research on bilingualism. That volume also included a chapter by Fergus and colleagues (2010) that set a useful foundation for understanding ethnicity and its impact on Latinx[1] identification through arguing for a theoretical expansion of the discourse on ethnicity and race that takes into account how other markers (e.g., language, immigration, culture) interact with "Latinxs"[2] as a racial category. In this chapter, I partly answer their call by paying attention to language/bilingualism as a marker, a boundary of Latinidad, and thus I take a different approach from Rolstad and MacSwan's discussion on bilingualism. My focus lies on naming and unsettling the significance of language and bilingualism to Latinxs' racialization – that is, how Latinxs' Spanish and English language/bilingualism makes Latinidad's racial boundaries. Latinidad (i.e., Latino-ness) refers to the racial category Latinx. Given my particular scope, this chapter speaks to both scholars of race and education and scholars of bilingual and language education, and to readers interested in the racialization of Latinx/a/o.

Before describing the organization of the chapter, I note some of the assumptions and definitions that undergird my arguments. This chapter takes as given that language and bilingualism form part of one's identity, and that language is a principal field of struggle for colonial subjects to assert recognition and self-determination (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2012; Grande, 2004). The chapter already assumes

that language, bilingualism, and biliteracy matter to Latinxs' educational outcomes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; García, 2009; Valdés, 2001), exemplified by, for example, the Chicano Movement youth highlighting bilingual education in their demands for improving their education (Pacheco & Chávez-Moreno, n.d.). Given these assumptions, this chapter moves beyond the idea of language's significance for Latinxs to instead contend with questions about the role of the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism in marking the racial boundary of Latinxs.

Marking racial boundaries is the work of *racialization*. By racialization, I mean the process of racial formation and hierarchical categorization into racial groups (Omi & Winant, 2015), which is always relational to other groups (Molina, HoSang, & Gutiérrez, 2019). Racialization is, to quote Treitler (2015), the "way persons are absorbed into a racial systems by racial assignment and categorization and taught the commonsense and sanctions accorded to the hierarchy of humans in the races in that system" (p. 156). Race refers to an European-originated classification and ideology where socially constructed differences are meant to signal worthiness and humanness (Wolfe, 2016), and whose caste hierarchies result in Whites materially benefiting at the expense of those racialized as Others.[3] Thus, race is not a personal characteristic or choice, rather race is constructed through a relational process of social interactions and structural impositions that are used against one racial group versus another. Given these definitions, I ~~either~~ do not use racialization to mean delving into racial identity theory or racial discrimination or prejudice, nor do ~~not~~ I focus on Latinxs being subjected to linguicism (discrimination based on language); abundant research shows how the right to the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism is curtailed in order to oppress Latinxs. Additionally, my focus on the racialization of Latinxs is different from examining the etymology of *Latinx* (see Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018 for further reading on the term).

To start the chapter's arguments, I describe how the very idea of Latinx as a race is questioned. I draw from interdisciplinary scholarship to intervene in debates among some education researchers about Latinxs' status as a race and to argue that Latinx *is* a race, pointing out that the alternative would necessitate questioning the racial status of other groups. Next, I argue that Latinx is a racial group that is defined by Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism (including an imagined, assumed Spanish language), and by the essentializing of that language and Latin American culture. I then complicate basing Latinxs' racialization on a shared Spanish language and tying a shared culture or race to Spanish/English bilingualism. These seemingly contradictory arguments are explained by moving further onto how the racial category of Latinx should be understood as referring to those who suffer from double colonization (Gómez, 2018) or *multiple colonialisms*, including settler colonialism and contemporary U.S. imperialism abroad (see, e.g., Chávez-Moreno, 2020; González, 2011). Then I discuss some of the consequences of erasing Spanish colonialism from the racialization of Latinidad and bring up some issues about who is included as Latinx. To conclude, I argue that by not considering Latinx a race and learning about the racial formation of Latinxs, educational scholarship contributes to the racial formation of Latinxs as an "off-white" and/or "honorary white" group, which adversely affects attempts to build cross-racial coalitions. My argument invites scholars to recognize Latinxs' multiple colonialisms as a more historicized definition of Latinxs' racial boundaries.

My Positionality

I come to the question of Latinx racialization as a critical race scholar of education with a background in language and literacy. As an immigrant adolescent, I associated my Mexican/Mexican American identity with being bilingual in Spanish and English – an association that motivated me to want to become a teacher of Spanish and provide a better education to students like me. Anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx sentiments lead to anti-bilingual education policies, which contributed to how I came to view the struggle for bilingual education as a defining civil rights struggle for Latinxs. This understanding motivated me to help Latinx youth enhance their bilingualism and biliteracy

and develop their Spanish, which I believed helped maintain their culture and familial ties. While my undergraduate studies exposed me to critical perspectives on the Spanish conquest of México and the loss of Indigenous languages, as a teacher of Spanish, I did not have reservations about full-heartedly teaching Spanish to racially diverse youth and I engaged in this in a way that linked Spanish with Latinidad (a linkage I now problematize).

I continue to learn about the problems with the idea of mestizaje and mestizo/a and this has helped me make sense of my family's anti-Indigeneity and moves toward whiteness in new ways. I identify as a Chicana and see my relationship to the land as one of the displacement. I recognize my family as disassociating from an Indigenous worldview and experience, thus I see it as problematic for me to claim an Indigenous identity without my family having taught me cultural practices, histories, or epistemologies stemming from or connected to Indigeneity. Excavating family histories of participation in settler colonialism, assimilation, and caste oppression has been elusive, which convinces me of its existence even while being unable to know the particulars.

Context and Accounts of Questioning Latinxs' Racial Construction

To start my chapter's arguments, I address whether Latinx is a race at all. The idea of Latinxs not being a race has been noted and contested by other scholars as well (e.g., Haney López, 2013; Torres-Saillant, 2003). What concerns me is a need to challenge the dismissiveness in certain contexts toward conceptualizing Latinxs as a racial group.

I have encountered the idea that Latinx is not a race in academic and non-academic discourse. For example, some years ago, after reading a nonfiction book about contemporary racial issues faced by Black Americans, I watched a video interview of the author, a preeminent Black journalist. My attention was piqued when the author dismissively said "Latinos, whatever that is." His comments throughout the interview made it clear that he knew what "Black" meant when discussing Black folks. Hearing his aside, I wondered about the Twitter uproar that would have ensued if he had said the equivalent about Indigenous people, or if a Latinx author had expressed this puzzlement over "Black folks, whatever that is." His statement is only one example of how it is acceptable to question whether Latinxs are a race or not.

Dismissing Latinx as a racial category also occurs within educational research. At an invite-only conference in 2019, 35 education scholars congregated to present on new visions of how pedagogy can serve communities that have been underserved in schooling. Presenters overwhelming focused on Black education and Indigenous education, and I was the only person to explicitly say I focused on Chicanx/Latinx education. Even though the other scholars' work also focused on a particular racial group, during the Q&A portion of my presentation on racial literacy in bilingual education, a leading scholar asked me what I meant by and counted as Latinx and Chicanx. A fair question – but it struck me that of all the other scholars who had presented before me (and I was one of the last presenters), no one was asked who counted as Black or Indigenous or White. Not asking this about other groups highlighted for me what I have perceived in other situations: the dismissal of Latinx as a racial category. These two experiences are examples of when I have perceived people to be uncertain about or contest the conceptualization of Latinx as a racial category in line with other categories like Asian, Black, Indigenous, or White.[4]

Contributing to the dismissiveness toward Latinx as a race is the U.S. Census' categorization of Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity and not a race on par with Asian, Black, Indigenous, or White. Because the census helps to categorize and name "race," perhaps separating Hispanic/Latino from race encourages some to think of it as an ethnicity. However, this conclusion would overlook the fact that about 42% of Latinxs opt for "some other race" in answering the census question (Tafoya, 2007), arguably indicating they do not identify their race as Asian, Black, U.S. Indigenous, or White, and/or that they view their Hispanic/Latino category as their race. That so many Hispanics/Latinos

select "some other race" in some ways compelled the U.S. census to reconsider its classification and it had planned to include Hispanic/Latino as a race option until the Trump administration reversed course (Gómez, 2020). While explaining the reasons is beyond this chapter's scope, it is important to note that it is against certain interests to classify and count the Latinx population – and its variations within – as a larger constituency. This refusal can be seen as a white supremacist tool to prevent the Latinx constituency from more easily claiming resources from government agencies and other institutions.

Some may wonder whether Latinxs are too distinct from each other phenotypically to be considered a race. This flawed idea of Latinxs being an ethnicity rather than a race because of their diversity in body, phenotype, and performativity inevitably leads to the problematic idea of delimitating race based on bodies, or what some call a body-based analysis of race. The logic that Latinxs' bodies are too different from each other incorrectly implies that other racial categories have less diversity in body-based features, for example that all Black folks look similar. A conceptualization of race that relies on the body toes the line of implying that race is biological, when most of academia has well established that race is not a biological fact; Latinxs do not have any more phenotypical variation than other groups to disqualify them as a race.

I can imagine the argument that because some identify as Afro-Latina, Asian Latinx, Indigenous Latinx, or White Latino, it is evident that the adjectives "Afro," "Asian," "Indigenous," or "White" refer to race while Latinx/a/o refers to ethnicity. To that, I note the incommensurability of race – that is, race does not have to follow its own rules or logic. As historical evidence suggests, race was socially constructed and is maintained in order to justify racism. Because of race's purpose, racial categorization does not need to be internally logical in its application and does not have one way of working. There is no coherent definition of any particular race that remains consistent across contexts, time, and geography. Racial designations have many exceptions to any rule put forth by white supremacist institutions and structures. Take for example the hypodescent practice that designated some Black folks as "Black enough" (i.e., one-drop rule) to justify bondage, while Indigenous folks experienced having one drop of White blood as enough for disassociation from an Indigenous claim, and some Mexican Americans who had one drop of Spanish blood could claim white identity (Gómez, 2018). The "one-drop rule" used to racialize people changed depending on what was needed to prevent alliances and to justify obtaining the desired labor and land. Indeed, it is this adaptive and nebulous quality of race that makes it so powerful and difficult to combat.

Racialization is not experienced in the same way by different groups, and in fact evidence points to racialization processes being multifaceted (Molina et al., 2019). Additionally, the racial logics at play vary depending on the context. Relatively "new" categorizations are being socially constructed (just as other racial categories are always in a process of change) and are negotiated and contested by different interests such as white supremacist settler colonial logics and anti-racist decolonial logics. What matters is acknowledging that the Latinx category is not somehow more constructed or more internally heterogeneous than other "real" racial categories. As Gómez (2018) points out in her analysis of the making of the Mexican American race, fluidity is an "enduring quality of American racial dynamics (especially in the construction of racial categories), rather than a feature unique to Mexican Americans" (p. 154). Indeed, arguments that dismiss Latinx as a race also lead to logics that cast doubt on which other "real" racial groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Indigenous) are left as a racial category.

Concluding that Latinxs are not a race also disregards historical and social science research that supports that the category is a race in much the same way as the other categories (e.g., Gómez, 2018; Haney López, 2003a; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Through a historical analysis, Gómez (2018) shows how Mexican Americans became a race in the racial hierarchy below Whites and above Blacks, and a race that rejected Indigeneity in order to claim whiteness. Gómez, in her book's first edition, was tentative about the "off-white" nature of the Mexican American race given their "ever-tenuous claim to whiteness" (p. 118), especially in the case of Mexican Americans elites.[5] But in her second edition,

Gómez claims research from the last decade provides more evidence that Mexican Americans and other Latinxs, because of social consciousness of racism, have moved away from "off-white" to being a Latino/a/x race on par with other racial groups. The interdisciplinary scholarship Gómez draws from should influence education scholarship to eschew the idea that Latinxs are an ethnicity and not a race.

While Gómez's (2018) original analysis is about Mexican Americans and not Latinxs more broadly, how Mexican Americans are racialized affects other Latinxs. One reason for this is that non–Latinx Americans commonly see all Latinxs as the same, and, depending on the region, other "Spanish speakers" get misidentified and racialized as Mexican American. This mistaken identification is likely because of Mexican Americans' large numbers (63.3% of all Latinxs; Flores, 2017) and historical presence even before the forming of the U.S. nation state. The misidentification leads to Mexican Americans' treatment arguably setting the foundation for the racialization of other "Spanish-speaking" people. Despite increasing subgroup diversity, the amalgamation of these various groups rests on simplifying them all to "Spanish speakers," thus sparking a process whereby people from different Latin American nation-states, with distinct histories and individual characteristics (such as class, language, relationship to Indigeneity, etc.) end up falling under the single homogenizing label of Latinx/a/o (Oboler, 1995). Racializing all Latinxs as "Mexican American" also exemplifies a function of race: erasing differences of intra-group diversity. Race overlooks human cultural diversity in order to essentialize, categorize, and dehumanize people who are racialized as Others. It is also the case that the Hispanic/Latino category has been constructed in order to incorporate other "Spanish-speaking" groups such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans (Mora, 2014), a point to which I will return later.

Considering that race essentializes/amalgamates, it may be seen as ironic that some people describe Latinx as an ethnicity and reject categorizing Latinx as a race because (supposedly) Latinxs have more intra-group cultural and linguistic homogeneity than other "real" races. The flawed idea implies two points, the first that Latinxs are a group with shared cultural practices, which leads to the second point that "real" races do not have shared cultural practices. Both of these points are easily refutable, the former by comparing intra-Latinx group's cultural practices and the latter by examining other groups' intra-cultural practices, or by considering whether each racial group within itself (e.g., Asian, Black, and Indigenous folks) does not parallel Latinxs' patterns of distinctive cultural practices being obscured. Latinxs' different cultural practices get essentialized, just as happens with the cultural practices of Asian and Indigenous and Black folks. Importantly, dismissing Latinx as a race exposes a misunderstanding about race's method of essentializing diverse people and erasing cultural differences in order to suit race's purpose of categorizing into discernable group (however arbitrary) and justify already imposed or intended oppression. Claiming that Latinx as a category is not as constructed or does not have the internal diversity of other groups (thus are an ethnicity and not a race) ironically does the work of race: the claim disregards Latinxs internal diversity in cultural practices, essentializes their diversity into a group, creating a group that supposedly has a discernable characteristic (in this case culture). Additionally, claiming Latinx is an ethnicity not a race also positions Latinxs as perpetual foreigners (Gómez, 2020).

Because different groups experience racialization in different ways, I suggest that for some, what is implied by saying that Latinxs have a shared culture is not necessarily cultural practices, but the shared Spanish language or Spanish/English bilingualism, or at least an imagined connection to the Spanish language.

Spanish Language and Spanish/English Bilingualism as Signature Feature of Racializing Latinxs

While Latinx identity and experience with oppression are influenced by several markers of difference and their intersections, for example, national origin, language, culture, immigration status,

gender, and physical characteristics (all of which also affect other racial groups), here I submit that the signature feature delineating Latinidad's racial boundary is Latinxs' Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism.

Before expounding my argument, I reiterate the caveat that attempts to find a logical and fixed definition of race's boundaries are in vain. However, it is still beneficial to seek to understand the construction of racial categories, however illogical and malleable, and the racial logics used to oppress. Race's mutability contributes to reducing the complexity of the U.S.'s racist capitalist state through spuriously divorcing race from class, obscuring central issues of the subjugation of people based on their race or other markers of difference, and concealing the perpetuation of white supremacy. Because othering is a mechanism of a racial capitalist white supremacy, what matters about racialization and its boundaries is that these constructions result in groups who are othered and dehumanized based on race. Latinxs, Asians, or another racialized groups can have their distinctions from Whites emphasized and seen as inferior in accordance to the needs of the racial capitalist white supremacist nation-state. Even if all racialized Others were to be exterminated (or, as in Bell's [2013] Space Trader story, were traded to aliens), the remaining wealthy elites would find differences among themselves (e.g., eye color, national heritage) in order to create a group that is "easily" identifiable and discernable (i.e., racialized) to populate the lower caste. This speaks to how, in many instances, race is a tool that needs distinctions made by a combination of factors such as a person's visual appearance (phenotype, dress), name, and linguistic characteristics. Accordingly, I return to the idea that Spanish and Spanish/English bilingualism are what racializes Latinxs.

While, generally and problematically, skin tone and other indicia of phenotype (e.g., eye shape) and language all matter to how Latinxs and others are identified racially, for Latinxs, Spanish and Spanish/English bilingualism are used to create racial boundaries around Latinx. As scholars from different disciplines have pointed out (e.g., Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018; Lynch, 2018; Rosa, 2019; Tienda & Mitchell, 2006), Latinidad is strongly associated with Spanish. For example, Rosa (2014) shows how Spanish, "accented" English, and Spanglish serve to racialize Latinxs, indeed even leading to imagining Latinxs who speak Standard American English as speaking Spanish. While differences in the Spanishes spoken by Latinxs helps Latinxs (and others) identify intra-Latinx differences in the subgroups' nationalities, the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism serve to bound Latinxs as a race and serve as its signature feature (Rosa, 2014). Further evidence of this role of language in the categorization of Latinxs as Latinx is how, for example, people who may be racialized as Black are seen as having a "legitimate" claim to being Latinx once they are heard speaking Spanish, and thus can distance themselves from Blackness (Toribio, 2003).

In her book *Making Hispanics*, sociologist Mora (2014) advances two main arguments about how the Hispanic[6] identity came to being in the U.S. First is that activists, government bureaucrats, and media worked and negotiated amongst themselves to help reify the Hispanic identity. Second is that collaboration amongst these groups' different interests compelled them to construct Hispanic as an ambiguous definition. Its ambiguous definition had the added benefit of making Hispanic be a broader category, and thus more inclusive of certain populations, thereby helping the causes and interests of the different groups involved. Relevant for my argument is Mora's conclusion that some of these groups eschewed constructing a pan-ethnic identity explicitly based on the Spanish language because it was seen as too narrow, given some people were English speakers with little to no fluency in Spanish. Rather, Mora argues that they purposefully bounded the category with ambiguous similarities around culture and values, an ambiguity that helped expand the pan-ethnic composition.

In reading Mora's (2014) evidential chapters, I was struck by how referring to a Spanish- speaking group was fundamental and reoccurring for government bureaucrats, census officials, and media groups (less so for activists). Mora notes that the term *Spanish-speaking*, referring to Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, was often used alongside Hispanic, Spanish American, and Spanish surnamed. For example, the first case study in Mora's book focuses on the Spanish- speaking vote and

the federal *Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People*. I argue that Mora's (2014) historical research shows that the Hispanic identity is founded on understanding and imagining this group as Spanish speaking, regardless of whether individuals in the group actually all speak Spanish. ("Latino" later emerged as a nearly synonymous term meant to reject elevating Spanish ancestry, but I note that the label Latino retains this boundary of Spanish-speaking and Spanish/English bilingualism.) Furthermore, "the idea that language could be a unifying characteristic of the Spanish-origin population" (Mora, 2014, p. 110) comes up repeatedly in her book. Thus, despite the best efforts of those who do not want to define Hispanic/Latino based on speaking Spanish, it is a foundational definition used for the category and it remains as representative for the group. While defining Hispanic/Latino ambiguously does include more people into the category, I argue that vagueness also allows for the foundational definition of Spanish speaking to continue. That is, an ambiguous definition precludes the specificity needed to disavow the already-imagined construction of Hispanics/Latinos based on language.

This social imaginary of the Latinx as Spanish speaking is true even though many Latinxs do not identify as speakers of Spanish; in fact, in the early 2000s, about 93% of immigrants from Latin America by the second generation report being either Spanish/English bilingual or English dominant, with only 7% reporting to be Spanish dominant (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006). The ambiguity, the tacit understanding of Latinx as defined by "Spanish speaking" and Spanish/English bilingualism, and the group being seen as linked by the Spanish language all result in supporting conditions where even though some may not speak Spanish, when an individual does not, they are judged as someone who *should* speak Spanish. As Aparicio (2007) notes of a group made up of people of Latin American descent with various languages, socioeconomic classes, immigrant statuses, phenotypes, and cultural practices, "Most outsiders would have grouped us all together as Latinas/os, minorities, foreigners, and *Spanish-speaking*" (emphasis added, p. 39). This idea that Latinxs "should speak Spanish" affects who is included or excluded as Latinx.

That Hispanic was constructed to group Spanish-speaking communities together (and Latino/a grew as a label that many use synonymously) also affects whether those from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean are included as Latinx. What many call "Latin America" – a name erasing Indigenous languages and referencing the European colonialists' common Latin-origin languages – is, arguably, understood as comprised of the nation states formed from the Spanish American colonies and not the Portuguese American or French American colonies. Some may argue Latino/a/x can include Portuguese and French speaking groups, especially given these three groups' similar colonial histories, but I would suggest that immigrants from, for example, Brazil, Haiti, and French Guiana are largely not socially constructed to be included as Latinxs, even though their Portuguese and French languages, respectively, would imply they are "Latin." I point again to the strong influence of constructing Latinx's boundary as Spanish speakers – not as speakers of Latin-origin languages – as the reason that they generally are not understood as Latinxs. That Portuguese and French speakers are socially constructed to be excluded due to a history of constructing Hispanic/Latino as Spanish speakers only points to the illogicality of "Latino" being used (instead of Hispanic) in order to disassociate from Spain yet tethering itself to Latin languages. It also has ramifications on the potential to form coalitions and may further anti-Blackness in the Latino/a/x category. The exclusion of these various groups is one of several issues that emerge from the Latinx category being so associated with the Spanish language.

It may be puzzling how many Latinxs still "stubbornly insist on retaining [Spanish]" (Darder, 2004, p. 234) when they are defined by the Spanish language *and* racially discriminated against based on that language. One may think that doing away with what marks them as Other would be beneficial, and indeed some do choose to assimilate (e.g., Gómez, 2018; Haney López, 2003b). Language shift is seen by some scholars as a pillar of assimilation, an indicator of an ethnic identity becoming only symbolic (i.e., similar to being, e.g., Irish or Italian in the U.S.). That Latinxs from immigrant

families do "lose" their Spanish dominance to become bilinguals or English dominant would suggest Latinxs' assimilation. Still, some Latinxs from immigrant families who may lack facility with the Spanish language want their children to learn Spanish. Tienda and Mitchell (2006) found in their research that some Latinxs associate learning Spanish with repairing a broken "cultural chain that occurred when their own parents failed to keep the Spanish language alive at home" (p. 48). Wanting to maintain membership in a speech community and/or association with Latinidad and/or family (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006) through Spanish contributes to how the Spanish language creates the boundary of Latinx.

I argue that because Latinxs are imagined as "should know/speak Spanish," and, as other scholars have found, because of their experiences of being racially discriminated against, Latinxs' English-language acquisition does not denote their assimilation. That is, despite the decline in Spanish-language dominance through generations, Latinxs continue to identify as Latinx (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). This identification happens despite the fact that, as Pérez-Torres (2000) notes, "notions of shared language [. . .] only produce a superficial sense of collectivity or alienation, anxiety or affirmation, among potential Latinos" (p. 539). The shared Spanish language helps delineate the group – even when Latinxs recognize its superficiality – and shared racial experiences help maintain those bounds. Thus, language is a significant marker in being used *both* to racially discriminate against *and* to racialize.

Scholars have shown how Latinxs are racialized and racially discriminated against based on Latinxs' languaging. For example, research by Rosa (2019) shows how Latinxs are racialized by their language, not just what is typically associated with race such as skin color or phenotype. Latinxs' Spanish identifies them as perpetual foreigners, diasporic "outsiders" who can be discriminated against. Casillas and colleagues (2018) show that the media creates a Latina character by using both accent and speech and bodily aesthetics, thus theorizing Latinidad as a "vocal body." The boundaries of Latinidad are formed when Latinxs are cast for roles because of their language experience, and shown in how the media industry doubts the ability of non- Spanish-speaking Latinxs to be successful in the Latinx market because of their English- language dominance (Aparicio, 2003). At a national level, Latinxs suffer anti-Latinx, anti- immigrant sentiments that are expressed through oppressing their language rights (Pérez Huber, 2011).

Attacks on language and other rights have served to create group affinity and solidarity and to mobilize and galvanize activism, making less nebulous the question of Latinxs' "Brownness" and "otherness" (e.g., Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012; Zepeda-Millán & Wallace, 2013). Additionally, Spanish has been important for the maintenance of a Latinx collective consciousness. For example, Delgado (2009) argues that the lynchings of Latinxs are not better known in whitestream[7] media because these accounts were in newspapers written in Spanish. Delgado notes that bilingual education enables Latinxs to have the Spanish/English biliteracy needed in order for them to not only learn these histories from their families but also other media. Knowing these histories of oppression helps form a group's racial identity.

Of course, Latinxs are discriminated against in other ways as well, such as denial of rights based on immigration status. Racism has historically and contemporaneously guided immigration rhetoric and policy (e.g., Molina, 2014; Turner, 2015). Consequently, one's place in racial stratification is closely linked to citizenship status and political inclusion (e.g., Gómez, 2018; Molina, 2014). But saying immigration status is connected to racism and racialization is different than saying immigration status creates the boundaries of the racial construction of Latinx; immigration does not do the latter for Latinxs in the way that language does. As Tienda and Mitchell (2006) point out, the difference between immigrants and immigrants specifically from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Central and South America, and México is the latter group's common language – a fact that constitutes "the single greatest difference between Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the United States" (p. 46). That is, Spanish – even if only imagined – sets a boundary for constructing the Latinx racial category.

I suggest that although immigration status is a way for Latinxs to be discriminated against (e.g., an ICE officer stopping a person and asking for papers), and it contributes to a historical long-view of racial formation (Molina, 2014), immigration status is not the visible/auditory reason that causes the ICE officer to stop and ask for documentation. The suspected immigration status is the means of discriminating, but the racial signifier that initiates the stop is the *physical* and/or *auditory* signals that the person may be Latinx and thus may be stopped and asked for papers. To reiterate, I am not arguing that immigration status is not a factor in the racialization of Latinxs (and other groups for that matter), indeed, scholarship has shown how immigration status is intricately connected to racialization (e.g., Molina, 2014). My argument is that the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism delineate the socially constructed boundary that racially categorizes Latinxs, and that this construction enables the erasure of colonialism and imperialism.

Complicating Latinxs' Racial Construction vis-à-vis Spanish Language/Bilingualism

Racializing Latinxs through Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism is fraught with tensions and contradictions, just as all racializations are problematic in their particular ways. As Mora (2014) points out, multiple interests negotiated to make the Hispanic (and by extension Latino) label ambiguous and politically palatable to powerful constituencies, which meant rejecting militant definitions that would emphasize Latinxs suffering colonialism and other oppressions. This historical foundation brings up several issues, especially when one considers how, for example, Mexican Americans became a race.

The making of the Mexican American race happened through a historical process of *double colonization*, which Gómez (2018) coined to describe people having to negotiate two racial projects: the first by Spain's colonizers and the second by the U.S. Both are projects of white supremacy and impose the Spanish and English language, respectively. Both racial projects committed atrocities, such as the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples and the severing of enslaved Africans from their people, land, and languages. And both racial projects continue atrocities, such as violently changing the linguistic landscape of what is commonly called the Americas. The racial projects also position the Mexican American and Hispanic/Latino labels as differentiating from and rejecting Blackness and Indigeneity (e.g., Gómez, 2018, 2020). These two systems continue to merge, collide, and shape contemporary anti-Latinx racism (Gómez, 2020). Consequently, Gómez's (2018) double colonization analysis is valuable for understanding not only the racial construction of Mexican Americans, but also other subgroups that get lumped into the Latinx category, including the next two largest groups, Puerto Ricans and Cubans, and many other more recent Latin American immigrants to the U.S., such as from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

To extend Gómez's double colonization framework, I posit that, while the particulars may differ and while each Latinx subgroup of course has distinct histories that need to be laid bare (Gómez, 2020; Torres-Saillant, 2008), the aforementioned subgroups have experienced *multiple colonialisms*. The multiple colonialisms framework highlights that Latinxs have had their own homelands devastated by American[8] imperialism, settler colonialism,[9] and still contend with anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity. These issues continue and change even as the Latinx racial category moves into its own place in the U.S.

To briefly explain what I mean by U.S. imperialism as different from settler colonialism, I note that I use American imperialism to refer to the structure, consequences, and actions of U.S. foreign intervention in nation states outside of what is commonly perceived as the American nation state. I have argued for conceptualizing immigrants in terms of empire (Chávez-Moreno, 2020) and here I pose a similar argument for the historical processes around imperialism, which have led to the racial

construction of Latinxs. While U.S. imperialism affects those outside of the U.S., it also impacts the populations associated with those racial groups within the U.S. For example, Bale (2012) argues that when U.S. imperialism escalates (e.g., during missile strikes in Middle Eastern countries), attacks on immigrant students from Middle Eastern countries and even those merely perceived as immigrants and/or foreigners (e.g., Muslim and Arab Americans) within the U.S. follow. These aspects of foreign policies' effects on groups on domestic soil differentiate U.S. imperialism from settler colonialism.

To return to the issue of the Latinx racial category, arguably, a common erasure is of Latinxs who identify as Afro-Latinx and/or Indigenous. In the U.S., many Indigenous people from Latin America are racially categorized as and thus experience life under the label of Latinx (e.g., Calderon & Urrieta, 2019; López & Irizarry, 2019). Some may speak Indigenous languages, identify as Indigenous Latinx (e.g., Alberto, 2017; Blackwell, Boj Lopez, & Urrieta, 2017), or reject the Latinidad category altogether to identify with a specific Indigenous group (e.g., Maya) because of Latinidad's erasure and history of anti-indigeneity (e.g., Boj Lopez, 2017; Calderon & Urrieta, 2019; LeBaron, 2012). Multiple colonialisms, and ongoing colonization especially of Indigenous peoples [which Urrieta (2003) names a "never-ending genocide" (p. 154)], continues to impact Latinxs' daily lives and transnational experiences (e.g., Alberto, 2017; Urrieta & Villenas, 2013). The erasure of Indigeneity is part of a settler-colonial project with the white supremacist assumptions of mestizaje – the myth that the Mexican, and by extension Latinx, is a result of the mixing that occurred between Spaniard conquistadores, the Indigenous populations, and Black people brought as slaves (Calderon & Urrieta, 2019; Gómez, 2020). Problematic issues arise from the myth of mestizaje, including erasing Afro-Latinxs and their histories, and a longing to recuperate an Indigenous past as if the history of racial castes, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigeneity in Latin America could be washed clean here in the U.S. (for insightful discussions, see, e.g., Calderon & Urrieta, 2019; Hernández, 2003; Pulido, 2018; Torres-Saillant, 2003).

Even though multiple colonialisms, including contemporary American imperialism, affect and serve as a commonality among Latinxs, this is not what was socially constructed to bound the Latinx racial category. Thus, I return to the idea that the Hispanic/Latino category was not formed by linking it to ideas about colonization, but rather, as suggested by Mora (2014), as about ambiguous shared "culture and values" and did not promote militancy through referring to colonial histories and injustices.

I posit that constructing Hispanic/Latino ambiguously and around shared culture and values not only does nothing to oppose constructing Hispanic/Latino as "Spanish speaking," it disconnects and disregards the colonization many suffered from and still face. By defining Latinxs by an imagined common language of Spanish, the racial boundary of Latinxs is based on a colonizer language and fosters several problematic issues. For example, this language identification skirts the brutal history and current violent structure that attempts to eradicate through forced assimilation. In the U.S. (and also in many contexts in Latin America), race's process of essentializing along with race-evasive American history education and likely lack of exposure to non-U.S. or Latinx histories (Santiago, 2020) signal that many do not learn about Latinxs' multiple colonialisms, or about the U.S. is an empire and its effect on Latinxs. This generates a lack of recognition that those commonly lumped into the category of Latinx speak Spanish because of Spain's violent colonization. Besides obscuring colonization and imperialism, the Latinx foundational boundary of "Spanish-speaking" continues Spain's colonization project. For example, even after imposing Spanish, which attempted and, in some cases, succeeded to kill certain Indigenous languages, Spain continues symbolic violence against Latinxs' bilingualism through policing and diminishing Spanglish (Zentella, 2017). I posit that we should recognize that the imagined commonality of the Spanish language among Latinxs is actually a stand-in for the boundary Latinx as those who have suffered from double and multiple colonialisms from both Spain and the U.S.

This brings me to a categorization issue stemming from the erasure of Spanish colonial history and to some issues about who is included as Latinx.

Some Consequences of Erasing Spanish Colonialism From the Racialization of Latinidad

Throughout U.S. history, Hispanic and Latinx elites in politics and other areas have played with their racial categorization, sometimes wanting to categorize themselves as White and other times as "less than White" or "off-white" (Gómez, 2018; Haney López, 2003b; Mora, 2014). For example, Mexican elites in the Arizona territory used bilingualism to distance themselves from "Anglos, Indians, and Mexicans" of lower-socioeconomic class (DuBord, 2010). As research has shown, manipulating and changing these categories have served as power plays that ultimately maintain a racial hierarchy where White elites gain advantage from racialized Others.

Given this history and considering race-labels' arbitrariness, what does it say about the racial category of Latinx when both Spaniards (who now make the U.S. their home) and Indigenous Latinxs are lumped into the Latinx category because of their imagined tie to the Spanish language, which stems from Spanish colonialism? I claim that the inclusion of immigrants from Spain (and other European immigrants to Latin America) as Latinxs just because they speak Spanish contributes to the illogicality of race and the confusion about race that further maintains white supremacy. It is a white supremacist and settler state project to lump Spaniards, "mestizo/Brown Latinxs," and Indigenous Latinxs into the same racial category through an imagined Spanish-language commonality. Identifying Latinxs racially by their bilingualism/Spanish language serves to disregard Spanish colonialism and to make invisible contemporary Indigenous peoples and the multiple colonialisms we suffer from. The lumping together of these groups makes even more apparent that Latinidad is linked to colonial nation states and relies "on the Mexican project of mestizaje, the caste system of the region, and the Anglo project of settler colonialism that all worked to disavow Indigenous presence and promote Indigenous dispossession" (Calderon & Urrieta, 2019, p. 9). These projects include the "mestizaje" practice of including Spaniards as Latinxs.

In the academy and in popular media, Spaniards are often classified as Hispanic/Latino. One need not engage in an exhaustive search to find examples of people who identify as Latinx and are from Spain. For example, Benmayor (2001) writes a testimonio explaining her identity as a Sephardic Jew from Spain who immigrated to México and then the U.S. To end her essay, she muses, "so what kind of a Latina am I?" (p. 58). Benmayor's questions and answers (note the title of her essay, "You Speak Spanish Because You Are Jewish?") point to her claim to being Latina based on her knowledge of Spanish. Other examples speak to how Spaniards realize that the Latinx label is imposed on them. Tatum (2019) writes of a

> dark-haired, light-skinned woman with the Spanish accent who explained that she was not used to describing herself as a Latina because she was from Spain – a European. But after just a few years in the U.S., her social context had racialized her as a Latina. She was seen that way by others, sometimes experiencing their discriminatory attitudes, and was coming to terms with this new, still unfamiliar identity as a "minority" in the U.S.
>
> (p. 91)

As Tatum's (2019) example shows, immigrants from Spain may experience being racialized as Latinxs, so then adopt, whether willingly or begrudgingly, a Latinx identity. Perhaps because the U.S. has a small Spaniard immigrant population, many Americans may not know they are European, or even care to find out. This is yet another example of race's work to essentialize differences and obscure colonial histories.

I argue that this lumping together is a symptom of a society that erases colonial histories and reads someone who is from a colonizer nation-state as the same as the colonized subject just because the colonized subject was forced to adopt the language of the colonizer. By putting both Spaniards and, say, Mexican Americans in the same category of Latinx, our social practices (which contribute to the construction of the racial category) end up erasing the history of Spanish colonization of what became known as Latin America. In other words, by following a logic of racializing Latinxs based on an imposed colonial language and categorizing Spaniards as Latinx, we participate in the social construction of a Latinx category that overlooks colonial histories.

Here I want to address the problem in viewing the Latinx race as a personal characteristic performed through speaking Spanish and being bilingual, versus defining Latinidad based on colonial histories that position groups in certain ways in their particular context. The individual performativity of race can be misleading because race does not live in an individual's identity or in how others view them. Rather, race is constructed through a historical subject positioning of groups (e.g., Gómez, 2018; Hurtado, 2019; Molina, 2014). Racializing Latinxs based on their Spanish-language performativity (or imagined Spanish/English bilingualism) facilitates defining Spaniards as Latinx, resulting in the erasure of the colonial relationships and histories between Spain and Latin America while simultaneously putting the colonized in an always-linked bind (or always-bounded link) with the colonizer. I pose that what should bound Latinxs are a history of multiple colonialisms from Spain and the U.S. and interference from contemporary U.S. imperialism, neither of which Spain has suffered. Making the boundary of Latinx the experience of suffering from Spanish/U.S. multiple colonialisms would necessitate excluding Spaniards and their descendants from this identification, and also acknowledge, for example, Filipinos' shared Spain/U.S. colonial history that may prompt including Filipinos as Latinx.

Notably, some Latinxs assert a shift from Hispanic to Latino in order to signal breaking from Spain's heritage. Still, because Latinx is so defined through the Spanish language, some Spaniards, perhaps not realizing that it is a term that is supposed to disassociate from Spain, subvert the Latinx term's break from Spain by counting themselves as Latinxs. Admittedly people have little control over how others identify them. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see a White Spaniard who self-identifies as Latinx (and of course dependent on the particulars) and not associate them with enacting whiteness through advancing an erasure of the colonization experienced by Latinxs with roots in countries that were colonized by Spain. This evaluation may be seen as playing into the colonial project of categorizing people into racial groups, yet, such logic overlooks that erasing colonial relationships de-historicizes and thus further dehumanizes people who suffered Spanish colonialism. Although I see the merits of arguments that call the act of figuring out loyalties and belonging unproductive, and advocate instead for problematizing the process of racial categorization (e.g., Alim, 2016), to complicate the process of racial categorization requires accounting for how people experience racism and racialization *in relation to others*, which leads to questions about belonging and boundaries (Molina et al., 2019). This tension begs for further discussion but is beyond this chapter's scope; hence I merely mention that it is precisely because people are able to be read as different races that makes race a powerful force and adaptive enemy. That race changes and is responsive to space and time makes it all the more difficult to combat its ideologies (Leonardo, 2013).

Conclusion: Toward Recognizing Latinx as a Race Constructed From Multiple Colonialisms

I began this chapter by arguing that Latinxs are a race. I note that the more people question whether Latinx is indeed a race, the more the group is positioned as perpetual foreigners and may be pushed toward whiteness, having to also reject the self-identification of Black or Indigenous or Asian (selections others would critique anyway). Education researchers who do not see Latinxs as a race aid

in socially constructing a Latinidad that continues to flirt with the idea that Latinxs can obtain benefits from being White (something some Latinxs attempt; e.g., Gómez, 2018; Haney López, 2003b; Torres-Saillant, 2008). This fiction that Latinxs are not a race allows for the continuation of intra-Latinx injustices, prevents Latinxs from making strides toward improving their condition, and prevents inter- and intra-racial coalitions from forming (Martínez, 1998; Toribio, 2003). Like Torres-Saillant (2008), I argue against the idea that Latinxs are "unified by the all-powerful bond of a shared linguistic heritage and a common culture, precisely because such a view impairs our ability to combat the anti-Indian and negrophobic traditions we inherit from Latin America" (p. 53). For coalitions to form, it is imperative to develop a nuanced understanding of Latinx diversity that acknowledges intra-community oppression.

I have noted that ambiguousness allowed for the racial boundary of Latinx to be drawn by the Spanish language and bilingualism, and that this definition is problematic because it erases colonial histories. In order to provide the specificity needed to disavow the already-imagined boundary of Latinxs based on language, I propose that Latinidad should be reconceptualized as a racial group that is bounded from its multiple colonialisms, that is, based on common experiences, lived and historical, of Spanish and U.S. colonial racial orders. I recognize an individual person cannot socially construct the racial boundaries delineating a race, an acknowledgment that may lead some scholars to dismiss the call for reconceptualizing Latinidad as formed by multiple colonialisms. But I submit that scholars do contribute to how society understands certain concepts, and thus should consider what ideas are advanced by their work.

One of the implications that emerge from the erasure of multiple colonialisms and identifying Latinxs based on language has to do with whom education researchers label as Latinx. I invite education researchers to contribute to defining the Latinx race not based on their Spanish or imagined language and bilingualism or culture/heritage, but rather on the multiple colonialisms Latinxs suffer. That is, what makes the Latinx race are the colonial and imperial histories and a collective, even if unconscious, relationship to these histories. Given white supremacy's tool of erasing histories, it is unsurprising that American society has an inability to grapple with the U.S. as an inherently racist, settler colonial, and imperialist nation-state. Yet this white supremacist outcome does not have to limit scholarly understandings of the racial construction of Latinxs to language/bilingualism. Scholars can help to reconstruct the Latinx label by moving away from the problematic understanding of Latinx based on language and bilingualism and by learning and adopting a historical view and framework of multiple colonialisms. Researchers of Latinxs and education do a disservice by ignoring that Spain imposed the Spanish language and not acknowledging multiple colonialisms as an important contributor to the racialization of many Latinxs. Consequently, I call for researchers, especially in bilingual and language education, to complicate how we conceptualize Latinxs.

Education researchers' construction of Latinidad need not follow a hegemonic discourse of a shared language and culture, which positions, as Pérez-Torres (2000) points out, "Latinidad as a form of benign hyphenation" (p. 538). For researchers thinking of who is Latinx in our studies, we likely ask participants to self-identify, which may be problematic if we do not report that the participant identifies as, for example, Latina and is also from Spain. If we are serious about defining Latinxs based on multiple colonialisms, instead of only asking our participants how they self-identify racially, we should inquire with attention to recognizing their relation to multiple colonialisms. Theories like Hurtado's (2019) principles for studying *intersectional racialization* could help researchers capture "the complexities of situational and structural dynamics" (p. 75) and bring in other "significant axes of difference" (p. 82), such as, I add, histories and experiences with the multiple colonialisms. This framework would also help analyze linguicism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism *relationally* to other racial groups (i.e., Asian, Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern/North African, White). Additionally, centering multiple colonialisms may even open the door for or further complicate whether

Portuguese- and French-American colonies should be included in Latinx, by taking into account the effects of other European colonialisms on the Americas. Latinidad could come to name subjectivities formed from differing histories of dispossession and displacement and from uneven relationships to multiple colonialisms.

Another important implication pertains more to teacher educators and teachers of Latinxs and speaks to the need to foster critical consciousness about race/racisms, colonialisms, imperialism, and linguicism (Chávez-Moreno, 2020, forthcoming). For bilingual researchers and educators, the idea of multiple colonialisms highlights that the Spanish we strive to help youth maintain comes from a violent colonialism that attempted or succeeded in separating people from their lands and Indigenous languages and customs. So what does it mean for teachers to work for biliteracy when the "bi" stands for two colonial, imperial languages (Motha, 2014; Zentella, 2017)? It implores teachers of bilingual education and of Latinxs to teach toward enhancing youths' critical consciousness. Thus, I join calls for bilingual education to develop critical consciousness (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Darder, 1991; Freire, 2016) especially relating to racism and multiple colonialisms (Chávez-Moreno, 2018, forthcoming).

To end, I summarize that in this chapter, I show that dismissing Latinxs as a race overlooks recent social science research and the history and significance of multiple colonialisms to Latinxs. I contend that Latinidad is founded on and associated with Spanish/English bilingualism and the Spanish language, and these are defining characteristics of Latinxs' racialization (racial boundary). I then point out some problems with this construction. I argue against solely defining Latinidad based on the colonial language Spanish and/or Spanish/English bilingualism (even if imagined) and posit that conceptualizing Latinxs based on multiple colonialisms has more potential to advance an anti-racist decolonial project. Despite the different histories of the Mexican American race and that of others who self-elect to be in the Latinx category, Latinidad can be used to seek similarities in historical experiences with multiple colonialisms and forge intra-Latinx coalitions (e.g., Aparicio, 2003; Oboler, 1995; Torres-Saillant, 2008). I urge education researchers to complicate how they see the Spanish language and Spanish/English bilingualism as what binds this group together in their understanding of the Latinx race, and to construct it as a race built on the commonality of a history of multiple colonialisms from the empires of Spain and the U.S.

Notes

1. I employ the *-x* in Latinx/Chicanx as a political project that disrupts gender binaries and patriarchy. By Latinx, I refer to people who currently live in the U.S., who have ancestral origins in Spanish-speaking Latin America (regardless of citizenry and birthplace), and who identify as Latinx/a/o. It excludes Spanish immigrants and their descendants, and people from Portugal's American colonies (América portuguesa); I explain this logic later in the chapter. Latinx is U.S.-centric rather than a global label, meaning that outside of the U.S., the term has no purchase given that Latin Americans do not refer to themselves as Latino/a/x.
2. Racial categories are sociopolitical constructions. Thus, ideally, I would use quotation marks throughout the text (e.g., "Latinx," "Black") to remind readers of this idea. But because doing so would visually clutter the text, I omit them going forward.
3. I use "racialized Others" instead of "people of color" to refer to, e.g., Asian American, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Muslim/Arab people and those at the intersections. My preference for the term "racialized Others" is to signal that (1) racialization happens not only through physical characteristics but also through other constructed "differences," such as language, immigration status, and relationship to land; and (2) these constructed differences serve to dehumanize and result in grave material consequences for the Other. I understand Whites as also racialized, but because whiteness is constructed to be racially unmarked and invisibilized, Whites are not racialized as an "Other." I capitalize "White" when referring to people, but not in other cases (e.g., white supremacy).
4. Each of these categories has a fairly robust debate about "who counts as (fill in the blank);" For example, Asian-American studies yields questions about whether Pacific Islanders, people from the Indian subcontinent, mixed diaspora, etc., are Asians.

5. In later work, Gómez (2020) discusses how other Latinx groups similarly position themselves vis-à-vis whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity.
6. Mora explains that her apropos use of Hispanic instead of Latino follows the historical element in her work and the actors' use of Hispanic.
7. A term from Sandy Grande exposing the whiteness in the so-called mainstream (see Urrieta, 2004).
8. Some refrain from using "America/American" to refer to the United States of America because the terms appropriate the name of the whole continent. However, I use "American history" in line with common parlance (i.e., as synonymous with U.S. history), and because this nomenclature became popularized once the U.S.A. became an empire through annexing Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and other territories (Immerwahr, 2019). It is important to keep in mind that neither "American" nor "U.S." rectifies the erasure of Indigenous peoples' names for the land.
9. While I acknowledge the debate about some immigrants and Latinxs being settler colonialists themselves, further discussion extends beyond the scope of this chapter.

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