

***“Colorism is rampant throughout the Latinx community and it needs to be addressed” - How social media is challenging the discussion of Colorism online.***

**A Study on Social Media and Colorism**

By

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## Abstract

Using a combination of Stokes-Brown theory of Latino Racial Self-Identification, Silverblatt's idea of Media as a new social institution, and Hunter's Social interaction theory, I explained how social media platforms such as Youtube and TikTok contribute to new approaches to the discussion of Colorism in the Latinx Community. With the increasing Internet accessibility, social Media creates a digital safe space for Latinx users to express their concerns and experiences with Colorism through virtual interaction, creating a unification and strengthening in the community based on a common motivational goal. Through content analysis on 8 Youtube videos and 7 Tik Tok posts, and 136 comments from the comments section of both social media platforms, this study gained empowerment insight into Latinx experiences with Colorism in their community. Also, this paper contributed to the study of social Media as a tool, and potential emerging social structure, that addresses social conflicts of oppressed groups.

## Flashback to my sophomore year

"You are lucky that you are *blanquita*," said one of my high school peers when I told her that I didn't know a lot of English. I was a new student in my sophomore year of high school, and I had just returned to the United States after living in Chile for the past ten years. I wasn't sure what she meant at first, but I soon realized my high school consisted of a large percentage of Hispanic/Latinx community from all different backgrounds, and the fact that I was light skinned meant that I was less of a target to be discriminated against than other students. She proceeded to tell me that if I wanted to, I could pretend to be an American by the way that I look and how my high school social life would be much better if I did. Sixteen-year-old me stood there terrified in the hallways by this new concern on top of just being a new ESL student. For this reason, I spent a lot of my free time researching what she meant by that comment, and that's how I came across Youtube and social media. The first time I heard of the term "Colorism" was on a popular YouTube Channel called "Pero Like," where they discuss important social issues presented in the Latinx Community. Numerous of their videos had subtitles to help the ESL community who have experienced discrimination based on their skin color, making it my favorite Youtube

channel and pastime. One of my favorite things to do on "Pero Like" was to head down to the comment section and read all the stories of people dealing with the same thing, making me feel identified and not alone. That being said, I realized soon enough that my struggles and discrimination was far from similar to others in the Latinx community. Because of my experience, I decided to conduct my senior project around the research question: How does social media push the conversation of Colorism in the Latinx Community?

## Introduction

As a sociological research paper, the terminology of Latinx is applied in the subject selected to acknowledge all identity representation in social media. In the past decade, I have seen the term gain usage in academic spaces such as university clubs and organizations for their students. Lourdes Torres (2018) discusses the importance of using the term "Latinx" by explaining that it is a "spirit of gender inclusivity, to represent the variety of possible genders as well as those who may identify as non-gender binary or transgender" (pp.284). In addition, as I conduct a content analysis on users' comments, I cannot assume the gender of anonymous posters. Therefore, I will avoid misidentifying online users by using a gender-inclusive term like Latinx.

Preliminary research provides data on Latinx Community is one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States and one of the most discriminated against after African Americans (Daniller 2021). The acts of discrimination against African American, Latinx, and Natives individuals often are committed by the White community, creating a social tension between White vs. Non-White minority groups (Thornill 2015; Wong Copsey-Blake & ElMorally 2021; Ionade 2016; Lurigio, Greenleaf & Flexon 2009; Feagin & Bennefield 2014 ). However, there is a gap in literature addressing the discrimination occurring within the same community, where racial discrimination occurs regardless of the presence of dominant white groups. In previous research, Bonilla-Silva

(1997) explains that minority groups are continuously absorbing "racial ideology" in a "racialized social system" (pp.465) established in a White dominant society. Subsequently, minority groups accept racial ideologies implemented in a social hierarchy based on skin designation and where "white" is established as racial supremacy, causing confrontation and disconnection among Non-White minority members.

In the Latinx community living in the United States, it is prevalent to experience competition among their members to look "American" or be socially assimilated into the dominant social group, where the experience of Latinx individuals with discrimination is based on their skin color. The idea of judging someone as being "dark-skinned" or "light-skinned" is a social phenomenon called Colorism. This phenomenon can be reinforced through several mass media such as Telenovelas, Latin magazines, new channels, and books. However, social media doesn't fit in the last category.

Social media platforms provide a new digital space that allows Latinx individuals to speak up about their concerns about social issues that affect their lives and their surroundings. Similar to what I experienced in my sophomore year of high school, social media such as Youtube and Tiktok enable individuals to create a video sharing their experiences, opinions, concerns, and thoughts about conflicts that oppressed groups should address. In addition to the rise of virtual networks, recent generations are managing social conflict differently from previous generations, making social media the center of social discussion and interaction among the youngest generation worldwide.

My thesis statement addressed the growing accessibility of social media affecting individuals' contributions to social change. For the Latinx community, social media allows a virtual social space to discuss Colorism occurring among Latinx individuals living in the United States, with no boundaries that limit space and time. Through YouTube and TikTok videos, Latinx content creators can communicate narratives about their own experiences with Colorism and interact with Latinx users that share similar experiences, perspectives, and opinions. This virtual social

interaction occurring in social media differs from the physical, social setting where visual prejudice on skin color affects the treatment of Latinx individuals. Social media is changing the way social issues are being discussed. Social media is undeniably a great source of strength, community, intellectual development, and spreading global awareness among individuals of the same ethnicity by creating opportunities for Latinx audiences to give their opinion and experience and unifying the community openly.

The contribution of my research study will analyze the interaction of Latinx users in social media to address the Colorism that affects their community and how social media provides a safe space for Latinx creators to interact and help Latinx users to discuss this topic. Colorism in the Latinx community is a problem that has persisted through the generations after colonialism, judging every individual based on how their skin looks. The importance of studying the role of social media is to understand its potential as a tool of social change that brings communities closer by increasing their communication with each other and reducing the gap between them caused by social conflict.

In the following pages, I will divide my literature review into four subtopics to help present different aspects or angles of my research paper and argument. The first subtopic will introduce the theoretical framework based on three theories: Stokes-Brown Latino Racial Self-identification theory, Silverblatt's Media as social institution theory, and Hunter's Social Interaction theory. Then I will provide a socio-historical background of Colorism that originated during and after colonialism in Latin America. Following, I will discuss present Colorism in the Latinx community and how this impacts Latinx social life. Following, I will discuss how previous studies have analyzed social media as a digital interaction tool that allows users to address social issues from "real life" but in a virtual setting. Subsequently, I will outline the data collection method and research methodology. After that, I will analyze the data collected from content analysis from both Youtube and TikTok comments sections and identify the frequent topics in the dialogue of Colorism in the Latinx Community. The research context in which the study is

conducted is then presented, followed by an overview. After presenting the results in a codebook table, I will outline the key findings. Finally, I conclude this study with a discussion, contributions, limitations, and future research topics.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework: Online approach to Colorism

By using Stokes-Brown's theory of Latino Racial Self-Identification, Silverblatt's Media as Social Institution, and Turner's theory of Social Interaction, I will show how the discussion of Colorism among Latinx individuals unfolds in social media through a unique interaction among content creators and users. I will start by introducing Stokes-Brown's work that examines how Latinx is changing Dubois's theory of Color-line and placing themselves in a "unique racial category" in the United States. Then I will proceed to Silverblatt's idea of Social media emerging as a new social constitution. I will consequently introduce Turner's Theory of Social Interaction to frame human interaction in social media primarily and examine the process of virtual interaction to engage in the dialogue of Colorism.

A previous study conducted by Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown implies that the Latinx community in the United States is "occupying a unique position in the racial hierarchy." This thesis considers the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory by applying W.E.B Dubois's famous work, *The Soul of Black Folk* where he states that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of color-line- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Du Bois 1903). This phrase reflects that skin color is a classificational determinant that divides the nation's societal structure mainly into white and black racial categories. Based on Du Bois' idea of Color-line, the author conducted surveys on the Latino population to understand how "Latinos are immersed in a culture where the dominant

racial paradigm exists around black, and white identity" (Stokes-Brown 2012), which leads to self identity struggle and a community disconnection that divides the Latinx community. In the context of my research paper, the problem of Colorism is even more amplified by the color-line division implemented in the American racial classification system. Stokes-Brown highlights that immigrants of color may "assimilate into the white mainstream, while others may come to identify with the black underclass" (pp.311), reflecting the social struggle of Latinx immigrants or Latinx descended to fit into either black or white category. However, Stokes-Brown's study emphasizes that Latinx individuals express that "racial categories often do not capture their sense of themselves" ( pp.321), implying that they find themselves in a 'position' that might not be completely identifying. The author predicts that Latinx are shaping a "new racial hierarchy", "placed in a newly emerging middle category" between white and black (pp.322). This finding introduces the idea of Latinx individuals forging a "third racial category" in which they can keep their racial and ethnicity identity and ease the social tension of Colorism in the Latinx community.

Stokes-Brown's study provides insights of Latinx becoming a potential "third racial category", however, she states that this accomplishment "may *eventually* emerge if more Latinx individuals self-identify themselves as the Latino racial category "(pp.329). In other words, the findings theorized the possibility of Latinx's future position in the racial categorization in the United States, but barely touched on *how* will Latinx will socially achieve this "third category".

In order to fill the gap in Stokes-Brown's study, I state that Latinx are currently working on finding their racial position by using social media platforms.

Despite previous research have focused on how racial discrimination are being continuously reinforced through multiple social institutions in the United States (Kosny, Santos & Reid 2017; Purnell et al 2018; Monnat 2010; Matsuade & Drakulich 2009). Silverblatt (2004) suggested that media is emerging as a new social institution, since it "provides a support system for individuals as they struggle to become members of a larger social network". In the context of my research



topic, social media can be considered a social institution providing a 'support system' for Latinx users to address the struggle of Colorism through the social interaction process.

Shifting our perspective of social media as a social institution, we can examine the structural system in which Latinx users form collective action and shift the conversation of Colorism to the incentive of embracing the 'Latino' identity as a valid racial category, besides the white and black categories (Stokes-Brown 2012). In order to understand how social interaction occurs in social media, I will base my argument on Jonathan H. Turner, *A Theory of Social Interaction*.

Then I will briefly describe Turner's three step process of social interaction and how this process structures the conversation of Colorism between Latinx users and content creators.

Turner's theoretical work (1987) focuses on the structure of human interaction by analyzing empirical literature on social interaction. After assessing existing work, extracting useful concepts and combining them into a synthetic structure, Turners define social interaction as the interchange of acts between two or more individuals is the "most basic elements of sociological analysis" (pp.5), and concludes that the main goal of social interaction is often seen as a unitary phenomenon (pp.15). This statement implies that groups are constantly engaging in social interaction to reinforce their structure through the interchange of acts. This contributes to my research topic by explaining that Latinx interacting with one another reinforces rules, institutions, social systems and even racial ideologies that are implemented in their community.

Subsequently, Turners explains the process of social interaction into three steps: 1) Motivational processes are those that energize and mobilize actors to interact 2) interactional processes concern how actors use gestures to signal and interpret; 3) structuring processes are those behaviors among motivated individuals that allow them to repeat and organize interactions across time and space ( pp15). In an online context, framing this process in social media discussing Colorism firstly, the motivational process is the incentive for Latinx users to share their experience, opinion or concerns with Colorism. Then, the interactional occurs when other online users support similar ideas and manifest connectedness through "likes" and mutual

supportive comments. Subsequently, the structural process is the increasing interchange of ideas and opinions between Latinx content creators and users in the comments section of every social media platform.

The theoretical framework developed from Stokes-Brown, Silverbratt, and Turner's work supports a solid basis for my research paper by introducing social media as a support system for marginalized groups to participate in social discussion. Furthermore, explore the effects of online interaction in the dialogue of Colorism in the Latinx community. Therefore, the discrimination based on skin tones that have often divided societies can be reduced by using social media as a way to build mutual conversation aimed toward building an integrative knowledge and support foundation for oppressed groups.

## Historical background

In order to comprehend the complexity of race existing in Latin America, this section will focus from a sociohistorical perspective by examining the early stages of European colonialism in Latin American countries where the racial-cultural mixture was first introduced.

Before the arrival of European explorers, the civilizations living in today-known-as Latin America mainly consisted of nomadic tribes living on the land without a supreme governing authority.

Findings have shown that instead of having one single dominant hierarchy, Latin America's societies consisted of multiple hierarchies or 'heterarchical' social organizations that comprised different dimensions of stratification (Schulz 2014)—foreshadowing that the arrival of European settlers with enslaved Africans, this epoch would shift abruptly the social structure established for centuries in the lands of Latin America. During the 19th century, the areas conquered by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers introduced the racial caste system. As Martinez and Iyer (2009) explains, “the White European were at the top of the caste, followed by mixed European and Indigenaus individuals, called the Mestizos. Then the mixed European and African

individuals called the *Mulatos*. At the bottom was the Indians and the Blacks" (pp.55).

Furthermore, European appearance was highly praised in the system and the system itself was "a structure of colonial power, natural order regarding intelligence and beauty among races" (Martinez & Ivery 2009 pp.55). For this reason, European colonizers introduced one of the first hints of racial ideologies to mix races or is also widely known as *mestizaje*. Scholars have defined *mestizaje* or 'mixture' as mixing mainly European Whites, Black Africans, and Natives to persuade a "blanquamiento de Raza " or whitening of the race (Martinez 1998). Each country in Latin America has a different version of *mestizaje*, such as Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, and Guatemala, consisting mainly of indigenous and Spanish blood (Martinez 1998). While *mulato* is a mix of enslaved Africans with Spanish blood, its population is predominant in countries like Brazil, Colombia, and the Caribbean countries like Haiti and Dominican Republic (Torres 2000). The mixing of race and culture introduced by the European colonizers was continuously encouraged, valorized, and celebrated because it was seen as an opportunity to "improve the race," which is a sentence still used among Latinx communities. Reflecting early historical evidence of racism, *mestizaje* can be considered the foundation of the ideology that places black and indigenous people at the lower social hierarchy scale while celebrating white individuals (Wade 2005).

Previous studies have examined the ideologies of *mestizaje* in the early stages of European colonialism in Latin America as a result of the theory of Social Darwinism (Cuervo 2009, Martinez 1998, Otamendi 2009). Reveals that the roots of the ideology of natural selection were being applied in colonization to "improve" the human race through "better breeding" and to support and encourage Western racial and cultural supremacy, also described as "Latin Eugenics" (Cuervo 2009). At first, I theorized that Latinx communities adopted racial ideologies from living in the United States; however, the concept of *mestizaje* introduced during the early Colonial epoch led to internalized racism integrating into Latin ideologies of race. Furthermore,

the internalized racial ideologies introduced by the racial caste system and mestizaje process shaped the Colorism that affects the Latinx community nowadays.

## Present Colorism in the Latinx Community

According to the 2020 Census, Hispanics or Latinos take up 18.7% of the overall population in the United States, making it one of the most prominent minorities in the nation. Previous research emphasizes the importance to acknowledge that Hispanic and Latinos individuals are considered an ethnicity, not a racial category (Feliciano & Robnett 2014), reflecting the conflict that the Latinx members constantly experience in the United States when they are asked to categorize their identity. Just like the United States, Latin American countries are densely diverse in race as a result of each country's colonial history, ranging from individuals identifying themselves as white, indigenous, "mestizo" or "mulatto" or determined commonly by their ancestry.

Despite these basic categories, scholars have noticed that "Latin American countries have an ambiguous institutional racial classification system that allows people to continuously change their racial category, also known as racial fluidity" (Telles & Paschel 2014). As a result of this, the racial identity of Latinx varies on the racial classification established in their host countries, therefore, allowing this fluidity between races based on the color of an individual skin tone.

Nowadays, the racial self identification mainly focuses on Latinx and Afro-Latinx and which is marked by the ethnoracial appearance of the individual. Previous studies have shown light-skinned Latinos are more likely to self-identify themselves as White (Vargas, 2019) and are more likely to "switch" their identity based on their social occasion (Christian 2009). Moreover, Latinx perceived as white or white-passing are often excluded from other Latinx groups since they don't look or act Latinx enough (Mendoza, Taylor, Montaña, Lucero & Dorantes 2021).

While, Latinx who have darker-skinned skin are most likely to self-identify as Black due to their

black heritage and emphasize with racial, social movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement; however, there's a struggle for Latinx descended from Indigenous roots that do not identify as Black. (Freeman & Loblack 2020).

Scholars have also noticed that dark-skinned Latinx are most likely to date people with similar racial categories. At the same time, lighter skin Latinx are most likely to date White non-Hispanic people (Felicino & Robnett 2014). In other words, the role of skin color and racial features are shown to be an important role in Latinx communities, reflecting the idea of colorism is deeply integrated into the practices of discrimination by privileging lighter skin over darker skin Latinx individuals (Haywood 2016).

Some scholars have also argued the level of discrimination results in the acculturation process for Latinx immigrants in the United States through the social interaction with their new community. Cultural assimilation is determined by the level of resemblance with American culture, fluency in English, and familiarity with cultural norms. (Craig, Douglas & Bennett 2009) Other scholarly findings contribute to the idea of assimilation with the ultimate purpose of being a true "American" that is English-speaking and white or light-skinned (Uzogara 201). However, these two previous research lack an emphasis on the obstacles that Latinx individuals face during the process of assimilation due to the prejudice against their skin color. In other words, a Latinx immigrant with dark skin might experience more difficulty integrating into the dominant culture than a light skinned Latinx immigrant.

In addition of the challenges that Latinx experience with discrimination in the United States, the latinx community faces the Colorism existing for decades in Latin America. Both societies have established societal structures that place white supremacy as the dominant group, normalizing whiteness as powerful and more valuable. Nevertheless, the Latinx communities living in the United States are experiencing a shift in the discussion of Colorism due to the development of social media platforms.

## Achieving Social Change through Social Media

Previous generations manifested social movements through marching, protesting, and organizing campaigns to achieve a shift in the political, social, or economic aspects affecting a specific group of individuals. With the increase in internet accessibility, individuals are engaging in social change by interacting in virtual dialogues and forums that allows a boundless digital space for marginalized groups to participate in collectiveness activism and social movements organizations. Social Media has helped create this virtual world by allowing its users to communicate, share ideas, complete activities, organize events, and spread awareness to the audience. However, some scholars argue that the mass globalization of social media is used for harmful purposes such as anti-immigrant propaganda and the spread of unhealthy body ideologies. Previous research studied the role of social media in the creation of a cyber-moral panic against immigrant Latinos in the United States (Flores-Yeffa, Vidales & Plemons, 2011). Other scholars argue that social media is used to promote harmful body image to the younger generation (Tiggerman & Slater 2013). For many scholars, social media has a range of beneficial and harmful consequences on society; however, in the context of addressing social conflicts in political and cultural settings, numerous researchers have found that social media is more than virtual networks. Researchers (Miladi 2016; Zhang 2013; Velasquez & LaRose 2015) imply that social media is an essential tool to expand assistance in social change by providing a new virtual space for individuals to participate and take action.

Through online participation in socio-political discussion, social media have empowered the accessibility for users to contribute to social change. As users use Twitter's hashtags to share "changing situational information" and updates occurring during the Egyptian revolution, thus allowing a collective cooperation to shift the political situation in Egypt. (Oh & Rao 2015).

Another example of the influence of social media to achieve social change is the large integrity of media in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa, where social media help to 1)provided avenues

for sexual minorities in Uganda to gain some visibility 2) facilitated new ways of expressing and negotiating national and regional identities, 3) increasing participation of women in the public sphere and their improved socio-economic situation” (Gustafsson, Ngomba, & Nielsen 2019)

In Nouredine Miladi’s analysis of Social Media and Social Change, he argues that social media provides “online spheres of communication for the youth and marginalized communities to participate in political campaigning and social empowerment” (2016). This implies that social platforms are providing opportunities for young and oppressed participants to actively engage in the discussion of political and cultural conflicts as a collective action. This study contributes to my research paper by emphasizing the importance of collective action in the process of addressing social conflicts. Through the social interaction of Latinx users in social media, they are enhancing communication that helps solve Colorism and reducing the disconnection experienced by the Latinx community with the potential of eventually diminishing Colorism.

## Methodology

My research paper is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis methodology, which examined in depth the discussion of Colorism in social media through the virtual interaction of Latinx content creators and Latinx users. Social platforms such as YouTube and TikTok are allowing an online discussion that originates from a community conflict that is lacking attention. For this paper, used the term "Latinx" as a gender-neutral term for anyone of Latin-American descent who do not identify as either male or female and also to signalize” the importance of nonbinary identification” (Torres 2018). However, when I conducted my research methods I selected the term "Latino" in social media queries since it is more often used in casual vocabulary.

I coined the idea of sociological imaginary theorized by C. Wright Mills describes that examining each individual's sociological imaginary "enables us to grasp history and biography and the

relations between the two within society" (Lemert 2016). Meaning that understanding the personal challenges of Latinx can provide collective information about more significant issues such as discrimination, thus allowing an emphatic view for the readers to understand the reality of selected oppressed groups. Facilitated by the internet, members of the Latinx community are able to narrate their experience with discrimination, express concerns about racist ideologies integrated among their own people, and discuss solutions to the community. In order to become aware of the sociological imaginary of Latinx members, I chose to analyze the comment section of Youtube videos and Tiktok posts with additional comments to apply content analysis to understand their experience with discrimination in their community established in the United States. Both social platforms consist of virtual structures where any individual can become either a content creator can create and upload content for a large audience (Stasik et al 2021) or become an online user to engage. Often these virtual websites have a comment section under the uploaded video or post that provides to the audience a space to express their opinion and/or provide feedback, and this is where the virtual interaction takes place. In addition, this feature allows for other users to add on someone's comment creating a dialogue to either support or oppose the comment.

I aimed to collect data mainly through Youtube videos and Tiktoks from 2018 to the present date and by searching queries related to my research question. In order to avoid an overwhelming amount of data and content not related to my topic, I rejected using single terms such as "discrimination," "Latino/Latina/Latine/Latinx," "Hispanic," which could lead to content not related to the field intended to study. Instead, I started to collect YouTube videos that resulted from searching "discrimination within the Latino Community" and selected five videos with the highest views, in addition to three more video clips that were suggested by the website. With a total of 8 Youtube videos, I noticed that most of them are created by well-established educational channels that collaborate with professional educators and experts on the field. Youtube is a suitable area for examination since the media platform offers a range of contents, and it's often



seen as a "community of individual content creators to provide information" (Tan 2011). However, since my research question focuses on how social media helps to create digital space to discuss discrimination within the Latinx community, I will focus on the comment section of each YouTube video and collect at least five comments with the highest likes by the audience.

Latinx creators have used TikTok to express concerns, narratives, anecdotes, and more personal experiences with discrimination in short video content. I want to examine closely Latinx's opinion and perspective related to the discrimination occurring within their community. Since many Latinx users use their accounts to speak up about their experiences with internalized racism in their own families and community, I believe analyzing at least 5 TikTok posts from Latinx creators will help provide data about their social position in the community. Unlike the YouTube videos I collected for this paper, the TikTok posts are created by Latinx creators that represent the Latinx youth community and participate in the pleasure of producing and circulating their cultural concerns with discrimination. In addition, I will collect 5-10 comments for every TikTok, i.e., eight comments for one post.

The methodology selected contributes to my research by "coding text into categories and then examining the frequencies of terms occurring in each category" (Ahuvia 2001). The data collected from the content analysis will provide descriptive information, opinions, viewpoints, and attitudes that Latinx individuals are experiencing regarding discrimination in their community. I will use analytical coding styles to help organize the patterns and topics repeated in every social and organize them into a coding book or list of codes based on their descriptions and brief data examples of references (Saldana 2009). After collecting 10 TikTok posts and 75 comments from the comment section from both YouTube and Tiktok, I will use Taguette, a tagging tool program to identify patterns and organize them into a codebook. Creating a codebook will help organize and structure the patterns by the frequency they are mentioned and interpret them for the study. I will identify whether the codes resulted from the YouTube video's

comment section and the TikTok videos and their comments will contribute to the purpose of understanding how social media provides an open space for Latinx members to express their concerns and address social issues that others might not be aware of that exist in their community.

## Findings and Analysis

### Overview

A qualitative and quantitative content analysis on two social media platforms was conducted to understand social media's social support system for the Latinx community to fight Colorism. The data collected came from 8 Youtube videos and 87 comments, and 7 Tik Tok and 49 comments. At first, I planned to apply content analysis on both Youtube and Tiktok videos; however, the length of Youtube videos can go up to 10 minutes, while Tik Tok videos didn't go longer than 15 seconds. For this reason, only Tiktok videos were coded besides the comments section from both Youtube and Tiktoks. The unit of focus for this study was primarily the comment section for these social platforms, in which the interaction between Latinx content creators and Latinx users enhances dialogue for Colorism. By studying the comments, the study was able to identify patterns and themes that are more frequently discussed in the online Latinx community world. By using a coding program called Taguette, I upload the selected comments and Tiktok videos to analyze their content and start the coding process. Initially, I assigned preliminary codes during the first round of examination. Then I proceed to create solid codes. Throughout the coding process, new codes would emerge when the content didn't fit the codes established at the beginning. Some codes were applied between 1- 3 times, thus not having enough frequency to interpret the reliability of the context examined. The results consisted of 22 codes, but due to the limitations of this research, I selected the top 7 codes with the highest frequency.

Once codes were established, a codebook was developed to provide a layout of the data found through the content analysis. In the section below, I organized the codebook as the following (left to right): The code name, the definition of that code and the number of frequencies that the code. The codes are arranged from the top as the highest number of frequencies to the bottom as the least number of frequencies.

Following the table, I grouped codes under four themes that mirror the subtopics I raised in the literature review section. I discussed each theme in detail and visual screenshots from the comment section. Finally, I will apply these findings to answer my research question.

Code	Definition	Frequency
Colorism	This label is used when someone expresses the prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.	35
Awareness of the problem	This label is used when a user expresses awareness about colorism in the Latinx community. The label consists of terms of gratitude and satisfaction when the creator is addressing a topic that lacked importance but was affecting most of the Latinx members.	29
Favoring light-skin	This label will be used when an user shares an experience where light-skin is celebrated over dark-skin	24
Internalized racism in family members	This label is used when a user expresses concern about their own family being racist. Also this label will be used when someone shares an experience about racism among their family members	19
Rejecting the term "Latinx"	This labels is used when a user refuses or rejects to accept the term "Latinx" and prefers using the term "Latino" since the "O" is gender neutral in Spanish	16
Race vs Ethnicity	This label will be used when a user discusses the idea that Latinx is an ethnicity and can have multiple heritage.	13
"Improve the race" ideology	This label is used when someone mentions or expresses the idea of "mejorar la raza" or in english, to improve the race. This is usually	9

	mentioned by a family member to a young Latinx to date white people or light skinned	
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## Analysis

### “The Ugly Chain of Colorism”

As shown in the table above, the code with the highest frequency number was “Colorism” with a frequency of 35, which was used when a comment talks the discrimination against individuals based on their skin color, typically against dark skinned Latinx. I merged the codes ‘Colorism’ and ‘Favoring Light Skin’ into one finding called The Ugly Chain of Colorism since prejudice on based on skin tone is the central factor discrimination occurring in the Latinx Community. The comments selected from both codes provide important information and insightful attitudes towards Colorism in the Latinx Community. The comments below are from Youtube videos addressing Colorism. These comments show insightful perspective of Latinx users:



Angel El Goldo • 1y ago

The most racist people I’ve came across are my own.

👍 661



💬 72



One of the most thoughtful findings comes from a Youtube user named Anon Mon who commented on the video posted by the Youtube Channel “Pero Like” on July 20th, 2020. The video under the title ‘Colorism and White Latinx Privilege’ narrates the experience of Maya Murillo as a light skinned latinx who saw his brother, who is two tones darker than Maya, constantly being discriminated against based on his brown skin color. From Anon Mon’s original comments on ‘Pero Like’, I focused on the following section:

I am black, and this is common in our community too. Very dark skinned Black people get treated worse by society; mixed and light skinned Black people get put on a pedestal because of their proximity to whiteness; and of course, White people get the best treatment in society b/c they're white.

The excerpt above from Anon's comment reflects how racial hierarchy divides individuals based on their skin color, and the treatment associated with each category, making whiteness the most privileged group and blackness receiving the worst one. Furthermore, Anon's comment connects to Stokes-Brown's (2012) idea of Latinx standing on the division of Color-line between whiteness and blackness. Since Latin America has a racially diverse background due to the caste system established by the European colonies (Martinez & Ivery 2009), Latinx communities have connected whiteness as superiority and a standard of beauty, which creates false narratives for Latinx individuals. The comment below shows Danyiel's experience with Colorism:



Danyiel's comment reflects the idea that light skin tone and European features were "always praised and considered beautiful" growing up, while him as an Afro-Latinx questioned his value due to the preferences of whiteness. Despite that Danyiel accepted and embraced his African features, his childhood was clearly affected by the ideologies of Colorism as it favors light skin as an ideal standard of beauty. Danyiel's experience reflects Wade's (2005) description of the

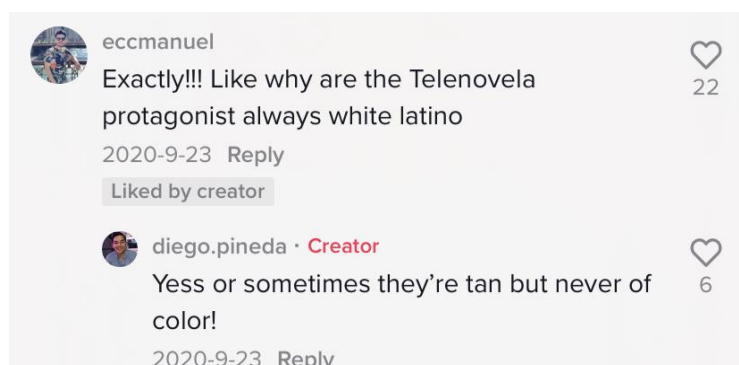
racial hierarchy scale that places black and indigenous at the lower category in Latin communities. Unfortunately, Danyel's experience was similar to numerous other comments collected in this study.

On July 4th of 2021, a Latinx Tik Tok user under the username Abybibym responded to a previous comment of a user criticizing Latinas for bleaching and coloring their hair blonde. Aby opened a discussion addressing the idea of whiteness as the beauty standard in the Latinx community. In her video, Aby says that:

*“Latin America people value those who are white or light skin, you know, white passing. That is the beauty standard, sadly. People who are on the dark side or “morenito” (brown) are not considered as pretty”.*

Numerous responses agreed with the content creator saying that Colorism is to blame for affecting Latinx individuals' self esteem by thinking they are “ugly” due to their dark skin tones. While other users say coloring your hair blonde is to “cover gray hair” and not necessarily an act of Colorism to strip away the Latinx appearance. One specific comment classified Aby's racial identity as “light skin” instead of “morenita” (brown skin). The social interaction between Aby and the user's comment illustrates how Latinx are constantly misidentified in the categories established by the Color-line division discussed by Stokes-Brown's (2012) work. Latinx are constantly shifting their identity due to their position between whiteness or blackness, ignoring the idea that Latinx can be placed in the middle and thus creating a “third racial category”. Within the discussion of Colorism, numerous users and content creators pointed out that media such as Telenovelas reinforces the idea of Colorism through their selected cast members. On September 23rd, 2020, the username 'Diego.pineda' posted a Tiktok video that addressed Colorism in the Hispanic/Latino culture by pointing out how Colorism manifests through daily aspects of life and how television strengthens the idea of light skin color as the dominant race. The comment below was made by the user name 'eccmanuel.' The comment shows that the

creator agreed with his opinion, creating a social interaction addressing how Telenovelas reinforce Colorism.



Another user responded to this comment emphasizing the consequence of Telenovelas is directly “creating negative stereotypes towards our own people of color”, reflecting the repercussions of Telenovelas’ racialized cast members. In other words, the whiteness of lead actors is perpetuating the idea of light skin tone being superior over dark skin ones. This finding implies that the media is controlling the perception of racial hierarchy based on the association of visual actors' skin tone and their social position assigned to them. As a result, the younger generation is exposed to false ideas of beauty through Telenovelas and accepting the ideologies of Colorism.

Colorism has profoundly affected Latin American culture by placing whiteness in the center of social formation structure. However, I must emphasize the highlight of “The Ugly Chain of Colorism' section is the discussion of Colorism is starting to open up in the Latinx community. The data from the comment sections reflects that Latinx are participating in addressing numerous subtopics such as the relation between standard of beauty and skin color, white privilege, and Colorism in mainstream media. Therefore, social media is reversing the negative association of skin color with beauty and power by directly discussing it with Latinx individuals. Unlike mainstream media like Telenovelas, social media is unique in the way that allows a virtual

interaction between content creators and users to interchange ideas and opinions, as well gain support from other users.

## Awareness of the problem: “This is exactly what our community needs”

The second code with the highest frequency was “Awareness of the problem” with a frequency of 29 comments expressing satisfaction or gratitude when the creator addressed colorism in the posted video. The importance of this label reflects how important and beneficial social media have affected Latinx individuals to discuss social issues in their community and spread awareness in the community. After collecting the data, I noticed a pattern of appreciation towards the content video for recognizing the discrimination in the Latinx community, most of the comments collected are seen below:



K Ilex • 1y ago

I'm glad we are taking about this

👍 508 🗨️ 5



Teryl McAlaster • 1y ago

Thank you for taking initiative in this way its really heartwarming 🧡🌻

👍 7 🗨️ 1 🧡



ShizukaRose • 1y ago

Glad Latinos are having these convos finally

👍 239 🗨️ 9 🧡



KMO 325 • 1y ago

Good job with these videos! Y'all covered a lot of ground.

👍 5 🗨️ 2 🧡

These comments illustrate the collective gratitude of Latinx users to the content creators that discussed Colorism in their videos. The online reciprocity between content creators and users through Youtube and Tiktok allows the interaction and interchange of perspective on Colorism. ShizukaRose's comments emphasize the word “finally” as implying that the long wait of addressing Colorism has come to an end. Similarly, Teryl's comment mentions “taking initiative” as part of her gratitude message, implying that the Latinx Community is finally acting against the



social conflict of Colorism. From an alternative perspective, I shift the interpretation of the comments to a generalized examination of the role of social media in this study. Based on the context of Silverblatt's (2004) work, social media proves to be an potential online institution that provides a "support system" for the Latinx audience to take actions on social conflicts. Since Youtube and Tiktok content creators took initiation by posting videos addressing Colorism, the Latinx community is already praising and celebrating these actions through comments. Although most comments consisted mainly of gratitude messages, other users provided an emphasis on the importance of discussing Colorism. A comment said "We gotta break that ugly chain of thinking that whiteness purifies" implying that the idea of favoring light skinned individuals has been wrongfully celebrated for generations in the Latinx community. The analysis of using the pronoun "we" implies the collective participation of Latinx individuals to contribute to the process of breaking the "ugly chain" of Colorism. Another user called Savina Zúñiga supports the previous comment and adds the importance of unification by saying:



Savina Zúñiga · 4y ago

We latinos need to be united. If we united, we would thrive so much, not only in the United states but throughout Latin America 🤝

👍 664 🗨️ 20

Savina's comment gained 664 'thumbs up' from other users, which signals the expression of approval and support of her contribution to the dialogue of Colorism. The amount of thumbs up on the comment is an example of Turner's second step on the process of social interaction (1987), in which "the interactional process occurs when 'actors' use gestures to signal and interpret' the message expressed by someone. In other words, the 'actors' are the online Latinx users that acknowledged Savina's comment and reciprocated similar feelings, thus creating a feeling of connectedness.

Although numerous comments celebrate the content posted and demonstrate gratitude towards selected Youtube and TikTok videos, several users expressed the hesitation that other Latinx individuals will accept Colorism as a social conflict. A comment made by Samantha Marie says:



Samantha Marie • 1y ago

I'm glad we're talking about this. Some people aren't ready for this conversation yet though.

👍 781    💬    🗨️ 7

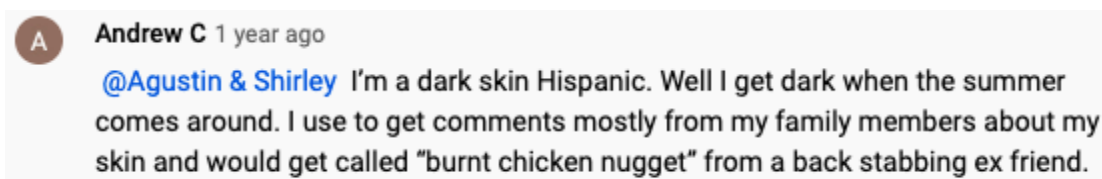
Samantha's comment can be interpreted as that previous generations manifest greater acceptance of Colorism as socially expected in their culture. This can be explained by the lack or absence of social media accessibility that, according to Miladi (2016), prevented "marginalized communities from participating in political campaigning and social empowerment." Without social media as an "institution to provide support systems for struggling individuals" (Silverblatt 2004), the older Latinx generations normalized and accepted the idea of whiteness as a superior race, resulting in the perseverance of Colorism throughout the next Latinx generations. In the context of my research paper, the young Latinx generation uses social media as an essential component to address Colorism and spread awareness in the community. The existing problem relies on the tension between Latinx generations, in which the younger generation found it difficult to have a conversation with the older Latinx generation on Colorism affecting their community. The tension between Latinx generations is commonly manifested in family dynamics.

## Racist ideologies in the Latinx Family


The third code with the highest frequency is "Internalized racism in family members' with a frequency of 19. After collecting the data, I noticed a link between the codes of "internalized racism in family members" and "improve the race ideology". Given the nature of Colorism,

Latinx families have internalized the idea of whiteness as a beautiful and superior race, while dark skin is seen as inferior and unattractive. For this reason, Latin America's saying "improve the race" is socially accepted in the Latinx community and is normalized to encourage younger family members to marry light-skinned individuals to produce light-skinned children.

The idea of Latinx family members being racist was greatly discussed in the comments section of both Youtube and Tiktok posts. In one Youtube video called "Colorism in the Mexican Community", the content creators advocate to fight anti-blackness and colorism in the Mexican community. As a response, one of the comments made by Andrew C, who identified himself as a "dark skin hispanic", expressed that he gets darker during summer time and he is used to racist comments from family members and friends.





Andrew's comment reflects the idea that Latinx families often manifest racist behaviors through microaggression actions such as labeling someone tanned as "burnt chicken nugget". Andrew says that he is 'used to' getting racist comments from family members, implying that the comments are something that repeatedly occurred in the past. This close examination can imply that Latinx members often accept racist comments to avoid confrontations, but leads to the integration of racial ideologies associated with self worth and self perception. In the context of my research paper, Andrew initiation to comment on a Youtube video addressing Colorism shows that social media is allowing struggling individuals to find a way to address social issues. Another aspect of internalized racism in Latinx family is the practice of encouraging Latinx individuals to date white or light skinned individuals to "improve the race", another way to define the practice of racial whitening. The comments below comes from both Youtube and Tikoks comment section:

 blan.cuh





This is my family they try to “mejorar la familia” and won’t let me date anyone darkskin


2021-5-28 Reply

 346




 Native Messiah · 1y ago

Yes!! We need to acknowledge this more in Hispanic community. we need to stop with the whole "mejoranda la raza" with getting with a light GF or bf. Thank you guys for talking about this, this always get pushed under the rugs.

 26   3 

 Blah blah blah blah · 4y ago

"Don't date black people, fix the race" I can feel that I'm ALWAYS hearing my grandma saying this!

 994   59

The term “mejorar la familia” (improve the family) or “mejorando la raza” (improve the race) from the comments above illustrate Latinx users' experiences with racism in their family members through the action of encouraging them to date light-skinned individuals instead of dark-skinned ones. The social persuasion of Latinx families to date light skinned people is often related to the desire to obtain ‘whiter’ family that will lead to experience more social privilege and less discrimination in the racial hierarchy system in United States. Nevertheless, the idea of improving the race is a direct result of the European practice of “mestizaje” (Martinez 1998) where the mixing of European blood with Indigenous and Black Africans was a manifestation of White supremacy.

The discussion of the two codes ‘internalized racism in family members and ‘improve the race ideology’ links to the historical background of colorism from the previous section in my literature review. This shows that for generations, the idea of light skin Latinx are more privileged by social acceptance and social mobility in Latinx culture. But with the era of technology, young latinx individuals are more integrated into social media platforms and find it easier to inform themselves about colorism as a social conflict and therefore, realizing that is not “okay” to think light skinned are superior than dark skinned individuals. Despite Latinx users sharing their narratives of family members being racist and encouraging them to date light skinned people, I believe it is important to address the comments of Latinx users expressing their struggle with

discussing Colorism with their families. The comments below are examples of Latinx struggles with family discussions:



These comments clearly state the tension between generations in the dialogue of Colorism, but also shows the lack of social awareness in older Latinx generations who are more resistant to social change. For this reason, I believe that the current and following Latinx generation will utilize social media as a tool, and possibly an institution, to constantly participate in the dialogue of social issues and ultimately accomplish social change.

## Unexpected Findings: “Rejecting Latinx” and “Race vs Ethnicity”

Both codes "Rejecting Latinx" (16) and "Race vs. Ethnicity" (13) were top 5th and 6th in the codebook. I emerged from these two codes under one discussion analysis since I did not include these ideas in my research topic. However these two topics were greatly discussed in Youtube and TikTok videos addressing Colorism and providing incidental findings that are worth discussing.

## Rejecting the term Latinx

The code "Rejecting Latinx" had a frequency of 16, and it was used when a user's comment implied a rejection to accept the term "Latinx" and preferred using the term "Latino" since the "O" is gender-neutral in Spanish. The comments below expressed discontentment and denial of accepting the word "Latinx" as a self-identification:



jeremy hearne • 1y ago

Just.. no. Latinx ain't a word mate.



3



Xavier Gomez • 1y ago

We are latinos not latinx show some respect to our people.



6

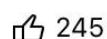


4



Don Guello • 1y ago

Who the heck voted to refer to me as "LatinX"



245

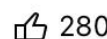


19



Kayavi • 3y ago

I'm not Latinx, I'm LATINA!!!



280



16

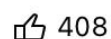
The comments made by Don Guello and Kayaki gained several 'thumbs up' or 'likes' from other Latinx users, implying that the rejection of 'Latinx' is a generalized feeling in the online Latinx community. A possible explanation behind this tendency is seen in the comment above: "We are Latinos, not Latinx. Show some respect to our people", implying the new term is offensive to the Latinx community and therefore unacceptable of Latinx to integrate in their language. Similar comments expressed concern and confusion about the decision to incorporate the word into their society. One comment made by Don Guello opened the discussion of the term's origin by saying, "who the heck voted to refer to me as LatinX."

Simultaneously, Blockom and Cesar's comments shown below implies that the term 'Latinx' didn't originate in Latin culture, instead is an European/White term that added a "ridiculous X" and is only used by Non-hispanic speakers. For this reason, several users expressed anger towards the term since it doesn't follow the Spanish grammar rules.



blokcom • 2y ago

The funny part about "Latinx" is that it's still a European term, just with the ridiculous X added to it.



408



39



cesar • 1y ago



LatinX just infuriates me. The only people that used them are non hispanics and some latinosaurs that don't know spanish. It's annoying how they just ignore all of the language and just change a word.

👍 225    🗨️    💬 7

The discussion validation of the term Latinx persisted throughout the data collection of this study. A couple of comments gave a detailed explanation that the term 'Latino' is already gender-neutral by saying, "when we talk about a group of people that includes males and women and natural gender we used the "O," so the "O" is male and neutral gender. A similar commentary added that "Latinos are gender-neutral. It's used to describe everyone from male or female, white black, natives, and even Asian across Latin America". Followed by a comment that said, "I don't understand the whole of Latinx, like everything in our language has gender no matter if it's an object or person."

Due to this study's design, the examination of Latinx online interaction in Social Media allowed not only to address Colorism in the community, but also provided the space to discuss any issue that requires more social attention. This finding can contribute to a future sociological study on Hispanic or Latin topics and understand the importance of using a term that satisfies the group being studied.

### Race vs. Ethnicity

The second unexpected finding was the code "Race vs Ethnicity," which refers to when a user discusses the idea that Latinx is an ethnicity or a race. All the comments that are coded into these categories were collected from Youtube comments, but none were found from Tiktok.

Weighting both sides of the debate, there was a higher comment tendency supporting that Latin/Hispanic is an ethnicity and not a race. The comments below show arguments made by Latinx users:



Hailey Kay • 2y ago

Im Latina. I am not a race. Im not a defined colour shape or size. I am Latina. Its a diverse culture, we aren't all tan and curvy. We are us.

👍 11    🗨️    📧 1



Anna Marie • 2y ago

Latino and Hispanic is not a race, it's an ethnicity.

👍 1    🗨️

Although Anne's comment lacks evidence to support the statement, Hailey's comments introduced the false stereotype of Latinx individuals based on their appearance. She says that "I'm not defined by color, shape, or size. It's a diverse culture, we aren't all tan and curvy". As Hailey said, Latin America is a diverse culture where the population can not be labeled simply by physical assumptions. Researchers have stated that Hispanic/Latin are considered an ethnicity, not a racial category (Feliciano & Robnett 2014). However the stereotypes associated with a Latinx individual are based on skin tones, leading to the debate that Hispanic/Latin is a race due to the common trait shared in the population.

On the other side of the debate, some Latinx users argue that Latinx is a race. One user called Jovanny Hernandez gives his opinion about Latinx as a race:



Jovanny Hernandez • 2y ago



Latinos/Hispanic is. A race I say this because we have traits and we have a majority which are mestizos is their diversity yes but we are a race because of the traits you see it with the majority that's what makes the race whether it's with hair, skin, eyes, etc and I've met a ton of Latinos or Latinas with light skin but they have Latino/Hispanic features we have what makes up a race so we are a race whether you like it or not



Jovanny's comment implies the idea of mestizaje as the common heritage of the Latinx community, where they shared the same mixed ancestry from Colonial times. Based on the literature review of this study, Jovanny's comment implies that Latinx is a race that predominantly consists of mestizos traits, a mix of European and Indigenous ancestry. The problem with Jovanny's argument is the exclusion of Afro-Latinx, who are a mix of Black Africans and Europeans. For this reason, the argument of Latin/Hispanic as a race is formerly based on the racial stereotype ideologies toward Latinx individuals. Furthermore, Hispanic or Latinx are already considered an ethnicity in the current U.S Census. Individuals can identify themselves as Latinx and have an African, Indigenous, or European heritage that makes up their racial identity.

## Conclusion

Through content analysis, this study answers the research question of how social media pushes the conversation of Colorism in the Latinx Community. The analysis proves that social media, such as Youtube and Tiktok, allows Latinx individuals to participate in public discussion regarding Colorism. Through these social media platforms, Latinx content creators can communicate narratives about their own experiences with Colorism and interact with Latinx users that share similar experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Simoustanly, the online social interaction occurring between Latinx content creators and users shaped the formation of a collective action directed in the same course, eradicating Colorism.

The primary findings discussed in this paper were drawn mainly from Latinx uses comments from the comment section of Youtube and Tiktok. The main topics are the impact of Colorism on the life of Latinx and the different ways. Colorism is manifested and reinforced through Telenovelas, the standard of beauty, and the association of superioress with skin color. The following finding shows that Latinx are aware of Colorism and acknowledge the initial action taken by Latinx content creators to address Colorism in their videos. The third findings illustrate

how Colorism is implemented in the older Latinx generation, who encourage the practice of racial whitening. Lastly, the fourth finding provides insight into online Latinx users' topics they want to address in the Latinx community.

In conclusion, social media is assisting the Latinx community in discussing Colorism from a lens of gratitude, optimism, and aspiration to eventually eradicate discrimination based on skin color. As I stated at the beginning of this paper, social media allows individuals to participate in open dialogue regarding topics of common interests, bringing communities closer by increasing their communication and reducing the gap caused by social conflict. The affirmation that social media functions as a tool for social change imply the first indicators introduced in Art Silverblatt's theory of social media as an upcoming new institution.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study presented several limitations which provide direction for future studies. Given the nature of this paper, the process content analysis is greatly based on "the coder's perception, which limits the accuracy of the reported frequency" (Lucibello et al., 2021), leading to the usage of biased terms in the findings. Using content analysis also brought other limitations to this paper.

The first limitation is shown in the unit of analysis in which I only focused on two social media platforms. By examining solely Youtube and Tiktok comments, I limit the effectiveness of the content analysis process to fully collect a thorough examination of other potential social media platforms. Incorporating other social media platforms can efficiently improve this limitation for future research purposes. A second limitation of this study is the methodology of content analysis on social media, where risks of bias are presented. Because social media consists of young individuals who have more access to social media, which is a convenient sample, a way to improve the future research will be in-depth interviews of Latinx individuals, allowing the older generation to participate in the study. Through the interviews, the study can expand the age

range in the sample collected and result in a more reliable conclusion that can be applied to a general understanding of sociology. Lastly, the third limitation of this study is found in the data collection process, where I selected a limited amount of codes to be discussed in the finding section. Several codes were omitted as a limitation of these papers, thus missing potential topics worth discussing. However, future research can incorporate the codes not included in this study.

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