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How Can I Trust You if You Don't Know Who You Are? The Consequences of a Fluid Identity on Cross-Racial Organizing between African American Women and Latinas in Atlanta

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Abstract: Scholarship in the area of cross-racial organizing between Latina/o and African Americans has increased substantially over the past ten years. Within that literature, scholars have identified many reasons why cross-racial coalitions both succeed and fail. Among the factors most often cited is the issue of trust. Despite the recognition of the crucial role trust plays in cross-racial organizing, little attention has been paid to what contributes to actually building trust between African Americans and Latina/o. I argue that one factor contributing to the distrust of Latinas among African American women involved in cross-racial organizing in Atlanta is the perceived discrepancy between Latinas' own asserted identity and the identity assigned to them by African American women organizers. Using data gathered from six years of participant observation and forty interviews conducted with African American women and Latinas organizing in Georgia, I discuss the consequences of identity construction for cross-racial organizing. I find that within cross-racial organizing spaces in Atlanta, perceived racial identities are used by African American women as proxies for determining Latina organizers' commitment to social justice and, correspondingly, how much individual Latinas can be trusted. Specifically, I find that African American respondents view Latina identity as optional and potentially white. Latina respondents, on the other hand, assert strong identities and contend that their perceived "optional" identities are a function of what Anzaldúa calls a mestiza consciousness or the straddeling of multiple identities. I argue that understanding how these identities are assigned and asserted by Latinas and African American women is a crucial and often-overlooked component to building trust, and by extension, to building sustainable cross-racial coalitions.

Keywords: cross-racial organizing; trust; identity; race; African Americans and Latinas/os

1. Introduction

The scholarship on coalition building between Latina/o and African Americans has grown substantially since the 2000 Census [1–22]. Within the broader literature on coalition building, scholars discuss many factors that contribute to a coalition's success or failure. Two of the most often cited factors include identifying commonalities [8,19,23–30] and the role of trust [1,3,4,30–33]. Despite the acknowledgement that trust plays a significant role in coalition building, little attention has been paid to the factors that contribute to building or hindering trust between African Americans and Latina/o on a day-to-day basis. Those who do offer insight into the process of building trust focus on the need to dispel stereotypes and fears by getting to know one another [1,19,34].

This article contributes to the literature on the role of trust in cross-racial coalitions by addressing the role identity construction can play in fostering and/or inhibiting trust between African American women and Latinas organizing in Atlanta, Georgia. Like other scholars, I found that there was distrust

between African American women and Latinas organizing in Atlanta. I argue that one of the reasons African American women organizers distrust Latina women organizers is the perceived incongruence between Latina organizers' asserted identities and the identities assigned to them by African American women organizers. That perceived discrepancy, I contend, was a significant factor in the cross-racial organizing spaces I observed because the consistency of an individual's non-white racial identity was often used as a proxy by African American women for how committed a Latina organizer was to the pursuit of social justice—and by extension, how much she could be trusted.

To make this argument, I investigate how African American women organizers living in Atlanta construct the identities of Latina organizers and how those same Latinas construct their own identities. I find that Black organizers primarily construct Latina identity based on what they perceive as Latina organizers' vacillation between white and non-white racial identities. Latina respondents, however, assert a consistent non-white ethnic and racial identity. Latinas contribute, what appears to the African American organizers to be a wavering public identity, to their not-fitting-into traditional racial or pan-ethnic categories or what Anzaldúa calls, *mestiza consciousness* [35]. I argue that the conflict between the identity assigned to Latina organizers by African American women organizers and that asserted by Latina organizers themselves has consequences that impede the successful maintenance of cross-racial coalitions. In the absence of other information, the perceived consistency—or what African American women respondents refer to as the "strength"—of one's racial/ethnic identity, is initially used as a proxy for how much Latinas can be trusted in cross-racial organizing contexts.

This article adds to the literature of trust by illustrating the ways in which individual organizers, in this case Latinas living in Atlanta, negotiate multiple identities in organizing spaces hold meanings for others that they themselves do not necessarily intend. As the demographics of the U.S. shift, and we wait to see how the U.S. racial social structure will incorporate an increasing number of Latinas/os [10,36–41], it will become increasingly important to understand the consequences of racial/ethnic identity in cross-racial coalition spaces. As Oboler and Dzidzienyo [24,41] write, we cannot expect that African Americans and Latina/o will come together as "an automatic occurrence", but rather only "as a result of sustained efforts, (and this) promises rewards for both African Americans and Latinas/os". I believe that part of this sustained effort is the investigation of the relationship between trust and identity construction.

2. Literature Review

Since the 2000 Census, research on intergroup relations between Latina/o and African Americans has exploded, particularly research focused on the Southeast [1,3,6,8–11,14,18,20–22,40,42–48]. Research on coalition building centers around identifying key factors that affect a coalition's success or failure. Alvarado and Jaret [1], for example, investigate the collaborative efforts of four groups located in North Carolina, Florida, and two counties in Georgia. They highlight both the successes and the struggles of these groups in order to identify key components of sustainable collaboration. They find that leadership development, connections to larger networks of regional organizations, trust among the participants, and the presence of a "bridge-builder" or "an individual who encourages or inspires African Americans and Latina/o to cross boundaries by supplanting fear with a sense of possibility", are necessary features of sustainable cross-racial coalitions [1] (p. 5). Sonenshein [30], and more recently Jones-Correa [49], have identified the presence of common interests, similar ideologies, and strong personal ties among leaders as key components in successful coalitions. Jones-Correa [48] adds that local context and the perceived cost of participation also contribute to the success or failure of coalitions between African Americans and Latina/o. In general, scholars in this area argue that some form of commonality is essential for building successful collaborations between African Americans and Latina/o [1,3,8,19,49–51].

One commonly cited obstacle in coalition building is the perceived competition between groups [1,3,5,7,11,19,20,34,52]. Gay [52] argues that coalitions in Los Angeles are much more likely to be successful when African Americans and Latina/o live in the same neighborhoods, and if African

Americans do not perceive Latinas/os to have surpassed them economically. Gordon and Lenhardt [7] find that commonality and positive attitudes among African Americans and Latinas/os can develop during frequent "equal status contact". Equal status contact occurs when African Americans and Latinas/os come into contact in contexts in which they are not in competition with one another [7].

Marrow [11,53] echoes this assertion in her work on black-brown coalition efforts in two rural counties in North Carolina. In her comparison of majority White Wilcox County and majority Black Bedford County, she finds that cross-racial coalitions make more progress in counties like Wilcox, where Latinas/os and African Americans are both in the numerical minority. In these situations, she explains, African Americans are less likely to feel the threat of being socioeconomically displaced by Hispanics. Both Marrow and Gordon and Lendardt's [7] findings are significant because they illustrates the importance of perception in shaping African Americans' behaviors toward Latinas/os.

2.1. Trust

An oft-cited yet under-theorized factor in the coalition building literature is the role trust plays in establishing and sustaining cross-racial coalitions [1,3,4,19,31–34,51,54,55]. In the introduction to his book *The Politics of Minority Coalitions*, Rich [32] writes that racial/ethnic minorities are unable to build sustainable coalitions because of minority groups' ethnocentrism, their distrust of one another, their differing abilities to assimilate, and whatever ad hoc alliances they may form with the white majority [32] (p. 2). Rich connects racial/ethnic groups' distrust of one another with their tendency to maintain social distance, as measured by "avoidance among minorities based on group calculation of risks and benefits arising from contacts" [32] (p. 3). Another factor negatively affecting minority coalitions is their differing opportunities for group assimilation or "queuing". Queue jumping, according to Rich, gives the appearance of greater social acceptance of selected minorities by whites and thus creates the impression that groups have differing abilities to assimilate. The final obstacle he identifies for minority coalitions is ad hoc alliances with the white majority. These alliances, or what Rich calls "driveby pandering", occur when one group decides that an alliance with whites will yield greater returns than their current minority coalition [32]. Although not explicitly stated by him, it stands to reason that three of the factors he identifies—ethnocentrism, differing abilities to assimilate, and ad hoc alliances with whites—all contribute to the fourth factor: distrust between minority groups. Sonenshein [30] and Rich [32] suggest that the best defenses against any perceived payoffs stemming from alliances with whites are mutual trust and respect among minority groups. In his research on black-brown political coalitions between Christian organizations, Warren [51] (p. 104) finds that the "trust inherent in their common Christian religion required further development" before the religious leaders he worked with were willing to form a coalition. The depth of the groups' distrust, according to Warren, was exemplified by the five years it took to overcome it in order to form a united political coalition.

Contemporary research on cross-racial coalitions also identifies trust as a key factor in coalition building. Alvarado and Jaret [1] pinpoint the creation of trust among coalition members as their first recommendation for building and sustaining coalitions (p. 48). Each of the four groups that Alvarado and Jaret profile emphasized the importance of—as well as created strategies for—establishing trust. These strategies, which included organizing social events with food and music, provided opportunities for members to dispel divisive stereotypes about each other. Alvarado and Jaret argue that the successful coalitions intentionally created a context in which people could become more comfortable with one another [1] (p. 46). In her research on coalitions among union leaders and Latina/o immigrants in Mississippi poultry plants, Stuesse [19] discusses the importance of establishing trust between these two groups, as well as between African American workers and Latina/o immigrant workers. More specifically, Stuesse discusses the establishment of trust based on shared ethical and political commitments. She found that despite an initial success in overcoming obstacles to increasing union membership, distrust of union leadership persisted among Latina/o immigrant workers [19] (p. 334). While not specifically addressing the issue of trust, Turnball [56] writes about

forums in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, designed to address tensions between African Americans and Latinas/os in the city. These forums, like those mentioned by both Alvarado and Jaret [1] and Stuesse [19], were meant to dispel stereotypes and find common ground [56]. Finally, Johnson [34], in his work on cooperation between African Americans and Latinas/os in challenging racial profiling, identifies trust as something that needs to be established between two groups that often see themselves as competing for limited economic resources. Johnson also finds that racism within minority groups and alliances with whites are obstacles to coalition building.

While research on coalitions between minority groups identify trust as a key element for building sustainable cross-racial coalitions, not enough is said about the process of building and maintaining that trust. This may be due to the case study approach to studying coalitions [31]. Hickley contends that the role of trust developed over time is often overlooked in what he calls "single-game case studies". Single-game case studies are studies that focus on events leading up to a particular election or decision but that do not examine how those events are situated within a larger series of events in which actors have formed relationships, opinions, and historical memories. "The single-game situation, then, deliberately excludes the temporal context within which political activity occurs" [31] (p. 66). According to Hickley, documenting the process of how coalition components such as trust are actually built is just as important as identifying these components as key factors for sustainable coalitions.

The closest that scholars have come to directly discussing factors that effect trust-building is to discuss settings—most often social gatherings—in which trust can be fostered [1,18,51,56]. While the exploration of settings may offer a significant contribution, these discussions do little to help us comprehend the processes of building or inhibiting trust in non-social organizing spaces. The strategies mentioned above are designed to dispel stereotypes and, by extension, to quell cross-racial conflicts. I contend that these stereotypes include perceptions of the relative ability to assimilate [32,42] and the likelihood of forming ad hoc alliances with whites [32], and that both of these are tied to initial perceptions of identity that occur long before coalition members attend social gatherings designed to break down these stereotypes.

2.2. Identity and Terminology

Group identity is another factor often tied to building successful coalitions. Rich [32] found that perceived racial ambiguity and differing abilities to assimilate are key reasons that Blacks and Latinas/os have difficulty building sustainable coalitions. Betancur and Gills [4] and Oboler and Dzidzienyo [42] have discussed the role that a group's perceived ability to assimilate can play in cross-racial organizing. They argue that the underlying assumption of Latina/o racial identity is that Latinas/os will follow the same assimilation stages as European immigrants did in the early twentieth century (see [57]). According to this model, Latinas/os will downplay cultural traits that distinguish them from the dominant white population, eventually becoming indistinguishable from it. Despite the differing historical trajectories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European immigrants from contemporary Latin American immigrants, the perceived ability to assimilate remains a significant obstacle for African Americans and Latinas/os in cross-racial organizing [42].

The meanings of terms such as "Hispanic", "Latino", "African American", and "Black" also contribute to the racialized context within which African Americans and Latinas/os build coalitions [55]. According to Cobas *et al.* [37], while the racialization of Latina/o groups as non-white have taken various paths, all are categorized within a rigid black-white racial hierarchy (p. 8). It is important to remember that pan-ethnic terms such as Hispanic and Latina/o were created within that binary hierarchy. Pan-ethnic categories are problematic, in part, because they appear to imply a homogeneous experience for all those who technically fall into each category [55,58,59]. The term "Hispanic" was created by the U.S. government to officially categorize people of Latin American and Spanish descent living in the U.S. [55]. Oboler asserts that the terminology that categorizes groups carries with it political, social, and personal meanings. Those meanings, she argues, are significant factors in race and ethnic relations in the United States [55] (p. 13).

Hattam [60] suggests that the creators of the pan-ethnic label "Hispanic" intended to create a designation that would maintain the difference of everyone included under the label without designating the group itself as non-White. Foner and Fredrickson [61] argue that the reluctance of other racialized groups to accept Latina/o as non-White is rooted in the distance that Hispanics/Latina/o have historically tried to maintain between themselves and blackness while also maintaining a tie to their own culture or to a common origin amongst themselves. The authors suggest that this has produced an ambiguous racial identity that is intentionally not Black while being just as intentionally potentially White [60]. Previous work has also problematized any attempt to fit complex Hispanic/Latino identities into a racial binary [13,58,62,63].

Among that scholarship is the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. In her now famous book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa [35] introduces the concept of *la mestiza. La Mestiza* is a combination of different and at time contradictory identities that intersect to construct the self (p. 100). Writing about *la mestiza*, Barvosa [64] writes "Living embedded in a multitude of conflicting social relations of culture, class, and sexuality, the *mestiza*, gains a multiple or 'dual identity' in which the subject strattles multiple life worlds"(p. 58). These subjects, according to Anzaldúa, live at the borderlands of multiple social identities, cultures and spiritual values. Of relevance here is the noticeable difference in the literature in the way that Chicanas write and theorize about their own identity and how their identities are written and theorized about by others. Building on the work of Anzaldúa, authors have theorized what Barvosa has called "the diversity of subjectivity", or the internalization of multiple identities. These subjectivities arise through ones immersion in various cultures and social groups [65] (p. 123). Unlike the literature on pan-ethnic labels, Chicana and Latina Feminist scholarship emphasizes, rather than overlook, the intersections and identity negotiations within social categories.

2.3. Racial Climate

Scholars have noted the racialization of Latinas/os in the South as an important area for research [10,19,22,36,40,59]; however, how the ongoing influx of Latina/o immigrants will affect the entrenched black/white racial binary in that region is still up for debate [3,11,42,43,47]. The influx of Latinas/os into the southeastern U.S. has forced scholars to reconceptualize how the racial identities of Latinas/os are constructed within this highly polarized region [10,17,19,22,36,40,59]. Scholarship in this area reveals the tendency to utilize the same rigid white racial frame applied to African Americans in order to racialize Latinas/os, particularly as their numbers continued to grow [37,38].

In her 2009 article on the impact of immigrants on the U.S. color line, Marrow outlines three models of racial frameworks that dominate the literature on the racialization of Latinas/os. The first maintains a White/non-White binary, racializing Latinas/os as non-White [10,39,66]. The second model also uses a binary, but the central distinction is between Blacks and non-Blacks [39]. In this model, Latinas/os and other non-Black people of color can "achieve" whiteness through economic mobility and social distancing from Blacks [41,67]. The third model groups people into three primary groups based on skin color and class [36]. In his work on the Latin Americanization of the U.S. racial structure, Bonilla-Silva presents this model to suggest that some Hispanics will become "honorary Whites", while others, primarily immigrants, will be considered Black [36]. While there are differences in the details, all of these scholars theorize the racialization of Latinas/os within the existing racial hierarchy.

The ways in which Latinas/os are racialized, as well as "regional and local racial grammar" have potential consequences for black-brown relations [22] (p. 232). The empirical work in this area is just beginning to emerge, in part because the dynamics are being documented as they happen [22] (p. 233). The scholarship that is available yields mixed results. Marrow [10] and McClain *et al.* [66] both find evidence of social distancing between Latina/o immigrants and African Americans. More specifically, Marrow finds evidence of a Black/non-Black color line emerging in the rural South. She contends that Latina/o immigrants view the social distance between themselves and Whites as more permeable than that separating them from African Americans [10]. Stuesse [19] finds a similar distancing, as well as

evidence that anti-indigenous and anti-Black racism presents a significant challenge for cross-racial organizing among Latina/o immigrants and African Americans in Mississippi's poultry industry. Discussing community-based data collected in collaboration with the Center for Research on Women in Memphis, the Highlander Center, and the Southern Regional Council, Barbara Ellen Smith finds that Black and Latina/o immigrant workers rarely viewed their relationships with one another through a lens of competition. Instead, she argues, these workers understood themselves as existing within different, but not necessarily conflicting, circumstances. Additionally, Smith finds that "common values—fairness, egalitarianism as workers, antiracism, and the mandate to resist undue exploitation unified their narratives . . . " [17] (p. 313).

3. Methods

Data for this article comes from a larger project concerned with the role that perceived similarities play in cross-racial organizing among African Americans and Latina/o in Georgia. Georgia's shifting demographics presented an opportunity to investigate the dynamics that arise when an established racial order is disrupted by the dramatic and rapid arrival of another racialized minority. My initial project did not set out to investigate identity. The focus of this article emerged from the respondents' discussions of trust; specifically, the topic of how to tell who could be trusted.

I performed participant observation and interviewed twenty Black women and twenty Latinas organizing across racial lines in Georgia. The data for this article come from those interviews, which were conducted between December 2004 and May 2005. I used a semi-structured interview format to ask respondents to reflect on their experiences organizing across racial lines. In addition to specifically asking about challenges and strategies in organizing, I also asked about how participants constructed their own identities and what they thought about pan-racial/ethnic terms such as "people of color". The interviews were transcribed and coded in the qualitative software program *Atlasti*. I used a modified grounded theory approach to analyze the data. I refer to my process as modified grounded theory because, while several codes emerged from the data, such as *Latinas as White* and *questioning commitment*, others, such as *trust* and *resource competition*, were extracted from the relevant literature (for more on open coding, see [68–70]).

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations were chosen and presented because they captured a pattern or a sentiment in a particularly articulate or succinct manner. Inevitably, some respondents spoke with more clarity than others and are thus quoted more often. When this occurs, the reader should keep in mind that these quotes are presented as evidence representing a larger pattern identified through various approaches to analysis. Occasional context for quotes is given as a way to situate data within an interview; however, protecting the identities of my respondents was the most important consideration in these decisions. The population of organizers in Atlanta at the time was small enough that particular language, events, organizations, and/or demographic characteristics could all be used as identifiers for individual respondents. In some cases, decisions were made to exclude certain key quotations that could be too closely linked to particular respondents. All respondent are referred to by pseudonyms.

All of the respondents were currently involved in or had had recent experience with cross-racial organizing among African Americans and Latinas/os in Georgia. I used multiple snowball sampling to identify twenty women from Black/African American and Latina/o ethnic groups. I chose to interview women in part to control for gender, but also because most of the participants and organizers in community activism are women [71–74]. According to Hardy-Fanta [72] and others, women are more likely to participate in the day-to-day activities that sustain a grassroots organization or movement while men tend to be the public face of the organization or movement [75].

My respondents had a variety of organizing experience. Some were heavily involved in issue-based coalitions, such as those formed to protest the removal of bus routes in low-income communities or to fight for fair wages and safer working conditions. Others were involved in political coalitions that focused on organizing events such as town hall meetings to "get the word out" about

anti-immigration legislation, including HB 256 and SB 170. The women ranged in age from 23 to 62 and had been organizing anywhere from two years to "longer than (I) have been alive". All but one of the women I spoke with was a high school graduate and more than half (24 women) had completed at least some college. Two of the Black respondents held Ph.D.'s and one held a Master's degree. One of the Latinas held a Master's degree, another was in graduate school, and one was applying to medical school at the time of our interview. All but five of the women I interviewed held professional jobs; they had incomes that ranged from under $10,000 to $69,000. The median income for my respondents was around $30,000.

Scholarship on cross-racial coalitions describes respondent samples like mine as "political elites" because of the nature of the coalitions my respondents were part of and because of their relatively high education and income levels [11] (p. 16). I would suggest that my sample is more heterogeneous than the term "political elites" suggests, given the varied types of organizing that these women were involved in, such as organizations that advocate for groups they themselves are not part of (*i.e.*, immigrants) as well as organizations that assist their own communities (*i.e.*, low-income workers, parents, racial and ethnic minorities, *etc.*). Still, my sample is somewhat overrepresented by "political elites" and thus distinct from those that dominate the study of black-brown coalitions in the *Nuevo South* [1,3,6,8,9,11,14,17,19,22,44–48]. Much of this work is focused on coalitions between African Americans and Latina/o immigrants in small towns in the Southeast. My work builds on and departs from those studies by investigating coalition building in a large city (Atlanta) and by focusing predominantly on non-immigrants.

My sample is unique, therefore, in terms of education and class, and also due to the citizenship status of the Latina respondents. All but three of the Latinas I spoke with were born and raised on the U.S. mainland. Of the three remaining Latinas, two immigrated to the U.S. as young adults, and the last was born and raised on the island of Puerto Rico, moving to the mainland when she was in her twenties. About half of the African American respondents were native Georgians; another four were originally from the Southeast. Most of the Latinas were not native to Georgia, but each woman had lived in Georgia for at least five years. Both the Latina and Black respondents were a heterogeneous representation of ethnic and racial identities. Latina respondents represented a broad range of ethnicities including Brazilian, Chilean, Colombian, Cuban, Mexican, Peruvian, and Puerto Rican. Three of the Latina respondents self identified as Black Latinas. Nineteen of the twenty Black respondents self identified as African American and Black, with one woman identifying as being of African descent in America.

I was heavily involved in some of the organizing efforts I write about here, most significantly in helping to organize town hall meetings on anti-immigration legislation and co-chairing the Atlanta Organizing Committee for Undoing Racism. I started this project wanting to understand how people went on doing this work in the face of so many internal and external obstacles. My focus was not on any particular form of organizing because I had been part of enough collective efforts in other states to know that many crucial dynamics and obstacles existed across organizing lines. I identify as Chicana. Initially, most non-Latina/o people I met both inside and outside of organizing contexts in Georgia did not know the term "Chicana". Explanations of this term usually led to interesting discussions of racial and ethnic categories and immigration. I worked in some capacity with all but one of the women I interviewed and worked closely with four of the African American women and three of the Latinas. By not limiting my research to one issue or case study, my work moves beyond the single case study approach that Hinckley [31] argues limits our ability to document the process of building trust.

4. The Nuevo South

To fully unpack the ways that identities are constructed and how these identities affect the dynamics of cross-racial organizing, we must take into account the context within which the organizing is taking place. Since the release of the 2000 Census, and more recently the 2010 Census, both scholars and the public have begun to pay attention to the influx of Latinas/os into destinations

within what has been dubbed the *Nuevo South* [1,2,7,10,11,17–19,21,22,43–46,76]. Every Southern state[1] except for Louisiana saw its Hispanic population increase between 2000 and 2006. Georgia, along with North Carolina and Arkansas, saw its Hispanic populations increase by at least three hundred percent between 1990 and 2006 [43]. Of equal importance to the numerical increase is the speed at which this growth occurred. Drawn by the robust economy, Latino settlement in the South is characterized by permanent workers rather than temporary migrants and represents a wide variety of nationalities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family structures [47,76]. In Georgia, for example, Mexicans comprised 65.4 percent of the total Hispanic population in 2006, followed by Central Americans (12.6 percent), Puerto Ricans (7.4 percent), and South Americans (6.1 percent) [76].

While pockets of the rural South have become home to these new Hispanic populations, urban centers have seen most of the growth. The site of my research, Atlanta, Georgia, is considered the second largest urban center or "hypergrowth" city in the South; its Latino population increased 995 percent between 1980 and 2000 [77]. Atlanta ranks 19th of the 60 largest metropolitan areas by Hispanic population [76]. Additionally, at the time this research was conducted, Atlanta had the greatest overall number of Latina/o in its metro area, with 467,418 reported in 2006 [78]. That number had grown to 546,000 or 11% of the Atlanta metro area by 2011 [76]. Questions remain as to the long-term consequences of such changes for race relations in a region dominated by a rigid black/white binary [3,11,42,43,47].

Data for this project were gathered at the beginning of a backlash against Latina/o immigration in Georgia and surrounding states. What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive list of events and issues involving Latina/o immigration in Georgia, but rather examples of debates and events that were occurring during the period of data collection. I choose to highlight these particular issues and events because they are representative of the types of conversations in which my respondents were taking part and the racialized climate in general. While this overview focuses on issues related to Latina/o immigration, all Latinas/os, regardless of immigrant status, were impacted by this backlash.

In 1999, local officials in suburbs surrounding Atlanta began passing ordinances prohibiting day laborers from gathering on city streets [79]. In 2001, a debate began between some members of Georgia's Black Caucus and a White legislator who had introduced a measure to expand the state's official definition of "minority" [17]. Broadening this definition to include Hispanics would expand the number of businesses eligible for tax breaks offered to businesses that subcontract with minority-owned firms. The measure eventually passed with the help of then-governor Barnes [80]. During that same year, controversy erupted over whether undocumented immigrants should be allowed to acquire U.S. driver's licenses or whether their licenses from two other countries—namely, Canada and Mexico—should be recognized in the state of Georgia. Initial supporters of the bill eventually bowed to political pressure and it was never passed [81]. Finally, in 2005, Georgia legislators introduced HR-256, which called for a constitutional amendment that would ban undocumented immigrants from receiving public services such as publicly funded healthcare, k-12 education, or higher education. This House Resolution also called on local law enforcement to work in cooperation with INS to help enforce federal immigration laws [82]. Although HR-256 was introduced in 2005, debates and anti-immigrant sentiment had dominated the local and state-level political climates for years preceding the official legislation.

Anti-immigrant sentiment was not limited to lawmakers. In 2002, responding to the purported "takeover" by Hispanics of Gainesville, Georgia, located approximately 55 miles northeast of Atlanta, the white-supremacist group National Alliance conducted an anti-immigrant rally [44]. Around the same time, the White anti-immigrant group Georgians for Immigration Reduction was lobbying the state legislature for stricter immigration policies. Finally, on several occasions, I noticed

[1] Southern states include Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Kentucky.

discounts being advertised on local restaurant marquees specifically for INS officers. Although I do not discuss issues related specifically to immigrants in this article, the context presented here is pertinent for understanding the racialized climate within which cross-racial organizing efforts were being conducted.

5. Identity Construction: Optional People of Color

In order to discuss the consequences of identity on cross-racial organizing among African Americans and Latinas/os living in Atlanta, I will first discuss the different ways that my African American respondents constructed Latina identity. All respondents were asked specifically about their own racial/ethnic identity and that of others they organized with. The quotes presented in this section were primarily in response to the question: "What do you think has been the biggest obstacle to cross-racial organizing between Latina/o and African Americans?".

Discussions of Latina identity by African American women organizers fell into two general categories. Eight of the twenty African American respondents assigned Latinas/os a White racial identity and another seven respondents made reference to the optional nature of Latina identity, meaning that Latina organizers could vacillate between White and non-White identities. Mary Waters [83] discusses a similar phenomenon that she calls "optional ethnicity", in which Whites choose to be ethnic on selected holidays and on some state-issued forms, but not when this choice holds negative consequences. Waters argues that this is possible because the negative social consequences attached to being a White ethnic have diminished to the point at which these identities have become what Herbert Gans calls "symbolic ethnicities" [84]. The difference between the idea of optional ethnicities and what Black respondents understand Latina organizers as doing is that, for the Black respondents, the negative consequences are associated with the deemphasizing, rather than the emphasizing, of Latina identity. In particular, the negative consequences attached to being a Latina "optional" person of color are the questioning of Latinas' commitment to the pursuit of social justice and a general distrust by African American women.

Beverly, a sixty-year-old African American organizer who was born and raised in the South, is representative of the group of women organizers who constructed Latina identity as optional. The quote presented here is taken from a lengthy discussion about the challenges she encountered organizing with Latinas/os.

> I didn't feel like we were on the same page. I thought there was a lot of class distinctions that were much more pronounced among the Latinos than there were among African Americans . . . I think African Americans identified more as African Americans and less by class . . . The other thing that I think women have—and this doesn't get talked about a lot, maybe in small groups—is the whole issue of . . . often, if you're a Black woman, you're a Black woman, wherever you are, wherever you go, and I think that Black women see not just Latino women but Latino women and other women of color as being able to choose when they identify and when they don't, and that's a big issue.

Here Beverly is describing her belief that Latinas can choose when they want to assert a Latina or non-White identity. In doing so, she evokes Waters' notion of an optional ethnicity. She does this by not only constructing Latina identity as a choice, but by doing so in contrast to Black women's identities. Thus, it is not only that Latinas living and organizing in Atlanta have the option to choose when and where they identify as Latina, but equally as important is that, according to Beverly, Black women's identities do not change from one situation to the next. She also implies that she thinks Latina identity is fractured along class lines, which is not the case, in her experience, with African Americans. Again, we see the construction of Latina identity in comparison to that of African American women. At issue here is not only the construction of Latina identity as having the option to be potentially White [60], but, as Beverly points out, the additional fact that these constructions do not get acknowledged or

addressed in the organizing contexts she took part in. Thus, any potential consequences of these optional identities also go unresolved.

In the next quote, Cathy, a biracial organizer who identifies as African American, recalls a situation where she found out that a woman who she and her co-workers thought was White was Latina. Cathy is discussing an anti-racism workshop that the partnership she worked for hosted in 2003. The workshop was intended to introduce participants to the health disparities within minority communities.

> We organized the director of the commission to come in, and for a long time we thought that she was a White woman. She basically came out in the training as a Latina, and it was funny because these other Latinas in the room knew when she walked through the door. So we got to the point in the training where it was like, you know, "What do you like about being (your race or ethnicity)" and so they (the Latinas) all kind of turned around and looked at her and were like, "You better say who you are, you know", so that was interesting for me to watch.

Cathy's story about the director's "coming out" as Latina is another example of how my African American respondents experienced the optional nature of Latina identity. In this example, the director, according to Cathy, "came out" as Latina only after reaching a point in the workshop at which the race and ethnicity of the participants was specifically being discussed. Cathy's use of the term "came out", coupled with her assumption that the other Latinas in the room were encouraging the director to "say who you are", implies that Cathy thought the director was intentionally concealing her non-White Latina identity. Cathy's reading of the situation suggests that the director had the option to choose between a White and a Latina identity and that she chose to assert a White identity until that option was taken away.

Many of the African American women I spoke with had stories about assigning Latinas White racial identities in both organizing and non-organizing contexts, only to later "find out" that the women were Latina. Despite the fact that Latinas/os can be of any race, most African American women respondents understood Latina and White to be mutually exclusive identities. Either Latinas were asserting a Latina identity or a White identity: African American women organizers did not allow for Latinas to be both Latina and White. This construction becomes evident later in Cathy's story, when she indicates that she thought the director was White "until" she found out the director was Latina. In response to a follow-up question about whether she thought the director would have revealed that she was Latina if other Latinas had not been present, Cathy said that she did not think so because the director had never mentioned that she was Latina in their past interactions.

> Cathy continues: "I mean we all thought she was White, until they (the other Latinas) said, 'Oh, no you don't' and 'Uh, well, okay (I) guess you (are) Latina now'" (laughing). Cathy's use of the word "now" in the preceding quote indicates that the director was, until she "came out", something other than Latina.

In this next passage, Emma, an African American veteran organizer, describes an "aha" moment she had after watching a group of Latinas/os decide which affinity group to join at a conference.

> E: I had been invited by this group we were working with and it was pretty much three Latino organizations . . . that were going to this training, and when they got to the affinity groups, there was this discussion that went on about which group certain people would go to, and they were all Latinos, so would (they) go to the White group (or) would (they) go to the Latino group, and I'm like, "Dang, I never thought that". I was never in a place where personally I could have . . . a discussion about that. So I said, this is a whole different perspective, it was very enlightening; it was like an eye opener. It gave me a new sense of this sort of dual or split identity, but I'm sure a lot of mixed race people (know about this). It was like, you know, an "aha" for me. And I'm like. "Oh, okay, I think I'm starting to get it".

> I: Starting to get what exactly?
>
> E: Get the whole dual identity or sort of the lack of clarity about it. I think African Americans have a really strong identification. You know, because very few, I mean unless you're mixed race or very light-skinned in passing, you know you're Black. Now, you might want to be called something else, but there is no issue. But it is an issue if you're from another group, if you're maybe Asian or Latina or possibly Native American, especially if you are biracial ... So I know Latinos are not a racial group, so that tends to push another layer of complexity on it ... I think African Americans sometimes don't understand the confusion around racial identity or don't even understand that you may not define it and your identity racially, you know. So when you come together, I mean like a lot of us, around organizing issues, the bond to see for organizers is not just oppression in general, but that Black people or people of color are getting their ass kicked and so that isn't as clearly felt and understood, then it's harder to find that common ground.

Emma's story serves as both another example of the way that Black women organizers in Atlanta constructed Latina identity as optional and a hopeful epiphany. She recounts how she discovered that Latinas/os have what she calls a split or dual identity after witnessing a group of Latinas/os discuss which affinity group to participate in—White or Latina/o. Observing this interaction was important for her because she herself had never been in a situation where she could choose which group she belonged to. Emma's use of the term "dual or split identity" suggests that the Latinas/os she observed, and by extension all Latinas/os, have the option to choose between a White and a Latina/o identity. This reasoning also suggests that a person cannot be both White and Latina/o and serves as an example of how the rigid black/white binary influences the ways Latina identities are constructed. Additionally, this "dual identity" signified to Emma a lack of clarity about one's racial identity.

Emma goes on to compare her own—and by extension all—African American racial identity to that of Latinas/os and other groups. According to Emma, African Americans have "really strong identification" and "know you're (they are) Black". She makes a noteworthy exception for mixed race or very light-skinned African Americans, using the term "passing" in reference to these groups, a word that is often used in a racialized context to describe the act of presenting oneself as belonging to another (usually White) race. By referencing this exception Emma suggests that the "strength" of one's identity is dependent on having an unambiguously non-White identity. That is to say, that if someone can or perceived as being able to "pass" for White (e.g., Latinas or mixed race and light-skinned African Americans), then her or his racial identity is not as "strong" or fixed as that of someone who cannot "pass". By including mixed race and very light skinned African Americans in her retelling of her "aha" moment, Emma is acknowledging that African Americans also negotiate multiple identities or what Anzaldúa calls *mestiza consciousness* [63]. Waters [85] finds that the children of West Indian immigrants engage in similar identity negotiations, moving between identifying as Black American and their West Indian ethnicity depending on the context.

In the second portion of her discussion, Emma generalizes her earlier statement about the lack of clarity around issues of racial identity among Latinas/os to other people of color, namely Asian and Native Americans and people who are biracial. By doing so, she is acknowledges that identitiy is more complex than the black-white binary allows. Then, she projects her new understanding of these groups' identities onto all African Americans, stating that they sometimes do not understand the "confusion around racial identity" or how non-Black people of color might not identify themselves racially.

In addition to providing another example of the ways that Latina organizers' identities are constructed by African American women organizers, this passage also indicates that assumptions about racial identity construction have consequences for organizing. Although subtly, Emma makes a connection between the experience of racialized groups and the likelihood of their finding common ground on which to come together or "bond" as organizers. She implies that unity among organizers come from "not just oppression in general", but from people experiencing institutional and individual racism on a regular basis—"getting their asses kicked". She goes on to explain that if there is not a

recognition that organizers are experiencing individual and institutional racism differently then "it's harder to find that common ground".

This link between identity construction and finding common ground contributes to our understanding of why cross-racial collaborations are so difficult to sustain. The existing literature has focused on societal-level issues such as resource competition, but it has done little to explain the group dynamics that occur before collaborative discussions can even begin. Emma provides an example of how exploration of intergroup dynamics can add depth and detail to what is already known about the challenges of cross-racial organizing. In the next section, I discuss the ways that Latinas construct their identities in private and public spaces. I do this to show the discrepancy between their asserted identities and those assigned to them by others; specifically, by my African American women respondents. In the final section, I discuss the implications of that discrepancy for cross-racial organizing.

6. Latina Identity: The Process of Trying to Fit

Many of the same indicators that African American respondents used as evidence that Latina organizers vacillated between White and non-White identities were also discussed by the Latinas whom I interviewed. Both the immigrant and U.S.-born Latina organizers described their identity construction as a process of figuring out how to reconcile their asserted racial and ethnic identities with assigned racial, pan-ethnic (*i.e.*, Hispanic or Latina), or pan-racial/ethnic (*i.e.*, women of color) categories. Although none of the Latinas used the term, the identity negotiation prcess closely mirrors the *mestiza consciousness* that Anzaldúa and others describe [36,67,70]. Latina organizers discussed these assigned categories in relation to relatively private spaces; for example, filling out government forms, and public spaces, such as meetings or workplaces. Jessica, a young Brazilian woman who worked with a variety of women's advocacy groups, describes how she negotiates these categories in both private and public:

> I think that a lot of people, when they come from other countries, they're very nationalistic. They have that side of their background, so they don't see themselves as a specific group. They see themselves as, "Oh, I'm Bolivian. I'm Mexican. I'm Brazilian". And so it's hard when you go somewhere and they're sort of all those people that they have different cultures and different even language sometimes, and they (others) just put (us) into a little group . . . Especially when I had to complete forms, and in Brazil they never ask you what race you are, what your race is. They never ask that on forms, so I had to choose between Black and Hispanic or multiracial. So I never knew what to put . . . I have forms that I put "Black". I have forms that I put "multiracial". I have forms that I put "Latina".

Having not grown up with an understanding of the construction or the consequences of race in the U.S., Jessica struggles with how to translate her Brazilian identity into preselected racial and ethnic categories. Her experience in Brazil is that people do not subdivide themselves into groups beyond their nationality as Brazilians. Jessica's initial lack of understanding of the U.S. racial structure meant that she did not know what race to select. Her solution was to mark different categories on different forms. She includes Hispanic and Latina, both of which are technically pan-ethnic categories, in her choices of racial designations. Using pan-ethnic terms to describe one's racial identity was very common among the Latina respondents. Jessica's comment about never knowing what race to select suggests that she thought that there was a "correct" answer as to where she "fit" in the U.S. racial structure. The fact that Jessica chooses different racial (Black or multiracial) and pan-ethnic (Hispanic or Latina) categories on different forms is an example of how Latina respondents negotiated not "fitting" into existing categories. Although the lack of adequate racial and ethnic categories on forms was a recurring theme, the topic was not confined to private spaces. Jessica continues:

> Now, I guess, when you (have) just been here for a while and you get to know the system and you get to know what they consider (you), you just need (to) make a shift and just kind of let go of some of the concepts you have. I think some people never let go, but I did. I can just put either "Hispanic" or "Latina". Even if I know that the term doesn't really include me—like the term itself. "Latina" does, I think, but not "Hispanic", (which) is just (a) person that speaks Spanish. I don't speak Spanish. That's not my first language. But I think that's the way the U.S. does everything. They put people in groups because that's easier, for whatever reason, in their mind. And you just have to accept and put yourself in that group for that purpose. Either it (is) because you're applying for school or you go to apply for a job, and then you can have your own personal life that you don't necessarily feel that you're part of that group . . . . So if I'm at work, a meeting, or a presentation, I definitely put my Hispanic hat on, my token Latina hat on, and I'll do what I have to do, but if I'm home I just feel like I'm just myself and I don't really have to put myself into some little group.

In the second part of her identity discussion, Jessica explains the process she went through that led her to eventually accept the U.S. pan-ethnic categories of "Latina" and "Hispanic". Instead of being upset about having to identify herself within a category that does not include her, namely, Hispanic, Jessica explains this as "the way the U.S. does everything" to "make things easier". It is worth noting that while discussing identity markers in public spaces, Jessica only references the categories "Hispanic" and "Latina". Earlier, when discussing her negotiations with racial categories on forms (*i.e.*, in private), Jessica includes "Black" and "multiracial" in addition to "Hispanic" and "Latina". Her exclusion of "Black" and "multiracial" from her discussion of public spaces, in combination with the use of the word "token" to describe her experience as a Latina at work, in meetings, and in presentations, suggests that the only identity available to her in public spaces is an assigned pan-ethnic identity. Which identities were available to her in public spaces is significant because identifying in public spaces ethnically as "Hispanic" or "Latina", as opposed to racially, was sometimes interpreted by African American women organizers as asserting a White or potentially White identity. Neither Jessica nor any of the Latinas I spoke with identified as White or discussed be able to pass as white. According to Jessica, she identifies as "Latina" or "Hispanic" because there is no other choice, but neither captures how she constructs her own racial and ethnic identity. She makes a clear distinction between how she identifies when there are no "little groups" to fit into, whether those categories are imposed in public or private. Jessica's quote is an example of a sometimes-public (e.g., at work and in meetings) racial and ethnic identity negotiation that could be perceived by African American women organizers as vacillating between different racial and/or ethnic identities or as having the option to do so.

Similar questions about racial and ethnic identity could also arise from Latina organizers' reactions to the terms "women of color", "Hispanic", and "Latina". Anita, a Mexican woman who organized primarily around issues of reproductive justice, discussed the name of a multiracial caucus she had joined:

> I mentioned to them (the women in the caucus) in one of the meetings that I'm okay with being called "a woman of color". I don't mind. Even though I don't really relate to them, I understand where it comes from and I accept it. It's fine. It was the same thing when I came here, when I first came to the country I didn't think that I was "Hispanic". I was okay with "Latina", but I wasn't okay with "Hispanic". Now I don't care. And you know, I'm fine with it, but I told them that I thought that—my inclination is kind of the same thing, that not everybody from the different cultures wants to be called "a woman of color", and maybe if they changed the name of the community, if it was like a "multicultural women caucus" or "diversity caucus"—something else—that would bring more people in.

Similar to Jessica, Anita is describing the process she went through before accepting the U.S. categories of "Hispanic" and eventually "woman of color". In this quote, Anita is discussing the reasons that she thought more racial minorities, particularly immigrants, were not attending a women of color caucus. In doing so, she reveals her initial dislike and ambivalence towards the terms "Hispanic" and "women of color". Despite not "really relating to them (other women of color)", Anita does not mind being called a "woman of color" because she understands "where it comes from", which is a place of solidarity. Later in the interview, she details a series of discussions in which she and a U.S.-born Latina in the group tried to explain to the other members, all of whom were African American, that the meanings of U.S. racial categories do not always translate clearly to other's lived experience. Anita also used her own experience with these categories to explain that not being comfortable with the term "woman of color" did not necessarily mean that one was trying to distance oneself from non-Whites. Her suggestion that the caucus be renamed a "multicultural" or "diversity" caucus, however, could give the African American women in the group further reason to believe that Latina organizers prefer to deemphasize race, as the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity have both been used to downplay the role of race in discussions of inequality [86].

All three organizers born outside of the continental United States expressed similar problems in struggling with the categories of "Latina" and particularly "Hispanic" when they first came to the U.S. mainland. The struggle with what it means to be Latina, however, is not limited to women who did not grow up in the continental United States. This next quote from Deanna, a Mexican American woman whose work and organizing centered around equity in schools, is representative of many native-born Latina respondents.

> You know what, I am a woman of color, but I don't really like that. And I think it (is) just (like) that whole Latino thing. I'm a Mexican (laughs). I'm a Mexican, and you know what, I know in the whole Latino universe Mexicans are on the bottom of the list. And my staff will make jokes, it's so funny because I am the director and they make jokes about me, their leader, because I've got Colombians and Venezuelans, and Colombians they think they are the best . . . But I am proud of who I am. I am proud of my parents coming here to the United States and building a life for us that we have, that I have. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. So, I have a lot of pride in who I am. And calling me "a woman of color" just puts me in this like big ol' melting pot. And I understand why other people—like (from) Latin American countries—they want to be the Colombians or the Venezuelans and stuff because there's a lot of pride in that culture. And so you know I'm proud of who I am. You can tell? (She points to all the Mexican art and cultural symbols in her office).

Within this short section of her discussion, Deanna simultaneously expresses what many African American organizers described as a "strong" representation of her Mexican ethnic identity and what could be perceived as a vacillating identity as a woman of color. She begins her response to the question "What do you think about the term 'women of color'?" by stating that she is a woman of color. She quickly clarifies that she does not like that term or "Latino" because it puts her in a "melting pot", meaning that these terms downplay the distinctions between the different races and ethnicities included within them. More specifically, Deanna thinks that her parents' struggle to come to the U.S. and build a life there is lost within both "woman of color" and "Latino". Her statement is another example of Latina respondents' struggle to negotiate multiple cultures and identities. Deanna's response, and others like it, support the scholarship that problematizes pan-ethnic terms. Deanna's resistance to the pan-ethnic terms "Latino" and "woman of color" supports the findings of scholars who find that the term "Hispanic" is too broad to encompass the realities of those categorized within it [55,58,59,62].

The women in this section represent a larger pattern among Latina respondents who do not see themselves reflected in existing racial, ethnic, pan-racial, or pan-ethnic categories. Most, like the women highlighted in this section, have come to accept pan-ethnic and racial categories for the

purposes of organizing. We saw this most clearly with Anita, who accepts the label "woman of color" because she understands that its use is about solidarity with other women. This lack of adequate categories means that Latina organizers are not wedded to one label or another, which can be perceived by African American women organizers as meaning that Latinas like Jessica, Anita, and Deanna do not have a "strong" racial or ethnic identity. I would argue that my Latina respondents' willingness to be included in categories that do not accurately represent them is actually evidence that they do have a clear, unwavering, or "strong" understanding of their ethnic and racial identities. Jessica plays her role as the "token Latina", but does not let that change her identity as a Brazilian woman. Anita and Deanna both accept the term "woman of color", even though they problematize it. Thus, the Latina respondents were not vasilating between identities, but rather straddling multiple constructed identities. This *mestiza consciousness* is perceived by most of the African American organizers I spoke with as not having a clear sense of who they (Latinas) are. The point of this article is not to argue that there is a "correct" identity for any of my respondents. As Markus [87] writes, all identities are dynamic: who we are depends on the context. The point here is to simultaneously acknowledge the *mestiza consciousness* and to suggest that this negotiation of multiple cultures and identities is situated within a rigid black-white racial hierarchy that does not easily accommodate multiple identities. Because of this, Latinas' *mestiza consciousness* run the risk of being misinterpreted. As I argue in the next section, misinterpretations hold grave consequences in the world of cross-racial organizing among African American women and Latinas in Atlanta.

7. The Consequences of Identity

As mentioned previously, one of the major factors in coalition building and coalition demise is trust [1,3,4,19,31–34,51,54,55]. The role that trust plays in cross-racial organizing can not be overstated, but it has been undertheorized. Scholars have taken note of its importance and some have outlined strategies for building trust [1,19,51,56], but few have tried to address where and how trust breaks down or from what initial sources distrust stems [19,32,56]. Up to this point, I have argued that African American women and Latinas organizing in Atlanta have competing constructions of what constitutes a "strong" or unwavering racial and ethnic identity. In this section, I suggest that those differences are significant because they have consequences for the womens' cross-racial organizing. Specifically, I argue that what is seen as an unclear or vacillating identity is connected in the minds of African American women organizers to their distrust of their Latina counterparts. This perceptible distrust in turn creates resentment among Latinas and can result in their pulling back or even departing from organizing efforts.

To frame this portion of my argument, I begin with a classic metaphor as retold by Sarah, an elderly Black woman with whom I organized for almost six years:

> There's a story I heard a man, J.C., say at the first workshop I attended in 1984, and I never forget it. If you look at a plate of ham and eggs, he said, you can see the difference between being dedicated and being committed. He said if you look at that plate you can tell that the chicken was dedicated, to give up the eggs, you know, but the pig, the pig was committed, cause he died for that ham. And I always think of that . . . . What are you—the chicken or the pig? (Laughs).

The importance of one's commitment to organizing cannot be overstated, nor can the consequences of having one's commitment questioned. At the time of her interview, Sarah had been organizing for almost forty years, predominantly in the area of tenants' rights. Sarah's quote illustrates the crucial difference between being dedicated and being committed to social justice—what most of my respondents called "the work". To some, this difference might not be important or clear, but for the organizers I spoke with, commitment was everything, because commitment meant you could be trusted. In Sarah's re-telling of this classic metaphor, the difference is presented as one between life and death. Later in her interview, Sarah explains what the story meant to her, referencing the

life-and-death nature of racism and what it takes to defeat a system that "takes the lives of African Americans everyday".

> "You can't defeat racism with dedication", Sarah said. "We need people who are committed ... in it for the long haul". During this same conversation about cross-racial organizing, she spoke about people she had once considered allies in the struggle against racism who have since left the work, people she "trusted". She ends the above quote by asking, "What are you, the chicken or the pig?" and then starts to laugh. Sarah's understanding of organizers generally falls along the lines of commitment or dedication, so much so that she periodically referred to people as "chickens" or "pigs", depending on her gauge of their level of involvement.

There was a general feeling among all of my respondents—Black and Latina—that some people are more committed to the work than others and that trust among coalition members is vital. In addition to other factors, such as where you live, the race of your spouse or partner, your socioeconomic status, your age, your occupation, where you grew up, *etc.*, African American and Latina respondents indicated that assigned ethnic and racial identity is often used as an initial proxy for assessing an individual's level of commitment and by extension, how much she could initially be trusted.

In response to a follow-up question concerning the consequences of Black women thinking that Latinas can pass for White, Cathy, an African American organizer quoted earlier, questions Latina organizers' commitment to social justice:

> Well it's, like, how committed are you, you know? Do you live this work or do you just do it for, you know, when you feel like it? I mean, it's sort of a consciousness issue. Sometimes it's hard to have a strong identity, identification, with a group that is sort of not super-clear in terms of who they are and what that means in this society, in the U.S.

Here, Cathy links what she and other Black respondents perceived to be Latinas' unclear idea of who they are to her questioning of Latinas' commitment to the work. She does so by making a distinction between living the work and engaging with it "when you feel like it", thus implying that Latinas' commitment to social justice work can vacillate along with their identities. Although she does not use the word "trust", Cathy's statement about finding it hard to identify with a group of people who are not "super-clear" about who they are, suggests that she has a certain amount of distrust toward Latina organizers. It is important to note that this statement came in response to a follow-up question about Latinas being able to pass for White. Instead of clarifying what she meant, Cathy responded with the above comment. The fact that a clarifying question about an optional White Latina identity elicited a response about commitment and trust suggests that these concepts are linked in Cathy's mind.

Questioning of one's commitment is closely tied to the idea of trust. The opinion of all of the African American respondents over 45 (eight), but only a third of those under 45 (four), was that Latinas could not be automatically trusted. In this next quote, Audia, a fifty-something-year-old Black organizer who primarily worked with non-profits to organize Undoing Racism workshops, is talking about a Latina who took over a position that an African American colleague of hers had recently vacated.

> I felt that the African American woman had my back, and I didn't have that same feeling about the Latino woman, and I think that's a big problem, as well. I think more often than not, those of us that are, and you tell me if this is true for you, but for me, my experience is that I will assume an African American woman has my back until she shows me otherwise. I will not assume necessarily a Latino woman has my back—she has to show me she does. But I will give the African American woman the benefit of the doubt based on my history and experience. You know now, it may not be the case, I'm not saying that they always do—they have to show me they don't. Whereas with a Latino woman, I'm not going to assume that automatic, (right) off the bat.

Initially referencing the Latina in the new position, but quickly generalizing to all Latinas, Audia states that she does not automatically assume that Latinas will "have her back". Again, Audia does not use the word "trust", but the phrase "has my back", is commonly used to signify that you trust someone to support you in times of need. Audia recognizes that the difference between the assumptions she makes about African American women and Latinas is problematic and asks whether I (and presumably other Latinas) make similar assumptions. Unlike African American women, according to Audia, Latinas have to prove to her that they can be trusted, or in Audia's words, that they "have her back". She bases her decision to trust or not to trust on past experiences of working with both groups. Audia, like many African American and Latina respondents, contextualized the distrust between African Americans and Latinas/os within both her personal experience and within her history with organizing. Despite not always being right about who will and will not have her back, Audia continues to give African Americans the "benefit of the doubt" while waiting for Latinas to prove to her that they have her back. It is important to note that Audia's trust and distrust are not absolute. She explains that although she initially approaches a situation based on her past experience, she is open to changing her assumptions about both African Americans and Latinas/os based on their actions (*i.e.*, whether or not they have her back). These links to distrust substantiate the findings of Alvarado and Jaret [1], Betancur and Gills [4], Hinkely [31], Rich [32] and Sonenshein [30], all of whom identify building trust between groups as a key factor in building cross-racial coalitions.

All twenty Latina respondents reported experiences of not being trusted by African American women while organizing in Atlanta. In response to a question about the challenges of cross-racial organizing, Marialena, a thirty-something Puerto Rican woman whose organizing centered on access to education states:

> I think women, all women, have to prove themselves, but I think women of color have to do it double, you know. And I think for brown women it's triple. I see it that way. I mean because we not only have to prove ourselves to the White women and men but to Black women.

Marialena's frustration with having to "prove" herself represents a larger pattern among Latina respondents. In this quote she situates her experience as a Latina doing organizing work within a larger framework of first women, then women of color. In doing so, she is acknowledging that "proving" oneself is not limited to her experience as a Latina, but rather is something that all women have to do. However, she is also alluding to the intersection of race and gender by saying that women of color have to prove themselves "double". She also hints at the presence of the intergroup dynamics between Black women and Latinas by suggesting that "brown women's" experiences are the most burdensome of all because they have to prove themselves to everyone (*i.e.*, "triple")—to White women and men and Black women. It is not clear from her statement whether Marialena meant White women and all men or just White men. What is clear, however, is that she specifically names Black women as a group that Latinas have to prove themselves to. When I asked her to elaborate on this point she responded by quietly informing me that she did not feel comfortable elaborating because of the open interview environment. However, once outside, she acknowledged that she did not feel as though her Black coworkers, who were also fellow organizers, trusted her. She said that they did not

think that the needs of Latina/o children, particularly undocumented Latinas/os, were important and that they were constantly fighting her over resources to enhance educational opportunities for these children. Marialena felt that African American women's distrust was connected to their resentment that Latinas/os were benefiting from the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement. She dismissed this idea by saying that Latinas/os still have to fight for everything they get, particularly undocumented Latinas/os. Marialena then reiterated that she felt that she had to constantly prove herself to African Americans, adding, "And for what? They are never going to see us in their struggle . . . . They are never going to trust us, really. It's frustrating."

In addition to the issue of trust, Marialena brings up a related factor: resentment. Resentment surrounding benefits gained through the struggles of the Black Civil Rights Movement going to Latinas/os is another oft-cited point of contention among both Latinas/os and African Americans [3]. As illustrated by Marialena's comments about her colleagues, this resentment fuels distrust between the two groups by once again calling into question the level of commitment Latinas/os have to the pursuit of social justice. If Latinas/os are thought of as jumping on the bandwagon of civil rights in order to feed on the shrinking minority benefits pie [3] rather than because of a larger commitment to social justice, trust will be difficult to establish.

This questioning of commitment and the projection of distrust by African American women toward Latinas organizing in Atlanta invokes frustration and in some cases causes Latinas to abandon cross-racial organizing efforts. The majority of my Latina respondents did not express feelings of distrust toward African American organizers. This could be because their experiences of not being trusted and having to prove themselves dominated the section of the interviews that focused on challenges. Latina respondents' reactions to distrust and the questioning of their commitment ranged from anger (exemplified in Marialena's statement) to contextualized acceptance. The two most common reactions to African American women's distrust were either to combat the questioning of their commitment by educating others about the struggles Latinas/os or specific ethnic groups face or a blanket refusal to work in cross-racial coalitions. There was, however, a third reaction exemplified by a minority (three) Latina respondents. While too small to constitute a pattern, the content of these comments is noteworthy because it offers an alternative model of framing and ultimately working through the consequences of ethnic and racial identity presented here.

This third reaction requires organizers to step back and situate their respective assigned racial and ethnic identities within both national and local racialized contexts. The three Latinas who favored this option reported that it came to them after many years of struggling with what it meant to be labeled "Hispanic". Perhaps the best articulation of the process of figuring out what being labeled "Hispanic" meant not only for herself but also for those with whom she organized came from a forty-five-year-old Puerto Rican woman who described her own journey from "White Puerto Rican" from the island to "Hispanic" to "woman of color".

> I understand "woman of color" as an experience that we share with other racial/ethnic minorities. Before we, as Latinas, can be "women of color" we need to deal with being labeled "Hispanic" and then "person of color". Part of that journey is realizing that in some places we are more palatable to (White) people than Black folks by virtue of not being Black. I had to learn that when I came to the mainland because in Puerto Rico I am considered White because of my skin, but once I was here they were, like, no, you are Hispanic, and then in my organizing I was told no, we are women of color . . . . It is a necessary reality to understand how others see us. This does not mean that we forget who we are or let this construct define us, but we recognize it for what it is and understand that it has consequences for us and our organizing. We did not create the [racial] construct, but we have to know where we fit in it—otherwise, we end up fighting each other.

Rosa came to the U.S. mainland thinking that her identity as a "White Puerto Rican" woman would remain fixed, but instead it was (re)constructed as "Hispanic". Rosa notes that her understanding of

herself as a "woman of color" came about when she began organizing. Part of her journey was to begin to think about her racial and ethnic identity as relational to the positions of others; specifically, to African Americans. Rosa goes on to explain that in order to organize across racial lines, Latinas need to know where they are situated along the U.S. color line and to know what that means, as well as to understand the privileges and consequences their position implies. She asserts that while this racial construct does not define Latinas, understanding how their identities are constructed within the construct is imperative to their ability to work successfully with other racial and ethnic groups. Like most African American and Latina respondents, Rosa emphasized the importance of not "forgetting who we are". Her use of this phrase is similar to my African American respondents, who referenced the importance of having "strong identities". Although Rosa does not identify the lack of trust as one of the consequences that not understanding national and local racial constructs can have for organizing if it goes unacknowledged, I argue that the two are connected. That is, Latina organizers who shared Rosa's understanding of racial constructs were less likely to take the distrust of African American women personally and to remain engaged with the work in Atlanta. Ironically, all of my respondents mentioned that a key to continuing to work in cross-racial organizing is to "remember who you are".

Rosa's comments illustrate a keen understanding on the part of a few Latina organizers in Atlanta of where they, as individuals, "fit" into the larger racialized social structure. This discussion is not meant to downplay the emotional toll that many Latinas associated with Black women's distrust and questioning of their commitment. I present Rosa's thought process as further evidence of the connection between identity and trust and also to suggest that there are strategies for understanding and working through distrust within organizing contexts that do not involve either quitting or compromising one's identity.

8. Conclusions

The discussions of racial and ethnic identity construction presented in this article suggest that Latinas' perceived ability to straddle the color line leads to a questioning of their commitment to social justice by African American women organizing in Atlanta. The importance of identity construction and interpretation was articulated in a number of ways, including through a concept that one African American respondent termed "split" or "dual" identities. This construction implies that Latinas have the option to choose whether to assert a White or non-White racial and ethnic identity, a concept similar to Waters' optional ethnicity [83]. The difference between Waters' idea of optional ethnicities and what Black respondents understand Latinas as doing is that the negative consequences in organizing contexts in Atlanta are associated with deemphasizing—rather than emphasizing—a non-White or Latina identity. The consequences associated with Latinas' perceived optional White identity are the questioning of Latina organizers' commitment and an initial general distrust by many African American women organizers. Correspondingly, the distrust by African American women in these organizing contexts creates resentment among Latina organizers, who report having to "prove" themselves to Black organizers.

Similar to other scholars who have written about strategies for building trust in cross-racial organizing [1,18,51,56], I found that the distrust of Latina organizers by African American women was not absolute. As one African American respondent put it, "I will not assume necessarily a Latino women has my back—she has to show me she does" (Audia). While all Latina respondents expressed an awareness of this distrust, reactions to it ranged from resentment to a contextualized understanding. Three Latina respondents recognized distrust as a product of the systems of oppression that they were working to combat. These three women recognized a need to understand where Latinas fit in the socially constructed U.S. racial hierarchy. Their strategies of staying engaged included an acknowledgement that others sometimes perceive them as being "closer" to White than African Americans and, therefore, more "palatable" in some situations in the U.S. While this acknowledgment seemingly lends evidence to Lee and Bean's [58] suggestion that Latina/o are becoming "honorary Whites", I would argue instead that it necessitates a distinction between assigned and asserted identity

that is not captured by our current racial categories. In order to truly grasp the complexities of Latina identities and *mestiza consciousness* in organizing contexts in Atlanta, there must be at least an equal acknowledgment of the "strength" of Latinas' asserted identities as Mexicans, Brazilians, Puerto Ricans, Black-Latinas, Hispanics, *etc*. In other words, while context matters, so do individuals' abilities to, in the words of one Latina respondent, not "forget who we are or let this construct define us" (Rosa).

The fluid identities represented by Latina respondents empirically illustrate a defining concept of Chicana feminist thought, *la mestiza*. This idea of living at the crossroads of multiple cultures and experiences, of negotiating multiple worlds and "developing a tolerance for contraditions" and ambiguity [63] (p. 101). Other Chicana feminist describe the phenomenon as being "strategically engage and move fluidly among different constituencies, always risking the consequences of not aligning ourselves absolutely with any of them" [88] (p. 2). Arrendondo *et al.* [88] talk about this experience as working within a *glorieta* or "roundabout space" in which they engage different groups of people who are making assessments of Chicanas' power in relation to their particular location at any given time. Similarly, the negotiation of the various identities expressed by many of my Latina respondents is tied into a larger system of rigid racial and ethnic classification that they believe does not accurately represent them. According to Anzaldúa [64], Arrendondo [88] and the data presented here, this necessitates Latinas having to move in and out of various identities depending on "where in the web of social relations a person is located" [87] (p. 364).

At its core, this article is about how and why racial and ethnic identities matter in organizing contexts in Atlanta. Although my data were limited to cross-racial organizing among African American women and Latinas in Atlanta, I believe that my findings have implications for other organizing contexts, particularly those crossing racial lines. Lipsitz [89] reminds us "racial identities are fictive identities, even when they have factual social consequences" (p. 186). Identities are socially constructed and greatly dependent on a variety of factors and contexts in which they are created and recreated. Each of our identities in any situation exists at the intersection of what we think of ourselves (what we assert) and what others think of us (what is assigned) [90]. Much of the power that race holds as a concept comes from our tendency to react to it as a fixed category [90].

What I have argued here, using the wisdom of twenty Black women and twenty Latina organizers, is that the perceived fluidity of Latina organizers' racial and ethnic identities can have unintended consequences in cross-racial organizing contexts in Atlanta. In order to negotiate those consequences, I suggest that organizers need to be proactively aware that identities matter. Too often in cross-racial coaltions we down play our racial and ethnic differences in favor of our precieved similarities. Much of what I witnessed in Atlanta was the struggle for an acknowledgement of those differences. Whether that was Latinas wanting to express identities that were truly theirs or African American women having the historical differences of experience and struggle in the South acknowledged, everyone wanted their differences known. Perhaps then, we need to spead more time allowing for those differences instead of expecting that everyone identify in the same way. It is one thing to aknowledge how racial hierarchies influence our identities, but it is another to accept those identities. In order to build successful coalitions, I think we need both an acknowledgement that racial hierarchies matter and more conversation and action to move past them, to embrace the *mestiza consciousness*. Barvosa, in her overview of Anzaldúa's work writes, "Anzaldúa insists that the ideal role of the person with mestiza consciousness is as a social bridge who works to unite divided people" [65] (p. 126). Perhaps to build better coalitions we need to develop our collective *mestiza consciousness*.

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