

## Lydia Ramirez\* transcript

\*This is an alias and is not the subject's real name. The subject asked to not be identified by name.

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) You're recording. Okay. Alrighty. So today is November 28th and I am interviewing Lydia Ramirez for my honors Thesis Research, titled The Latino South Race and Racialization. We'll jump right in. Are you 18 years or older? And can you state and spell your first and last name for the record?
- Speaker 2: [00:22](#) Lydia Ramirez
- Speaker 1: [00:30](#) and when were you born?
- Speaker 2: [00:32](#) I was born August eighth, 1989.
- Speaker 1: [00:37](#) Cool. And where are you from and where did you grow up?
- Speaker 2: [00:40](#) So I'm from Bakersfield, California, which is Central Valley of California and that's where I grew up as well.
- Speaker 1: [00:48](#) And have you ever lived in any, any other places?
- Speaker 2: [00:51](#) I have. I lived in Mexico for a bit when I was 13. I almost lived there for a year and then the rest of my life is in California.
- Speaker 1: [01:04](#) And what brought you from Bakersfield to Mexico and what part of Mexico?
- Speaker 2: [01:09](#) So I lived in Sinaloa and Michoacan, which is, I'm originally where my parents are from. So I am Mexican American and they were both born in Mexico specifically and senior law and when I was 13 they wanted us to buy us, I mean my siblings to go to Mexico and study there for a bit. And so, um, we were there for almost a year and then we moved. I don't, we never really moved there. We, it was like, we visited there for a year and then came back.
- Speaker 1: And did you also go to undergrad in Bakersfield?
- Speaker 2: [01:50](#) Yes. So my Undergrad and my Grad school is from Bakersfield. And then now I'm here.

Speaker 1: [01:56](#) And what brought you here?

Speaker 2: [02:00](#) What brought me to Mississippi? Oxford, Mississippi. So, um, I came to Oxford, Mississippi to pursue my doctorate degree in higher education. Um, all of my life and education is from California. And I felt as though when I was looking into a graduate program, I really wanted it. I wanted it something to be. I'm very different than what I was getting in California. It wasn't that it was a bad, the same, but I really wanted something, especially if I was staying in higher education, I wanted something that would allow me the, the, uh, ability to learn something different in and out of the classroom and at the same time be able to hopefully bring that back to the state of California.

Speaker 1: [02:55](#) Is Race an important part of your identity? Why or why not

Speaker 2: [03:06](#) so, it is very important to my identity and I think that sometimes that's between both, like what society tells me that I look like obviously, and how my race impacts, um, the way that the world sees me, the, uh, the other way around, if that makes sense. So I think from that perspective, yes, race is very important to my identity. Okay.

Speaker 1: And um, how has your experience been at the university and living in Oxford?

Speaker 2: Do you have a more specific question?

Speaker 1: Just totally open ended it role in comparison to where you're from.

Speaker 2: So obviously I'm from Bakersfield, California in California is known for being the melting pot, hopefully if the world just kidding. Oh, the United States, but um, so there's a lot more diversity, visual diversity and beyond, but specifically I think, um, I went to a Hispanic serving institution, so there was at least 25 percent Hispanic students or students who identified as being Hispanic at my institution. So there was a lot of people that look like me, um, when we look. So I have a background in psychology and when, uh, you look at like success and what that looks like in perspective to like race and ethnicity. Um, the research talks a lot about how it's important for us as even humans to see people who look like us where we are, are trying to go. So if I see a

professor who is Hispanic or Mexican or whatever I identify with, even if it's beyond race, then I'm more prone to believe that I can be in that place. That's not my reality here. I'm meeting people who I can't, who look like me, who are, even though that's not important in the great picture, it's important for that ask, that psychological aspect that it's sometimes very difficult to, um, continue to be connected to that part of myself. Um, especially with like food and all of. Because I think when we think of race we just think like, oh, this person looks a certain way and that's, that's what races. But like sometimes there's so many different components that we don't think about, like the culture that comes with that race or the food or all of these things. All of these, it's almost like a tree. I'm going to give you a metaphor. I'm, here's the tree of my race. And then the roots. We don't really think about where the roots came from. And so for me, um, I think being in Mississippi brought made my race even more salient because it was, it was like what I was being identified by from others. Like people are constantly. The question I get here the most is like, where are you from? What are you, who am.

Speaker 2:

[06:31](#)

Sometimes I just want to be like I'm human, but it's very important for people to know because they're trying to, um, determine who you are and then they're trying to put you in a box which can be very uncomfortable at times to be like, okay, why can't I just be me? Why can't I just walk around and be like, oh, I'm Lydia, nice to meet you and that's who I am. But it's like a sense of we were trying to understand where do you come from, what do you stand by? And obviously make some assumptions based on like, what my race is or what my ethnicity is and what all of these components, um, which is human nature to try to understand others. Um, I just think here, moving to Mississippi, it's made a lot, a lot of my self more questionable, I guess you could say, um, as opposed to in, in California, it was just kind of you were there and I'm sure I got like, Hey, what are, like, are you Mexican?

Speaker 2:

[07:38](#)

Are you this? Or even not that, whatever. But it didn't happen as often as here. And sometimes I think about like, well, is it, I'm an education obviously, so is it because there's not that many people who look like me, so people are trying to understand, okay, like there's this foreign looking person to this place, so I need to know what they are. It's a very interesting. But it's been a, for the most part,

a positive experience. And I don't know if that's because I've, um, I've intentionally made it into, into a positive experience. Yes. Does it get exhausting at times to be like, why do I have to answer this question? But I'm also being in education, it has given me a challenge outside the classroom that allows me to view race, ethnicity, culture, and all of these different components are these identities in a very different way.

- Speaker 2: [08:37](#) And it allows me to, working in the field that I do, um, I have a student contact on a daily basis. So being able to, um, educate those individuals so that these questions are either asked in a more sensitive way or I'm not asked at all or maybe not make assumptions based on someone's race. Even if they, whether they identify with it or not, because I think we have this mentality that, oh, that's your race, so you must identify with no, like if I wanted to identify with another race, that's my right as a human to identify with whichever race I would like to or if I was biracial, like I get to decide which race I identify with. So it's kind of those components, but it's been. So I've taken something that may be at the beginning made me feel I don't want to. It's hard to identify what it made me feel.
- Speaker 2: [09:42](#) I don't think. I think at times it did make me feel a little uncomfortable because it was like, well, why is this, why is this so important for people to know what my race is and how it would happen at the very bare beginnings of a relationship where it's like, hi, nice to meet you. I'm so and so. What, what are you. It was almost like the followup to my introduction. Um, so, but then I realized like how much good I could do from being able to educate students that like maybe you don't ask what are you, maybe you asked like do you like what race do you identify with or identify with this, what do you identify with and things like that. So,
- Speaker 1: [10:30](#) and this question is worded towards undergrads. What is your major plus patient and notable involvement, but what are you studying? What year in your program argue and what are you involved in on campus?
- Speaker 2: [10:46](#) So I am currently, this is my third year in the PHD program and I'm studying higher education and student personnel and then involvement on campus. So my job, my graduate assistantship keeps me very, very busy. Um, but I am involved in Bgsa which has been a great organization to be

part of and I've been, I'm a member since like the first semester I was here. Um, and it's been a good. Other than that, like I've done orientation, I did orientation this summer, which was in a very rewarding experience. Um, what else? Yeah, outside of my graduate assistantship. Um, those are the two things that I really like enjoyed doing outside of it.

Speaker 1: [11:42](#) And now kind of more into questions about your identity white. No. One more question, sorry. What are the most important aspects of your life right now and why?

Speaker 2: [11:51](#) Oh, aspects. Like what, what do you mean by what's most important to you right now? Right. I think, I mean obviously, um, my spirituality, like I'm religious and I'm a believer, I'll put it that, so like that's a very um, important part. And then I think secondly would be family, like being a daughter and a good sister. Hopefully a good daughter too, but like being um, a supportive family member for my family and then obviously a student and um, being a student affairs professional I think um, is also very important. That kind of encompasses like all of the different things that I do on the daily basis and how those feed into those big ones.

Speaker 1: [12:47](#) And I'm now more into questions about your use and your identity. Um, so the US Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity as two different concepts. What is your ethnicity? What do you mean? Two different contents, so concepts, ethnicity are not the same. People use them interchangeably, but they are two totally different constructs. I'm in races more so of the construct and ethnicity is more real according to the research and everything. Um, so what do you consider your ethnicity to be? Oh Gosh, that's a very hard.

Speaker 2: [13:22](#) I don't think of. I'm going to answer it more. I don't know if it's gonna I don't think it's going to be a question. I don't think of ethnicity as much as I think about my race. Like I think maybe I'll answer it by giving you an, like an umbrella of the identities that I identify with. So like when it comes with, when it comes to the argument of like Hispanic or Latina, um, I think people tend to separate those two. I identify with both, but I also understand the history of where those two components come from. Like I am Hispanic because I, you know, I'm a descendant of a

Spanish speaking country, which is the, his Spanish Spanish part. And then I'm also, I'm Latino or Latin x and those components we can go on for days about that, but I'm in identifying in that is like the Latin America part.

- Speaker 2: [14:32](#) So I mean I don't, I don't necessarily get asked much about in the way of I density what my ethnicity is. I tend to be asked what is my, what is your race, what are you. And honestly I answered that based on maybe how I feel on that day, but so I will say like, Oh, I'm Hispanic or I'm Latina. And sometimes it depends who asked to like are they going to. Am I going to go into full detail and explanation about what I'm, what I am referring to? Or is this just like in passing and I'm just going to. Is it this is going to be a full on educational conversation or is this like. Yeah. I identify with Being Hispanic, Latina, Latinex and Mexican American. So I don't, I don't necessarily know
- Speaker 1: [15:28](#) how to answer your question, if that makes sense. How do you identify racially? What is your voice? What is my race?
- Speaker 2: [15:37](#) A little bit of everything. Apparently according to 23 and me, I'm just kidding. What is my race? Oh Gosh, Mexican, I guess, but then I would also argue that that's leaning more into my ethnicity. Um, my race is human.
- Speaker 1: [15:59](#) Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino and you have a preference of either term why?
- Speaker 2: [16:06](#) No, and I think that's going back on like the aspect of like Hispanic identify with Hispanic because even my first language is Spanish, so I'm a descendant of a Hispanic speaking country and then with Latina it's in La is still in La, considered Latin America, so I identify with that and then the Latin x aspect of course comes with trying to be, take away the gender aspect. So like I will in. I typically encourage myself to be more inclusive by saying, oh, I'm allowed to next instead of Latina or specifically gender, putting a gender into the identity is spent essentially.
- Speaker 1: [16:53](#) And so studies shown that the Latino population is growing in the US. How do you think this will affect the way race or race relations is viewed in this country? Can you repeat that question? A study showed that the Latino population is growing in the United States. How do you think this will

will affect the way race or race relations in this country and it is number 15. I know sometimes things are easier to understand what,

Speaker 2:

[17:28](#)

how do I think it's. It will affect. I mean obviously as one aspect develops others. Well I think eventually hopefully I'm alive by this time but like eventually no, I think it raises a very interesting factor to think about because it almost puts you in like these little islands like you are this race and you are this race or this race and that's when we run into a lot of historical conflicts but I'm in the. But I think with hopefully as the Latino, because this is not specific to like does this include like just look like. I guess I have a lot of questions within that question to answer your question, but specifically I think I hope that as that aspect grows, so does the actual like Biracial, so that the biracial aspect, I don't think. I think we're very good at compartmentalizing racist into one race. Like if you are, and I think by racial identities have only like much recently I guess been um, something that people have began to identify with. So like, you know, I'm half white and half, I'm not personally, but I'm saying like if someone's half white, half Latino or Latina or lefty next, like at what point does that become its own race to the point where there's so many different races. It doesn't really matter what kind of race you are because technically

Speaker 2:

[19:30](#)

if we're being, I guess technical in the race aspect, like I can identify as being one or the other or not identifying as being the other. So just because the Latino pop. I guess my question is like if the Latino law to next population is growing, is that just a one race thing or is that a. does that also affect. I don't think one can change without the other. So if that changes so well, the other one's changed. So I think hopefully the goal is it'll give us a more diverse population instead of like taken away. Because the way, the question, maybe I'm picking up the question, the way the question is structured is that will all become at some point that will be the only race.

Speaker 1:

[20:24](#)

No, no. So by 2015 I did not. Yeah. So like by 20, 50 Latino's are expected to be the largest country will be a majority minority country. So with the increased population, how do you think just the increased presence of Hispanics and Latinos affect the way race operates and race relations and how people operate with each other?

Speaker 2: [20:55](#) That's not what I got from that interpretation. I guess. How do I think it'll affect everything?

Speaker 3: [21:03](#) Mm.

Speaker 2: [21:05](#) Let me think about this one because now I'm stuck on the other conversation. So let me just swerved. Um, in 2015 you said, or 50 because 2015 already passed. Did they say how much it's increasing, right?

Speaker 1: [21:30](#) It doesn't say. Um, um, the last time I looked at the demographics and looked at the, I'm like, what is expected from the Census Bureau? Um, the main thing I can remember was that was mind blowing, but they were even saying but like 20 slash 20 or something that, uh, like the country, I think the country is now almost one third Hispanic or Latino and that's in any case whether one parent is of Hispanic or Latin American, just saying whether blow, whether you're a great, great, great grandparents,

Speaker 2: [22:03](#) great. Just as a variable, not whether both parents are from Mexico and American, but just as a very wide umbrella term of the ethnic group. This will be the largest minority

Speaker 1: [22:19](#) by 2050 and America will be a majority minority country by 2015. So the whites will be like the minorities,

Speaker 2: [22:29](#) we'll all just be minorities. I mean I think of obviously it just erases a very interesting factor and I could go on for days on both sides of the argument of like whether it's good for us to continuously need to make this because I think a lot of decision making goes, is affected by race, especially in certain avenues. I will say that. Um, so I think like, hopefully since it's going to be a place with more obviously like policy is going to have to change if I'm not only necessarily because of that aspect, but the aspect that there, it's going to be more like you just said, like minorities will be the majority. So hopefully

Speaker 2: [23:39](#) I guess it's, for me it's more of a hope not necessarily, um, like how I, it'll affect it. But the hope is that it'll affect it in a more positive way where obviously changing. We're not doing a really good job currently at matching our policies are matching like how we work as a nation based on our population. I will say that. And so I think I hope that as

things progress and I guess things change, so will everything else to fit the needs of [inaudible] those needs are going to be very different versus, you know, depending on what people identify with.

Speaker 3: [24:24](#)

Take you out.

Speaker 1: [00:00](#)

I went on circle, so yeah, I'm done. Yeah. So number 16, how do you maintain your Latino or Hispanic heritage while being a student here and living in Oxford? Um, uh, how do I, I don't know that I've done a very good job at it. Obviously being Latino, Latina, Latinex. Um, how do I do this?

Speaker 1: [00:54](#)

There are several different components about being Latina that impacts like the way I do things on an everyday basis. I mean obviously culture is culture, so there are a lot of things that I didn't know. Being back home, things were so much more accessible like the music, like even down. It sounds so, so interesting because I never really thought about it. Like even down to like what I eat, how I eat, the food, the, the music that I listened to or like the music that truly gives me joy and fulfillment to my, to my soul. I guess you could say it's a really weird concept because like I said, it wasn't till I come pre completely, like extracted all of the, like I guess I didn't appreciate how much I had. You don't appreciate what you have until it's gone. So like now that those components are out of my life were not as accessible. Like something as simple as like going somewhere where you can find authentic. Like I mean authentic, like not, I mean we have some restaurants here but like purely authentic food and like how that, so directly linked to Hawaii identify as a person, race, ethnicity, all of these different concepts. Um,

Speaker 1: [02:23](#)

it has been very difficult for me here. Like even when I'm like, oh, I want Mexican. Something as simple as like, I just want Mexican candy, like great reese's pieces, you know, crunch, all that is great. But I just sometimes want to mess up on or the clean or you know, like you're probably talking about. But like something so simple that I took for granted because you can go literally like across the street from my house and they had a whole aisle of just pure Mexican candy. They had a section. And even then I was like, okay, look at this small section. But now that's like the one, at least I had a section, you know, or like things like

ingredients that you really don't think about like that you used to cook food. Like I found myself almost like lost at times in like okay I need this specific seasoning for this specific dish that I have no idea where to buy.

- Speaker 1:            [03:32](#)            And I think like there's, do you know that the one that got it was like on the corner before you turn into campus Wank, I'm probably talking too much about this, but there was a like little shop and they literally sold a lot of the things that. And it was out. I mean it was pretty authentic, like, and it's gone, like it's no longer like it's closed. They ran out of business and things. So like what I used to get there, like the Taco shop, some of it they have but they're, they don't have such a huge section as they did. And so you all like I'll find myself like when I go home, like I'll try to stock but I can't, I can only stock for so long. So or like, so the way that I try to do it here is like finding those places and you know, I was just in Texas for a week so I stocked up on some things and then I brought him over. Um, so like bringing stuff over, he is one of the ways that I maintain that, but I don't know how that links directly to ms because I can't get it here. But I'm also like music, just like a, sometimes in my office I'll be listening to, you know, Mexican music or like the music that reminds me of home or like, you know, just big home as in like with my parents. Um, so I guess that's one way that says that's it. That's all I got.
- Speaker 2:            [05:13](#)            Say Food, things like that. Um, and what are some challenges you face in Oxford University and as a Latina Hispanic woman?
- Speaker 1:            [05:29](#)            Oh Gosh. I think, you know, I've thought about this question, not specifically like asking myself, but like I think about it, I'm not constantly. I thought about it a lot more at the beginning when I got here specifically because it did feel like in trying to find my community, it was very hard, um, to be able to find people who got it. Like I will never know what it's like to be a white person. I will never, like, I can't, no, I can try to.
- Speaker 3:            [06:09](#)            I'm like,
- Speaker 1:            [06:13](#)            you know, walk a day in their shoes or I can try to be, I can try to understand, but I can't ask someone to truly understand what it's like to be me and look like me and go

to a school in the south like the University of Mississippi. Just like I can't do that. Vice versa with someone else. Like I'm like take someone's identities and walk with those identities in this, in this place. And I think at the beginning it was very difficult for me to understand that concept of like, you know, why people identify that the way that they identify. Like here, um, a lot of, there's a huge emphasis on efforts of like the concept of black and white because of the history of the state of Mississippi because of the history of this institution and what that means. There's, there's a lot of conversation, there's a lot of communication on the black and the white. I don't want to call it an issue, the black and white conversation. We'll, we'll call it. And I think because, um, there's not a lot of Hispanics. Like I, I, one of my things is like data, it's really weird and I looked at our numbers and obviously there's like 600 in total Hispanic, Latino students at this institution in comparison to the 25,000 that go here or 20,000, whatever. That's nothing, you know, that's not even a thousand students. So I think,

Speaker 3: [07:59](#) um,

Speaker 1: [08:01](#) like things that are impact, that impact my community are impacted me as a person. They're not ignored, they're just not at the forefront. Um, which is fair as a, you know, I'm obviously, I'm going into higher education and I understand from the other perspective and that's what becomes sometimes hard. Like I straddled the line between I'm a graduate student, but I also have a role that gives me also a little bit of the, not administrative but more on the other side of that, of the aspect of higher education. And so from that aspect I get how like the biggest focus should be getting students to be here in order to match the demographics of the state. So obviously like in I was talking to a friend from another back in California and their, their thing they were talking about like, oh my institution doesn't do a very good job at recruiting black students.

Speaker 1: [09:06](#) And I like it dawned on me for a moment that like an institution, like a part of the responsibility is attempting to make it a more diverse environment, welcoming and all that. But at the same time recruiting based on. It's like convenience, convenient sampling. Oh, surprise. I remember that. It's like convenience sampling, like these you're gonna recruit where it's more convenient. If I'm

making efforts to recruit, if I'm putting investing, you know, a thousand dollars to recruit people who already live in the area, then that's what, that's where I get more for my bank. Then recruiting students who I may get one or two who live in that area. So in that concept, if it was, I'm trying, I try to understand it from the concept of the student. Like it makes it very difficult at times to like feel as though it is like a place where I belong in a place that welcomes my culture and my, um, I guess ethnicity, but like if most importantly like my culture and who I am as a person in celebrating that and being able to say like, I can go to this space or on this time during this time we have this which helps me celebrate a little bit of a culture which makes me feel welcomed at this institution.

Speaker 1: [10:40](#)

I since then have like worked on being better about like, you know, my responsibility and taking action and getting involved. And I'm surrounding myself with people and you know, attempting, like going out and eating authentic food a little more often or like and things like that. So it's just very interesting. And has anyone ever asked you about your race or ethnicity and how do you typically respond to these types of questions? Um, I think I like covered it a little bit earlier, but like, um, it just also, I think it's depends a place they ask like, you know, obviously, and you can tell the difference between like I want to know because I'm curious and I want to know because I just don't feel like I'm a fan of the thing that you are about to tell me or whatever. Um, so it just, um, obviously it depends. But like most I do at the beginning I did get, this is a question I get asked the most here and like I said, it depends on the day, but like for the most part, like

Speaker 1: [11:58](#)

depending on what they ask before, you can tell whether they mean race or ethnicity and I will answer so. So like, I mean I identify with being, sometimes I also talk about like what do you mean specifically? And they'll elaborate on what they're wanting to know and then I'll have the conversation of like the difference between Latino and Latina and let the next. And I'm just always, I feel like every opportunity is an opportunity to educate, but people need to want to know of course or want to learn, um, or like sharing like me being Mexican and I'm Hispanic. So it just depends. And have you ever experienced any assumptions about your character? Has anyone ever to stereotype you in a way because of your perceived identity race? Oh yes,

many times actually. But um, what are some things that people say or my character? Um, I guess like not necessarily like my character, but like I'm obviously I was here during the time of our last presidential election, so there was many times that I'm

Speaker 1: [13:34](#) individuals who were running for office. Obviously at that level we're saying things and um, we're making comments of um, that were really directly correlated to some of the identities that I hold. So sometimes when I would say like, Oh, I'm Latina, they would ask like, oh, so like what are, like, what else are you, which they were getting at like, are you from, you know, Brazil, are you from else? Like what, like way or they wanted me to get more in you essentially know what they're asking. But then eventually when it was like, Oh, I'm Mexican, a lot of the stereotypes or comments or questions that were directly coral are directly linked to what was saying being said in the media about Mexican people. And um, mainly very directly linked to immigration. I was being asked those questions and it was very interesting to watch,

Speaker 1: [14:44](#) you know, like 18 year olds like connect. Okay. So like they are, she is a Latina, specifically she's Mexican and uh, this is being said about Mexicans. Then she must add a medically fit, fit that aspect. So like I would get asked like if people knew I was Mexican, they'd be like, so are you illegal? Or like, are your parents illegal? Are you undocumented? I would get asked that question so much, especially during that time to now, not so much, but, or they would ask like, did you immigrate to Mississippi? Like with any, like completely taking apart the fact that like I've been in California, you know, and so it was very interesting even sometimes like, um, I'll get it.

Speaker 3: [15:34](#) Um,

Speaker 1: [15:36](#) people will say, Oh, I already knew that. And I was like, well how did you, how did you know, because that's very, it's a very specific thing to know. And they're like, well I could tell in your voice that you were enough from, from here. And I was like, from like where he's from here. And so we'll go into deeper conversations of like whereas from here what is here and they'll be like, well, from the United States and I'm like, Oh, I'm from California. And so it's just kinda like taking those stereotypes and like trying to

educate them about like, just because a person sounds is or identifies with a certain identity doesn't mean they fall under that. They're not all the, all the same I guess you could say. And so it's just interesting.

- Speaker 2: [16:23](#) Do you speak Spanish if guests, how? If no, why not?
- Speaker 1: [16:28](#) I do. I am fluent in Spanish. It's actually my first language. Um, how did I learn my parents speak Spanish, so, um, and it was my first language. So
- Speaker 2: [16:40](#) there you go. And how important is the ability to speak Spanish to the culture? Gosh, you're getting in deep here.
- Speaker 1: [16:48](#) Um, I think it's obvious. It's very important. Um, I think sometimes a little too important. Okay. No, that sounds right. Not too important. It's just I think people are judged based on their ability or inability to speak Spanish and being, it's like almost like a rating. I'm like the Latino Latin x culture has a lot of different aspects that go into this. Like you must in order to have your Latino card, you must fit this category. And I struggle with that a lot because especially even with Spanish, like if people
- Speaker 1: [17:37](#) don't speak Spanish then that automatically almost makes them less Hispanic. Like you're not like the Times I've heard people use the term, you're not a real Hispanic because someone doesn't speak Spanish or doesn't speak Spanish fluently. Um, is one too many and I think it's almost like this aspect of like if you don't fit this category then you must not telling other people how they should or should not identify. I struggle with this concept. So yes. Um, it, I think from that perspective it is very important. Um, but I could go on for days of like, you know, why,
- Speaker 2: [18:23](#) why other things were linked to that. But yes, the university and our combined 22 and 23. How does the university and the community catered to and omit the Latino population? Wait, what did you say about 20, 23? I'm combining the questions. They're essentially the same question. It's just one is looking at how the university community,
- Speaker 1: [18:50](#) I mean there is an extensive. These types of things regardless of the population is an ongoing process for any university. I think specifically, um, this is a much newer focus for the institution, but I do see how they're trying. I

mean, even if like it's baby steps trying, they're still trying, like even the aspect of celebrating Hispanic heritage month and I've participated in some of these, some of those events, but like I'm not, every institution has a Hispanic Heritage Committee or Hispanic heritage celebration and I think even the, the mere start that they, you're trying shows that at least they recognize, okay, we have these students and obviously there are things that are important to them and how can we as an institution attempt to help with that. Um, and I've asked some of the questions of like, you know, having Spanish speaking orientations and things like that, but like I think there's, it's things that the institution has tried from my understanding has tried in the past but is not as successful and things. So, I mean obviously they're attempting to do things for this population. But, um, and with everything, it's going to be a hidden minute. Some things are gonna work here. Something's going to work on California that don't work here. So like, um, but I think that they're trying, I see them trying, um,

- Speaker 1: [20:34](#) um, omit.
- Speaker 2: [20:37](#) They're trying. How do you view race in the US in the south and here in Oxford?
- Speaker 1: [20:51](#) I think race is very important to the US. Um, I don't know about the south, but I know that it, I mean Oxford brings people from all over, but uh, is it majority mississippians? I would think right in Oxford, I would assume so, yeah. So if we're making an assumption based on if this is a place in Mississippi, um, I have not, I've visited areas in Mississippi and I get some very interesting questions around the state of Mississippi. So I think that race is very important to the south and to Oxford.
- Speaker 2: [21:41](#) And how do you perceive the Latino population of 50? The idea of race in the south. So just the mere presence of Latinos who don't fall into the dichotomy of black and white affecting the way that racial dichotomy operates.
- Speaker 1: [22:01](#) Well, hopefully it's affecting it in a positive way to determine that. It's more like there's more. I think sometimes there's like a blinded aspect that it's only, it's only black or white and you fit into one or the two categories and that's not. Obviously, that's not the reality of what we constituents the race aspect, so hopefully,

Speaker 4: [22:30](#) um,

Speaker 1: [22:32](#) it will lead to a more positive outlook in being, in focusing equal attention to all.

Speaker 2: [22:42](#) I already asked you about challenges. Are there any other points or topics or things that you'd like to talk about that I did not ask you?

Speaker 1: [22:51](#) No. Is there any other topics you would like to talk about?

Speaker 2: [22:55](#) No, I think that's good.

Ingrid Valbuena

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Okay, go ahead and get started. I'll be looking at the questions here. Um, so today is November sixth and we are currently in the library conducting interview for my thesis research titled The Latino South Race and Racialization. Um, are you 18 years or older? And can you stay in spelling your first and last name for the record?

Speaker 2: [00:22](#) Okay, my name is Ingrid Valbuena. I was born September 29th, 1996. Okay.

Speaker 1: [00:36](#) And where are you from and where did you grow up?

Speaker 2: [00:39](#) So I am from and grew up in Venezuela.

Speaker 1: [00:44](#) And um, what other places have you lived in?

Speaker 2: [00:46](#) So I lived in Chicago all of my life until I graduated high school. I've lived in Oxford, Mississippi ever since.

Speaker 1: [00:54](#) And um, what brought you from Venezuela to here?

Speaker 2: [00:58](#) So I graduated high school in my parents and I always talked about the opportunity of studying, doing college abroad. Um, so I applied for Ole Miss, I want an interest in the IMC program in that I just knew my senior year that I was going to study at Ole miss

Speaker 1: [01:16](#) How did you hear about Ole miss all the way in Venezuela?

- Speaker 2: [01:21](#) So I had an advisor connect it to the extracurricular English classes that I was taking and her job was advising students to study abroad, um, and she knew I was wanting to study integrative marketing communications and at the time Ole miss was the only university that offered that program as an undergraduate program and it also had a scholarship for internationals, so applied to other schools. But this was a program that I was most interested in and even though I had never been to Oxford or Mississippi, that's how I got into it.
- Speaker 1: [01:57](#) Awesome. And is race an important part of your identity? Why or why not?
- Speaker 2: [02:03](#) Um, I guess it wasn't really important when I was in Venezuela because everyone there is kind of like the same. Like, I don't know, it's just not defined when you're growing up and you're either like lighter skin or darker skin, but either way we're all kind of a mix between native, you know, natives, slaves in European, like the people that came. So like, you know, there are some of my friends that were, you know, they were Italian because after World War Two, their grandparents moved here, so they were like Venezuelans, Italian or they were finished Spaniard. Like their closeness to that other side of the world was much more like it was closer, closer I guess. Then like I guess mine would be because I just know my grandparents and great grandparents is like Venezuelans. But then when I came to ole miss, I guess I don't, I don't wanna say it's like from day one, but it was always a conversation.
- Speaker 2: [03:03](#) There's always this conversation of race. I never thought about race until I was coming to Mississippi and my friends were like, oh, people are racist there. And I was like, oh no, no. And so then I got here and like through classes, through friendships, through involvement, I feel like it's become a really big conversation that I am a part of because I am a human being here and race is a big deal. But also like, you know, made me wonder, it should have and shouldn't have been a big deal where I'm from too. Or is it just different? I don't know,
- Speaker 1: [03:36](#) you know. And um, how did that impact you? Like coming from a country where there was really no, I guess the large distinction in rates versus coming to the United States and

especially in the south and then even more so here in Mississippi where race is very important.

- Speaker 2: [03:57](#) I guess the first thing that made me think is like where do I fit in. And you know, and that's, you know, up until maybe two years ago, the phrase people of color was never like something I had heard or used. Um, but now I guess it's like it is like, it is part of who I am, what it is, something that I like. I feel like that's where I fall under. But it also made me realize that just because race wasn't a big deal or it wasn't a constant conversation where I'm from doesn't mean they shouldn't have been because just because I'm not white doesn't mean I can't be racist or my peers, my family, the people that look like me can't be racist. So I think it's, it has, it has affected how I think it's made me more understanding and definitely made me understand things that I had, could have gone my whole life back home without even considering. So in that aspect I feel like it's been pretty positive not only on me but in my family and my friends because I'm like so much more aware of the differences, how they're good and how their bad and how to be more respectful.
- Speaker 1: [05:01](#) Okay. And um, how has your experience being in university and living in Oxford?
- Speaker 2: [05:08](#) It's been great. Like I love, I love the university. I had a really great, like, overall experience. I mean, I'm still here, I'm a Grad student now, but I feel like my favorite part of it is that these conversations about race inclusion, diversity, detention, how do we fix it? It's so constant that I instead of, instead of pushing me away, kind of pulled me in and it made me understand these topics. Uh, and I also think that I was very lucky that I ran into the people that I ran into at the time that I ran into because I've had a great experience. I've been involved in, you know, almost everything that I've wanted and like I feel like I am much more ingrid now that I was four years ago and will be more ingrid in two years. Like it is, has been a really great place. I think that I've been really lucky. Another, that's not everyone's experience, but that has been my hope that it's, it is more and more people have that experience like that because I feel like I have both learned a lot and gone through a lot. But I've also really thoroughly enjoyed it and like have had really good stuff happened to me.

Speaker 1: [06:17](#) And what is your major classification and some notable involvement that you have on campus?

Speaker 2: [06:24](#) So I'm doing a masters of Science and integrated marketing communication, so in and I graduated with a bachelor's in the same thing. Um, and while I was here I was an orientation leader. I did rebel radio, had shows. There was a marketing director, I was in the column society. I, um, yeah, I was, I was in a Sorority, I was in, I was vice president of Alpha Macron Pie. Um, but yeah, I think those are pretty good. Very stuff.

Speaker 1: [06:55](#) Okay. Uh, what are the most important aspects of your life right now and why?

Speaker 2: [07:01](#) Right now I guess is family, friends and education. Like I have only gotten in closer for my family the older I get, which I'm, I love it. Like it's, I don't know what's making me thing this way now. And it's not that I didn't think of before. It was just more permanent now. You good?  
Recording. Okay, cool. And

Speaker 1: [07:24](#) you were talking about the most important aspects of your life, right where you left off?

Speaker 2: [07:29](#) Yeah. Yeah. Let me start again because I remember I said, you know, whatever I said family, friends in education, a family because I feel like the older I've gotten, the more, the closer I am to my family. I've always been really close, but, you know, being away grows heart, you know, that this cheesy phrases of just like I love my family and I hate that I have them so far away. But I love that it's made me appreciate them a lot more friends because after four years here, my friends here are family and like just continue growing those relationships. I'm lucky that so many of them are still here. I'm lucky that so many of them get to come visit. So that's always just kind of like what makes life worth living and then education because that's what I'm here for and it's just kind of like, I feel like these two years that I have left for me to buckle down, get serious about what I really want to do with my life and like, you know, in a work aspect. So, um, you know, no more involvement in mind. No more like kind of things within the school that I wanted to achieve, I want to achieve outside of the school, so I feel like those are the most important aspects to me right now.

- Speaker 1: [08:39](#) And so the US Census Bureau, now we're going to get some more questions about race and identity of the US Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity as two different concepts. What is your ethnicity?
- Speaker 2: [08:54](#) I think of my ethnicity as Venezuelan, Latin, Hispanic, but it's only because I was born in Venezuela, Latin because Venezuela is in Latin America. And then Hispanic because I come from a culture. Let's speak Spanish. Nothing beyond. That's the three.
- Speaker 1: [09:12](#) And uh, what is your parent's nationality and do you identify with your nationality?
- Speaker 2: [09:16](#) Yes, my parent's nationality of both penicillin. My parents like, uh, both my parents were born in Venezuela. I was born in Venezuela. So yes, even though I don't live there anymore, being Dennis Olan as something that's never done that.
- Speaker 1: [09:31](#) And do you have a family? Your parents still live in Venezuela? Are they, do they live in the United States?
- Speaker 2: [09:36](#) They live in Miami. They moved during my junior year of college. Uh, yeah, my mom, my dad and my sister all moved.
- Speaker 1: [09:45](#) Okay. And um, how do you identify racially and why do you identify this way
- Speaker 2: [09:51](#) racially? I think it would go back to just being Latin and Hispanic. Um, I think a long time ago I looked up the definition of these and oneness geographically based and the other one is language base. Um, so I don't know if like you can't use them interchangeably because you can be Hispanic and not be Latin and you can be loud and not be Hispanic because you can be from Barcelona and be Latin, speak Portuguese and you can be from Spain. Susannah should not be a lot. And so I guess whenever people ask me what my race is, I answer Latin and Hispanic.
- Speaker 1: [10:24](#) And um, do you identify as Hispanic or Latina? Do you prefer either term?
- Speaker 2: [10:29](#) Identify as both. I think Latin, it's just more because I, you know, even if I don't know, the majority of us speak

Spanish and like, but the majority of us, our culture is similar and I don't know, I feel like that is heavier than just the language that I speak.

- Speaker 1: [10:46](#) And do you prefer the term Latin overlap? Dina, don't mind. And a study showed that the Latino population is growing in the US. How do you think this will affect the way race and race relations with you to this country?
- Speaker 2: [10:59](#) I think hopefully it would make it less polarized, but I know that in some extent it has nothing to do with that. I think it will make people realize that it's not only to. That it is kind of more of a spectrum that we're continuously going to mix in. That there are some important things that we all should know in order to be more respectful, but that these things that make us different students separate us. I feel like that's a lot into one sentence, but I feel like it's a little bit of the gist of what I feel like this is going to bring.
- Speaker 1: [11:31](#) Right. And how do you maintain your Latino culture while being a student at Ole Miss?
- Speaker 2: [11:39](#) I continues to speak to my parents, but I think a big thing is food and just the way that I and my friends are super used to by now and it's like, you know, I am, I cannot say how to. You're not hug you because where I'm coming from, we kiss each other on a tick every time we see each other. Uh, you know, I feel like I am an awful cook. But the way that I cook, the way that I do almost everything in the kitchen is how I learned it from my family. So like that is just like, that's where you learned are from. How do you unlearn that? Like that's just how I do it. Um, and that thing just continuously. Like if people are around me and they see that my dad's calling me, they're not going to expect me to speak English.
- Speaker 2: [12:24](#) They're not going to expect me to, you know, there's never a line between like, oh, here I am doing my culture and here I am not doing my culture is everywhere and it's just a part of who I am and for some of my friends that has been something they've learned or they asked me like, oh, how was that? What was that about? Or something like that. But with time they just know they just learn about something new before. And what are some challenges you faced with the university as a Latina? I guess just like going straight on into, you know, realizing their race is such a big deal

and like understanding it and like I'm really glad that I was never like, oh I want to ignore this and never do this and never learn about this because it's scary and overwhelming and it's not that I was like leader of the pack let me talk about these things.

Speaker 2: [13:14](#) But it was always definitely curious and I was always lucky that like a lot of my friends didn't look like me. Not only in the fact that they were, you know, they were not Latin, but there were also other cultures that I was able to learn from above the culture of Mississippi and other culture in school and like all these things that they were nice enough to explain to me and talk to me about, like, it's actually my freshman year when I didn't know. So asking these questions were my way of knowing. Um, but I think other than that, like it's just, you know, you're just not everywhere. Not everyone looks like you. Not everyone comes from the same culture as you. So it's hard to run it to the people that like you see in, you already know the things that you're like, Oh yes, my family.

Speaker 2: [13:59](#) That's that too. Or Yes, but I think throughout the years I found more and more of those people because number one, I think one of those people came here, but also they are here. They're not hidden. They're just like doing their own thing. So like, unless you go and do their own thing, you know, you don't sound like they're like, hi me, be friendly. That's not how it works. You just have to find common connections and then be like, Oh yes, let's do that. Or like even there's a guy in my grad cohort that's in California and he's like a third generation Mexican American and first day of Class I was a first version he talked to and he was like, Oh, you know, we started speaking Spanish. We Dr our families and like, you know, it's just simple, it's easy. Comes in like. And then once you have that, like first connection, it makes making other connections so much easier. And um, has anyone

Speaker 1: [14:52](#) ever asked you about your race, your ethnicity and how do you typically respond to those questions?

Speaker 2: [14:58](#) A lot of people ask me where I'm from because they know I'm not from here. Um, and I just answer, um, I guess after for like, you know, the longer you're here, the more you get asked that question and then we're like, ah, there, there's more to me than where I'm from. Um, and sometimes it's

just people that are your friends that are you just getting to know them. So I feel like it's a case by case basis. I will always say where I'm from, I will always answer questions. Not a disrespectful person, but I definitely have learned to stand my ground where I feel like where they're going. It's not something that I'm comfortable with talking about, but it doesn't happen very often.

Speaker 1: [15:39](#) And you said people can tell that you're not from here. How would you say people can tell that?

Speaker 2: [15:45](#) Because I'm not white and like, you know, I have my skin is like the color that it is and like my eyes are dark and my eyebrows are thick and like in my hair is like mainly a hot mess. So that's my responsibility. But like, you know it's dark and like, you know, if you see me on the phone with my parents, I'm not going to be speaking English. So like I feel like people can look at me and maybe they won't know I'm Venezuelan, but they will know I'm Hispanic and Latin and that's fine.

Speaker 1: [16:15](#) Have you ever experienced any assumptions about your character because of your identity?

Speaker 2: [16:20](#) Yes. I feel like a lot of people think that I'm Mexican and that's a common, I feel like that's common for a lot of Hispanics and a lot of Latinos, like you just, that's just what they know, what people know the most. Um, so I've had people just kind of assume that I'm going to correct them and that's fine. Like, um, and then not very often, but a lot of my fame and my friends' families may ask me about immigration status and stuff like that. And I generally just answer honestly, I don't have like, I guess my situation is not as, I don't wanna say dramatic, but I'm saying like I'm complicated or hard to explain and like, but I feel like I wouldn't like to be asked that question if I didn't want to answer it. So sometimes I'm just kinda like, is it really your business? You know? But yeah, I think that's, that's it.

Speaker 1: [17:22](#) What do you think gives people, I guess like the place or the authority and really asked you like what your immigration status is because you can ask anybody what their citizenship status is regardless of what they look like. So what do you, what do you think it is really causing that are causing adults or your friends' parents? I guess like Middle Age folks to ask you that?

- Speaker 2: [17:46](#) I think it's definitely the versus the minority in the sense of like they belong here. You don't belong here even though that doesn't stand any ground. Um, and I think definitely the political climate, like I mean it's a constant conversation in the news, positive or negative. So people that maybe thought about it but wouldn't ask now feel like they can ask because it's an issue right now and they may have develop opinions about it based on news coverage and stuff like that. So I feel like that is why people feel like, number one they can ask and number two they should ask and like all this kind of things.
- Speaker 1: [18:31](#) Um, and do you speak Spanish? If yes, how did you learn?
- Speaker 2: [18:35](#) Um, yes, my native language is Spanish, so since I grew up in Minnesota, that was my first language and then while I was growing up, I learned English as a second language.
- Speaker 1: [18:43](#) Um, and how important is the ability to speak Spanish to the Latino culture?
- Speaker 2: [18:49](#) I feel like it's super important, um, but I feel like it's not what makes you Latin. I am, I speak Spanish because I grew up in a Spanish speaking country, so it'd be really weird if I didn't because that's how we do things, you know? Um, but I think a lot of it is, is maybe not the language as a whole, but the things that come with the language, um, that are very, very important. So like the closeness to your family, uh, the food, the music, all those things are just as important as language to me.
- Speaker 1: [19:25](#) And how does the university and the community cater to the Latino population?
- Speaker 2: [19:29](#) They do so little that I. Oh, I don't even know, you know, like I remember my freshman year, I made my first friends through laso. Uh, and that was really hard for, to find people. Like none of them were men as well, but a lot of Ecuadorians, a lot of Colombians, so it was really nice to just be around that group of people. But I don't know if that's been the case for new latins coming in. Um, so it, because I know it's an organization that depends on the amount of Latin Americans and Hispanics at the school house and if that number doesn't grow, how can you expect Lasa to grow? Um, but in terms of the community, I don't

think I've ever noticed anything that's specifically catered to Hispanics and Latinos at all

Speaker 1: [20:23](#) and kind of following up. How does the university and the community or the Latino population,

Speaker 2: [20:31](#) I guess by not like, like by not seeing it represented anywhere is hard for you to like picture yourself there or like feel like you can do certain things that other people may feel like they can do it and only because they have the confidence but because they see people like them on those kind of places.

Speaker 1: [20:53](#) And um, how you view race in the US in the south and in Oxford

Speaker 2: [21:00](#) I guess in the world is just race is just what you were born into a in, you know, it can be a big part of your identity. I think it just depends on a case by case basis, how you grew your life. I think in America is something that is very important and that it's people shouldn't ignore, it should be talked about. Talking about is good. Talking about things. It's got being open minded and trying to understand things is even better. You should do it about not only race but everything. Be Open minded and learn and like don't expect people to have to explain everything to you. Go and look for that information. And I think in Oxford is like, it's incredible. There's like Mississippi small town, you know, all the reputation that comes with that. But it is a place where this conversation is alive and I feel like the more things happen, the more like momentum it gets. And I was like I don't want that to die. I don't want that to knock into any happening because there's, I've seen so much change in my four years here and I want you to see more in the two years that I've left here and the future that I come back and I just want to continue seeing change and I think that, you know, don't sleep on Oxford, Mississippi. I feel like real changes happening and I feel like that's good.

Speaker 1: [22:25](#) How do you perceive the Latino population? A thickening of the idea of race here in the south?

Speaker 2: [22:32](#) I guess like the Latino population is growing a lot in the south, like maybe because we think of Latino population with think like big cities like New York or we think of California, we think of the border, but like there is such a

big Hispanic and growing population in the south that I think, you know, I think it's gonna. I don't think it's going to complicate things in a bad way. I think it's going to complicate things in the sense of like people are gonna realize how similar southern hospitality culture in Latino culture are and I think it's going to complicate things in the sense of like, people aren't going to get along, you just have to open your mind and not have this like window that you see the world through that pain salespeople, people as bad because that's not what it is. Um, so I don't know.

Speaker 2:

[23:20](#)

I feel like in my really, you know, in the, in the aspect that I want to be very optimistic. I want them, I want these two groups of people to find that common ground because that was a big part of how I found almost to be comforting because people were really, really nice and people were like, you know, come to my house eating my food. Like this hospitality thing. It's like seeing my, my family is like that. And on my family's like, you need anything come, like, eat my food. You can say my place. Like it's, it's very welcoming and like kind of like expects nothing in return. Um, and I would hope for that to be a good thing. And um, is there anything else or any other topics or points that you'd like to discuss that I didn't ask you? Oh, thanks. I hope I explained myself well enough that you listened to this and you're like, oh yeah, that's what she was referring to because I can be like, just too many words. So little time. You know, what does the new meme, it's like I have two brain cells. Me Today.