Mexican-origin children from immigrant families are impacted by various systemic oppressions in life. The study seeks to examine how adolescents’ developmental outcomes are associated with specific phenotypic, psychological, and social features of skin color, as manifested by skin tone, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress. By taking a holistic approach, we examine both positive and negative adjustment outcomes, including delinquency, resilience, and effortful control. Participants were 604 Mexican-origin adolescents aged between 11.08 and 15.29 (M age = 12.91, SD = 0.92) with at least one immigrant parent. The findings highlight the harm of foreigner stress and the benefit of skin color satisfaction in Mexican-origin adolescents’ development of delinquency, resilience, and effortful control, especially for those with a darker skin color.

Key words: delinquency – effortful control – resilience – skin color

Despite the shared national value of equality, not everyone in the United States is treated equally regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, or other statuses. As the single largest ethnic minority group in the US, Mexican Americans are a major target of multilayered systems of oppression, including classism, racism, colorism, and xenophobia (Budiman, 2020). As skin color is one of the most salient phenotypic features by which one’s race, ethnicity, national origin, and socioeconomic standings are judged (Dixon & Telles, 2017), the experiences of Mexican-origin youth with systemic oppressions are intricately linked with their skin color (Kiang, Espino-Perez, & Stein, 2020). Yet, the systems of oppression are traditionally examined as separate social categories assigned to youth for their independent downstream influences, rather than as overlapping interdependent systems that present diverse and unique experiences for youth development (Santos & Toomey, 2018). How youth draw meaning from their oppression-related experiences and shape their own development also

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Interlocking Systems of Oppression

Representing systematic institutionalized unequal treatment of one group over other groups, oppression manifests in different forms, depending on the basis for group differentiation (Yamato, 1990). As the transition from childhood toward adulthood, adolescence is a sensitive developmental period with significant physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes. In particular, as the transition into adolescence, early adolescence (ages 10–14) is when most dramatic developmental changes start. Youth experience major educational shift from elementary to middle school, increasingly earlier sexual maturation and debut and even early school leaving or employment (Blum, Astone, Decker, & Mouli, 2014). Yet, it is one of the most neglected developmental periods, receiving much less attention than later adolescence (World Health Organization, 2011). Thus, understanding the developmental processes as well as risk and protective factors in early adolescence not only helps ensure healthy development in the short term but also sets the foundation for health and well-being in middle-to-late adolescence and beyond.

When puberty begins in early adolescence, various bodily characteristics and changes can become sensitive issues for youth, including their skin conditions (Tyler, 2020). Their awareness and interest in oneself and in others become more heightened as they obtain advanced abstract thinking skills and greater exposure to various peers, adults, and social contexts in life and media (Choudhury, Blakemore, & Charman, 2006). From early adolescence on, exploration and formation of racial/ethnic identities become personally and socially meaningful, whereas racial/ethnic prejudice becomes more stable and automatic (Degner & Wentura, 2010). For youth of color living in multi-layered systems of oppression, their skin color perceptions and preferences, physical self-consciousness, and identity development are susceptible to the meanings attached to skin color in various social groups and the larger society (Fegley, Spencer, Goss, Harpalani, & Charles, 2008). Thus, skin color–related oppressions are

remain understudied (Spencer, 2007). In addition, Mexican-origin youth are not only underrepresented in developmental research but the existing work also focuses more on risk than resilience or strength (Umaña-Taylor, 2009). To enrich the understanding of holistic development of Mexican-origin youth under systems of oppression in the US, the present study draws upon the intersectionality theory (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Settles & Buchanan, 2014), the relational developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2015), and the integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children (García Coll et al., 1996) to examine skin color-related oppression experiences, as well as how such experiences associate with delinquency, resilience, and effortful control among the youth.
particularly pertinent to the development of youth of color during adolescence.

In addition, as the development of the limbic system precedes the development of the prefrontal cortex during adolescence, youth are more risk-taking and impulsive than both children and adults, especially under peer influence (Giedd & Denker, 2015). Contextual stressors, including poverty, mobility, discrimination, prejudice, and bicultural stress, also tend to collectively challenge the development of youth of color from immigrant families (Schwartz et al., 2015). These cumulative internal and external risk factors make youth of color not only vulnerable to delinquent behaviors but also create unique opportunities for the development and enhancement of resilience (Masten, 2001). As elaborated by the relational developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2015), youth and their multiple levels of changing context mutually influence each other over development, the adaptive coaction of which can ensure youth thriving even in a context with adversities. Similar to the effect of resilience, effortful control may refrain youth from becoming over-aroused or delinquent, even in challenging situations (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Thus, adolescence is also a sensitive developmental period for delinquent behaviors, resilience, and effortful control.

**Skin Color–related Oppressions Impacting Mexican-origin Youth**

As elaborated by the integrative model for minority children (García Coll et al., 1996), social position factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, and social class) have unique developmental salience for youth of color. The manifestation and interaction of these factors are “non-shared” with the mainstream population but are legitimate and valuable developmental processes of their own, deserving much more research attention than they have received. Youth with different combinations of social position factors may experience various magnified or diminished impacts from intersecting systems of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Settles & Buchanan, 2014). Thus, an intersectional perspective is imperative in understanding the within-group heterogeneity embedded in the development of youth of color.

In the present study, we specifically focus on skin color–related oppressions commonly experienced by Mexican-origin youth, including colorism, internalized colorism, and racialized xenophobia. As elaborated earlier, colorism represents societies’ unequal treatment of different groups of people based on their skin color (Dixon & Telles, 2017). When colorism is internalized by individuals, internalized colorism can be reflected in one’s self-evaluation and level of satisfaction about his/her skin color. In turn, when skin color is used by others as the basis to speculate on adolescents’ race/ethnicity and nationality, it can lead to others’ unequal treatment, such as being perceived as foreigners rather than as peer citizens. Such racialized xenophobia as experienced by youth exemplifies another form of skin color–related oppression. Thus, skin color–related oppression can take on different forms contextually as colorism, psychologically as internalized colorism, or symbolically as racialized xenophobia. In the present study, we use skin color to operationalize colorism, use skin color satisfaction to operationalize internalized colorism, and use foreigner stress to operationalize racialized xenophobia.

**Skin color.** For centuries, the European Whites have depicted their race as superior to all other human races to defend the history of their slavery and colonial domination in Africa, Asia, and America and to maintain White supremacy in political and socioeconomic structures (Omi & Winant, 2014). As skin color is the most observable bodily feature for discussions of race, it has served as a historical and modern proxy for racial categorization, although light skin has no distinct superiority to dark skin (Hall, 2018). Yet, because skin color is inappropriately used to establish social hierarchy throughout the recent history of Latin America and the US (Chavez-Duenas, Adames, & Organista, 2014), it plays a key role in the well-being and adjustment of Mexican-origin youth. With mixed racial heritages from Indigenous, Black, and White ancestors, the skin color of Mexican-origin adolescents runs from the lightest as European Whites to the darkest as African Blacks (Telles, 2014). Thus, different skin colors are assigned different values through differentially allocated life chances and psychological consequences (Montalvo & Codina, 2001). Darker skin puts youth at greater risk of poverty and residential segregation (Relethford, Stern, Gaskill, & Hazuda, 1983), physical and mental health problems (Calzada, Kim, & O’Gara, 2019; Perreira, Wassink, & Harris, 2019), educational and career challenges (Kim & Calzada, 2019; Ryabov & Goza, 2014), acculturation struggles (Montalvo & Codina, 2001), and discrimination (Bozo, Revels-Macalino, & Huynh, 2018). In addition, skin color–related oppressions also function in subtle
symbolic forms, including lower educational and career expectations from teachers, racially biased testing and tracking procedures, and much harsher and more frequent punishment for the same behavior than White youth (Ogbu, 1991). Thus, skin color draws pervasive unequal treatments to youth of color because of systems of oppression.

**Skin color satisfaction.** How others evaluate one’s ethnic group differs from how group members themselves evaluate their own group, as reflected in the research on adolescents’ public versus private regard. In a three-year longitudinal research (Hughes et al., 2011), adolescents’ affective evaluations of their own ethnic group remained positive and stable, regardless of racial/ethnic backgrounds, whereas perceptions of how others evaluated their group showed different change patterns (i.e., increased public regard for Chinese American youth versus decreased public regard for African American, Puerto Rican, and Dominican youth). Informed by the connection and potential discrepancy between others versus self-evaluations, the present study examined whether and how skin color–related oppressions were internalized among Mexican-origin youth and were associated with developmental outcomes.

It is unfortunately true that internalized oppression can make members of the oppressed group “battered” to the extent that they consciously or unconsciously accept oppression as deserved and justified or even undermine and reject the existence of oppression (Yamato, 1990). As adolescents actively explore their immediate environment and the broader sociocultural context to draw meaning for their own identities (Finkenauer, Willems, Weise, & Bartels, 2019), research suggests that it is through internalized oppression that skin color satisfaction, rather than actual skin color, relates to adolescents’ adjustment outcomes (Kiang et al., 2020; Maxwell, Brevard, Abrams, & Belgrave, 2015). Skin color satisfaction means being satisfied with one’s skin color, regardless of hue (Maxwell et al., 2015). If Mexican-origin youth perceive their skin color as negative as implied by the systems of oppression, they may have difficulty accepting and identifying with their racial/ethnic group (Yip, 2016), and may go through conscious self-denigration and develop negative self-evaluations (Hall, 2013). A plethora of empirical and anecdotal evidence have documented the universal preference for lighter skin color where individuals with darker skin are less satisfied with their body image and attractiveness (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019), and are more likely to adopt skin-lightening practices (Dixon & Telles, 2017). Such internalized skin color–related oppression also goes beyond the evaluation of physical appearance as individuals with darker skin were also found to be more depressed (Louie, 2020) and have poorer self-esteem (Landale & Oropesa, 2002). The more difficult it is for Mexican-origin youth to accept their dark skin color as satisfactory, the worse their academic performance (Codina, 1992).

At present, the relation between actual skin color and skin color satisfaction is not as straightforward as a linear one-to-one function. Except for individuals who are extremely light or extremely dark, the skin colors of most Mexican-origin youth are intermediate to different extents. Yet, Mexican-origin individuals are commonly miscategorized by others for their race/ethnicity and nationality, and in turn, experience corresponding discrimination, regardless of how light or dark their actual skin colors are (Gonlin, 2020). Research on Black adolescents suggested that due to both in-group and out-group colorism concerning ethnic authenticity and White privilege, respectively, medium-skinned Black youth have better mental health outcomes than their darker- or lighter-skinned peers (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Hunter, 2002; Louie, 2020). Similarly, bicultural Mexican-origin youth with intermediate skin colors are significantly more interested in contributing to Mexican American communities than their darker- or lighter-skinned peers (Vazquez, Garcia-Vazquez, Bauman, & Sierra, 1997). Thus, the relation between skin color and skin color satisfaction, as well as their joint impact on youth development involves complex intragroup variations.

**Foreigner stress.** Beyond systemic unequal treatment associated with skin color and internalized colorism, Mexican-origin youth in the US are also subject to racialized xenophobia. They are perceived to be perpetual foreigners whose languages, religions, cultural values, and practices are distant from, inferior to, and unwelcomed by the prototypical U.S. citizens (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Mexican-origin individuals also tend to be suspected of their legal citizenship and loyalty to the United States (Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2013; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). Even if they are U.S.-born citizens with legal status and are acculturated to the mainstream culture, 2nd and 3rd generation Mexican-origin youth are still negatively stereotyped and unfairly treated as undeserving foreigners competing with U.S. citizens for resources.
(Huynh, 2012). Such experience of being stereotyped as foreigners has been found to be associated with greater internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Cavanaugh, Stein, Supple, Gonzalez, & Kiang, 2018; Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011), lower life satisfaction (Armenta et al., 2013), lower self-esteem, and lower academic aspiration (Kiang et al., 2020). Some research suggested that individuals with darker skin colors are more likely to be stereotyped as foreigners (Devos & Banaji, 2005). However, when the effects of colorism and xenophobia were considered together, regardless of being darker- or lighter-skinned, Mexican-origin youth born in the US had lower self-esteem than their darker-skinned peers born in Mexico (Codina, 1990). Thus, xenophobia may overshadow or intensify the negative impact of colorism on Mexican-origin youth.

Therefore, colorism, internalized colorism, and xenophobia are interconnected systems of oppression influencing the development of Mexican-origin youth. These oppression experiences are linked to the skin color of youth in complex ways which operate both independently and interdependently. Considering their intersectional salience in the life ecology of Mexican-origin youth, the present study seeks to examine how adolescents’ developmental outcomes are associated with their skin colors, representing colorism; skin color satisfaction, representing internalized colorism; and foreigner stress, representing racialized xenophobia.

Holistic Development of Mexican-origin Youth under Oppressions

Beyond having direct implications for the life reality of youth of color, these systems of oppression also lead to unbalanced research focus in developmental science (García Coll et al., 1996; Syed, Santos, Yoo, & Juang, 2018; Umana-Taylor, 2009). Research attention on youth of color is inadequate in general. The majority of the limited work on youth of color has focused on African American youth. The unique developmental experiences of all other minority groups remain largely unknown (Syed et al., 2018). For decades, the limited research on youth of color has been dominated by a deficit conceptualization, which approaches racial/ethnic differences as minority children’s deviation from the normative development of children from White middle-class families and strives to identify deficiencies in minority children’s biological and cultural foundations (García Coll et al., 1996). Thus, more research is centered on risk factors and negative outcomes than on protective or promotive factors and on positive outcomes of minority youth (Umana-Taylor, 2009). As emphasized by the relational developmental systems theory (Lerner et al., 2015) and the integrative model for minority children (García Coll et al., 1996), although these systems of oppression are integral parts of minority children’s life reality, children are active producers of their own development, coping with and adapting to their environment with unique resilience and strength (Umana-Taylor, 2009). To get a holistic understanding of Mexican-origin adolescents’ development under systems of oppression, the present study attends to both weaknesses and strengths of Mexican-origin youth, including delinquency, resilience, and effortful control.

Delinquency. Delinquency ranges from minor offenses (e.g., lying, skipping school, and running away from home) to serious illegal behaviors (e.g., theft, vandalism, and assault). It has long-term negative implications for youth development, including school dropout, gang activity, and criminal offense (Fernández-Suárez, Herrero, Pérez, Juarros-Basterretxea, & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2016; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Smith, & Porter, 2003). It is often associated with social position factors that expose youth to systems of oppressions. In a series of cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses with nationally representative youth in the US, darker-skinned African, Asian, and Hispanic youth exhibited more violent behaviors than their lighter-skinned peers within the same race/ethnicity (Ryabov, 2017). There is evidence that darker-skinned youth are more susceptible to phenotypic discrimination, more likely to be victims of violence themselves, more exposed to delinquent peers, and have fewer opportunities to build strong prosocial connections than their lighter-skinned peers (Ryabov, 2017; Thornberry et al., 2003). Similarly, Mexican-origin youth have a relatively higher level of delinquency than non-Latino youth, including violence, property offenses, alcohol and drug consumption, and bringing weapons to school (Bird et al., 2001; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2020; Felson & Kreager, 2015; O’Gara, Calzada, & Kim, 2020). Mexican-origin youth who experienced racial/ethnic discrimination are more likely to anticipate using violence (Romero, Gonzalez, & Smith, 2015) and to get involved in fights (Flores, Tschann, Dimas, Pasch, & de Groat, 2010). It is possible that youth display delinquency as an act of self-defense or reprisal against the systems of oppression that they experience.
**Resilience.** Resilience indicates achieving positive and healthy developmental outcomes despite serious adversities (Masten, 2001). It is a dynamic process involving the presence of both adversities and positive adjustments about adversities (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Resilience has critical importance for Mexican-origin youth as they commonly encounter multiple systems of oppression in the form of discrimination, prejudice, community violence, and stereotypes (Holleran & Jung, 2005). With increased attention to the development of resilience among youth of color, studies have consistently documented that Mexican-origin youth do develop resilience despite adversities, especially if they possess positive personal, familial, communal, and cultural resources (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Chapin, 2015; Conger et al., 2012; Holleran & Jung, 2005). As these studies revealed, pride, confidence, and positive ethnic identity within the person, as well as positive social interactions in the family, school, and community settings contribute to the development of resilience. However, as the understanding of resilience should be contextualized in adversities, further investigation is needed to clarify how multilayered systems of oppression independently and jointly influence the development of resilience.

**Effortful Control.** Like delinquency and resilience, effortful control is also a critical developmental outcome which predicts long-term developmental benefits by helping individuals effectively self-regulate in impulsive and challenging situations (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). This temperamental dimension is observable in early infancy and continues to develop throughout adolescence as youth become more volitional, autonomous, and agentic in their own life (Taylor, Widaman, et al., 2018). Greater effortful control in early adolescence is associated with better school and work outcomes later on for Mexican-origin youth (Atherton et al., 2019; Damian, Atherton, Lawson, & Robins, 2020). However, unlike delinquency and resilience, research on effortful control, particularly among Mexican-origin youth, is very limited, probably due to the lack of a strength-based approach for minority youth in general (Lerner et al., 2017; Umana-Taylor, 2009). Still, the same systems of oppression that influence the development of delinquency and resilience of Mexican-origin youth seem to function in similar ways for the development of effortful control. In particular, hostile social interactions and ethnic discrimination led to considerable sharp declines in effortful control (Atherton, Lawson, & Robins, 2020), whereas self-esteem and endorsement of Mexican cultural values were associated with better effortful control among Mexican-origin youth (Atherton et al., 2019). Effortful control also functions in similar ways as resilience, in that it buffers the negative effects of adversities on Mexican-origin youth, generating enhanced coping skills and lessened delinquency and depression (Taylor, Jones, Jones, Anaya, & Evich, 2018; Taylor, Widaman, et al., 2018).

As articulated by the holistic perspective about minority children’s development, both weaknesses and strengths are engendered and are interrelated with each other under interlocked systems of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; García Coll et al., 1996; Lerner et al., 2017; Settles & Buchanan, 2014; Umaña-Taylor, 2009). Yet, how distinct positive and negative outcomes are subject to the impact of systems of oppression through similar and unique processes remains to be elucidated. By examining the associations between the developmentally salient adjustment outcomes (i.e., delinquency, resilience, and effortful control) and skin color-related oppressions experienced by Mexican-origin youth, the present study will help enrich the understanding and practice of reducing risk and promoting resilience and thriving among ethnic minority youth in the US.

**The Present Study**

Focusing on skin color-related oppressions, including colorism, internalized colorism, and racialized xenophobia, the present study explores how skin colors, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress independently and jointly predict delinquency, resilience, and effortful control among Mexican-origin youth. Three sets of major hypotheses are proposed: First, we expect darker skin color, lower skin color satisfaction, and greater foreigner stress to be associated with greater delinquency, lower resilience, and lower effortful control. Second, we expect the particular relation between an oppression indicator and a developmental outcome to be qualified by the other oppression indicators. Specifically, the positive relation between darker skin color and delinquency is expected to be buffered by skin color satisfaction, but to be intensified by foreigner stress. The negative relation between darker skin color and resilience or effortful control is expected to be buffered by skin color satisfaction, but to be intensified by foreigner stress. Finally, we
expect adolescents’ skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress to fully interact in predicting their delinquency, resilience, and effortful control. Considering the complexity involved in these interactions and the lack of prior research evidence about the interplay among these skin color–related constructs, we do not formulate specific hypotheses about these interactive effects. However, we expect the combination of advantaged features of skin color (i.e., lighter skin color, higher skin color satisfaction, and lower foreigner stress) to be associated with favorable developmental outcomes (i.e., fewer delinquent behaviors, greater resilience and effortful control). In contrast, the combination of disadvantaged features of skin color (i.e., darker skin color, lower skin color satisfaction, and higher foreigner stress) is expected to be associated with unfavorable developmental outcomes (i.e., greater delinquency, lower resilience, and effortful control).

**METHODS**

**Participants**

The current study utilized data collected from 2012 to 2015. Participants were 604 Mexican-origin adolescents with at least one immigrant parent recruited from a metropolitan city in central Texas (Kim et al., 2020). Data collection occurred during Barack Obama’s presidency, and the political climate of Texas and the larger US was mixed, particularly regarding immigration. For example, although Obama’s presidency had a positive effect on people’s perception of discrimination, and his administration implemented a Deferred Action program that allowed around 45% of undocumented immigrants to legally stay and work in the US (Shear, 2014), the Obama administration also focused on deportations of unauthorized immigrants by using the policy of wide-scale detention with more than two million deportations occurring over the course of his presidency (Sakuma, 2017). At the state level, the Texas government enacted anti-immigrant policies, such as the 2017 Texas law (Senate Bill 4), which stated that it is illegal to be a sanctuary city in Texas (limited cooperation in enforcing the immigration law in Texas), though central Texas has been known to be more liberal. Thus, anti-immigrant policies were in place at state and national levels which contributed to the overall political climate of Texas.

Adolescents were in 6th–8th grades, and their ages ranged from 11.08 to 15.30 years ($M_{age} = 12.91$, $SD = 0.92$). Slightly more than half of the samples (55.4%) were girls, and 75.3% of the participants ($N = 455$) were US-born and 24.7% of the participants ($N = 149$) were Mexico-born. The median household income was between $20,001 and $30,000. The average of the mother’s highest education level was some middle/junior high school.

**Procedure**

Target participants were recruited through school presentations, public records, and community recruitment in central Texas. Families qualified for participation if parents were of Mexican-origin and had a child in middle school. A family visit was scheduled for families who qualified for participation. During the family visit, informed consent and informed assent were provided with parents and adolescents separately. Bilingual interviewers then administered the questionnaires separately for parents and adolescents, reading questions aloud to participants and recording participants’ responses on a laptop. Questionnaires were prepared in both English and Spanish. Both English and Spanish surveys were presented together so that participants can have the option of the other language for any specific question. Participating families were compensated $60.

**Measures**

*Skin color.* Adolescents self-reported on how they perceived their skin color with the item: “Which best describes your skin color?” Responses included 1 (white), 2 (light brown), 3 (brown), 4 (dark brown), and 5 (black). Higher scores reflect one’s perception of a darker skin color. Previous research has also used a single item to assess skin color (Perreira et al., 2019).

*Skin color satisfaction.* Adolescents’ skin color satisfaction was measured by one item: “How would you describe your satisfaction with your skin color?” Participants reported on a scale of 1 (unsatisfied) to 5 (satisfied). Higher scores indicate a more satisfying perception of one’s skin color. Other research has also used a single item to assess skin color satisfaction (Winter, Danforth, Landor, & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, 2019).
Foreigner stress. Adolescents’ foreigner stress was measured with four items adapted from previous research (Kim et al., 2011). A sample item is “When people look at me, they see a foreigner.” On a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), adolescents reported how much they agreed with each of the statements. Higher mean scores indicate higher perceived foreigner stress in adolescents (α = .67).

Delinquent behaviors. Adolescents’ delinquent behaviors were assessed using 14 items adapted from the Youth Self-Report (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). On a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (not true) to 2 (often true or very true), adolescents rated their own problem behaviors such as stealing and lying during the past six months. A higher mean score indicates more delinquent behaviors (α = .76).

Sense of resilience. Adolescents’ sense of resilience was measured using three items from the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). A sample item is “I tend to recover easily after an illness or hardship.” Prior research has validated this scale for use with Mexican-origin adolescents (Kim, Hou, & Gonzalez, 2017). Adolescents reported their sense of resilience on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher mean scores reflecting a greater sense of resilience (α = .64).

Effortful control. Adolescents’ effortful control was assessed using a 4-item subscale (Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). A sample item is, “I tend to be on time for school and appointments.” Adolescents reported on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher mean scores reflecting a higher level of effort control (α = .72).

Covariates. A set of demographic variables were measured as covariates, including adolescent age, gender, nativity (i.e., whether born in the US or not), mother’s education level, and the average annual household income, given that these variables have been shown to link with adolescent adjustment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). Using an 11-point scale, mothers reported their highest education level from “1 = no formal schooling” to “11 = finished graduate degree” and reported family income in $10,000 increments (from 0 = less than $10,000 to 11 = more than $110,000).

Analytic Strategy

The current study analyzed data using Mplus 8.3 with the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation method of handling missing data (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). We examined a set of baseline models relating three predictors (i.e., adolescents’ perception of skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress) to adolescent outcomes (i.e., delinquent behaviors, resilience, and effortful control), controlling for youth age, nativity, gender, family income, and maternal education. First, we examined the main effects of three predictors on adolescent outcomes. Second, we added two-way interaction terms among the three predictors. Finally, we added the three-way interaction effect among the three predictors. Significant interaction terms were probed using simple slope analyses (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991).

RESULTS

Descriptive Information and Correlations

The descriptive information and correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 1. Results generally demonstrated that there are significant associations among predictors (i.e., perception of skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress) and adolescent outcomes (i.e., delinquent behaviors, sense of resilience, and effortful control). Specifically, a higher level of foreigner stress was positively associated with perception of darker skin color and more delinquent behaviors; foreigner stress was negatively related to the perception of skin color satisfaction and sense of resilience.

Delinquent Behaviors

As seen in Table 2, the main effects analysis indicated that foreigner stress significantly predicted youths’ delinquent behaviors; youth who perceived greater foreigner stress reported more delinquent behaviors. Skin color and skin color satisfaction were not significant predictors of delinquent behaviors. The 3-way interaction model was not significant; thus, we elaborate below the results of the significant two-way interaction model. In this model, we observed a significant interaction effect between foreigner stress and skin color. Probing of the interaction revealed that adolescents’ perception of their foreigner stress was positively associated with delinquent behaviors for youth reporting a darker skin color (b = .38, SE = .01, p < .01), but this
association was not significant for youth reporting a lighter skin color ($b = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p = .08$).

**Sense of Resilience**

As seen in Table 3, skin color satisfaction significantly predicted adolescents’ sense of resilience; youth who were more satisfied with their skin color reported stronger sense of resilience. Foreigner stress and skin color were not significant predictors of resilience. A significant two-way interaction between skin color satisfaction and foreigner stress, as well as a significant 3-way interaction between skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress also emerged in the models with interaction terms. Probing the interactions in the 3-way interaction model, we found that the positive association between skin color satisfaction and adolescents' sense of resilience was the strongest for adolescents perceiving darker skin color and lower levels of foreigner stress (Figure 1a). Said differently, in the context of low foreigner stress, youth with darker skin reported a strong positive relationship between skin color satisfaction and...

### TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Primary Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Skin color satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreigner stress</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>Delinquent behaviors</td>
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<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>−0.09*</td>
<td>−0.11**</td>
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<td>0.38**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.15**</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
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<td>−0.18**</td>
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<td>0.09*</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.098*</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
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<tr>
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<td>603</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>604</td>
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<td>0.65</td>
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<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.54</td>
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</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01.

**TABLE 2**

Regression Analyses Predicting Delinquency with Main Effects and Interactions among Skin Color, Skin Color Satisfaction, and Foreigner Stress ($N = 604$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Main-effect model</th>
<th>Model with two-way interactions added</th>
<th>Model with three-way interaction added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>β</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin color</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin color satisfaction</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>−.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigner stress</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigner stress × skin color</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin color satisfaction × foreigner stress</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin color satisfaction × skin color</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>.01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education level</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
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</table>

Note. Foreigner stress and skin color satisfaction were centered at their means.

*p < .05, **p < .01. Significant parameters are bolded.
resilience. A similar association emerged for youth with a lighter skin color and lower foreigner stress, but the association was weaker than for those with a darker skin color. In the context of high foreigner stress, youth with darker skin color reported no association between skin color satisfaction and resilience. In contrast, in the context of high foreigner stress, youth with lighter skin reported a positive association between skin color satisfaction and resilience.

**Effortful Control**

For effortful control, skin color satisfaction emerged as a significant predictor in the main effect model (see Table 4); youth who were more satisfied with their skin color also reported greater effortful control. A significant two-way interaction between skin color satisfaction and foreigner stress as well as a significant three-way interaction between skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress also emerged in the models with interaction terms.

Probing of the three-way interaction term revealed that the positive association between skin color satisfaction and adolescents’ effortful control was the strongest for those adolescents perceiving a darker skin color and lower levels of foreigner stress (see Figure 1b). Said differently, in the context of low foreigner stress, youth with darker skin reported a strong positive relationship between skin color satisfaction and effortful control. A similar association emerged for youth with lighter skin color and lower foreigner stress, but the association was weaker than for those with darker skin color. In the context of high foreigner stress, youth with darker skin color reported no association between skin color satisfaction and effortful control. In contrast, in the context of high foreigner stress, youth with lighter skin reported a positive association between skin color satisfaction and effortful control.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study adopted an intersectionality framework to understand the interlocking systems of oppression faced by Mexican-origin adolescents, and how they relate to youth developmental outcomes (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Settles & Buchanan, 2014). This approach adds a novel contribution to the literature given that past research has mainly examined the different systems of oppression salient to Mexican-origin individuals separately, rather than examining the ways they intersect in individuals’ lives and development. By examining skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress together, the current study has added unique and novel understanding about their independent and interdependent functions in the development of Mexican-origin youth. Additionally, this study employed a holistic approach by examining both weaknesses and strengths among
Mexican-origin youth within the context of these intersecting systems of oppression (García Coll et al., 1996; Lerner et al., 2017; Umana-Taylor, 2009). Overall, our results support the assertion that multiple systems of oppression work together to impact Mexican-origin youth. We found that foreigner stress was associated with negative developmental outcomes, such as increased delinquency and lower effortful control, particularly for those with darker skin color. Skin color satisfaction was associated with greater effortful control and resilience, particularly for those with darker skin color and low levels of foreigner stress. These findings illustrate the ways in which xenophobia and colorism interact to impact Mexican-origin adolescents’ development. This is important to understand as these findings can help us work to reduce risk and promote resilience and thrive among Mexican-origin youth.

The current study focused on three outcomes relevant for Mexican-origin youth: delinquency, resilience, and effortful control. These are important developmental outcomes to understand as delinquency has been associated with long-term negative consequences, such as school dropout and criminal behaviors (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Thornberry et al., 2003). Additionally, resilience and effortful control are two indicators of positive youth development given that they both protect and promote healthy youth outcomes (Masten, 2001; Rothbart & Bates, 2006). Yet, findings differed for the outcomes.

For delinquency, we found that foreigner stress and skin color interacted to predict adolescents’ behaviors. Specifically, higher levels of foreigner stress were related to greater delinquent behaviors among Mexican-origin youth, but this relation was only among youth with darker skin color (not...
Among youth with a lighter skin color). Indeed, Mexican-origin individuals in the US face racialized xenophobia where they are perpetually stereotyped as foreign and inferior (Zou & Cheryan, 2019), and these stresses have been found to negatively impact their adjustment (Calzada et al., 2019). For instance, perceived discrimination, which included xenophobic experiences specific to migrant children, has been linked to increased levels of delinquency among migrant and immigrant youth (Li & Xia, 2018; Walsh, Fogel-Grinvald, & Shneider, 2015). One’s beliefs that they are perceived by others as a perpetual foreigner may add the impact of being perceived as foreign may compound this. Given that colorism favors lighter skin and devalues darker skin, and that colorist incidents are pervasive among youth (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019), it may be that youth with darker skin experience more feelings of isolation and alienation (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). Thus, it could be that when youth with dark skin are treated as foreigners, these feelings of alienation are amplified which may cause them to act out as a defense mechanism. In reaction to experiencing unfair treatment and feeling alienated, youth may display a lack of willingness to obey rules from our conventional social institutions due to the reduction of social bonds and increased negative emotions (Li & Xia, 2018), thus resulting in more delinquent behaviors.

Contrary to our hypotheses, skin color satisfaction did not relate to delinquency among youth. Past work has suggested that skin color satisfaction indirectly links foreigner-based objectification and mental health outcomes, such as self-esteem (Kiang et al., 2020). However, the present study focused on delinquency, an externalizing behavior. It may be that skin color satisfaction is a more salient predictor of internalizing rather than externalizing factors, though this is not yet clear. Future work should continue to explore the impact of skin color satisfaction on externalizing behaviors in order to better understand its role in youth development.

The present study also examined youth’s sense of resilience and effortful control, two indicators of positive youth development. For both indicators, we found that three sources of oppression interacted to impact Mexican-origin youth. Specifically,
skin color, skin color satisfaction, and foreigner stress interacted to predict resilience and effortful control. Stated simply, higher skin color satisfaction was associated with greater sense of resilience and effortful control among youth with low levels of foreigner stress. This was particularly true for youth with darker skin color as they exhibited the strongest relationship between skin color satisfaction and resilience and effortful control. When foreigner stress was high, however, youth with dark skin color reported no benefits of skin color satisfaction. That is, skin color satisfaction was unrelated to neither resilience nor effortful control for youth with darker skin color and high foreigner stress.

Together, these results suggest the benefit of skin color satisfaction on positive youth development, particularly in the context of low foreigner stress. This is well aligned with the literature that has linked high skin color satisfaction to positive outcomes, such as higher self-esteem and greater academic importance (Kiang et al., 2020). The findings from the current study add more evidence to suggest that skin color satisfaction is beneficial to youth of color. Our findings also highlight the negative impact of foreigner stress for youth with darker skin color. Despite evidence that skin color satisfaction promotes positive development (Kiang et al., 2020), this was not enough to protect youth who face multiple oppressions. It could be that having darker skin in a society that devalues this phenotype prevents youth from reaping the benefits of skin color satisfaction on positive youth development. The presence of multiple risk factors occurring within the context of one another has been linked to increased likelihood of poor developmental outcomes (Appleyard, Egelan, van Dulmen, & Srouge, 2005; Rutter, 1979). Thus, perhaps the combination of experiencing foreigner stress, along with living in a society that devalues dark skin color, is an overload of stress to the extent that high skin color satisfaction is not enough to protect against these salient stressors in relation to resilience and effortful control.

**Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

Our findings expand our understanding of development among a sample of Mexican-origin youth by examining the unique and intersecting sources of oppression and how they negatively impact adjustment, as well as sources of resilience and effortful control, such as skin color satisfaction that positively impact youth. Although social justice is a central focus of intersectionality theory and should be an integral part of psychological and developmental research (Rosenthal, 2016), most studies that claim to be intersectional are actually using a multiple jeopardy approach instead – only looking at how multiple oppressions negatively impact youth development – but failing to examine how a position of privilege or a source of resilience interacts with disadvantaged social positions and identities in influencing youth development (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021). With a holistic approach toward sources of both oppression and resilience as well as positive and negative developmental outcomes, the present study contributes to filling the gap in the literature.

Despite these contributions, our study is not without limitations. First, cross-sectional data were utilized, limiting our understanding of directionality and the impact of foreigner stress and colorism on adolescents' well-being over time. Future work should address this by utilizing longitudinal data in order to examine the complexity of these relationships. Second, our data relied upon self-reports of youth on all constructs. Given this, social desirability and shared method variance may have played a role. Another consideration related to self-report of skin color specifically is that reports of skin color may also vary according to different reference standards among youth. For instance, youth may perceive themselves as having lighter skin if they grew up in a neighborhood where a majority of people had darker skin than they did, as compared to those who grew up in a neighborhood with people who had lighter skin than they did (Brunsm & Rockquemore, 2001). A more objective assessment of skin color that does not rely on self-report may reduce social desirability, shared method variance, and help piece apart the nuances of contexts in future work (Landor et al., 2013).

Another limitation of this study was that we were limited in exploring the potential moderating roles that gender and nativity may play in predicting youth development. Although we controlled for gender and nativity, there could be additional and important ways that these factors may intersect with colorism and foreigner stress to predict youth outcomes. Previous research has linked certain dimensions of gender, such as male dominance, as correlates of delinquency (Bottcher, 2001) and, thus, gender may intersect with other systems of oppression faced by Mexican-origin youth (Budiman, 2020). Additionally, nativity status may play a role in the meaning of skin color for youth as skin color and colorism can have different
meanings across cultures. For example, in Latin America, skin color and colorism are closely linked with race and racism, such that they are sometimes considered equivalent (Dixon & Telles, 2017). However, in the US, skin color and race are more clearly distinguished from one another (Dixon & Telles, 2017). Given these differences, nativity status may influence the meaning of skin color, consequently impacting youth perceptions of skin color and their skin color satisfaction. Future work should consider the additional moderating roles of gender and nativity when exploring these relationships to better understand the intersections between gender and nativity along with other systems of oppression.

Related to generalizability, it is important to note the larger political climate in Texas during which this study was conducted, as well as the unique immigrant population in Texas and how this may have impacted youth’s perceptions and meaning of skin color. As a state, Texas has a large population of Latinx immigrants and is known to not be immigrant-friendly (American Immigration Council, 2020). The context of living in a state with a large Latinx immigrant population versus a state with a smaller Latinx immigrant population may have impacted the meaning of skin color for youth. Indeed, racial context has been found to relate to the importance of skin color among Black students; specifically, skin color held more importance for students at a predominantly Black university than those at a predominantly White university (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Socia, 2005). Thus, it may be that the context of a large Latinx immigrant population in Texas, compared to other areas of the US, may have made skin color more salient to youth. Furthermore, the anti-immigrant sentiment present in Texas alongside adolescents’ own documentation status (something that was not assessed in the current study) may have also added to this salience. Specifically, the larger context of anti-immigration sentiment within a broad Latinx community could mean that youth are navigating colorism differently than youth growing up in a different context, such as California. If youth are undocumented, the salience of skin color and foreigner stress could be especially high. Thus, it is important for researchers to consider both documentation status and the larger political and immigrant contexts when understanding the nuances of how colorism impacts Mexican-origin youth.

Finally, the current study focused on stressors and colorism, but an equally important process occurring during adolescence is identity formation, specifically ethnic/racial identity (ERI). Indeed, youth ERI is well-studied, and the existing literature generally suggests that a more positive ERI is associated with a number of positive youth outcomes, including more positive mental health and academic outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). ERI has also emerged as a protective factor, buffering the effects of racial discrimination on youth adjustment and psychological functioning (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Though less studied, skin color satisfaction and ERI have been found to positively relate to one another, such that more positive ERI beliefs (private regard) were associated with greater skin color satisfaction (Maxwell et al., 2015). In the current study, we found that skin color satisfaction did not protect youth in the context of high foreigner stress. Given the salience of ERI, particularly as it relates to foreigner stress (as ERI stresses the importance of one’s ethnic/racial background), it could be that ERI may protect youth more than skin color satisfaction; when youth are exposed to the negative effects of foreigner stress, adolescents may look inward to their ethnic/racial identity and belonging to find meaning, which may be more protective. Thus, the meaning of their skin color may be less salient. We call for future research to explore this possibility and extend this work by examining how ERI processes among Mexican-origin youth co-occur with skin color satisfaction and oppression-related stressors.

Overall, this study provided meaningful and novel insight surrounding the role of interlocking systems of oppression on the adjustment outcomes of Mexican-origin youth. Our findings indicate that foreigner stress is a harmful source of oppression for Mexican-origin youth, particularly for those with darker skin. The study also highlights the benefit of skin color satisfaction, particularly on aspects of positive youth development. Taken together, these findings have important implications for future research and culturally relevant intervention programs. Culturally relevant intervention programs are needed to reduce foreigner stress and strengthen skin color satisfaction to benefit Mexican-origin youth, especially those with darker phenotypes that are devalued as a result of colorism. Parents and schools specifically can help youth develop positive relationships with their skin color by promoting a positive sense of self and resisting colorist ideologies that devalue darker skin. This can include fostering a strong sense of ethnic identity by allowing youth opportunities to learn about, explore, and connect with their
cultural roots to promote positive psychosocial functioning (Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko, Douglass Bayless, & Updegraff, 2018). Multicultural diversity programs that aim to reduce bias, mitigate foreigner stress, and foster positive racial/ethnic identity may be particularly beneficial for youth in family, school, and community contexts, given that schools and parents are important socializing agents for adolescents (Arnon, Shamai, & Ilatov, 2008). Decreasing foreigner stress in life and cultivating skin color satisfaction in self-perception should be emphasized in the family, school, and community settings of Mexican-origin adolescents to optimize their development through the promotion of resilience and effortful control, as well as the prevention of delinquency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES


