NI LATINO, NI NEGRO: THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF AFROLATINO MALES IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

Claudia García-Louis
University of Texas at San Antonio

Ni Latino, Ni Negro: The (in)visibility of AfroLatino Males in Higher Education Research

Claudia García-Louis
University of Texas at San

For decades, academic researchers have reported on the lack of educational success of men of color in higher education. Many fixate on their lack of academic progress rather than attempting to understand how to adequately serve their needs. In response to the lack of asset based, solution driving research, many academics adopted the issue of young men of color as their educational platform. Yet, in their attempt to accentuate and position young men of color as competent and able individuals, the majority of researchers have overlooked AfroLatino males. In fact, AfroLatina/os as a whole remain largely invisible in higher education research since the majority of researchers adhere to monoracial and homogenous perspectives of race and ethnicity. Thus, this study highlights the lived experiences of six self-identified AfroLatino males in higher education by centering their experiences as racialized men on campus. Findings illustrate how AfroLatino males are forced to navigate a campus climate that does not acknowledge their physical presence (as AfroLatino males) or their academic needs. Further, they reported being forced to negotiate strict racial and ethnic categories in addition to language in order to gain peer acceptance on campus.

The Latina/o population has been poised as the fastest growing demographic group in the United States. The 2010 Census counted 50.5 million Latina/os who accounted for 43% of the total population growth in the past decade (United States Census, 2011). Although the Census attempts to count every person, it is estimated about 775,000 Latina/os were not counted (Lilley, 2012). A primary factor is Latina/os hesitancy to adopt U.S. racial and ethnic categories (Rodriguez, 2000) in addition to the unknown number of undocumented people who do not participate in the Census due to fear. Yet, despite such monumental growth, Latina/os continue to be seen as a

negligible community. Strict homogenous racial categories have established and maintained the Black-White binary which is damaging and marginalizing to those caught in-between. Sundstrom (2008) suggests the binary "does not engender accurate descriptions of the United States' racial past or present, and it skews discussions of the future of race and racial justice toward the perspectives and interests of blacks and whites" (p. 66). This anachronistic approach of viewing human diversity has systematically controlled how individuals are perceived and assessed by researchers. In higher education, much like in other social science fields, individuals are studied through a monoracial approach – perpetrating the rhetoric that individuals fit neatly within socially constructed racial and ethnic categories (García-Louis, 2016).

Although academic research seeks to be comprehensive and all encompassing, the adoption and perpetration that monoracial categories are authentic force double-minorities like AfroLatina/os into invisibility. A clear example of this phenomenon in higher education is the study of young men of color. For decades, academic researchers reported on their lack of educational success; many fixated on their limitations rather than attempting to understand how to adequately serve their unique needs. In response to the lack of asset based, solution driving research, many academics adopted the issue of young men of color as their educational platform (e.g. Harper & Harris III, 2010; Sáenz, Ponjuán, & López Figueroa, 2016). Emerging research conveys a more holistic and asset based narrative about young men of color in higher education centering their gifts but also identifying their challenges. The research illustrates how these young men encounter obstacles during their transition from high school to college (Harper & Newman, 2016; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009), interrogates why

they find difficulty adjusting to campus climate (Reynolds, 2010; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2011; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), and identifies why they seem averse to help seeking (Strayhorn, 2010; Wood & Harris III, 2015).

Although young men of color encounter similar obstacles on their educational pathways, researchers have also identified unique differences between the educational experiences of Latina/os and African American students (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992). In their attempt to accentuate and position young men of color as competent and able individuals, they have overlooked AfroLatino males since they do not fit neatly into racial/ethnic categories. In fact, AfroLatina/os as a whole remain largely invisible in academic research since the majority of researchers adhere to monoracial and homogenous perspectives of race and ethnicity (García-Louis, 2016). Thus, not only does racial discourse largely ignore non-Black people of color, it also upholds an obsolescent perspective of human diversity and ignores the changing U.S. demographics – in particular Latina/o student intra-group racial diversity.

Purpose of Study

In recent years a surge of asset-based research on men of color in higher education has surfaced, and researchers have identified best practices to support their educational pathways (e.g., Harper & Harris III, 2010; Sáenz et al., 2016). However, Latino males' educational experiences have traditionally been assessed through a homogenous racial and ethnic approach. This methodology places serious limitations on the visibility of non-mestizo Latino males. It also overlooks their vast intra-group racial diversity. *Latinidad* by default has been defined as *mestizaje* and anyone who

falls beyond those rigid parameters is overlooked. Little academic research in higher education focuses on the experiences of AfroLatina/os (García-Louis, 2016) – much less AfroLatino males. It is imperative their experiences be studied given extant research indicates Latino and African American males lag behind their female counterparts in educational attainment across the P-20 pipeline (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Reynolds, 2010; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010). It is uncertain if AfroLatino males demonstrate the same trends, but it is imperative we gain a better understanding of their experiences.

The conspicuous oversight of the fastest growing demographic group has recently captured the attention of some researchers (e.g., Amaro & Zambrana, 2000; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Forbes, 2010; Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Hirschman, Alba, & Farley, 2000; Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010; Passel & Cohn, 2008; Rodriguez, 2000; Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) who understand the implications at hand. Their research comprises a growing body of literature that critically assesses the experiences of Latina/os and stresses the urgency of acknowledging their heterogeneity. Paradoxically, the double minority status of AfroLatino males (Latino and Black) has led to their oversight since most researchers follow federally designated racial and ethnic categories.

This study strives to make a valuable contribution to the literature on young males of color by underscoring the educational experiences of AfroLatino males in higher education. Similar to Jones Brayboy (2004) this study also illustrates how AfroLatino males are "visible in their institutions in ways that contribute to their marginalization, surveillance, and oppression" (p. 125). Thus, to help make their stories

more visible, a phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted. The guiding research questions were (1) How do AfroLatino males view themselves in relation to Latino and African-American males on campus? (2) How do AfroLatino males make sense of their (in)visibility on campus?

Literature Review

Assetbased research on young men of color over the past decade and a half has mostly centered around the educational experiences of Black males – most specifically African Americans (Harper, 2014). The noted surge may be attributed to the urgency of countering the plethora of demeaning, dehumanizing, and problematic research dating back to the 1930's which depicted Black men as dangerous, apathetic, and incompetent (Brown, 2011). The second most assessed group of young men in education are Latinos, but they remain relatively understudied. Sáenz and Ponjuán (2009) identified unique challenges Latino males endure throughout their educational pathways which are culturally specific but generalizable to all Latino males. The majority of researchers have utilized socially accepted ethnic and racial categories that leave very little room for the exploration of intra-group racial diversity. An exhaustive search of men of color literature produced no findings on the experiences of AfroLatino males in higher education. Thus, for the purposes of this study literature on Latino and Black males was utilized.

Latino Males in Higher Education

Latino males face different obstacles than their female counterparts, while Latinas have matriculated at higher rates than Latinos, they continue to be significantly underrepresented in higher education. Yet, much attention has been placed on

identifying the educational barriers Latino males encounter to accentuate the pervasiveness of their situation. Latino males are far less likely to graduate from high school and matriculate at a four-year institution than other racial/ethnic minority group members (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Pérez II, 2016; Sáenz and Ponjuán, 2009). While many researchers have presented daunting statistics with little hope for their future, other scholars have purposefully incorporated asset-based Latino cultural values to their assessments of Latino males. Pérez II (2016) found Latino males were able to persist at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's) by affirming and celebrating their Latino identity and "[drawing] on linguistic capital to minimize the negative effects of racial microaggressions" (p. 753). Further, he showed that Latino males took it upon themselves to counter negative stereotypes peers, faculty, and administrators held about them.

Sáenz and Ponjuán (2009) urge researchers to acknowledge three factors when studying Latino males including (1) differences in early childhood schooling, (2) cultural and gendered norms, and (3) the role alternative career pathways play for Latino males who opt out of higher education. The aforementioned have been identified as imperative factors that impact Latino male's enrolment in postsecondary education and begin as early as elementary school. Allen (2016) identified that for Latino males attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) the racial/ethnic composition of the community where they grew up directly impacted their socialization on campus. Latino males who grew up in predominantly Latina/o neighborhoods felt more comfortable with like-peers but those who grew up in diverse neighborhoods were more likely to engage in cross-racial interactions on campus. Her findings illustrate the

importance of early exposure to diverse populations and its impact on cross-racial engagement on campus.

A consistent finding across studies is the negative impact lack of financial means has on Latino males' academic and extracurricular engagement. Latino males report feeling increased pressure to work while in college to help sustain their family, but they took pride in helping (Sáenz, García-Louis, Drake, & Guida, 2018). Crisp and Nora (2010) identified environmental pull factors that draw Latina/o students' attention away from academics to external factors of university life such as working, commuting, part-time status, and other financial obligations. In fact, Latina/os, as a whole, are significantly less likely than other groups to accept educational loans and accumulate student debt (Krogstad, 2016). Therefore, many Latino males find themselves working multiple jobs while enrolled in college (Sáenz et al., 2018), they tend to enroll in community colleges at higher rates than any other group (Krogstad), and they enroll part-time rather than full-time (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2011). The noted factors are not unique to Latino males, but extant literature accentuated that these common threads can manifest into unfavorable circumstances which can inhibit (or slow down) their academic persistence.

Black Males in Higher Education

The experiences of Black men in higher education are not much different than those of Latino males. They continue to be underrepresented at the most elite schools and are enrolling in higher education at disproportionally lower numbers than their female peers (Harper, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008). However, each group faces unique social-political challenges that forge divergent experiences. Wood and Harris III (2015)

conducted a study on African American and Latino males attending community colleges. They identified availability of financial aid and low cost of attendance were central to their college selection process. However, they identified differences between those who persisted and those who did not. For Black males, those who persisted had more access to financial means, a family member who had attended the same institution, and identified positive institutional characteristics. The most striking difference between the two groups was athletics. Black males who attended an institution based on athletics as a primary factor were less likely to persist; athletics was not a factor for Latino males.

Harper (2014) emphasized that the racialization and historical pathological discourse anchored in the demonization of Black males has placed unique limitations in their educational pathways. He concludes that decades of deficit based, racist fed, and stereotypically informed literature has succeeded in convincing to society that Black men simply do not care about school. Reynolds (2010) not only countered the myth of Black males not caring about school, he also demonstrated how Black parents were systemically kept away from engaging in their son's education. Even worse, when parents were actively engaged, educators made surprising comments to them regarding how amused they were at their sons' proficiency in academics and good behavior – in some cases effectively disenfranchising parents. The importance of parental involvement in the academic success of Black males has been highlighted numerous times. Parental and familial support was found to have a larger effect on a successful transition and academic persistence in college for African American males than the effect of college academic performance (Cabrera et al., 1999).

Unfortunately, African American males continue to be overrepresented in detention, suspension, and academic disciplinary actions at the K-12 level at larger numbers than any other racial group (Harper, 2014; Harper & Harris III, 2010). Barriers to their academic success are only intensified as they move up the educational pipeline. The commodification of the Black male athlete has stolen student-athletes' opportunities to gain an education in favor of scoring big and securing a win for the institution. Far too often Black males are tracked into majors that provide them with limited job placement opportunities in the future in favor of flexible schedules to accommodate their athletic obligations (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012). Consequently, many Black males attending K-12 institutions are perceived as *troubled children* and enroll in higher education institutions who see them as instruments (to win games) rather than students. Further, for the many who are not athletes and were actively involved at the K-12 level, a blanket statement informed by stereotypes seriously limits their academic experience.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework utilized for this study was (in)visibility established by Jones Brayboy (2004). The framework was developed to understand the educational experiences of Native American students attending elite Ivy League institutions. Jones Brayboy uncovered that there was a "perceived place" socially accepted for Native Americans and the institution was not one of them. Consequently, despite Native American students being enrolled in such prestigious institutions, they were not able to take advantage of the benefits, given they were preoccupied with navigating (and avoiding) hostile environments. Considering the dearth of literature on AfroLatina/o students in higher education and taking into account the social construction of race and

ethnicity, generalizations can be drawn between how society perceives AfroLatina/os – either by categorizing them into racial/ethnic boxes or simply dismissing their existence on campus. García-Louis (2016) suggested AfroLatina/os are forced to not only navigate institutional cultures but also racial/ethnic barriers that could complicate their in-group acceptance and persistence.

Jones Brayboy (2004) addressed, "Native Americans are visible in these institutions in ways that contribute to their marginalization, surveillance, and oppression" (p. 125). Thus, rather than integrating with campus culture, they found it easier to avoid social encounters with others than seeking them out. The framework suggests students placed value in avoiding contact with other students (non-Native Americans), strategically made themselves less (in)visible, and actively employed strategies that allowed them to control how (in)visible to be in certain spaces. All of these strategies were developed in order to minimize the surveillance and oppression they were forced to endure on a daily basis. Finally, students employed strategies that helped them "preserve their individual and group identities within an uncomfortable and often oppressive context" (p. 127). Jiménez Román and Flores (2010) identified the many ways AfroLatina/os are forced to hide, assimilate, overlook, and even dismiss their *AfroLatinidad* in society; largely because Latina/os and African Americans are "counter-posed and pitted against one another in a kind of race for demographic supremacy" (p. 329). AfroLatina/os are the synthesis of the two and are often overlooked and categorized based on the physical appearance and not their cultural identity (Rodriguez, 2000). It is uncertain if AfroLatina/o college students are forced to endure the same negotiations that Jiménez Román and Flores identified; this study could help inform this

area of study. AfroLatina/o college student literature is scant and through the use

(in)visibility as a framework this study could help uncover how AfroLatino males

negotiate their (in)visibility on campus. The framework also helps illuminate how they

see themselves in relation to their African American and Latino male peers.

Methodology

In response to the lack of research on the experiences of AfroLatino males in

higher education, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study (Creswell, 2009) to

initiate the work of highlighting their educational experiences. This sub-study is part of

larger study conducted in the northeastern United States which aimed at highlighting the

experiences of AfroLatina/o college students enrolled in a mid-size, urban, public, four-

year commuter college campus. Participants in this sub-study fulfilled the following

requirements: (a) self-identified as AfroLatino, (b) self-identified as male, (c) were

enrolled full time, and (d) were at least sophomores in class standing. The study

received support at the system level, and an institutional gatekeeper was assigned to

assist with the recruitment of participants. Recruitment was done through postings in

campus newsletters, listservs, and fliers across campus. This study highlights the lived

experiences of six AfroLatino males and how they navigate their college experience.

Pre and post semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the

participants (Patton, 2002). Questions centered around the experiences of being an

AfroLatino male, sense of belonging on campus, and their educational goals were

central to the study. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed using

participant selected pseudonyms. Data manager software Atlas.ti was utilized to assist

in the coding process. Transcribed data was first coded using open coding strategies

(Saldaña, 2013). As coding progressed, I incorporated sub-codes to further analyze the data. Significant themes emerged and were assessed through the lens of Jones Brayboy (2004) (in)visibility framework. Furthermore, words and phrases spoken in Spanish were kept and purposefully not translated to keep participants' narrative untainted. In fact, Salinas (2017) argued the importance of acknowledging language when attempting to understand the experiences of Latina/os in society. He calls for us to elevate the *voces perdidas* by publishing in Spanish to retain the original intent but also to challenge dominant voices. Findings illustrate detailed account of AfroLatino males' experiences on campus and how they see themselves in relation to their African American and Latino male peers.

Positionality

I self-identify as Mexican-immigrant, first-generation, woman of color, and visibly appear mestiza. Since I am not AfroLatina nor a male, I consciously attempted to consider data through multiple viewpoints. Since many AfroLatina/os have experienced prejudice by mestiza/os, I verbalized the importance of the research and worked with participants over the span on a year to establish rapport. The pre and post interviews proved to be important since it helped establish rapport. Participants were more open and candid during the second interview. Moreover, my experiences as a first generation, immigrant student, who grew up in a predominantly White community further aided me in establishing rapport with participants. I consciously and consistently challenged inherent assumptions by journaling.

Limitations

The study is part of a larger study conducted by one researcher over the span of a year. This sub-study reveals the experiences of six self-identified AfroLatino male students attending a mid-size, urban, commuter, public four-year institution in the northeastern United States; as such, findings speak only to the experiences of those students. Participants who volunteered for the study recognize their African lineage which indicates a certain level of awareness. Consequently, those with prominent African features who do not acknowledge their Blackness were not represented in the study. Nonetheless, findings could provide a starting point from which to assess the experiences of other AfroLatino male students attending different institutional types in various geographic regions. The methodological approach to this study illuminates the importance of assessing Latina/o students' experiences through a heterogeneous perspective.

Findings

"*We Exist*"

Participants consistently identified feeling overlooked and undervalued by fair-skinned peers, faculty, and staff. In fact, four out of the six participants utilized the phrase "we exist" when asked what they wished others knew about their experiences on campus. David is a senior and stated, "you know… the crazy thing is we [AfroLatinos]… they [administrators] don't see us. We exist and they [other AfroLatinos] just deny who they are… they don't care about identifying who they are because they don't have to." David shared feeling invisible on campus but that invisibility was a phenomenon caused by other AfroLatina/os – not just dominant groups. When prompted to explain what he meant by "they don't have to" he stated, "it's a skin tone issue." In other words,

AfroLatina/os who are able to "pass" do so. It is unclear if those students do it to avoid

encountering the constant questioning associated with identity politics and skin tone

gradient. They may be exhibiting what Jones Brayboy (2004) identified as strategizing

their (in)visibility on campus. Nonetheless, that privilege is not afforded to AfroLatinos

like David who's darker skin tone automatically places him in the "other" category. In

addition, he shared that his preferred use of Spanish language further alienated him on

campus.

Many participants mentioned feeling overlooked by fair-skinned Latina/os but

also by their Black peers. Language was identified as the primary reason for this tension

(or exclusion). As soon as AfroLatino males spoke Spanish, they were automatically

cast as "other" and no longer considered an insider. Christhian immigrated from the

Dominican Republic when he was thirteen years old, most of his friends on campus are

Brazilian exchange students and African immigrants. He mentioned feeling welcomed

into the African immigrant student group but as soon as he spoke Spanish he

immediately sensed something had changed. Christian stated;

> I don't know how to explain… everything is good if you speak English with an accent… to them it doesn't matter if I speak with an accent… *pero cuando* [but when] I speak *español* [Spanish], *me tratan diferente como que no soy como ellos* [they treat me differently as if I am not like them]… they no say nothing, just *comportamientos* [behave differently towards me].

While Christhian was not outright rejected from the group, he reported experiencing

differential treatment; their behavior towards him changed as soon as he spoke

Spanish, but he could not pin point exactly how. Jones Brayboy (2004) did not identify

language being a factor in negotiating (in)visibility; but once again, Christhian had to be

strategic about where he spoke Spanish and with whom. He was masking his cultural

identity to gain in-group acceptance in a place where he already felt like an outsider given his recent immigrant status.

AfroLatino males felt they needed to strategize to gain acceptance – but never at the cost of their AfroLatino identity. Consequently, they developed a strategy to only speak Spanish when spoken to and English was set as the default language on campus. Participants also identified the lack of self-identified AfroLatina/os on campus as a major issue. They mentioned "knowing" most were Dominican or Puerto Rican, but seldom did students disclose *AfroLatinidad* as their identity. "To be honest, we just get tired of having to explain what we are, and why we look the way we do, and why we speak Spanish, it's exhausting" explained Angelo. The act of self-identifying as AfroLatino places them in a precarious situation given the lack of peoples' awareness of Latino heterogeneity. Rigo put it simply, "it depends how I feel and how much I want to explain; but most of the time I don't want to explain myself." Thus, they endure under the guise of a socially constructed identity placed upon them by the beholder.

Finally, David noted being judged by how he looked and it did not matter who he was or how he identified by others:

> To many people "I will always be a thug on a college campus". Just because I walk into campus, it doesn't protect me from what others think when they see my dark skin… what they know is that Black men are bad, society taught them that. So guess what? I am Black and Latino.

Yet, David has learned to navigate the numerous spaced he occupies, and like his peers, he is strategic about when he speaks Spanish, identifies as AfroLatino, and how to act in certain spaces. All participants expressed an understanding of what society deemed as their perceived place (Jones Brayboy, 2004), but that place was not campus. Not one participant felt they were fully accepted on campus, but insisted they

111

were there to stay and would not leave until they graduated.

(In)visibility in Plain Sight

AfroLatino males in the study described feeling invisible on campus. Despite the campus being located in a historically diverse community – considered the enclave of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans – course offerings did not represent such diversity. Damian mentioned taking a course through the Latin American, Latino, and Puerto Rican Studies department to learn about his *AfroLatinidad*; he was shocked to discover they only covered AfroLatina/os in a half-page of a single chapter, the paradox being the lack of recognition within a department that specializes in Latina/os. Damian decided to form a study group comprised of other AfroLatina/os students who wanted to learn about their cultural heritage and "take over" the library. Paradoxically, to learn about themselves they had to self-teach each other through the use of campus library resources rather than taking a formal course. Their (in)visibility was not just physical but also institutional. The lack of formal course offerings on AfroLatina/os in a department dedicated to the geographic region with large amounts of Afrodescendants is simply negligent. This is a clear example of how the institution is contributing to their marginalization and oppression (Jones Brayboy, 2004) by erasing them from formal course content.

Campus activities offered through student services did celebrate diverse cultures, but none on campus were dedicated to AfroLatina/os. Two participants mentioned being recruited by African American student organizations, but both refused their offer given hesitancy in claiming a history that was not theirs. Damian shared,

> being an AfroLatino on campus it's almost like you can't really call yourself Black because African-Americans have their own history that is separate... and you have to understand there is a separation and... you can't claim something that is

not necessarily yours. It's like saying yes we are all Black. Yeah, the Diaspora aspect is there but not the history.

Damian's quote captures the complexity of their identity. He also highlights his daily struggle, "the crazy thing is people see me in the street, and all they see is my skin color and the stereotypes about Black men. I just keep my head up and keep moving." Damian's testament underscores two very important concepts. First, Afrolatina/os are not necessarily included in the Black diaspora. People will make generalizations about their skin tone and place them into categories. Even in a place as diverse as this community (with a massive AfroLatina/o population), individuals will still box him into negative Black male stereotype. Second, the messaging regarding Black males is not positive, but he has made a clear and distinct decision to focus on his academic goals.

AfroLatino males described instances of having to navigate socially ascribed labels based on their phenotype. However, their phenotype only captures their physical appearance and not their experiences, identities, histories, language, or stories. Yet, when campus administrators and faculty see them on campus, they are automatically thrust into socially constructed groupings – robbing them of their own narrative. Angelo shared how he copes with the tensions, "*yo ando en lo mío* [doing my thing], I'm here to get a degree to better my life." He simply stays focused and attempts to make himself less visible by not engaging. Like Angelo, other AfroLatino males consciously decide to stay focused on their studies and not engage in the conversation around their *AfroLatinidad*. They concluded it is more important to graduate than to get stuck negotiating their identities on campus since they have to do it on a daily basis off campus.

Building Resistance

Consistent with previous studies on men of color in higher education (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010; Wood & Harris III, 2015), AfroLatino males encounter academic and social obstacles along their educational pathway but continue to persist towards their educational goals. Rafael captured the essence of their experience,

> As an AfroLatino I really want to make something of myself I don't want to fall prey to the vices of the city even though they're all around me. I don't want to fall prey to the expectations that my high school teachers had of me, that you know that I am just going to be another dropout or be another problem in society.

Rafael, like the majority of other participants, received messaging early on from their educators that they would "amount to nothing." Many of them shared stories of being called out by teachers and fighting in the playground to defend themselves but not out of mischief. In many ways they felt they had to live up to those expectations, Rigo stated, "either you sink or swim… it's like, you are told, how you have to act like… if you don't fight, they get you… they [educators] expected it." Yet, despite such messaging and marginal expectations from some teachers they all persisted and continue to do so on campus. Rafael stated earlier "I don't want to fall prey to the expectations" there seems to be an active resistance and consciousness of what the alternatives could be.

Participants decided to build resistance on campus through determining which "battles" to take on. They formed study groups with other AfroLatina/o students to teach themselves what the institution fails to do. They expressed feeling overwhelmed and frustrated with not only having to learn to navigate campus culture but also their ethnic identity. Pablo is a non-traditionally aged student and had engaged in deep self-exploration prior to enrolling. He expressed feeling frustrated at the complexity of navigating college while embracing his cultural identity. Pablo has made a conscious

decision to not focus on negotiating his ethnic identity since only he has full control of his academic success. In fact, all participants unanimously agreed that their goal of obtaining a college degree was not going to be swayed by any obstacle or anyone.

Participants reported knowing failure was not an option; as Angelo expressed it, "the City don't offer a safety net"; consequently, despite feeling marginalized, overlooked, and (in)visible on campus, they carry on towards graduation. Participants identified that to be successful on campus they must not fixate on how their AfroLatino identity impacts their experience but rather centralize all energy on graduation. Nonetheless, when other participants heard of Damian's study circle, three of them joined his group. Evidently, there are clear indications that their resistance is centered around their desire to make themselves (in)visible by creating a space for themselves on campus – all while navigating an institutional environment that seems to not place value on their AfroLatino identity.

Discussion

As the Latina/o population continues to grow, it will become imperative that researchers adopt a heterogeneous approach to assessing the experiences of Latina/o students. The primary goals of this study was to illuminate the importance of disaggregating the Latina/o population in educational research. This methodological approach allowed me to highlight the stories of AfroLatino males contributing to the male students of color literature. Findings suggest AfroLatino males are forced to traverse socially constructed categories that in effect, thrust them into (in)visibility through the social investment of African American and Latina/o nomenclature. However, the negotiation worked both ways. AfroLatino males were thrust into racial categories

based on their skin tone and physical features, but their experiences were more complicated than just being a Black male. Hence, participants actively resisted the labeling through a conscious acknowledgment that history, language, and culture matters. Flores and Jiménez Roman (2009) termed this unique experience "triple-consciousness" as AfroLatina/os are forced to make meaning of their personal identity in relation to Latinos, Blacks, and U.S. dimensions of social reality. This study contributes an additional dimension, that of male identity and societal expectations. The conjunction of their identity as an individual and their physical appearance amalgamate into unique and distinct experiences to other Latino and African American males.

Participants expressed being aware of colorism, social expectations, and negative stereotypes attached to Black males. Yet, they did not solely identify as being Black and understood the importance of acknowledging the distinction between their experiences and that of African Americans. They actively resisted such labeling through overlooking those transgressions and centralizing their energy on degree completion. They displayed control of their (in)visibility through strategizing around how often, with whom, and where to disclose their AfroLatino identity. Yet, as Viernes Turner (1994) uncovered underrepresented students are constantly reminders of their status as "guests on campus" since institutions fail to undergo cultural, institutional, and structural transformations that foster inclusivity of student diversity.

AfroLatino males reported feeling overlooked on campus and in essence were experiencing what Jones Brayboy (2004) termed (in)visibility. Despite the campus being located in a historically diverse city and neighborhood, not one participant could identify a single program, service, club, activity, or class that was dedicated to serve

AfroLatina/os. This finding fully illustrates how the institution is contributing to AfroLatino invisibility and marginalization of their identities by overlooking their presence (Jones Brayboy; Turner, 1994). Moreover, in addition to navigating campus culture and academics, they were also forced to make daily decisions about whether to disclose their ethnic and/or cultural identity. Consistent with prior research on men of color in education (Bimper et al., 2012; Harper, 2014; Harper & Harris III, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuán, 2011), AfroLatino males shared K-12 experiences where educators labeled them as "trouble makers" and told them they "would amount to nothing." These denigrating messages and constant reminders of their perceived misfit in the educational system continue to cause internal conflict between their academic goals and expectations. The long term consequences of these demeaning messages could manifest themselves into lower academic expectations and decreased levels of academic confidence (Cabrera et al., 1999).

College administrators must make note of these findings; while campus does offer Latin American studies, not a single class is dedicated to *AfroLatinidad*. The surrounding campus community is comprised of Latina/os with rich racial diversity – many of whom have African lineage – but it is not reflected in any campus offering. Establishing a relationship with the surrounding community is vital given Latina/o students tend to persist on campus due to their strong connections in the local community (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nadal, Mazzula, Rivera, & Fujii-Doe, 2014). In addition, higher education institutions must understand that any K-12 experience (good or bad) will directly impact their students' academic confidence in college (Harper, 2014; Harper & Harris III, 2010; Saenz &

Ponjuán, 2011). Thus, establishing strong relationships with the local community and K-12 schools could help increase sense of belonging and persistence of AfroLatino males.

Finally, participants shared that they find themselves constantly negotiating in-group acceptance and/or belonging. The primary factors in the negotiation process was their phenotype – which is out of their control – and language. If they fail to find community on campus, their persistence could be jeopardized, but it is vital to assess how intragroup discrimination based on skin tone gradient impacts their academic experience (García-Louis, 2016). This study is the first that accentuated the combination of both phenotype and language used as primary factors influencing AfroLatino males' educational experiences. It is imperative more research be conducted on the experiences of AfroLatino males in higher education, only then will we know how they navigate their college pathways and how to adequately support their needs.

Significance and Implications

There are actions an institution could implement in order to support AfroLatino males on their campus. For example, expanding the definition of Latina/os to include self-identification categories could capture valuable data. Gaining a more comprehensive portrait of intra-group Latina/o diversity would not only help institutions identify sub-student populations but also help alleviate the oversight of AfroLatino males. Noted data could facilitate culturally appropriate program development to increase student engagement, persistence, and graduation. Fostering awareness activities such as university sponsored speaker's series that provide students, faculty, staff, and administrators the opportunity to learn about Latina/o heterogeneity and the nuances associated with such a diverse group could raise awareness of Afro*presencia*

on campus. Findings revealed AfroLatino males engaged in self-teaching about *AfroLatinidad* because the institution lacked courses specializing in this area. Expanding course offerings in the Latin American department to be more inclusive of their academic learning needs would not only foster inclusivity, but also help debunk the flawed belief that Latina/o are a homogenous racial group.

Finally, inviting the surrounding community – which is largely AfroLatina/o – to engage in community-campus partnerships could help the institutions build rapport with the local community and increase the visibility of AfroLatina/o students on campus. Institutions can match the needs of AfroLatina/o students with relevant issues uncovered by researchers and strategically implement initiatives to fill gaps. Programs and initiatives designed for male students of color tend to use federally designated race and ethnic categories; this study challenges such initiatives to critically assess how such practices could lead to the oversight of AfroLatino males. Male students of color initiatives need to move away from anachronistic categories to fully live out their mission to serve all young men of color – include AfroLatinos.

References

Allen, T. O. (2016). (In)validation in the minority: The experiences of Latino students enrolled in an HBCU. *The Journal of Higher Education, 87*(4), 461–487.

Amaro, H., & Zambrana, R. E. (2000). Criollo, Mestizo, Mulato, LatiNegro, Indigena, white, or Black? The U. S. Hispanic/Latino population and multiple responses in the 2000 census. *American Journal of Public Health*, *90*(11), 1724–1727.

Bensimon, E. M., & Dowd, A. (2009). Dimensions of the transfer choice gap: Experiences of Latina and Latino students who navigated transfer pathways. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(4), 632–659.

Bimper A. Y., Harrison L., & Clark L. (2012). Diamonds in the rough: Examining a case of successful Black male student athletes in college sport. *Journal of Black Psychology 39*(2), 107–130.

Brown, A. L. (2011). "Same old stories": The Black male in social science and educational literature, 1930s to the present. *Teacher College Record*, *113*(9), 2047–2079.

Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E. T., & Hagedorn, L. S. (1999). Campus racial climate and the adjustment of students to college: A comparison between white students an African-American students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *70*(2), 134–160.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Crisp, G., Taggart, A., & Nora, A. (2015). Undergraduate Latina/o students: A systematic review of research identifying factors contributing to academic success outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(2), 249-274.

Crisp, G., & Nora, A. (2010). Hispanic student success: Factors influencing the persistence and transfer decisions of Latino community college students enrolled in developmental education. *Research in Higher Education*, *51*(2), 175–194.

Flores, J., & Jiménez Román, M. (2009). Triple-consciousness? Approaches to Afro-Latino culture in the United States. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, *4*(3), 319–328.

Forbes, J. D. (2010). Black Pioneers: The Spanish-speaking Afro-Americans of the Southwest. In M. Jiménez Román & J. Flores (Eds.), *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and culture in the United States* (pp. 27–37). Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Fry, R., & Gonzales, F. (2008). *One-in-Five and Growing Fast: A Profile of Hispanic Public School Students*. Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502556

Gándara, P. C., & Contreras, F. (2009). *The Latino education crisis: The Consequences of failed social policies.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

García-Louis, C. (2016). Beyond multiracialism: Acknowledging AfroLatina/o students. *Journal of Student Affairs in Higher Education*, *25*, 21–27.

Harper, S., & Newman, C. B. (2016). Surprise, Sensemaking, and Success in the First College Year: Black Undergraduate Men's Academic Adjustment Experiences. *Teachers College Record*, *118*, 1–30.

Harper, S. R. (2014). (Re)setting the agenda for college men of color. Lessons learned from a 15-year movement to improve Black male student success. In R. A.

Williams (Ed.), *Men of color in higher education: New foundations for developing models of success.* (pp. 116–143). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Harper, S. R., & Harris III, F. (Eds.). (2010). *College men and masculinities: Theory, research, and implications for practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, *120*, 7–24.

Hirschman, C., Alba, R., & Farley, R. (2000). The meaning and measurement of race in the U.S. census: Glimpses into the future. *Demography*, *37*(3), 381–393.

Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *Journal of Higher Education*, *63*(5), 539–569.

Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing difficulties and factors in successful college adjustment. *Research in Higher Education,* 37(2), 135-157.

Jones Brayboy, B. M. (2004). Hiding in the Ivy: American Indian students and visibility in elite educational settings. *Harvard Education Review,* 74(2), 125-152.

Jiménez Román, M., & Flores, J. (2010). *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Krogstad, J. M. (2016, July 28). 5 facts about Latinos and education. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. (2008, February 11). U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050/

Lilley, S. (2012, September 12). Poll: 1 out of 3 Americans inaccurately think most Hispanics are undocumented. Retrieved December 1, 2016, from http://nbclatino.com/2012/09/12/poll-1-out-of-3-americans-think-most-hispanics-are-undocumented/

Nadal, K. L., Mazzula, S. L., Rivera, D. P., & Fujii-Doe, W. (2014). Microaggressions and Latina/o Americans: An analysis of nativity, gender, and ethnicity. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, *2*(2), 67–78.

Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. (2008, February 11). U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050/

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Pérez II, D. (2016). Over the ivy wall: Latino male achievers nurturing community cultural wealth through their involvement at a highly selective, predominantly White research university. In V. B. Sáenz, L. Ponjuán, & J. L. Figueroa (Eds.), *Ensuring the success of Latino males in higher education: A new national imperative.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Reynolds, R. (2010). They think you're lazy" and other messages Black parents send their Black sons: An exploration of critical race theory in the examination of educational outcomes for Black males. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *1*(2), 144–163.

Rodriguez, C. E. (2000). *Changing race: Latinos, the census, and the history of ethnicity in the United States*. New York: New York University Press.

Sáenz, V. B., García-Louis, C., Drake, A. P., & Guida, T. (2018). Leveraging their family capital: How Latino males successfully navigate the community college. *Community College Review, 46*(1), 40-61.

Sáenz, V. B., Ponjuán, L., & López Figueroa, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Ensuring the success of Latino males in higher education: A national imperative*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Sáenz, V. B., & Ponjuan, L. (2011). Men of color: Ensuring the academic success of Latino males in higher education. *Institute for Higher Education Policy Institute*. Retrieved from: website http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/m-r/(Brief)_Men_of_Color_Latinos.pdf

Sáenz, V. B., & Ponjuán, L. (2009). The vanishing Latino male in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *8*(1), 54–89.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Salinas, C. (2017). Transforming academia and theorizing spaces for Latinx in higher education: *voces perdidas* and *voces de poder. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 30(8), 746-758.

Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). "Assume the Position . . . You Fit the Description" Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue Among African American Male College Students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *51*(4), 551–578.

Sólorzano, D. G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Educational inequities and Latina/o undergraduate students in the United States: A critical race analysis of their educational progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *4*(3), 272–294.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). Fittin' In: Do Diverse Interactions with Peers Affect Sense of Belonging for Black Men at Predominantly White Institutions? *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *45*(4), 953–979.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2010). When Race and Gender Collide: Social and Cultural Capital's Influence on the Academic Achievement of African American and Latino Males. *The Review of Higher Education*, *33*(3), 307–332. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.0.0147

Sundstrom, R. R. (2008). *The browning of America and the evasion of social justice*. Albany, NY: Suny Press.

United States Census Bureau. (2011). *2010 census shows nation's Hispanic population grew four times faster than total U. S. population* (Government No. CB11–CN.146). Washington, D. C.: United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn146.html

Viernes Turner, C. S. (1994). Guests in someone else's house: Students of color. *The Review of Higher Education*, *17*(4), 355–370.

Wood, J. L., & Harris III, F. (2015). The effect of college selection factors on persistence: An examination of Black and Latino males in the community college. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *16*(4), 511–535.